

Selling Race in America: Ideologies of Labor, Color, and Social Order in  
Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Advertising Imagery

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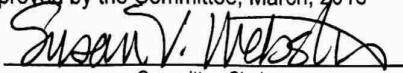
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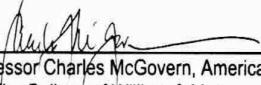
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## ABSTRACT

Scholars have studied American advertising in terms of collectible Americana, histories of printing technology, and consumer culture. These approaches leave a substantial gap in our understanding of American advertising in terms of its roles as a powerful carrier of ideological value and as a critical participant in national discourses on race and American identity. My study examines nineteenth- and twentieth-century advertising imagery and visual culture--including trade cards, postcards, prints, and other related ephemera--reading them as commentaries on contemporary racial, social, and economic issues. Printed in large quantities and widely distributed, these materials were immensely popular and reached vast audiences nationwide. Based on extensive archival and collections research, I employ art historical methodologies to examine advertising imagery and ephemera, bridging the fields of labor, food, health, and race studies to generate a complex discussion of the myriad stereotypes employed to oppress and limit African Americans' participation in the American dream.

I argue that stereotype in these images was a potent method--technologically and ideologically--of identifying, classifying, and qualifying humanity and "Americanness." Bred by pseudoscience and propagated throughout the first half of the twentieth century, in particular, stereotypes targeting African Americans argued for their supposed inherent backwardness, inferiority, and suitability for the labors and livelihoods considered unsuitable for white Americans. Picturing black figures in American advertising and visual culture as out-of-control, insatiable, unclean, inexhaustible, and nostalgic bodies created a salve for white anxieties concerning the increasing opportunities afforded black Americans socially, politically, and economically in post-emancipation America. My close reading of advertising cards, postcards, prints, and other related ephemera as contributors to national discourses on race sheds new light on their creation, use, and dissemination as powerful tools for selling ideologies about human value, identity, and participation in American life.

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## **Introduction**

This project started in 2010 when I was startled by an advertising card for Sapolio soap that shows a plump black woman proudly holding up a pot that she has cleaned with the soap (Figure 1). She smiles at her reflection, which is white. I had to stop and think about the image, because at first glance it is easy to read: the woman is pleased with the pot, which gleams so spotlessly that in it she can see her own reflection. But it also holds a meaning that is much more complex, more sinister, and powerful in its implicitness: the woman's black face is effectively whitened by her use of the soap, her hair is lightened, and, what's more, she seems pleased by the transformation. Through her use of the soap, her appearance is supposed to be cleaned, corrected, and sanitized. The image haunted me; I could not stop thinking about it. I knew next to nothing about advertising cards, but the more of them that I found, the more I wanted to know who made these cards, who was pictured on them, and how they were used. I quickly realized that images like the one that haunted me were not uncommon and, in fact, were part of a sizeable subset of advertising cards that seemed intent on picturing the black body for the purposes of marketing anything from soaps and thread to fertilizers and appliances. I wondered: What is this all about? Who's writing about this?

What troubles me most about the Sapolio image is its legibility. What does it mean that we can, as twenty-first-century viewers, read a card so racially charged and understand its meaning? How is it that we can grasp the marketing message—that Sapolio cleans until it shines (and whitens)—before, as well as, or even without, noticing the racist message? I contend that it is because we are numb to the racist messages that

operated in nineteenth- and twentieth-century advertising images because we are still confronted with them and still consume them on a day-to-day basis (albeit in sometimes subtler, more implicit ways) in the twenty-first century. We are so accustomed to images and texts of racial stereotypes in contemporary consumer culture that our own associations between race and quality, bodies and food, hierarchy and status, go relatively unnoticed and, more than that, continue to benefit the advertising industry and the companies that use such associations to sell their products. I want to unravel these associations, and while that process involves the kind of close looking and painful confrontation that scholarship has thus far largely avoided, it brings us closer to being more mindful consumers and citizens. In addition, and perhaps more important, it allows us to make strides toward acknowledging the power of such images; it is my hope that addressing, rather than turning a blind eye to, their violence can in some way chip away at their cruelty and make it less effective. The woman on the Sapolio advertisement gains a kind of liberation and agency when the power that demeaned her in her representation is confronted, grappled with, and challenged.

More than that, studying the profuse stereotypes that circulated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a useful lens for viewing racist tropes as they persist in contemporary American culture. Examining troubling imagery from the past provides a foundation for grappling with why we, as twenty-first century consumers, continue to permit and purchase—literally and metaphorically—old stereotypes about racialized bodies. Consider, for instance, today’s television advertisements for Popeyes. Since 2009, Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen (also known as Popeyes Chicken & Biscuits or simply as Popeyes), a company founded in New Orleans in 1972 (and known then as “Chicken on

the Run”), has aired a series of TV commercials starring “Annie the Chicken Queen,” played by a woman named Deidrie Henry. “Annie” is the creation of AFC Enterprises, the parent company in charge of operating and franchising the Popeyes brand, and GSD&M Idea City, the advertising firm that conceived of the commercial ad campaign. And the company stands by its brand, supported by its character. Popeyes Chief Marketing Officer, Dick Lynch, has described Annie as an “honest, vibrant, youthful and authentic” character “who will give it to them straight.”<sup>1</sup>

While all of the Popeyes commercials featuring Annie rely on her southern accent and familiar, colloquial conversation with the viewer, one commercial in particular—Popeyes Louisiana Trios (April 2014)—blatantly invokes old stereotypes to grab the viewer’s attention and confirm a certain promise of quality. The scene opens with Annie standing at a picnic table, draped in a red and white tablecloth, fried chicken and biscuits arranged before her. On either side of Annie stand two women—not just any women, but rather Annie herself—cloned or replicated in order to assist herself in preparing food and informing the audience about her delicious southern fried chicken (Figure 2). All three “Annies” smile wide and enthuse with each other about the flavor of the food and the “deal” that the customer gets, receiving so much food for such a low cost.

What is the value of showing Annie as a woman reproduced? Certainly it is a play on the Popeyes “3 of a kind” theme for their value deal at the time; yet it is more than that. In fact, it is a sort of homage to early ads that paired black characters with “Southern” food products. Cream of Wheat did this in the twentieth century, picturing

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<sup>1</sup> “Popeyes: Why I Like Annie the Chicken Queen,” April 30, 2014.  
<http://politic365.com/2011/05/21/popeyes-why-i-like-annie-the-chicken-queen/>.

their Chef Rastus as a repeating, replicated figure who is always ready and at your service. This advertising narrative multiplies the availability of labor, servitude, and consumption. Advertisements like these, which picture black bodies as sources of labor and production that can be readily and easily reproduced, assuage the viewer, who is likely tired, overworked, and looking for an inexpensive, quality meal. And like Cream of Wheat, which reproduced Rastus over and over again to make white people feel reassured by the availability of willing labor in post-emancipation America, Popeyes reproduces “Annie the Chicken Queen” as a welcome and willing cook who is not only available but also—and perhaps more importantly—happy and eager to serve.

The Popeyes commercial shares a method of stereotype, literal and figurative, with a 1902 Cream of Wheat print advertisement picturing the company’s familiar face, Chef Rastus, portrayed as usual hovering above two large sheaves of wheat (Figure 3). Like the wheat, Rastus is shown in abundance; unlike the wheat, however, Rastus is shown multiplied, reproduced, and repeating in identical forms that can be readily churned out. While the two sheaves of wheat look alike at first glance, they are in fact unique. Unlike nature, which is diverse and ever changing, Rastus is forever the same, easily reproduced, replaceable; in fact, he appears in four identical iterations, as if marching along, gaily holding his pot and a piping hot dish of Cream of Wheat. Like “Annie the Chicken Queen,” Rastus is the consummate happy producer. Both Rastus and Annie market their company’s products today, and just as Rastus’s visual characterization has changed very little over the years, commercials featuring Annie and her “sassy” enthusiasm for feeding American families play in new television ads every few months.

The same stereotypes and practices of disseminating racist propaganda exist and are reified time and again in contemporary American life.

### **A Word on Archives**

My research for this project began at the Valentine Museum in Richmond, Virginia, where I found the Sapolio advertising card, and led me to numerous archives at a range of institutions, including the Virginia Historical Society (Richmond, Virginia); Special Collections at Earl Gregg Swem Library at the College of William & Mary (Williamsburg, Virginia); the Grossman Collection at Winterthur Library (Wilmington, Delaware); the Warshaw Collection of Business Americana in the Archives Center at the National Museum of American History (Washington, D.C.); and the Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History at Duke University (Durham, North Carolina). Other important research sources include the following collections that I accessed online: Library of Congress; the Charles and Laura Dohm Shields Trade Card Collection, Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library at Miami University; Newton Free Library's Trade Card Collection; Baker Library, Harvard Business School; and Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries. An abundance of websites, including those of commercial products as well as independent collectors, make additional facets of American advertising ephemera accessible online. I compiled my research into a database of around 400 images; however, I examined thousands of advertising cards, postcards, advertisements, and other related materials, in the course of my research, all of which informed my thinking on the issues I address in this study.

I selected the archives based on the composition, scope, and accessibility of their collections. It is important to note that the institutions whose archives I visited are not the sole holders of the kinds of imagery examined in this dissertation, nor do their holdings comprise solely the kinds of materials I discuss here. I dedicated 4 years to perusing archival collections, acquiring reproductions, and photographing of a wide variety of images. My approach to this subject and my research process entailed examining collections of advertising materials and visual ephemera, looking at depictions of race, in particular, but not exclusively. Furthermore, I studied, selected, and compiled the images as a collection of my own, creating a database that allowed me to systematically sort and analyze them, identifying patterns and themes, overlapping dates, printing techniques, and visual motifs. The themes and stereotypes addressed in the dissertation arose directly from the images, not from my own expectations or preconceptions. Equally important is the fact that the illustrations of themes and stereotypes in the dissertation are representative examples of categories that comprise hundreds of similar images on trade cards and postcards. Rather than “cherry-picking” images that were particularly alarming or interesting, I selected those that were representative of imagery that was mass-produced and, indeed, abundant in collections and archival repositories. My end goal in confronting these stereotypes was to interrogate their origins and historical impact as they played out in advertising and ephemera, and to establish a method for approaching, reading, and grappling with this relatively unexamined and often troubling part of American history.

## Racial Reverberations

In 1899, Strobridge & Company Lithographers printed an image for one of George Thatcher's Greatest Minstrels' songs, "Hello! My Baby" (Figure 4). The illustration is a disturbing collage of racist tropes, which are worth citing individually. A white man in blackface, identifiable by his white hands and blackened face and red lips, looks out at the viewer as he stands and cranks a large machine. A boy and girl dance together in the middle ground; they have caricatured faces with large white eyes and red lips, the girl's mouth making a round, pink O. The most interesting part of the scene is the machine that the minstrel figure operates. At the left side of the image, we see a wide variety of objects being ushered into the mouth of the machine, with the minstrel helping to feed the goods into its opening. The items include, among other things, a banjo, a slice of watermelon, a cane, a top hat, and a chicken. According to the illustration, items such as these are what, churned together, make up African Americans. Moreover, these "ingredients" create a carefree, performative black body that, as seen in all seven figures pictured in the image, appear dancing, singing, music-making, subject to revelry, and accident-prone. As the small child in a yellow dress peeks into the mouth of the machine, a black boy is ejected from it; he holds his hands over his ears and stretches his mouth open in a cry as if bracing himself from the cacophony of the group to which he has been added. This picture combines a number of racist stereotypes that commercial art and advertising perpetuated for the purposes of appealing to white American consumers. Postcards, advertising cards, product packaging, and print advertisements alike relied upon images like this one and the ideologies it reinforced to contribute to modern discourses on American identity and belonging.

The most unsettling part of reading this image is the realization that the ideas illustrated in its narrative continue to gain reinforcement in twenty-first-century American society. In February 2014, a private school in northern California made headlines when it served a lunch menu in honor of Black History Month, creating outrage—and some defensiveness—among the parents, the students, and the nation. Carondelet High School for Girls offered a menu comprising fried chicken, cornbread, and watermelon as part of the fête. I include a selection of comments posted to the ABC website when it published this news online:

secondlook: Having grown up in the south I can tell you guys this is southern food. I'm not sure how this got attached to just black people. I think that's the part that is so offensive. It's some made up stereotype.

tn2987: The over-reaction to this is bewildering. The school did nothing wrong and shouldn't be castigated for an honest celebration of African American culture. It's the same thing as serving rice during the Chinese New Year or tacos during Cinco de Mayo. These three foods [fried chicken, cornbread, and watermelon] are an accurate representation, if not a staple of all typical African American's [sic] diets....

sue: I love fried chicken, and I'm not ashamed. I am also AA [African American], and think the school should not have apologized. Who complained? We need thicker skins. Sunday dinner when I was growing up was fried chicken. All stereotypes are not negative.

HM8432: Visited MLK's [Martin Luther King's] hotel room at the old Lorraine Hotel (now the Civil Rights Museum[ ]) in Memphis years ago. They have everything in the room how it was the day he was shot, including a plastic representation of his half-eaten last meal on the table inside. What did he have to eat? Fried chicken, watermelon, and some other smaller things. He obviously enjoyed the dish, and white people (like blacks) here in the South, enjoy it just as much!....Liking watermelon and chicken only becomes divisibly stereotypical if you permit it to be so. There are worse things for African-American activists to worry about, like high unemployment, slavish government dependence, poor academic performance, the drug culture, the collapse of the family unit, and disproportionate gun violence, etc....

joseph devassy: I'm a parent of a student at Carondelet High School and I was one of the concerned citizens who needed to speak up about [sic] this egregious choice for the Black History Month menu selections. It was extremely offensive to offer fried chicken, watermelon, and cornbread. I am very encouraged that the school has decided to instead serve chicken and waffles, pigs feet, collard greens, black-eyed peas, and grape soda.

Linda: Oh give me a break, how long is this race card going to be played!

Dark Legacy: It's the watermelon I tell you... the watermelon that set everybody off.<sup>2</sup>

Why are we so emotionally invested in what people eat? Why do the connections—or *perceived* connections—between people and the foods they both produce and consume open the door for uncomfortable and unseemly conversations? Why do we hold onto beliefs that particular people eat particular foods? And why do those beliefs continue to cause turmoil in twenty-first-century America? The fact that an educational institution created a menu honoring a particular race and including as part of that homage foods that for centuries have evoked racism and its manifestations—paired with the fact that people reacted with such fervent degrees of ennui and anger, disbelief and shame, pride and confusion—indicates that we are still coming to terms with the myriad issues, values, and ideals that troubled our nation from its very conception.

## **Recontextualizing Race**

While scholars have written much on American advertising, particularly post-1930, few have examined closely the profusion of trade cards that initiated the boom in

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<sup>2</sup> “School Apologizes for Black History Lunch Menu,” ABC News, 6 February 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/school-apologizes-black-history-lunch-menu-22395079>.

advertising during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, locating them within the larger framework of American visual culture. Indeed, few scholars read trade cards and similar ephemera as *texts* that narrate critical, explosive, and dynamic issues in the shaping of American history and the trajectory of national race relations. I want to counter the academic trend of relegating ephemeral images to categories of “early advertising” or the material products of the creation of chromolithography or technologies whose heyday suddenly ended in the 1920s. These images are an important part of American art history. In fact, I want to move away from the tendency to view advertising cards as a set—as cards on a page, as part of a larger tradition of collecting and scrapbooking—and move them into the methodology of art historical study wherein they are examined as critical works that communicate specific and important agendas. While scholars have written on economic history, food studies, labor history, critical race studies, and cleanliness and hygiene, I attempt to bring all of these subjects together into one nuanced examination of popular American imagery. I demonstrate through a study of American advertising and ephemera that the images that passed from hand to hand, from page to page, from domestic to child, and from child to mother, had profound and resonant effects on American perceptions and ideologies of race and social order.

## Literature Review

I aim to situate this project within the discussions and debates engaged by a number of scholars who have valuably contributed to the literature on constructions of race in American material and visual culture, and it is important to acknowledge their

work and explain how my own aims to negotiate with them. In particular, Grace Elizabeth Hale's book, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (1999), addresses whiteness as a condition and a creation that both conveys and constructs value. *Making Whiteness* is a seminal work revealing the myriad ways in which whiteness was manufactured, construed, and utilized in shaping American life, its spaces, experiences, and products. While Hale includes a brief discussion of advertising cards, she does not include any images, and focuses predominantly on advertisements for soap. I see this space as a useful one for inserting advertising cards and related ephemera in the discourse on race as a cultural construct. A discussion of stereotype and race would be incomplete without Stephen Jay Gould's book, *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996), as it provides a complex and important account of the popular, troubling, and pseudo-scientific ways that we have looked at mankind throughout history. By analyzing "scientific" studies, beliefs about the human brain, and ways of examining bodies, Gould reveals the disturbing impulses behind some of the ways that men have "measured" humans as a means of asserting ideas about the classification, measurability, and un/changeability of mankind.

One of the key fields I draw upon in the dissertation is food studies. Several scholars of particular note have examined the relationship between African Americans and food, its creation, its consumption, and its value, and their work has provided a critical launching pad for my own scholarship. In his text, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (1998), Maurice Manring discusses the fraught history of the Aunt Jemima figure as she has been reified and reproduced as a real person hired to act out a character, to a character with a life of her own perpetuated in American myth, to a

commodity made consumable for the American public. His text is an important contribution to unraveling popular stereotypes and understanding how the characters created for advertising became potent figures in American culture. Psyche Williams-Forson addresses similar stereotypes head-on in her book, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (2006). By pairing a history of black women and food, Williams-Forson reveals the power involved in race, womanhood, and food, highlighting old stereotypes and peeling back their layers to illuminate the intricate workings of their creation, perpetuation, and meaning. While not specifically focused on food, Patricia Turner's *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (2002) presents a formidable analysis of African-American stereotypes and their production as collectibles—among them food-related products such as cookie jars and mammy figurines—and a variety of forms of entertainment. Turner analyzes these objects and cultural forms, arguing that old stereotypes are still hard and fast in everyday life. Her work is indispensable for anyone studying stereotype and its manifestation in American popular culture.

Another particularly relevant work contributing to food studies is Helen Veit's book, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (2013), which studies the moral impulses behind how Americans chose what and how much to eat, what they sent overseas as war relief, what foods they considered exotic or taboo, and what they served on their own tables as nourishment for future generations. Veit's analysis focuses specifically on the period of the first World War and makes a powerful contribution to our understanding of how food choice and consumption held meaning for twentieth-

century Americans. I consider my work to be similar in this aim, yet I trace the myriad connotations and ideologies to earlier moments in history, where the seeds of meaning were planted and flourished as Americans continued to associate bodies and nationalism with what they chose to purchase, produce, and serve to their families.

Acknowledging the general exclusion of African Americans from advertising's target audience, Katherine Parkin's *Food Is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (2006) focuses instead on late nineteenth- but primarily twentieth-century advertising's appeals to white women to select particular products in order to provide love and affection to her family. Parkin's approach is more textual than visually based, and her visual analysis of advertisements is slim. Her main objective in *Food Is Love* is to reveal how advertisements' textual messages cultivated feelings of fear, obligation, and urgency to nurture emotional bonds, in turn urging white female homemakers to buy and use particular food products. My work aims to fill the gaps in this kind of scholarship, which generally excludes the examination of images and ads that did in fact target African Americans and which focuses on more accessible, explicit textual modes of consumption (as opposed to more visually charged advertisements that communicated on more subversive, even subconscious ideological levels).

I particularly see my dissertation in conversation with Kyla Wazana Tompkins's book, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (2012), which takes a critical look at Americans' meaningful and fraught relationships with race and consumption, examining in particular dietetics, literature, and trade cards. Tompkins is one of the only scholars of whom I am aware who closely studies advertising cards as critical texts that participated in national discourses on race; however, her work differs from mine in her

explicit focus on orality. Much of her analysis centers on the sexual and political implications of the mouth and gastronomic processes. In addition, her discussion of advertising cards is but one chapter in a larger work on race and the body, including examinations of literature and dietary history.

Labor studies is a vast field with an abundance of scholarship relating to American history and the African-American experience. I especially see my work in conversation with Robert Zieger's book, *For Jobs and Freedom* (2007), which presents a history of African Americans' experiences working, securing economic independence, and making strides toward equal treatment as laborers in the years following emancipation. Zieger astutely addresses the triumphs and setbacks encountered by black Americans as they entered the free labor workforce, explaining how race, politics, and economics impacted their transition from working under slavery to working for independence, both personal and professional.

American concerns with health and cleanliness is an area that my work considers integral to the overarching subjects of bodies and consumption. Most relevant to my discussion is Suellen Hoy, who takes on the nation's interest in health and hygiene in her book, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (1996). *Chasing Dirt* presents a chronological study of American conceptions of good health and well-being, cleanliness, disease, and sanitation and their impact on daily life and national consciousness. Hoy reminds us that "cleanliness" was not always a popular American concern and, throughout the centuries, has been a concept with ever-changing and complex meaning.

Two books on scrapbooks provided a useful foundation for researching and studying advertising cards and ephemera from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth

centuries. Ellen Gruber Garvey's *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (2012) reveals the varied ways in which scrapbooks were used in American life, studying them as tools for self-expression, political engagement, and preserving memories. While she includes a chapter dedicated to African Americans, Garvey's emphasis is on how black Americans created and used scrapbooks, as opposed to how images in scrapbooks pictured black subjects. *The Scrapbook in American Life* (2006), edited by Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler, discusses the history of scrapbook-making in America, addressing who made them, how, for what purposes, and how viewers engaged with them. Whereas both books largely examine trade cards as parts of the larger whole—the scrapbook—I read them as objects that convey powerful messages independent of the album page. *Writing with Scissors* and *The Scrapbook in American Life* are important reminders, however, that the meaning and interpretation of the kind of images and texts presented on advertising cards had the potential to shift and transform when put on a page with other cards and ephemera. They also convey the significance of the viewer's reading of the images in the process of collecting, arranging, and preserving them, reminding us that where images are encountered has a significant impact on both how and by whom they are read.

And finally, a number of historians have produced important texts on American advertising and consumerism, and their insights have been critical to my own study. Jackson Lears's book, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (1995), focuses on advertisements as products of both advertisers and consumers, examining the agendas created, practiced, and aimed for on the part of both parties. He analyzes the processes wherein advertisers and consumers constructed ideals

and narratives of self-transformation via consumption. While Lears examines advertising agencies' and artists' attempts to convey and shape American identity via ideals of abundance, plenty, and progress, I take up the matter of who was considered fit for enjoying those conditions. African Americans were in fact a pivotal part of these ideals, and part of my goal is to demonstrate how advertising and ephemera addressed their role in the "fables" of American life. Another book critical to discussions of advertising in America during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries is Charles McGovern's book, *Sold American* (2006), which discusses advertising's effective shaping of American citizens via consumption. McGovern demonstrates how consumerism and citizenship became intimately linked as advertising cast the purchase of goods as a distinctly democratic act. His work provides a key foundation for understanding the nuances of advertising as an arena for creating and controlling visions of American identity.

My project aims to engage with all of these scholars and to bring the myriad disciplines and issues presented in scholarship together into an exploration of how advertising imagery and visual ephemera shaped American culture. I want to trace stereotypes, anxieties, and their production in American material and visual culture back to their roots in order to better reveal the nuanced history that created potent concepts and images of American identity and citizenship. As Robert Rydell, whose work has focused largely on American spectacles and entertainment, states in his book, *All the World's a Fair* (1984), "Exactly how scientific ideas about evolution, race, and culture were disseminated from academic circles to the level of popular consumption...is less well

understood and has led a handful of historians to question the legitimating function of Darwinian ideas.”<sup>3</sup> This is, in fact, the very project to which I aim to contribute.

Theoretically and methodologically, I adhere to Jules Prown’s theory of material culture:

Material culture as a study is based upon the obvious fact that the existence of a man-made object is concrete evidence of the presence of a human intelligence operating at the time of fabrication. The underlying premise is that objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged.<sup>4</sup>

Racist images of black figures did not comprise the majority of illustrations in American advertising in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; indeed, the images studied in this dissertation are examples of the minority in terms of what American advertising pictured. This does not, however, suggest a lack of importance, nor does it imply that such images were rarely seen or encountered by the average American citizen. To the contrary, these images were prolific enough that they were produced and reproduced in abundance and, in turn, reached vast audiences. This dissertation brings a critical portion of early American advertising out of the shadows in which it has hidden in order to approach a better understanding of our nation’s past, fraught with racial tension, as it was expressed in objects of everyday life. While it is uncomfortable, to say the least, to view these images, I believe that addressing them and trying to understand their impact on American

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<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1982): 1-2.

life is important. Keeping them tucked away only nurtures and perpetuates their silent violence.

Unlike works of “fine” art, which can be explained through scholarship with the aid of artist biographies and primary source material regarding provenance and the ideas behind their creation, advertising cards and postcards were largely unsigned, undated, and lacking any kind of source material. This makes them a difficult body of work for scholarly study; this fact, paired with their extreme racist content, likely explains their relative absence in examinations of American advertising and consumer culture. Yet it is precisely these factors—the anonymity, lack of information, and the unbridled racism—that imbued them with such overwhelming ideological power both in their heyday and today. Without studying them and challenging their messages, these images can act with abandon upon any eyes that find them. It is my goal to arm the reader with the knowledge and tools needed for encountering such images, because it is my hope that this process can manifest a new power that initiates healing.

### **A Case Study in Stereotype, Hunger, Labor, and the Racialized Body**

Before we begin our journey through the images and issues taken up in the dissertation, it is helpful here to take a step back and examine illustrations for which we *do* have provenance information and that were produced for one of the most popular food brands in America: Cream of Wheat. The company’s advertising “character” and chief interlocutor, Chef Rastus, was a familiar and often much-loved figure. Many artists have created paintings for printing as Cream of Wheat ads, including one of the most prolific,

Edward Vincent Brewer (1883-1971), who produced over 100 paintings for the company between 1911 and 1926. Looking closely at one of Brewer's creations for Cream of Wheat affords a useful introduction to the major themes presented in this study.

Around 1915, Brewer painted *The Connoisseurs* (Figure 5), which was printed in magazines the following year. In the illustration, Brewer alluded to divisions between realms—social, racial, and artistic. The title speaks directly to the notions of good “taste” regarding both breakfast cereal and aesthetics. Particularly in the original sketch for this work, which shows Chef Rastus and a child taste-testing a fresh batch of Cream of Wheat, the reference is double—the child consumer recognizes that Cream of Wheat is both an appetizing and worthy product for his consumption, and Rastus is defined as a “connoisseur” of the very food he produces.

Brewer's original sketch for “The Connoisseurs” recently turned up for sale on Ebay and was purchased by the Earl Gregg Swem Library at the College of William & Mary, allowing me to conduct a close comparison of it with the published advertisement (Figure 6). Significantly, the advertisement varies in one important detail: the child's race. The boy, whom Brewer initially pictured as white with brown curly hair, appears in the printed ad as black. The rest of the scene is identical to the original painting in nearly every aspect, including the meticulously detailed stove, backsplash, and tile floor, as well as Rastus's stance and expression. The fact that the artist changed the boy's race, then, is all the more important. In fact, Brewer re-conceptualized the boy's overall appearance—both his skin color and his clothing—thereby exposing his concern with the scene's primary subject. In the printed ad, the boy—who in Brewer's original painting wears a rather nondescript red shirt and shorts—dons a little chef's outfit and thus appears as a

miniature Chef Rastus, sporting a matching chef hat, jacket, and apron. Suddenly the image has an entirely new resonance; by picturing two versions, so to speak, of Chef Rastus, Brewer has allowed for the image and its title to suggest that the black figures are the intergenerational “connoisseurs” of a product that they seem forever bound to prepare and serve. No longer a taste-test between cook and consumer, the scene now entails an educational apprenticeship in racialized labor and “taste” between chef and sous-chef. Unlike the white youths pictured in Brewer’s other ads, who are represented in various settings and always healthy, robust, and active, the black child’s future projects a very different horizon of possibilities. His future is prescribed by his very characterization as the next Rastus, always smiling, always content in his service to white families.

Brewer’s draft painting and the advertisement as it ran in magazines reveal important issues and ideas that circulated in everyday American life leading up to and following the turn of the century. First, Rastus was the epitome of a stereotype. In addition to his depiction as the nostalgic “happy slave,” always working and eager to serve white families, the chef was also a stereotype in the literal or technological sense. In the vast majority of ads created for Cream of Wheat, various artists reproduced the chef in one way or another: often creators pictured him multiplied, his body printed more than once in a single ad, making him more emblematic than human; furthermore, Rastus’s face was usually inserted as a photograph, around which the artist created the rest of the vignette. A veritable “stereotype,” Rastus became interchangeable and thus synonymous with the product itself—an object of consumption marketed to the viewer/consumer.

Second, the advertisement and Brewer's original painting reveal explicit distinctions between hungry bodies that deserve nourishment and those that do not. The child in the draft painting contrasts Rastus in both skin color and comportment; the narrative suggests that he has entered the chef's space in order to have a taste of the cereal and ensure it meets his satisfaction. The boy's tasting of the Cream of Wheat prepared by Chef Rastus is a moment of nourishment and enjoyment. In contrast, the black child in the printed version is clearly presented as working in collaboration with Chef Rastus. His tasting of the hot cereal is part of his tutelage, part of the process of making sure the product he and Rastus made is suitable for the white viewer/consumer's consumption.

This brings us to the third facet of this ad and the contemporary issues it addresses: the advertisement as it ran in magazines pictures the black child as a miniature Chef Rastus, implying that he is working within a system of labor to which he naturally belongs. His posture mimics that of Chef Rastus and his outfit is a close copy of the mature chef's, underscoring the argument that the boy is destined to work as Chef Rastus does, producing food for the nourishment of white American families. And finally, Brewer's visual narratives address the notion of the healthy, clean body as a part of white American life. The white boy is nourished by the cereal, his body turned to frontally face the viewer/consumer. He smiles with his hand at his hip, eating the Cream of Wheat, his health and fitness a testament to the quality of the product being marketed. The black child in the printed ad, however, directly faces Chef Rastus and his uniform is a powerful reminder of his exemption from consumer society. His body is covered by a crisp, white chef's uniform, readying him for working in a kitchen. Brewer illustrated the kitchen,

moreover, as a perfectly clean and tidy space. And lacking any individuality as all of the white children in Brewer's other ads possess, the black child's posture aligns him with Rastus such that they are mirrors of one another, becoming part of what Grace Elizabeth Hale identifies in some ads as "The attempt to figure absolute racial difference."<sup>5</sup> The fact that Brewer changed key identifiers when he switched from picturing a white child to a black child reveals that he—and the company and audience for whom he illustrated—considered such key differences to exist and to have meaning. It is this set of stereotypes and widespread ideologies of race that I work to unravel and examine in the chapters that follow.

## Chapters Overview

The chapters that follow are arranged thematically, beginning with the largest issue at hand: stereotype. In Chapter 1, I discuss stereotype as both a technological printing process and as an ideological phenomenon that is both process and product. I examine stereotype as a means of producing and reproducing ideas, particularly about race, and trace some of the most potent and lasting racist stereotypes of the time back to their roots, which I argue lie in pseudoscience and ethnology.

Chapter 2 addresses issues of hunger and sustenance as pictured in American advertising and ephemera. I demonstrate how African Americans were overwhelmingly

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<sup>5</sup> Brewer often took photographs of white children playing, using them as models for his paintings; indeed, the children pictured in Brewer's Cream of Wheat advertisements are often his own children or his neighbors'. Patricia Condon Johnston, "Edward Brewer: Illustrator and Portrait Painter," *Minnesota History*, vol. 47, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 4. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 157.

pictured as insatiable, bestial figures incapable of exhibiting self-control when in the presence of food. I explore the complex ideas put forth in such imagery, making connections between racist anxieties and modern concerns about food, nourishment, and democratic self-control.

In Chapter 3, I study imagery and objects that imagined violence enacted by and against black figures. American advertising and popular culture relished fantasies about black bodies being implicitly and explicitly harmful and harmed, revealing important ideologies about race and social order. Scenes in which black figures were chased, injured, and assaulted provided a means of metaphorically regulating and punishing the fantastical, out-of-control black body. Likewise, scenes in which black figures were imagined as both threatening menaces and buffoons capable of inflicting harm ultimately undermined African Americans' participation in modern society and mocked their accomplishments.

From there, in Chapter 4 I segue into a discussion of laboring bodies as they were depicted in American advertising, in particular. I demonstrate how key differences between depictions of black and white bodies at work argued for essential, "inherent" differences between the races. While black figures were pictured as inexhaustible, always available, and happily laboring bodies, white figures were by and large exempted from imagined scenes of hard work. The black figure was continually employed as a body made performative for the purposes of serving the white viewer/consumer, and the very stereotypes produced by early arguments about the "natural" differences between blacks and whites were reified as justifications for identifying the black body as a workable body.

And finally, Chapter 5 explores concepts of health and hygiene in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, which were often closely associated with notions of race. African Americans were consistently imagined as being outside of the realm of clean, healthy, nourished bodies, unless for the purposes of serving the white viewer/consumer. In fact, black figures, particularly in advertising, were continually scrubbed and scoured in an anxious attempt to work out the permanence of race. By picturing black bodies in various states of whitening, American imagery argued for the supposedly inherent inferiority of African Americans, who, even if their skin could be partially lightened, would never be completely made white.

### **A Note on Scope, Provenance, and Language**

This study is by no means a complete examination or discussion of the representation of race in American visual culture during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While my work focuses specifically on African Americans portrayed in advertising and ephemera, there is still much to be said about representations of countless other Americans—Asian Americans, Irish Americans, Native Americans, to name a few. One could also pursue questions of gender and issues of sex in American advertising during this time, as both were powerfully depicted in images and texts during these centuries. Furthermore, one could perform this same analysis more deeply in terms of the larger themes I have laid out—stereotype, hunger, labor, and health and hygiene—as each of these would be a worthwhile lens for studying this imagery. It is my goal, however, to show how the fundamental stereotypes at work in the imagery I study

impacted and were applied to all of these arenas of American life. Ultimately, my study is a launching point, the beginning of a conversation whose issues are revealed here as the tip of the iceberg.

Throughout the dissertation I have indicated where possible the provenance of images; however, artists, dates, and even printers' information is largely unknown for many (if not most) of the advertising images I examine. This is particularly true for the nineteenth-century material. The lack of provenance information affords another valuable opportunity for future scholarship, for tracing advertisements from around the turn of the century to their origins of manufacture and creation is a difficult yet worthwhile task.<sup>6</sup>

It is important here to address the terminology that I employ throughout the dissertation. While the images that constitute the majority of the material that I examine are advertisements, looking *only* at advertising material would have done a disservice to the overarching purpose of this study, which is to argue that ephemeral imagery—especially advertisements—comprised popular and potent contributors to national ideologies about race and American identity. They did not exist in a vacuum, yet they constituted one important part of a larger fabric of visual conversation. Thus, I vacillate, where appropriate, between explicitly referring to “advertising cards” and the like, and using the more general terms “ephemera” and “visual culture.” I explore more than the visual, however, including as part of my discussion literary texts that circulated concurrently with the imagery that comprises the bulk of this study. Advertising images, postcards, prints, short stories, songs, games, and product labels all solicited a national

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Jay has done some of this important work, particularly for some of the earliest of advertisements. See Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

audience comprising all ages, sexes, and races. Studying these sources together and uncovering the extent to which they communicated with one another sheds new light on the familiar issue of race in American history. Visually based and art historically handled, this study is essentially and passionately interdisciplinary.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, a disclaimer is prudent, as the imagery and language in many of the objects that I examine in this study are offensive at best and horrifying at worst. I have tried to treat these texts and images as sensitively as possible. My intention is that engaging with these materials will serve a greater purpose that benefits us not only as consumers but also scholars whose understanding of stereotypes in advertising and visual culture will continue to expose the roots of their creation and begin to both address and extirpate their troubling reverberations in contemporary American life.

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<sup>7</sup> I recognize that some of the language in this study utilizes broad terms to refer to stereotypes, themes, and even race, and want to emphasize that I am not creating monolithic categories for what are very complex issues.



Fig. 1  
“Scour Kettles With Sapolio,” c. 1870-1900. Advertising card. Sapolio. Enoch Morgan’s Sons.  
Boston Public Library, Print Department, Soap (shelf).  
Digital Commonwealth Massachusetts Collections Online. August 14, 2015.



Popeyes Louisiana Trios Commercial 2014

Fig. 2  
Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen. “Popeyes Louisiana Trio Commercial 2014.” Television advertisement. May 12, 2014.



Fig. 3

"Cream of Wheat," 1902. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Cream of Wheat Company.

Private collection.



Fig. 4

"Hello! My Baby." 1899. Sheet Music Title Page. George Thatcher's Greatest Minstrels. Strobridge & Co. Lithographers (printer).

Accessed August 14, 2015.

[http://www.vintaga.com/Posters/Minstrel/19791996\\_JDRc2L/1555318135\\_xGjcLv8#!i=1555318135&k=xGjcLv8](http://www.vintaga.com/Posters/Minstrel/19791996_JDRc2L/1555318135_xGjcLv8#!i=1555318135&k=xGjcLv8).



Fig. 5

*The Connoisseurs*, c. 1915. Oil on artist's board. Edward V. Brewer (artist). Cream of Wheat Company.

College of William & Mary, Earl Gregg Swem Library, Special Collections.

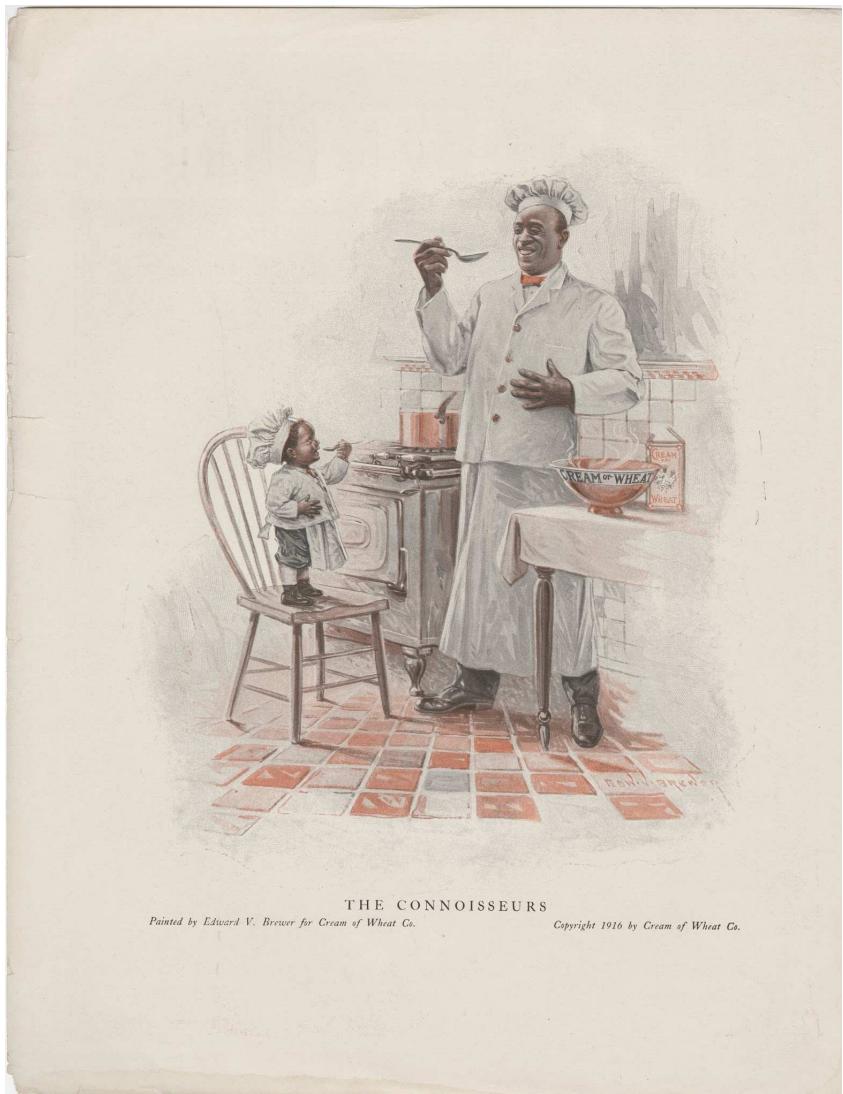


Fig. 6

"The Connoisseurs," 1916. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Edward V. Brewer (artist). Cream of Wheat Company.  
College of William & Mary, Earl Gregg Swem Library, Special Collections.

## Chapter 1

### Stereotype: Reproducing Bodies and Ideas

For roughly half a century, Americans of all ages, sexes, and races came in contact on a daily basis with small paper cards measuring on average 4 inches by 3 inches, known as advertising cards or trade cards. Some were hand illustrated in black and white with pen or pencil drawings; others featured only text; still others were printed in blue or gold lithography or, in later years, were colored in a variety of bright hues for an eye-catching effect. Some had riddles and rhymes meant to appeal to children, while others contained highly charged text or imagery intended to target a particular audience, either on a commercial or ideological level (and sometimes both). Between 1860 and 1910, Americans acquired these cards in numerous ways: vendors passed them out on the streets, business owners stuffed them into packages that customers purchased, companies mailed them out, and people—youths especially—traded them, ultimately compiling collections that were pasted into scrapbooks, used as decorations in the home, or saved and admired like souvenirs or trading cards. Relying upon imagery to grab the viewer’s attention, engage and entertain them, advertising cards were legible to national audiences regardless of their viewers’ literacy or educational background. During the pinnacle of its popularity in the 1880s, “the trade card was truly the most ubiquitous form of advertising in America.”<sup>8</sup>

Advertising cards were one category of objects that participated in early American consumer culture, relying upon image and text to market not only commercial

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 3.

goods but also ideas about society, politics, and the economy. While advertising cards later gave way to print magazine ads, postcards circulated in tandem with trade cards, selling ideologies in much the same way as bona fide advertising. Although postcards were not explicitly commercial in nature, instead serving the purpose of sending a brief message to a friend, relative, or colleague, they nonetheless *were* commercial in the sense that they were mass produced for sale and they circulated via post and private distribution in much the same way as did advertising cards. Furthermore, postcards relied heavily on imagery to capture their audience's attention in order to convey a particular message, what I consider *selling* an idea or *marketing* a specific discourse. And just as Americans made advertising cards personal and invested them with memory and meaning (by collecting, arranging, trading, and saving them), so too did they employ the mass-produced images on postcards in an intimate way by inscribing messages on their versos and sometimes on the images themselves, often attaching personal meaning to their selection of a particular card to send to a particular recipient.

At the most fundamental level, advertising cards and postcards were products of reproduction. An artist created a drawing, which was printed en masse on paper cards for wide distribution. The technology of lithography made this process easier and more refined, enabling printers to produce more cards with finer detail and, with time and the invention of chromolithography, richer colors. Scholars have studied the process of chromolithography as it pertains to the history of advertising cards.<sup>9</sup> My point in this discussion, however, is that advertising cards and postcards were, by their very design,

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<sup>9</sup> See especially Jay, *The Trade Card*, and Jay T. Last, *The Colour Explosion: Nineteenth-Century American Lithography* (Santa Ana: Hillcrest Press, 2005).

heavily reliant upon stereotype, both technologically and visually. It behooves us to work through what this means, and taking two examples will benefit our understanding of the duality of stereotype in trade cards and postcards alike.

The first example is an advertising card featuring an illustration and a blank space in which the local retailer has stamped his and his partner's surnames, Toms & Smyth, and their store address, making the customer aware that they sell Acorn brand stoves and ranges (Figure 7). This kind of card was a particularly popular choice, as it provided the image and allowed the retailer to customize it by applying his name and location to the card with a stamp or in his own handwriting. The second example is an advertisement that I will discuss in greater detail below. It is a 1902 advertisement for Cream of Wheat, in which the brand's familiar character, Chef Rastus, is shown multiplied, with four of him standing lined up a row (Figure 8). In this instance, printing technology allowed the precise reproduction of his image, bolstering the stereotype that he embodied—the smiling, happy black worker who is abundant in both his desire and his availability to serve white families.

Indeed, stereotype was a double-edged sword that both allowed for advances in printing and inherently encouraged the production and dissemination of racist propaganda. In the printing industry, stereotype referred to a technical process by which pages of text, known as forms, were cast into metal plates, which could then be printed and re-printed numerous times.<sup>10</sup> This technology did away with the expensive and time-consuming need for resetting type. In visual culture, stereotype refers to two nearly

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<sup>10</sup> "Stereotyping," The Museum of Printing, accessed July 14, 2015, <http://www.museumofprinting.org/Collection.html>.

identical photographs printed side by side. When viewed with a stereoscope, the photographs overlapped, appearing three-dimensional. In both printing and visual culture, stereotype conveyed notions of reproduction, doubling, and better ways to make more of something singular. When applied to American life, the word “stereotype” took on more complex meaning in its new connotation as a moniker for any idea that was repeated to the extent that it became familiar and held a relatively fixed meaning for the average audience.

In visual culture, stereotype—the potent, repeated idea—permeated American advertising and ephemera with astounding speed and frequency. Homi Bhabha argues that this kind of imagery operates by the logic of stereotype, which depends entirely upon reproduction—“a continual and repetitive chain”—of otherness.<sup>11</sup> That perceived otherness, furthermore, “*must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh.”<sup>12</sup> Stereotype, in other words, depends upon the identification of difference, which must be continually repeated and reinforced in order to function as a recognizable and familiar trope that conveys meaning. This is precisely what advertising cards, postcards and other advertising ephemera accomplished: their mass production and potential for wide distribution made the images they carried the kind of “continual and repetitive chain” that Bhabha describes. And while stereotypes were applied to all people—white, black, old, young, and so on—tropes relating to African Americans were so abundant as to demand that we question why their bodies were pictured so crudely and offensively to adorn postcards and market anything from soap to food to fertilizer. Considering that the

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<sup>11</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question...Homi K Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6: 29.

<sup>12</sup> Bhabha, “The Other Question,” 29.

imagery of advertising cards, especially, was the result of conscious choices made by both the artist/printer and the manufacturer/retailer, it is significant that the cards “placed an image in the mind of the consumer to associate with the advertised item.”<sup>13</sup> The choice to picture African Americans on trade cards that often had no logical relation to a product being marketed, then, is a critical point of inquiry. I argue that these stereotypes, which were printed and reprinted, distributed, purchased, collected and saved, were manifestations of earlier conceptions, bred by prejudice and pseudoscience, that African Americans were innately less human than white Americans; as such, they perpetuated and reinforced ideas of racial inequality at a time when equality was increasingly a prospect for black Americans.

### **Bodies in Question: Pseudoscience and Issues of Black Humanity**

Scholarship has grappled with pseudoscience and its impact upon notions of race, producing a number of important works that address both black and white perspectives on race as an identifier that was studied, measured, qualified, challenged, and embraced variously throughout American history (and possessed European roots). My goal is not to replicate what has already been written, but rather to acknowledge the work that has been done by historians and to continue the conversation as it relates to how notions of race played out in American culture in everyday visual objects. In fact, scholars have studied pseudoscience as it related to biology and religion, literature and politics, but I want to

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret E. Hale, “The Nineteenth-Century American Trade Card,” *The Business History Review*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Winter 2000): 684.

point out how much of the imagery abundant in advertising and ephemera of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was dependent upon the history of pseudoscience and its feverish attempts to identify the origins of the races and, in turn, establish their relative values.<sup>14</sup>

While pseudoscientific thinking about race changed and evolved, so to speak, over the years, two dominant strands of thought ran throughout in the form of origin narratives: monogenism and polygenism.<sup>15</sup> Monogenism argued that all mankind, regardless of skin color, descended from one pair (biblically, Adam and Eve), and that people looked different owing to the impact of diverse environmental factors. Polygenism touted different origins for different races, arguing that people of particular regions and complexions were in fact different species. Polygenism was especially favored by those who believed that blacks were inferior to whites, as it promoted the idea that people of different races were naturally not intended to mate and produce offspring. Doing so, according to this origin myth, would be fundamentally unnatural and eventually result in racial degeneration.

One of polygenism's leading figures was Dr. Samuel G. Morton (1799-1851), who during the 1820s and 1830s measured the volume and dimensions of hundreds of human skulls in order to prove that brain size—and, in turn, intellect—was specific to the

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<sup>14</sup> Two particularly notable publications on the history of pseudoscience include William Stanton's *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) and Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996).

<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that there were different schools of thought within both monogenism and polygenism. John Haller, Jr., goes into detail about the individual groups in his article, "The Species Problem: Nineteenth-Century Concepts of Racial Inferiority in the Origin of Man Controversy," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 72, No. 6 (December 1970): 1319-1329.

individual races.<sup>16</sup> Two of Morton's publications, *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844), served as the "foundational texts" for the so-called American School of ethnology, led by Morton and his fellow scientists, George Gliddon, Josiah Nott, and Louis Agassiz.<sup>17</sup> His studies and conclusions made Morton "a pioneer of American race science and physical anthropology," and his assertions that the various races belonged to distinct species of separate origins won him significant respect.<sup>18</sup> In fact, "by 1850...Morton convinced most of the scientists of this time that the multiple origins theory was the most parsimonious way of explaining human variability" and his work made "scientific method and theory" fundamental elements of "any social construct of race."<sup>19</sup> Given his research agenda, Morton's studies of human skulls concluded, rather unsurprisingly, that English Europeans possessed the greatest brain capacity and Africans had the least.<sup>20</sup>

Two other men who also achieved scientific acclaim in this arena were Dr. Josiah Clark Nott (1804-1873) and George Robbins Gliddon (1809-1857). Their 1854 publication, *Types of Mankind*, aimed at reproducing, substantiating, and continuing the work of Samuel Morton and Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) by employing cranial measurements, taxonomic charts and diagrams, and studies of ancient bodies and

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<sup>16</sup> "One Race or Several Species," "Race: Are We So Different?," A Project of the American Anthropological Association, 2011, accessed August 6, 2011, [http://www.understandingrace.org/history/science/one\\_race.html](http://www.understandingrace.org/history/science/one_race.html).

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 197-198.

<sup>18</sup> "One Race or Several Species."

<sup>19</sup> Brendan O'Flaherty and Jill S. Shapiro, "Apes, Essences, and Races: What Natural Scientists Believed about Human Variation, 1700-1900," Columbia University Department of Economics Discussion Paper Series, Discussion Paper #:0102-24 (New York: Columbia University, 2002): 23-24, accessed August 22, 2011, <http://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac:113664>.

<sup>20</sup> "One Race or Several Species."

artworks. The book includes a number of drawings that compare the skull shapes and sizes of various groups of people, some of them making assumptions based on the comparisons that are shockingly straightforward. For instance, one illustration shows three skulls, each “matched,” so to speak, with the kind of figure it represented (Figure 9). The “Greek” skull is paired with the sculpted “Apollo Belvedere,” the Classical ideal and by its identification as a deity, a being who is in fact *superior* to humans. The skull is well-proportioned: the cranium is almost perfectly round, the jaw is square, the teeth aligned, and the eye sockets, nasal cavity, and jawline are in nearly perfect vertical alignment. The skull’s match, Apollo, features a straight, angular nose, small mouth, and flowing hair (drawn with careful, almost loving detail). The second pair comprises a “Creole Negro” skull and a “Negro” man, who has flat head, swollen lips (accentuated with facial hair), bulging eyes, an enormous neck that makes the face appear almost disproportionately small, and a nose that is so round and curved as to appear nearly disfigured. The skull is a stark contrast to the “Greek Skull,” with its misshapen, elongated, slanted, angular shape lacking any perfect vertical or horizontal axes. The “Young Chimpanzee” skull is remarkably similar to the elongated, asymmetrical cranium of the “Creole Negro,” with an exaggerated jawline to match. Furthermore, the “Young Chimpanzee” figure is strikingly similar in appearance to the “Negro;” the artist has rendered the skin of both the chimpanzee and the black man with hatching strokes, giving them identical coloration, and their eyes sit within similarly fleshy sockets. In fact, the “Negro” appears almost as simian as the “Young Chimpanzee” appears human. As if finding it necessary to reinforce the assertions made by the illustration, the authors state that “a man must be blind not to be struck by similitudes between some of the lower races

of mankind, viewed as connecting links in the animal kingdom” and argued that they could not “rationally” prove that the Orangutan and Chimpanzee were “widely separated from certain African and Oceanic Negroes.”<sup>21</sup>

*Types of Mankind* made polygenist ideas popular; it was printed in nine editions and sold numerous copies.<sup>22</sup> In fact, even with what was at the time a steep selling price of \$7.50, the book’s first 3,500 copies sold out in only four months.<sup>23</sup> As the foundational text of the American School of ethnology, their publication was “the leading American work on human races at the time.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, their work was so well known and esteemed that, nationwide, “books, newspapers, tracts, and stump speeches” featured Gliddon’s and Nott’s claims about the inequality of races.<sup>25</sup> While the work of pseudoscientists like Morton, Gliddon, and Nott went relatively uncontested by white Americans, some members of the African-American community sought to challenge the arguments made by white ethnologists. Most of the scholarship on pseudoscience has taken up white perspectives on people of color; however, historian Mia Bay’s book, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (2000), examines the African-American response to popular notions about race and human equality. Throughout her study, she makes the point that both black and white arguments about race were continually contradictory, often simultaneously challenged, and

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<sup>21</sup> Josiah Clark Nott and George Robbins Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: Or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon the Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History* (London: Trübner & Co., 1854), 457.

<sup>22</sup> “One Race or Several Species.”

<sup>23</sup> Derrick Z. Jackson, “141 Years Later, Bigotry Still Sells,” *The Baltimore Sun* (January 13, 1995), accessed November 30, 2015, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1995-01-13/news/1995013205\\_1\\_nott-tag-gliddon](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1995-01-13/news/1995013205_1_nott-tag-gliddon).

<sup>24</sup> O’Flaherty and Shapiro, “Apes, Essences, and Races,” 24.

<sup>25</sup> Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 225.

dependent on the opposing side's arguments. Assertions on both sides almost invariably circled back to the idea that the races were ultimately qualifiable based either on appearance and/or on temperament.<sup>26</sup> Bay observes that while white Americans usually used black Americans' outward appearances as important markers of their inferiority and backwardness, African Americans rarely made significant mention of whites' appearances in their writings on race and mankind.<sup>27</sup> Instead, their analyses usually emphasized white people's character and asserted that whites were aggressive, immoral, and oppressive by their very nature.<sup>28</sup>

At the heart of all of this, Bay points out, was the matter of history and who, in man's earliest years, had ruled over whom; for that, white and black ethnologists often believed, would provide perhaps the most accurate historical account of who was inherently dominant and who was inherently inferior, who was naturally a ruler and who a slave. While black intellectuals took up matters of pseudoscience to challenge and respond to white ethnologists' claims of African Americans' racial inferiority, other black Americans in the late-nineteenth century in particular, also joined the conversation, albeit without the technical science perspectives employed by black writers. Instead, creation narratives and origin tales bridged both groups and their understandings of race and differences among men. Bay cites a number of such tales in her work, but three in particular stand out as relevant to my discussion. The first is the Hamitic Curse, in which Noah cursed his son, Ham, after Ham looked upon him in a moment of naked

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<sup>26</sup> Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37-41.

<sup>27</sup> Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 37.

drunkenness and laughed. Noah cursed Ham's son, Canaan, proclaiming him the "slave of slaves."<sup>29</sup> The second is a tale in which the devil reportedly created black people in order to mimic God's creation of Adam. "But the devil did not have clay, so he used mud instead and substituted moss for hair. Not pleased by the figure he had created, 'he kicked it in the shins and struck it in the nose, thus establishing the physical attributes of the black race.'"<sup>30</sup> The third relevant story recounts that in the beginning, all of God's people were black; in time, they discovered a pond in which they could wash themselves and lighten their skin. "Wanting to 'change deyselves den like dey always has,' they flocked to the pond, which gradually ran out of water, leaving some yellow mulattoes and those who came last still black, except on the bottom of their hands and feet, where they walked 'tryin' to get white.'<sup>31</sup> The three tales represent only a few of many creation narratives, but these particular examples testify to the matter of appearance as an indication of man's humanity. Significantly, they also address the notion of changeability, as race was continually debated to be either fixed or malleable, both options presenting their own array of positive and negative outcomes. Furthermore, the notion of blackness being a curse, the devil's doing, and/or a condition worthy of being changed, speaks to the steadfast associations between dark skin color and a dark, sinister, backward, or bestial human character.

While the most renowned pseudoscientists were working and writing in a time period prior to the production of the bulk of the material I examine in this dissertation, the claims they made and the studies they carried out had a resounding impact well into

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<sup>29</sup> Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 122-123.

the twentieth century (and, I would argue, persist today). And while the sometimes crude and often times biased and manipulated tests, measurements, and studies that they performed can seem ridiculous to us now, prior to the Civil War, “what we now call scientific racism was the *science* of its day.”<sup>32</sup> And even when monogenism and polygenism underwent an “apparent synthesis” in the 1870s, it did not overturn or expunge racial stereotypes, nor did it do away with notions of inequality among the races.<sup>33</sup>

Bay’s *The White Image in the Black Mind* provides a thorough discussion of white Americans’ treatment of black slaves, especially, but also freedmen and women as domestic animals and argues that the association of man and beast continued throughout slavery and into the future. She observes that

Thus, while freedom itself provided the ex-slaves with a long-sought-after recognition of their humanity, there is little reason to doubt that the freedpeople continued to encounter challenges to their status as human beings in the white racist ideology that endured unabated through emancipation, Reconstruction, and beyond. For not only did African-Americans find themselves subject to continuing racial discrimination, but the idea that black people were physically and mentally very close to animals was widely disseminated among whites in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.<sup>34</sup>

This was no doubt the case, as African Americans’ intelligence and morality continually came into question as issues of politics and sociology alike. Yet I see room to expand

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<sup>32</sup> Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> John S. Haller, Jr. “The Species Problem: Nineteenth-Century Concepts of Racial Inferiority in the Origin of Man Controversy,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 72, No. 6 (December 1970): 1319.

<sup>34</sup> Bay, *White Image in the Black Mind*, 147.

upon Bay's observation, particularly as she notes the dynamics at work in the spread of these racist ideas. Mentioning briefly that advertising was one of the venues for picturing African Americans as ape-like figures, she observes, "Admittedly, both popular and scientific representations of blacks as bestial creatures were directed primarily toward white rather than black audiences, and it is difficult to know how familiar the freedpeople were with this written and visual antiblack propaganda."<sup>35</sup> I see my work responding to these issues in two ways: first, by revealing another stereotype in the association of blacks with food goods, specifically fruits and nuts (not to mention their conflation with cotton), which tells us that animalistic associations were not the only ones upheld as suggestive of black Americans' purported natural inferiority. And second, by examining advertising cards and postcards, especially, as vehicles of such racist ideologies, my study demonstrates the profuse and wide-reaching scope of these objects as potent contributors to national discourses on race.

### **Hybridity and the Body: Humanity, Otherness, and Their Meanings**

One of the major concerns regarding the origins of man lay in the issue of hybridity, a state presumed to threaten the national social order. The underlying question pertaining to people of all races besides Caucasians was whether they were men as much as white men or whether they were in fact "half-brutes."<sup>36</sup> In particular, those who adhered to the monogenist perspective "defined the difference between race and species

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<sup>35</sup> Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind*, 147.

<sup>36</sup> Haller, "The Species Problem," 1319.

by means of the terms ‘hybrid’ and ‘mongrel.’”<sup>37</sup> The offspring of people of two races of the same species, they believed, would be a mongrel capable, at least in the first generation, of reproducing. On the other hand, if two people of different races were of *different* species, then they would produce a “sterile hybrid.”<sup>38</sup> Hybrids were believed in this case to be entirely unnatural, as only people of the same species could and *would* mate.<sup>39</sup> Polygenists, meanwhile, were relatively adamant that the “Negro was not only a separate species but was also incapable of modification through time....[and] had remained unchanged through centuries of breeding.”<sup>40</sup> Gliddon and Nott were so convinced of hybridity as the result of two races mating that they included a lengthy list of hybrids in *Types of Mankind* (Figure 10).

Indeed, as we saw in Gliddon’s and Nott’s work, polygenism held that there was a Chain of Being comprising all mankind, ranked in order from lowest (most primitive) to highest (most civilized). Africans were situated on the chain between man and “lower primates,” creating the so-called missing link between apes and civilized man.<sup>41</sup> These ideas resulted in—and were nurtured by—nineteenth- and twentieth-century images that compared black people to apes, a comparison that was as pivotal and ideologically loaded in pseudoscience as it was in advertising and print communiqués. Implicit within the pseudoscience of the mid- to late-nineteenth century *and* images mass-produced in American advertising and ephemera were both a concern with the potential economic consequences of the advancement of the “inferior” races and a fear of racial

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<sup>37</sup> Haller, “The Species Problem,” 1320.

<sup>38</sup> Haller, “The Species Problem,” 1320.

<sup>39</sup> Haller, “The Species Problem,” 1321.

<sup>40</sup> Haller, “The Species Problem,” 1322.

<sup>41</sup> “One Race or Several Species.”

contamination. The drawings utilized as evidence in *Types of Mankind* and the images distributed in print as late as a century afterward asserted that members of the presumably “lower” races—blacks in particular—were more akin to primates and, in turn, unlikely—and unsuitable—to join white society.

These racialized notions of hybridity had their roots in a much earlier time, however, reaching back to the colonial era, when exploration and colonization resulted in struggles over ancestry, identity, and hegemony. Homi Bhabha takes up these issues in his formative text, “Of Mimicry and Man” (1984), expounding on the forceful impact of mimicry, which he defines as “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.”<sup>42</sup> Drawing on the work of Edward Said,<sup>43</sup> Bhabha explains that mimicry allows for “an *ironic compromise*” between colonial impulses of static identity and recognizable change and difference, functioning as a “desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. ”<sup>44</sup> Bhabha repeats the phrase—“almost the same, but not quite”—throughout his discussion, emphasizing the importance of ambiguity and disavowal for the purposes of mimicry. Which is to say that mimicry and the stereotypes it both perpetuates and relies upon, always operate in the liminal space of uncertainty; the self and the Other must continually be similar enough to be compared but dissimilar to the extent that they can be categorized, identified, and conceptualized as distinct. In fact, the colonial impulse to

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<sup>42</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October*, Vol. 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (Spring 1984): 126.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>44</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 126.

assert power and authority demands a definition of what is right and normal, but mimicry, as a part of that process, necessitates an intimacy with that which is distinctly *not* right:

Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline...[but] also the sign of the inappropriate...a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers.<sup>45</sup>

We can observe this process even in images produced as late as the early twentieth century, in which the black figure is repeatedly depicted as simian, ignorant, unrestrained, and backward.

The stereotyped black figure is the result of what Bhabha describes as the process of colonial imitation, in which, ever in limbo between mimicry and mockery, “the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry...becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence....both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual.’”<sup>46</sup> We will see, especially in the chapters to come, that this incompleteness, this virtual partial presence, is what supported stereotypical representations of African Americans in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American advertising and ephemera. The black figure is continually and simultaneously dichotomous and contradictory; s/he is always in a state of incompleteness, being both simple, and yet threatening; lazy, but a dependable laborer; unintelligent, but a source for authority on cooking and domestic work. This dichotomy and incompleteness worked, however, for the purposes of picturing stereotype, because, as Bhabha explains, mimicry’s purpose is to repeat rather

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<sup>45</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 126.

<sup>46</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 127.

than to represent.<sup>47</sup> It is not concerned—particularly in images such as the ones in my study—with representing African Americans as they truly are, but rather with repeating ideas about them as they might be; in this way, they picture not the reality but the virtual character as he is imagined in the anxious white mind.

Americans participated in this wavering prioritization of reality and history versus fantasy and story in myriad arenas, from science labs and libraries to printing houses and storefronts. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century science experiments, texts, and images alike spread ideas not dissimilar to those utilized during the colonial period, in which one group was positioned as dominant over another in order to legitimize its power. Skin color was one of the principal factors invoked to justify dominance and subjugation. Significantly, Bhabha transforms his familiar phrase, “almost the same, but not quite,” into “*Almost the same but not white,*” halfway through his discussion, acknowledging both Sigmund Freud’s analysis of “the very notion of ‘origins’” (“The Unconscious,” 1915) and stereotypes such as the “Simian Black.”<sup>48</sup> He explains that mimicry always makes itself visible “at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed.”<sup>49</sup> Like polygenism, which picked and chose, so to speak, which portions of the Bible’s origin stories it upheld, mimicry carefully selects information that is useful to its goal. It shapes what is known and what is feared (and yet, often desired) into a carefully composed “*metonymy of presence,*” or stereotypes like the “apelike” African American.<sup>50</sup> According to Bhabha, *mimicry*, “a difference that is

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<sup>47</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 128.

<sup>48</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 130.

<sup>49</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 130.

<sup>50</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 130.

almost nothing but not quite,” permutes to become *menace*, “a difference that is almost total but not quite,” as a conglomeration of repeated guilt, pseudoscientific hypotheses and rationales, fears, and identifications furiously attempt once and for all to identify the norm and the Other.<sup>51</sup> In colonization’s Othering, just as in the repeated racist, stereotypical depictions of black figures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American imagery, “Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, [and] grotesquerie, which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body.”<sup>52</sup>

Fears and fascinations about undifferentiated bodies took center stage in American visual culture in the years leading up to and following the turn of the century. The national impulse to identify, classify, and distinguish bodies continued, piquing Americans’ curiosities about what mixed bodies looked like and how they would not only be recognized, but named. In particular, notions of hybridity permeated and permuted the imagery depicting black figures in American visual culture. Advertising cards and postcards, especially, took up hybridity as both a useful topic for selling goods and ideas and a strategy for appealing to consumers’ own curiosities and anxieties about mixing bodies. Around the year 1900, the makers of Patapsco Superlative Flour printed an advertising booklet intended to appeal especially to children. Titled “Wonderful Animal Book,” it allowed the reader to flip the pages in any way that pleased him/her, creating an interesting animal with every combination of pages turned (Figures Book 11 and 12). The pages featured half of the body of numerous animals, including the name of the animal

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<sup>51</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 132.

<sup>52</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 132-133.

(also halved) at the top, such that when the reader flipped the pages, he could see a variety of hybrid animals and their funny hybrid names, such as a “Ste/ale” (half-steer, half-whale) or a “Hy/ale” (half-hyena, half-whale), and so forth. Like Gliddon and Nott, who identified very specific human types resulting from various racial pairings, the “Wonderful Animal Book” organized hybrid bodies by appearance and by name, with the impression of being systematically created.

The possibility of racial mixing was a potent concern not only in the time of Morton but also in the twentieth century, when even postcards took up the subject. Two postcards in particular demonstrate how anxiety about the inherent “wrongness” of miscegenation was not only a troublesome but also a titillating issue. The first pictures a black man with an earring and a top hat kissing a white woman with blond hair (Figure 13). While his features conform to exaggerated, cartoonish trends of the time, the woman’s features adhere to more classical notions of beauty so often used in picturing white women in ads and postcards alike. Both are reminiscent, as well, of the kinds of figures illustrated in *Types of Mankind*, which were meant to suggest that all blacks and all whites had aesthetically inferior or perfect features, respectively. In this postcard, the man’s lips are round and full and his clothes make him out to be the foolish dandy. The stark contrast in their appearance reinforces the scandalous nature of their pairing, as the two are intended to be obviously mismatched—the man being apeish and cartoonish in appearance and the woman looking much like the ideal of a beautiful American housewife (as she was imagined to be, at least).

Another postcard pictures a white woman with dark hair breastfeeding a black baby (Figure 14). While black wet nurses for white babies were common during slavery,

a white wet nurse for a black baby would have been a bizarre notion. Indeed, the artist shows us that this is no wet nurse: a framed image of a black man, the babe's father, hangs on the wall behind them, completing the picture of a mixed race family. The baby contentedly suckles his mother's breast as she smiles down at him. The image is powerfully legible in three ways: first, it creates the image of an interracial family unit, and second, it hints at the absentee black father, a stereotype that ran rampant during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. It also, however, nods to the common phrase "Two wrongs don't make a right," which was often rephrased as "Two blacks don't make a white," or some variation thereof. The idea, which is legible here in the child's dark skin color and in the card's title, "White and Black," is that an interracial couple will not produce a white child. No matter how light-skinned, the child will always be black and therefore a "lesser" hybrid. As Bhabha would say, the infant is almost the same but not quite.

Yet matters of hybridity, as they continued in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not solely about science and sex; rather, American ephemera created image after image picturing black figures as hybrids themselves: that is, as people who were so backward and inferior that they could trace their roots back, quite literally, to the land and its products. Hybridity manifested itself in images like "What-er-melon," an advertising card from around 1898 promoting Swinburne's Cough Cure (Figure 15), in which a black man (signified by the dark hands and feet) is depicted as a hybrid watermelon man, half-fruit, half-human. The whites of his eyes are as green as his skin/rind, and his wide nose hovers over a gaping smile, made from the flesh of a slice taken out. As we will see, the card is but one among many in its portrayal of a black man

as a watermelon, but this card takes the tension of hybridity to an even more troubling level in its depiction of the man eating the very slice that forms his mouth. The image is one of both hybridity and of cannibalism, as the black man is so hungry and tempted by the sweet fruit that he cannot help but eat himself.

### **Food as Body / The Body as Food: Evolutionary Problems and the Black Body's Origins**

The American economy was greatly marred by panics and depressions during the latter part of the nineteenth century, with depressions occurring in the years 1873-1878, 1883-1885, and 1893-1895.<sup>53</sup> I believe it is no coincidence that these depressions coincided with a profuse production of racist advertising cards. Drastic social and economic changes resulted in pervasive anxieties about African Americans' potential for success; their freedom to move, socialize, buy and sell goods, and work for pay was considered perilous to white society. Indeed, economic changes and their accompanying anxieties generated an ever-increasing animosity toward blacks and "intensified whiteness as a potent political ideology."<sup>54</sup> This animosity often played out in visual culture, as black figures repeatedly were represented as caricatured buffoons—some of them, Jim Crow and Zip Coon, to name just two—becoming popular stereotypes in print culture, literature, and on the stage. The stereotypes I have discussed so far, and those that I will address in greater detail throughout this study were all "part of the popular

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<sup>53</sup> Jay, *Trade Card*, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 120.

culture of America at the turn of the twentieth century.”<sup>55</sup> Historian J. Stanley Lemons observes that these stereotypes “were so familiar that few people had any notion that they degraded black Americans. Most people thought the caricatures were simply funny.”<sup>56</sup> Yet my research indicates that, in the case of American ephemera at least, the degrading impulse and impact of stereotypes were on a number of levels very conscious and intentional. The process of choosing an image for one’s advertising card, for instance, could not have been but so trivial or arbitrary a task, since one’s name and reputation were being sold, paired with whatever pictorial vignette adorned the trade card. Similarly, individuals selected post cards with some degree of thoughtfulness, as evidenced by their tendency to write on the images, assigning names, writing jokes, and otherwise relating to the image on the face of the card they were sending. While certainly intended to be eye-catching and entertaining, the stereotypes presented on advertising cards and postcards, and later in print ads and even packaging, are meaningful at the most fundamental level because popular culture (and I argue its stereotypes) “aims at the familiar; it seeks to verify an experience already known, to express a common wish.”<sup>57</sup> This returns us, in fact, to one of my key points—that the stereotypes presented in American ephemera were legible and popular because they were representations of the familiar and the “already known,” or rather the already *imagined*.

One of the most pervasive and troubling stereotypes in the realm of American advertising and in popular culture more widely (as I will discuss below) was the repeated

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<sup>55</sup> J. Stanley Lemons, “Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 1977): 102.

<sup>56</sup> Lemons, “Black Stereotypes,” 102.

<sup>57</sup> Lemons, “Black Stereotypes,” 104.

conflation of black figures with foodstuffs. There existed a kind of perverse fascination with images of black bodies gorging themselves on food, with illustrations featuring oversized, brightly colored mouths and eyes, and with emphasizing the sensual experience of bringing food to lips and ingesting delicious comestibles. In his article, “Feeding Race” (2010), historian Itai Vardi argues that eating contests, which were the real events echoed in American ads and imagery, aided in blurring distinctions between black bodies and objects, particularly food, as “Immersed in the pie or watermelon, his facial features now distorted by the foodstuff, the black contestant appeared as both a repulsing and amusingly attracting sight. This confusion of boundaries between food and body aided in solidifying his position as an essentially different, deviant corporeality in the eyes of the white gaze.”<sup>58</sup>

Within advertising, especially, but in other print ephemera as well, the black body was continually paired with food. Sometimes African Americans were pictured as inhabiting foodstuffs, and other times (and more commonly) as being synonymous with the foods they ate. I will discuss the issue of hunger in relation to depictions of black Americans in Chapter 2, but the point here is that picturing the black body as a physical part of the very goods it consumed became a kind of anxious attempt to assert African Americans’ natural backwardness and inferior status in the lineup of humanity. It also served as a determined support of contemporary evolutionary pseudoscience, which argued that black people were inherently less civilized and naturally less *human* than white Americans.

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<sup>58</sup> Itai Vardi, “Feeding Race: Eating Contests, The Black Body, and the Social Production of Group Boundaries through Amusement in Turn of the 20th Century America,” *Food, Culture and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2010): 376.

Black people were often thought to be so naturally connected to the land and its bounty that advertising cards and postcards alike depicted them as literally emerging, being born from fruits. An advertising card for Sapolio soap is shaped like a watermelon that bursts open to reveal a black person's head (Figure 16). The figure's visage features the usual stereotypical aspects, including tight curly hair, wide eyes, and full lips pulled back to reveal a toothy grin. The face is androgynous, making it seem universal in its depiction of a black figure. Moreover, the smiling black face, in this image and others like it, becomes visually synonymous with the fruit that both frames and appears to generate it. In a manner similar to other images that pictured black people *eating* watermelon, this fruit exhibits signs of being eaten: the rind appears gnawed at, opening to reveal the jubilant black face. This trope created a kind of origin myth for African Americans: visual narratives presented them as being birthed by the land. This myth substantiated claims that blacks were in fact part of the land and hence naturally better suited than whites for the hard labors of agricultural work.

Time and again images depicted African Americans bursting forth from and/or being contained within fruits, nuts, and other agricultural products. And while this visual trope was not exclusive to African Americans, the method of representation for blacks and whites depicted inside food products was markedly different. A comparison of three advertising cards, two marketing the same product, reveals a distinct continuity in terms of stereotypes employed in this kind of imagery and its connotations. Two cards, both produced circa 1890, advertise Dunham's coconuts. The first depicts a white woman standing inside a coconut (Figure 17). She wears a bright red dress with full sleeves, a white collar, white apron, and a white hat. She holds a coconut pie or cake out in front of

her, meant to represent the confection successfully made with Dunham's coconuts. She looks out toward the viewer and grins. The coconut in which she stands has jagged edges, suggesting that it has been split open; yet its interior is hollow, save for the woman standing within. The critical point here is that the white woman is not physically *part of* the coconut; rather, she is one component of the artistic composition, being external to (though standing inside of) the fruit. This distinction is made explicit by the fact that the interior of the coconut is the same green hue as the background, which comprises abstract dark and light green storm clouds. It is not, in other words, white, like the edges of the fruit, indicating that the fruit is a metaphor for the product rather than for the user/consumer of the product. A comparison of this image to the second card for Dunham's makes this distinction clear.

The second card is printed in black and white, with no background elements and greater contrast in order to make the image pop (Figure 18). It shows a coconut marked "Dunham's Cocoanut," with a monkey's face inside the cracked opening of the fruit. The monkey is represented as particularly humanoid; his face has humanlike skin and his eyes are full of expression as he gives the viewer a sideways glance and grins. Unlike the previous image, the inside of this coconut is white, as we would expect, and the monkey is depicted as emerging from the fruit. Especially since we cannot see the rest of his body, we are led to imagine that he is part of the fruit itself, having lived inside it or gestated within it, or perhaps having cracked open the fruit and climbed in. The former scenario, however, seems more likely, since the fruit looks much too small for the monkey to have entered of his own volition. Instead, the image implies that the monkey was part of the coconut all along—that he was, in fact, born of the coconut. The monkey

and the coconut thus become synonymous with one another, creating an associated link between the body of the monkey and the flesh of the coconut. This hybridization draws—and depends—upon colonial stereotypes of apelike blacks, a characterization that developed and persisted well into the twentieth century. Yet in this image and ones like it, the stereotype is more complex, creating associations not only between the black figure and his supposed kin, but also between his body and a comestible, a product grown from the earth and harvested for consumption.

Monkeys were often associated with African Americans, owing to their purportedly primitive and uncivilized nature. Yet my focus here is more on the linkage between body and food, and matters of origin, in representations of race. The third card I compare to the two Dunham's advertisements makes the purpose of the imagery less suggestive and more direct (Figure 19). It, too, is an undated card, promoting the services of G. Schultze, a barber. The card is in the shape of a gourd or squash that once again bears a jagged hole through which, this time, a black human face appears. The gourd is depicted in an extremely realistic fashion, with ample highlighting and texture, and a business card is shown tied to the vegetable's tip. The face of the man that emerges from the gourd has tight, curly hair and open red lips that reveal rows of white teeth. He smiles broadly at the viewer, seemingly unconcerned about being trapped within the gourd. The inside of the vegetable is blacked out; only the man's red and white striped collar is visible below his face. Most importantly, perhaps, is the man's skin color, which is precisely the same hue as the outer skin of the vegetable. Rather than being easily removable from the food product, as in the white woman and the coconut, this man is squeezed inside a vegetable with an opening only big enough for his head to fit through.

If we compare this image with the Dunham's image of the monkey in the coconut, we see that, coincidentally or not, the two are eerily similar in composition. In both, there are allusions to the black figures' origin as a triad of associations—between monkeys and lands where coconuts grow, for instance, between monkeys and African-American men, and between African-American men and food goods—creates a visual system of stereotype. These associations suggest the “appropriate” place for blacks (i.e. in lands other than America), their supposedly natural subhumanity, and their proper place as *products* of the earth as opposed to *consumers* of the earth’s fruits. These images and the stereotypes both within and put forth by them intended to provoke familiar pseudoscientific narratives of man’s origins and strengthen assumptions about African Americans’ inferiority.

One of the most common foods associated with black figures was the watermelon, which became a popular metaphor for African Americans’ purported simple-mindedness and hunger, as well as a comedic tool for illustrating in no uncertain terms the notion that black people’s origins were naturally backward and more primitive than whites’. Advertising was not the only venue for imagining African Americans as deriving from fruits and similar food goods. Postcards afford similar testimony to the appeal that such images held for early twentieth-century audiences. One example from 1913 pictures a black boy stepping out from an opening in a watermelon (Figure 20). The boy is barefoot and wears a tattered hat and shorts held up by one overall strap. He looks out dumbly with his finger in his mouth, and the caption presents his words: “I’se Right In It.” The message is unambiguous, indicating both visually and textually that the boy originated from the watermelon. The postcard also suggests that black people were always already

poorly clothed and mentally dim, having no concerns about their “lesser” condition. And finally, it reaffirms the supposed affinity black people had for watermelons.

The black body pictured inside fruit offered what purported to be not merely a humorously pleasing image but an appealing souvenir as well. White consumers, more than wanting to simply *view* black bodies as being contained within foodstuffs, actually wanted to *possess* these bodies as they were imagined within fruits, vegetables, nuts, and other agricultural products. In 1929 an advertisement ran for table favors, which white housewives would have presented on the table during a party or social gathering (Figure 21). The text reads:

**Walnut Favors.** / Unique Table Favors. Small paper mache [sic] English Walnuts, containing favors as shown in illustrations. Our enlarged illustration at the left (containing a nigger baby) will give a very clear idea of the size and general appearance of these novel favors. Order by number if you prefer any certain kind, otherwise we will use our own judgment.

For fifteen cents each, a housewife could present her guests with little walnuts to crack open gleefully during the festivities. And if she requested the walnut favor illustrated in the enlarged image, she and her guests could possess their very own “nigger baby.” The other souvenirs inside included dice, a pacifier, bells, an airplane, and a camel. However, this advertisement selects the “nigger baby” as the token favor, with the child’s dark, naked body artfully rendered to show physiognomic detail. The child’s knees are bent, covering the genitals, and its hands are up at its chest, granting a sense of modesty suitable for a party favor. More than a pleasing image as the advertising cards and postcards seem to have been, the baby in the walnut made the simian, uncivilized, contained African-American body a tangible object that could be bought, saved, shared,

and possessed. It brought discourses on race, humanity, and identity into physical form and spread them throughout American households for only the cost of loose change.

### **Pictures on Postcards: Pseudoscience for the Masses**

Postcards were particularly literal in their depictions of black figures being part and parcel with food goods, almost always returning to the ideas put forth by pseudoscience and debates about the origins of the human races and species. Such images, as well as those discussed above, and indeed the ones that I examine throughout this study, were born of the popular notion, bred by pseudoscience, that black Americans were naturally and irreversibly inferior beings. Illustrations on advertising cards and postcards and many other forms of printed ephemera participated in a fervent discourse on who was truly an American citizen worthy of equal rights. In fact, it was the work of “scientists” like Gliddon and Nott that infused highly charged images like “Evolution of a coon” (discussed below) with meaning that was legible to many Americans.

Postcards first entered American consumer culture in 1893, initially becoming a “fad” purchased as “commodity souvenirs,” and later becoming everyday objects of middle and upper class life.<sup>59</sup> In fact, from 1905 to 1915, Americans purchased millions of postcards annually; indeed, 1906 was a peak year, with 700 million sold. They were so abundant and beloved that “every proper parlor of the period had its postcard album.”<sup>60</sup> Observing that postcards featuring African Americans were some of the most popular

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<sup>59</sup> Wayne Martin Mellinger, “Postcards from the Edge of the Color Line: Images of African Americans in Popular Culture, 1893-1917,” *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Winter 1992): 415.

<sup>60</sup> Mellinger, “Postcards from the Edge,” 415.

cards sold during this time, Wayne Mellinger addresses the significance of their depictions of African Americans in his article, “Postcards from the Edge of the Color Line” (1992), in which he unpacks the meanings of staple stereotypes mass produced in postcards. Mellinger studies postcards as objects of popular culture that employed visual techniques to assert African Americans’ inferiority as beast-like “others,” and argues for their historical significance by stating that their power lay not only in “their ability to reflect racial ideologies of the historical period, but their capacity to *reproduce* those ideologies.”<sup>61</sup>

The fact that the images considered below were featured on postcards is important, because it signals the relative universality and salience of these racist tropes and ideas. Their mass production also indicates that these kinds of horrible images *meant* something to people, who consciously chose them as vehicles for sending messages to friends, loved ones, or colleagues. In other words, postcards were not trivial kitsch objects used benignly for brief communications; rather, they were potent vehicles for framing and sharing important thoughts and opinions. They were, in the case of pseudo-scientific thought and practice, especially, critical means of engaging the public in matters of politics, (pseudo)science, the social order, and “American” life.

A four-part evolutionary image adorns an undated postcard produced by Moore & Gibson Company in New York (Figure 22). The illustration is titled “Evolution of a coon,” and features four stages of a black man’s transformation into a watermelon. The title is handwritten in cursive, giving it a personal as well as an educational effect, suggesting that the image is didactic. On the far left is the bust of a black man with

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<sup>61</sup> Mellinger, “Postcards from the Edge,” 416.

grossly oversized nose and lips, a pointy head, and tight curly hair. The second stage depicts the man with his face slanted, his lips jutting out, and stripes marking his head. The third shows his face as almost completely obscured by stripes and now entirely oblong in shape. Finally, the image on the far right shows a watermelon held in the palm of a person's hand. The illustration reveals its complexity in its double reading. If read from right to left, as suggested by the title, the drawing presents a watermelon "evolving" into a black man. However, if read from left to right—the standard mode for reading evolutionary diagrams—the black man *devolves* into a watermelon. Not only does he devolve into a watermelon, but he also devolves into a distinctly consumable product, as underscored by the hand holding the fruit. In fact, the image suggests that the black man's mind is never his own; instead, it is someone else's possession. Moreover, his head—a watermelon—is essentially empty, comprising sweet but watery flesh. Here, as in many other advertising and postcard images, the black body has become synonymous with food, and the body's own vulnerability to being consumed is conflated with that of the very foods it—and other bodies—eats.

Another contemporary postcard takes up the evolutionary theme in an equally explicit manner. This illustration is titled simply, "Evolution," and shows a brief three-part transformation from a watermelon, at left, into the face of a black man, at right (Figure 23). The text beneath each phase of the metamorphosis spells out its process: "Watermelon" beneath the image of the fruit; "Into" beneath the pivotal mid-transformation image; and "Coon" beneath the image of the jovial black face. In this image, the watermelon starts out looking much like a smiling face, with highlighted areas where the eyes would be and a bright cut-out section resembling a grinning mouth. In

fact, the first image looks remarkably similar to the third, suggesting that the watermelon and the black man's face were never that different, almost to the point of being indistinguishable.

The evolutionary transformation is further simplified in another postcard, which pictures a watermelon face wearing a top hat and polka dotted bow tie (Figure 24). As usual, the mouth is shown grinning, formed by a slice removed from the fruit. The text reads, "I'm Your / MELON / Honey." The image plays upon the stereotype of the black dandy, a comical, outrageous figure characterized by his flamboyant dress and foolish confidence. As in many similar illustrations of black men as hybrid watermelons, his eyes are curled shut as he grins. In fact, open eyes are often markedly absent from images like this. Further dehumanizing African Americans, this visual technique removes the viewer from the subject's humanity, granting the viewer complete freedom to engage in the voyeurism solicited by the images and their text.

These depictions derive from the same stereotypes and concerns with the origins of race that Bay discusses in *The White Image in the Black Mind*, yet they also reveal that the conversation regarding black Americans' humanity was deeper than simply marking them as "lesser-than" by their dark skin or pairing them with domestic chattel that could be worked and then set free.<sup>62</sup> They demonstrate that black Americans were in fact considered base in nature, relatively unthinking and insensate and, as such, were bodies ripe for the picking. This is to say that black Americans were synonymized not only with animals but also with food for a very important reason: to suggest that they were

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<sup>62</sup> Bay discusses this in Chapter 4 of *White Image in the Black Mind*, "Us Is Human Flesh," describing how enslaved African Americans sometimes expressed feeling like domestic animals that could be worked, beaten, and let go at the white man's whim.

naturally intended to be consumed and, if left to their own devices, would do the consuming. It was a turn of the tables in which African Americans were no longer forced to labor for the good of whites; they now were pictured as *themselves* a product still available for use and consumption, all benefiting white America.

### **Innately Linked: Black Bodies and Stereotyped Consumption**

The imagined link between African Americans and food goods, especially watermelons, was not limited to presumed similarities between their human flesh and that of the sweet fruit. Rather, Americans created narratives in which race was inextricably bound with food—its availability, nutrition, and value. Black people were continually pictured as being, in all aspects of their lives, obsessed with food. They were portrayed to be so innately preoccupied with food that their day-to-day existence was defined by their knowledge of, pursuit of, access to, and consumption of edible goods. An advertising calendar page from the late 1800s makes this point particularly well.

Clarence Brooks & Co. created what appears to have been an advertising calendar around 1880 (Figure 25). This particular page features an interior classroom setting that depicts an African-American man teaching a room of black children. The man is well dressed, wearing a red coat, white blouse, blue pants, and shoes. His pupils appear similarly well dressed. Half of them sit in the back of the room and giggle amongst themselves while the other half stand toward the front and snicker as they look upon their classmate, who sits on a stool at the front of the room, wearing a dunce cap. He frowns in shame as his teacher scolds him, saying, “Yer Bin To Dis Cadermy Eighteen Months,

An' Dunno How To Spell 'Pork?' Yer Nebriate, Ye!" The dialect is so thick as to require a careful reading, and its message is even thicker with meaning. The instructor's fine clothes and comportment contrast significantly with his muddled language, giving the viewer the sense that he is, despite outward appearances, not particularly educated himself and incapable of proper speech. This detail alone is loaded with serious implications. First, it suggests that the man is no better off now—as a well-dressed school teacher—than he would have been years earlier as, in all likelihood, a slave. His ability to secure finer clothing has superficially changed his exterior, but it has not changed what counts, that is, his intelligence. This reveals the second implication: that the man's flawed language undermines his status as an educator of younger generations of African Americans, who will not be well served by his poor tutelage. These suggestions create a copacetic cycle that would have reassured white viewers that, despite the increasing liberties and educational and career opportunities granted to black people, their very nature would hold them back, now and in the future.

In fact, this implied indefinite inferiority is emphasized by the teacher's words to the dunce, which condemn the child for not knowing how to spell the word "pork" despite eighteen months of schooling. Again, the meaning is multifaceted. The child's ignorance is further testimony to the black man's ineptitude as a teacher. Additionally, it implies that black children's curriculum in school was food-related—although not in terms of nutritional information, which was being hammered into white society among all age groups (how many calories were in food, how food was used by the body for nourishment and energy, and so on), but rather how merely to spell food goods like pork. The boy's ostracism, emphasized by the dunce cap, indicates that his ignorance of the

spelling of “pork” was a serious offense, a notion further supported by the teacher’s chagrin that the boy cannot spell the word after a lengthy period of instruction. Elements of the classroom setting emphasize the idea that this is indeed the extent of the children’s learning. The book that the teacher holds in his hand has two pictures on the cover: one resembling a plant form and the other what appears to be either a chicken or piece of fruit. Additionally, an apple rests on the floor along the left side of the image. The classroom is devoid of any other elements that would indicate what the children are learning about; food seems to be the only obvious subject matter at hand.

Notions about African Americans’ bodies and minds being innately entwined with food permeated American popular culture, from print media to literature and music. Abel Meeropol’s poem “Strange Fruit,” published in 1937 and famously performed and recorded by Billie Holliday two years later, metaphorically expressed the disturbing experience of seeing lynched black bodies hanging from trees:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,  
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Abel Meeropol, “Strange Fruit,” 1937, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/film.html>.

Meeropol's poem explains the spectacle of lynching in terms reminiscent of the imagery common in earlier advertising cards and postcards, as the victims' bodies are compared to fruit. In this instance, however, they are not likened to sweet, ripe watermelons, but rather to a "strange," dead, rotting, "burning," "bitter crop" left out to be consumed only by the crows that land to devour them before they "drop." The poem draws on familiar stereotypes, both of the "gallant South," with its "sweet" magnolia trees, and of the black figure, who has the "bulging eyes" and "twisted mouth" frequently pictured in advertisements, cartoons, and illustrations. In the poem, however, the magnolias are sites for murder and the black subject's facial features bulge and twist in rigor mortis. The tree, in fact, becomes powerfully emblematic of the vicious cycle that both births and murders the African American, growing from the soil where blacks have died, reaching a height where its fruit will ripen, "rot," and "drop," making for the next "bitter crop." Holiday's articulation of Meeropol's words made the convergence of body and fruit unforgettably haunting, as one listener described her singing of the last line: "The voice goes up—crah-ah-OP!—like a scream....She leaves the last note hanging. And then—bang!—it ends. That's it. The body drops."<sup>64</sup>

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a multifaceted web of imagery carried potent assertions about American citizens, relying upon stereotype to speak to a national audience. Stereotype was a system of power by which ideas about Americans' identity, humanity, and value stretched into and saturated all aspects of life. It addressed all parts of the human experience—from one's origins to his sustenance, from one's relationships

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<sup>64</sup> David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (London: Canongate Books Ltd., 2001), 90.

to her work—creating complex narratives about who could and should participate in American society and how. From the time of the Civil War to the early decades of the 1900s, American visual culture continued to breed presumptions about African Americans' origins and bodies being naturally linked to the land and its fruits, yet imagery took these associations even further in the years leading up to and following the turn of the century. Black figures appeared profusely in advertising and ephemera, and more than their bodies being linked with fruits of the earth, they were pictured as being essentially and entirely consumed by food. As considered in the following chapter, picturing black figures and food became a popular vehicle for expressing anxieties about African-American hunger, appetite, and opportunity.



University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections

Fig. 7

"Acorn," c. 1880. Advertising card. Rathbone, Sard & Co. (Albany, NY), Toms & Smyth (Marion, IA).

University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections.

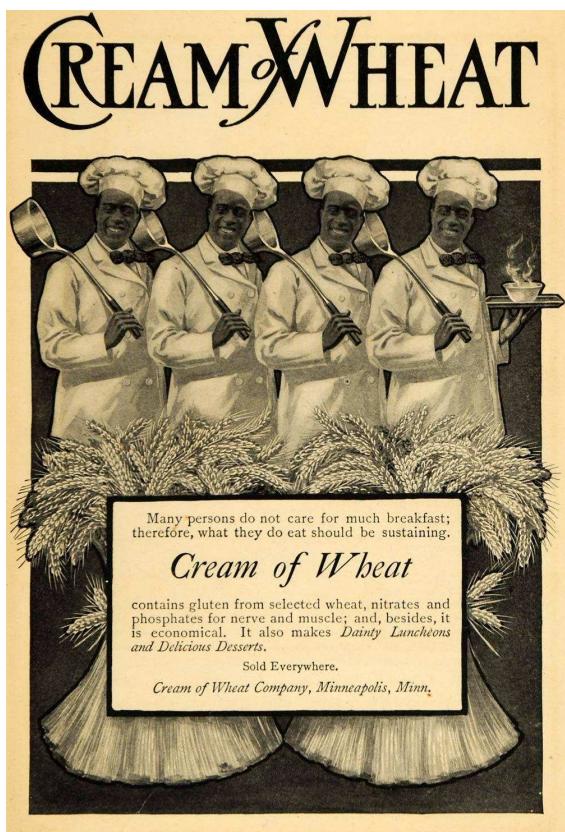


Fig. 8

"Cream of Wheat," 1902. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Cream of Wheat Company.

Private collection.

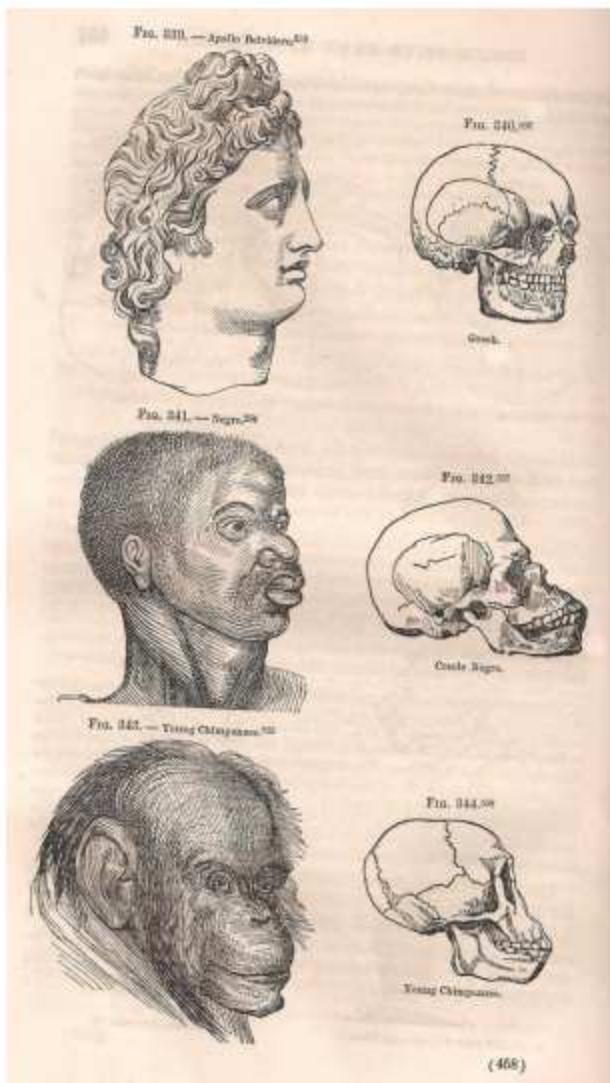


Fig. 9

"Apollo Belvedere. Greek. Negro. Creole Negro. Young Chimpanzee. Young Chimpanzee." Gliddon and Nott, *Types of Mankind*, 458.

<i>Parents.</i>	<i>Children.</i>
White father and Negro mother .....	Mulatto.
White father and Indian mother .....	Mestiza.
Indian father and Negro mother .....	Chino.
White father and Mulatto mother .....	Cuarteron.
White father and Mestiza mother .....	Creole — pale, brownish complexion.
White father and China mother .....	Chino-blanco.
White father and Cuarterena mother .....	Quintero.
White father and Quintera mother .....	White.
Negro father and Indian mother .....	Zambo.
Negro father and Mulatto mother .....	Zambo-Negro.
Negro father and Mestiza mother .....	Mulatto-oscurio.
Negro father and China mother .....	Zambo-Chino.
Negro father and Zambo mother .....	Zambo-Negro — perfectly black.
Negro father and Quintera mother .....	Mulatto — rather dark.
Indian father and Mulatto mother .....	Chino-oscurio.
Indian father and Mestiza mother .....	Mestizo-claro — frequently very beautiful.
Indian father and China mother .....	Chino-cola.
Indian father and Zambo mother .....	Zambo-claro.
Indian father and China-cholar mother .....	Indian — with frizzly hair.
Indian father and Quintera mother .....	Mestizo — rather brown.
Mulatto father and Zambo mother .....	Zambo — a miserable race.
Mulatto father and Mestiza mother .....	Chino — rather clear complexion.
Mulatto father and China mother .....	Chino — rather dark.

Fig. 10

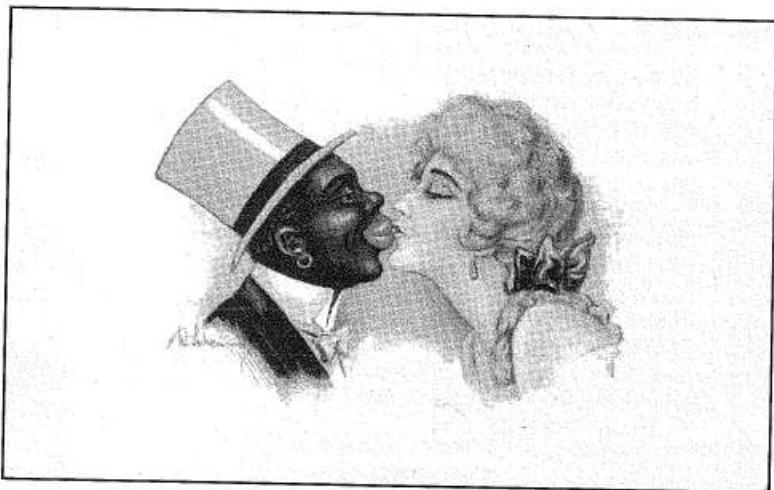
“Parents. Children. (Tschudi’s catalogue of ‘amalgamations in Peru’), Gliddon and Nott, *Types of Mankind*, 455. From Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, Am. ed., 1853, ii. pp. 162-3.



Figs. 11 & 12

"Wonderful Animal Book," c. 1900. Advertising booklet. Orange Grove Flour Mill (MD).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



*W. Schwering, M.M.B. 606  
"Black and White"*

Fig. 13

"Black and White," n.d. Postcard. W. Schwering (artist). M.M.B.  
Mashburn, Joseph Lee. *Black Americana Postcard Price Guide: A Century of History Preserved on Postcards*. Enka: Colonial House, 1996.



*Marquis, I.M.P.  
American Series  
14, "Black and White."*

Fig. 14

"Black and White," n.d. Postcard. Marquis (artist). I.M.P.

Mashburn, Joseph Lee. *Black Americana Postcard Price Guide: A Century of History Preserved on Postcards*. Enka: Colonial House, 1996.



Fig. 15

"What-er-melon," 1898(?). Advertising card. Slocum Johnston Drug Co. (Heppner, OR). Charles Brown (printer).

Winterthur Library, The John and Carolyn Grossman Collection, Filing Cabinet 8-4, Trade Cards: C-G, Food & Drink / Fictional.



Fig. 16

"Sapolio," 1882. Advertising card. Enoch Morgan's Sons. Donaldson Brothers (printer). University of Iowa Libraries, Victorian Trading Cards Scrapbook, xMs P123.

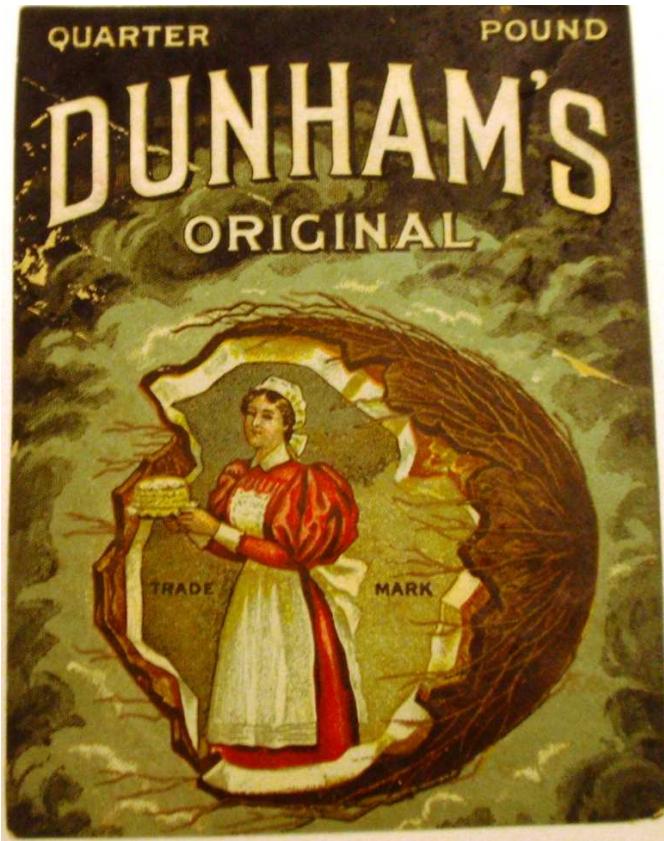


Fig. 17

"Dunham's Original," n.d. Advertising card. Dunham Manufacturing Company (St. Louis, MO).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 18

"Dunham's Cocoanut," n.d. Advertising card. Dunham Manufacturing Company (St. Louis, MO).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 19

"Compliments of G. Schultze, Barber," n.d. Advertising card. G. Schultze.  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, The  
Warshaw Collection of Business Americana.



*Ullman, "Happy Days" Ser. 81  
1913, "I'se Right in it."*

Fig. 20

'I'se Right In It,' 1913. Postcard. Ullman Manufacturing Co. (New York, NY).  
Mashburn, Joseph Lee. *Black Americana Postcard Price Guide: A Century of History Preserved on Postcards*. Enka: Colonial House, 1996. 147.

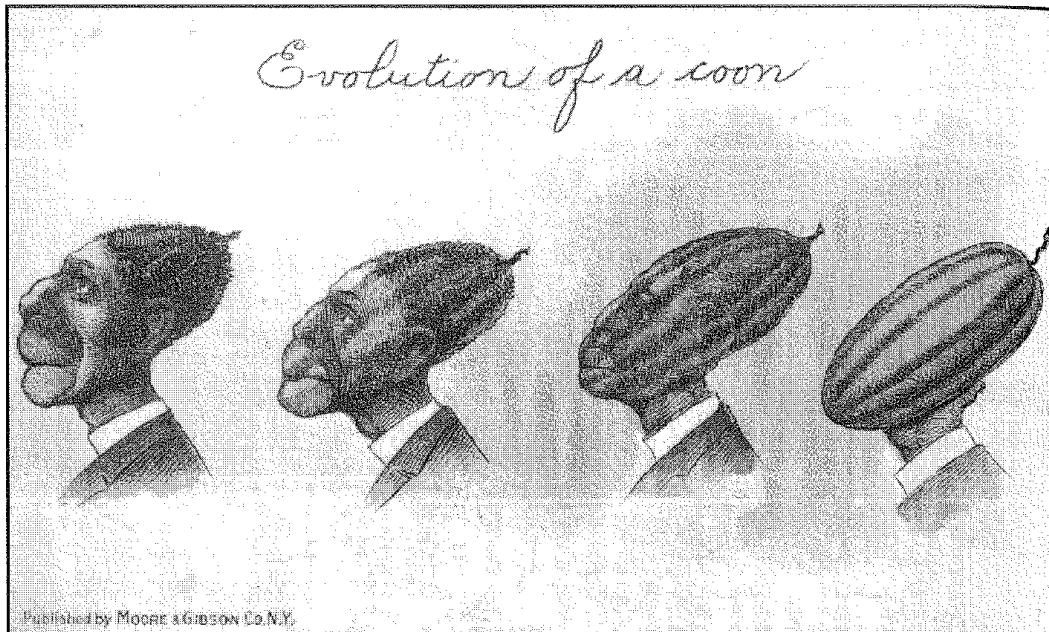


Fig. 21

“Walnut Favors,” 1929. Print advertisement. Unknown publication.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. “Description of the Pickaninny Caricature.” Accessed February 2016.

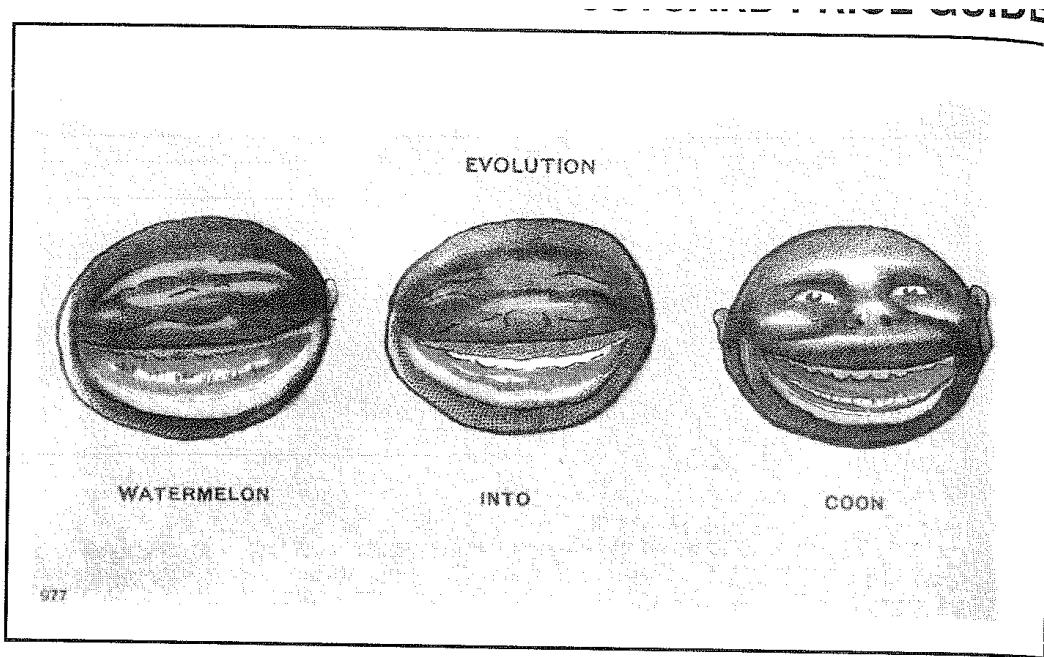
<http://www.authentichistory.com/diversity/african/3-coon/2-pickaninny/index.html>.



*Moore & Gibson  
2, "Evolution of a coon"*

Fig. 22

"Evolution of a coon," c. 1910. Postcard. Moore & Gibson Co. (New York, NY).  
Mashburn, Joseph Lee. *Black Americana Postcard Price Guide: A Century of History Preserved on Postcards*. Enka: Colonial House, 1996. 126.

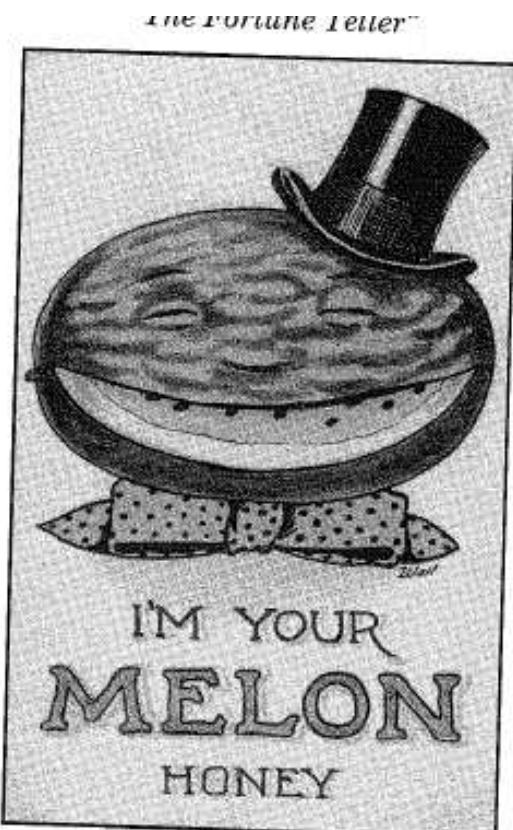


Anonymous, #977, 1909, Evolution  
"Watermelon into Coon!"

Fig. 23

"Evolution: Watermelon Into Coon!!," 1909. Postcard.

Mashburn, Joseph Lee. *Black Americana Postcard Price Guide: A Century of History Preserved on Postcards*. Enka: Colonial House, 1996. 154.



*Bernhardt Wall, Bamforth. 316*

Fig. 24

"I'm Your Melon Honey," c. 1910. Postcard. Bernhardt Wall (artist). Bamforth. Mashburn, Joseph Lee. *Black Americana Postcard Price Guide: A Century of History Preserved on Postcards*. Enka: Colonial House, 1996. 90.

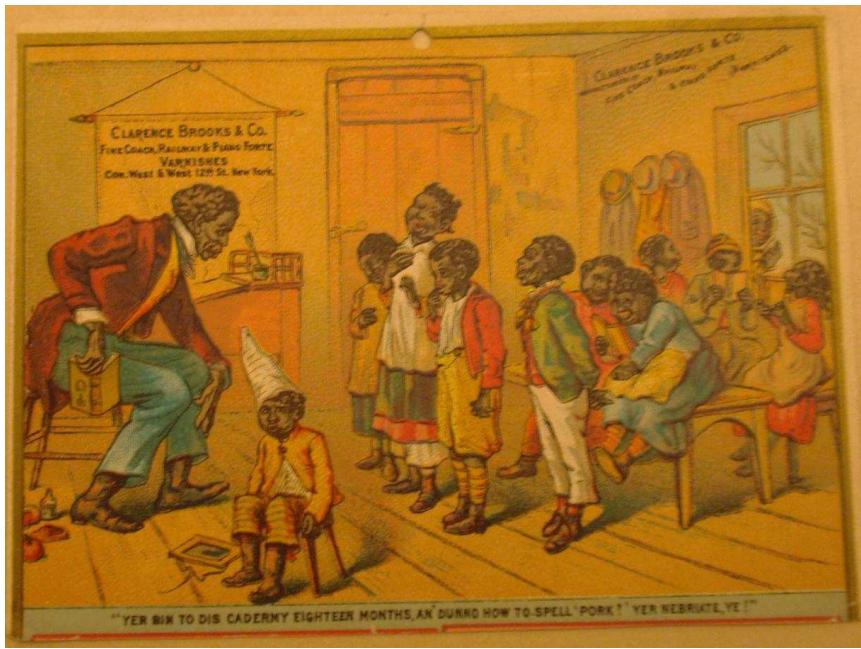


Fig. 25

"Yer Bin To Dis Cadermey Eighteen Months, An' Dunno How To Spell Pork?" Yer Nebriate, Ye!," c. 1880. Advertising calendar. Clarence Brooks & Company (New York, NY). American Bank Note Co. (printer).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, The Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Paint, Box 2, Brooks, Clarence.

## Chapter 2

### Hunger and Consumption: The Politics of Eating and Being Eaten

In March of 1919 *Ladies' Home Journal* ran an advertisement for Aunt Jemima Pancakes that was loaded with meaning, conveying potent ideas about race, gender, and American identity (Figure 26). This image is striking in its narrative, created by text and imagery, which presents a wholesome, idealized white American family preparing to enjoy a meal. “The favorite breakfast of every member of the family,” Aunt Jemima’s pancakes are ready-made by the white mother and served to her healthy, rosy-cheeked children and husband, who sit happily around the table, ready to partake of the bountiful spread before them. Advertising images like this stand in stark contrast to those of black Americans, who were rarely depicted enjoying plentiful and nutritious meals. Consider, for example, an advertising card from the late nineteenth-century, in which a black boy is shown competing with a dog for an unrealistically large oyster (Figure 27). Complete with stereotypical, caricatured features, the boy is presented as a laughable figure who is willing to play tug of war with a dog in order to secure his next meal. Contrasting the image of the happy, white family, this boy is on his own, left to his own devices to ensure his nourishment. Moreover, the illustration leaves the scene’s conclusion open-ended, picturing no resolution for the boy’s hunger. Images like these were part of a larger racialization of eating depicted in popular imagery during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which black figures were repeatedly rendered as ever hungry beings incapable of joining white society’s campaign for a fitter, healthier America.

Food was a site of intense and unrelenting anxiety for Americans of all stations in life. The poor couldn’t get enough, the middling classes sought proper nutrition, and the

upper echelons of society carried the weight of setting an example of good taste and model eating for the rest of the consuming nation. Food was not just a staple of life: it was a highly contested source of sustenance, physically and socially, economically and politically. In her recent book, *How the Other Half Ate*, Katherine Turner explains the multifaceted “social problem” of alimentation during this period: “Food was a private matter with public implications. Unclean food and food businesses could cause disease. Poorly fed children would become poorly educated delinquents. Poorly fed men were prone to drink. Women who were trapped at the stove had no free time to educate themselves.”<sup>65</sup> No wonder, then, that advertising pushed new boundaries in terms of its imagery and text when consumable goods were on the market. Regardless of one’s literacy, social status, gender, age, or race, Americans were continually bombarded with advertisements, cards, and mailers that directly addressed ever-present fears about food—who was eating it, how much they were eating, how and what they were eating, how their meal was prepared, who was preparing it, and to what end. Black Americans increasingly became the veritable poster children for advertisements, both those marketing food goods and those that were totally unrelated to food, serving as the pictorial scapegoats for a host of national discourses centering on food.

Imagining black people’s lives as inextricably intertwined with food enabled white Americans to envision them as incapable of advancing economically, socially, and politically, regardless of whatever legal rights and opportunities were bestowed upon them. Food was always at the center of this imagined stasis. The purported link between

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<sup>65</sup> Katherine Leonard Turner, *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 19-20.

black bodies and the land, especially the fruits that it produced, permeated American society, becoming the subject of popular forms of entertainment. Short stories such as Charles Chesnutt's "Dave's Neckliss" (discussed below) and "The Goophered Grapevine" (discussed in the next chapter) played with boundaries between the human body and what it consumed. Chesnutt's stories are pertinent to this discussion not only because they were circulating throughout American households during the same time that visual representations of blacks were abundant features of advertising cards and postcards, but also because his tales echo a concern with hybridity as well as with African Americans' relation to food and the land.

In Chesnutt's 1888 short story, "Dave's Neckliss," one of the plantation master's jealous slaves accuses Dave, the hardest working enslaved person owned by Master Dugal, of stealing bacon from the smokehouse. Master Dugal gives his overseer permission to punish Dave in any way he pleases; thus, the cruel overseer ties the ham to a chain and forces the innocent man to wear it around all day, every day. Dave suffers numerous months wearing the ham "neckliss," his whole life turning upside down as a result; his friends disown him, his lover rejects him, and he loses his sanity, believing himself to be turning into a ham. His insanity grows so severe that he becomes almost infantile and harmless enough that the Master frees him of the necklace. Dave's mind, however, fails to recover, leading him to light a fire in the smokehouse and hang himself over its flames. Convinced that he had become a ham, Dave strung himself up to cure.

The plot of "Dave's Neckliss" addresses the trauma of slavery and the physical and psychological warfare used in controlling the minds and bodies of those forced into a life of servitude. The story uses Dave's mental transformation from a man into a ham as a

metaphor for slavery's transformation of a man into a thing.<sup>66</sup> More than a *thing*, however, he transformed into a domestic animal that could be fed, butchered, and then consumed: an image—as we will see—not uncommon in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century American advertising, trade cards, and postcards.

African Americans were consistently pictured as ever-hungry voracious eaters who would consume anything, edible or inedible.<sup>67</sup> A postcard from around 1909 depicts a black figure with wide eyes and bright red lips approaching a white, blonde-haired girl. He carries a large stick and stares at her hat, which has a large bird on top (Figure 28). The caption asks, “How would you like to be the bird on Nellie’s hat?”—making a playful joke of the black figure’s attempt to try to catch the faux bird, presumably for a meal. Indeed, African-American figures are frequently depicted as so incessantly famished that they will resort to any means necessary, even risking life and limb, for their next meal. Though the depiction of black adults, particularly men, as insatiable beings was undoubtedly an allusion to their supposedly limitless sexual appetite, women and children were not spared portrayal as gluttonous eaters. In fact, while scholarship has tended to suggest that African Americans were rarely, if ever, depicted as consumers in American advertising, the opposite is in fact true.<sup>68</sup> They were relentlessly pictured as

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<sup>66</sup> Heather Tirado Gilligan, “Reading, Race, and Charles Chesnutt’s ‘Uncle Julius’ Tales,” *ELH* Vol. 74, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 206, accessed July 21, 2011, doi: 10.1353/elh.2007.0003.

<sup>67</sup> Susan Honeyman discusses the character of Brer Rabbit as one who deftly manipulates opportunities to acquire food, often resorting to stealing. When in one story Brer Rabbit finds himself without water—the very source of life—he explains that it does not concern him because he can drink dew instead. I see parallels here between the character of Brer Rabbit as a distinctly raced figure and the stereotype of the hungry black American, who was both always hungry and yet always conniving enough to scrimp by, often at the expense of whites. Susan Honeyman, “Gastronomic Utopias: The Legacy of Political Hunger in African American Lore,” *Children’s Literature*, Vol. 38 (2010): 51.

<sup>68</sup> Katherine Parkin, for instance, argues that African Americans were rarely the subjects or target audience of food advertisements. She observes that “Food advertisers in particular remained hesitant to associate

consumers—however, not the ideal, politically and morally upright participant the ideal culture of consumption. African Americans were instead characterized as uncontrollable devourers of all things. They were represented as beings who consumed only because their base insatiability urged them to steal, poach, gorge on, and defile foodstuffs that did not rightly belong to them. As such, African Americans were represented as the worst kind of consumers—that is, consumers without the taste, etiquette, self-control, and morality promoted by modern American food culture.

In fact, judging by the imagery on postcards and advertising cards, Americans seem to have been obsessed with images of black figures preparing food, eating or wanting to eat. The abundance of such images points to a kind of fixation on the orality of eating and the base, animalistic pleasure and fervor with which black Americans were imagined to eat. And while there are certain sexual aspects to this subject, I identify another tension at work in these illustrations: the extreme anxiety over American sustenance and access to food. Looking upon images of black Americans happily indulging in eating served as a justification for why they must remain inferior members of American society and at the same time became a tantalizing sort of vicarious participation—if only visual—in the kind of unhindered, unabashed consumption that modern American food culture increasingly disavowed. African Americans became a popular target group for the depiction of the hungry scapegoat; they were pictured as incessantly ravenous beings as a means of emphasizing their supposed animalistic nature,

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their products with African Americans,” in turn refraining from picturing them in advertisements and abstaining from including black American consumers in market research. Parkin’s focus, though, is predominantly on the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. Katherine J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 13.

and were at the same time represented as unbridled consumers of food goods, becoming fantastic caricatures of the kind of indulgent, pleasurable eating from which many white Americans felt barred from participating. Fundamental to mass-produced images of African Americans eating was the pseudoscience that lingered from centuries before: black figures were repeatedly pictured as people incapable of making sound decisions and exercising self-control. Watermelon, chicken, foods with little nutritional value, and even inedible objects comprised the fantasy of stereotypical African-American sustenance. Each of these tropes depended on and perpetuated potent ideologies about racial inequality and who should and would bring forth the next generations of Americans.

### **America's Frustrations with Food: Appetites, Overeating, and Modern Food**

#### **Culture**

The early twentieth century witnessed formidable changes in American eating habits, which fueled fires of concern regarding national appetites and what it cost to sate them. Citizens were consuming more food and, in turn, spending more money. According to historian Stanley Lebergott, during this time, “Americans typically spent more on food than citizens of almost any other nation.”<sup>69</sup> With the height of national spending and consumption, food became a hot button issue for Americans, not only in their personal lives, but in their participation within society at a political level.

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<sup>69</sup> As cited in Katherine J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 2.

As Parkin points out in *Food is Love*, “Insecurity is a prevalent theme throughout food advertisements,” and advertisers took advantage of this sense of vulnerability and perceived necessity to make the “right” choice, so to speak, by establishing powerful associations between food choice and social status.<sup>70</sup> The result was a sense among consumers that “not using the advertised product would result in some type of failure.”<sup>71</sup> Women, in particular, felt the pressure to provide healthy meals to their families, and advertisers targeted them directly. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, “advertisers frequently employed scare tactics to intimidate women into buying their foods. Infant and child mortality had been significant problems in American history and continued to be a real and common possibility through 1920.... Ads menacingly told mothers threatened with the possibility of their child dying that their only hope was to purchase the correct foods.”<sup>72</sup>

From the 1890s to the 1920s, especially, major changes in American food culture promoted various attempts at food reform. Helen Veit describes this upheaval, observing:

Food practices in the United States had never been static, but major changes in previous decades had unfastened a whole generation of Americans from habitual ways of dealing with and thinking about food. Since the late nineteenth century, Americans had witnessed the rise of industrialized food production and distribution, a revolution in nutrition science, the institutionalization of home economics within U.S. public schools and universities, the shrinking presence of servants in middle-class homes, repeated attempts by reformers to Americanize the diets of immigrants and

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<sup>70</sup> Parkin, *Food is Love*, 50.

<sup>71</sup> Parkin, *Food is Love*, 50.

<sup>72</sup> Parkin, *Food is Love*, 195.

improve the diets of the poor, the beginnings of both commercial and domestic refrigeration, and a dramatic spike in food prices.<sup>73</sup>

With all of the changes in American food culture, tensions mounted regarding who was eating, how they were eating, what they were eating, and to what end. Particularly during war time, food served as a site for political action, as Americans were urged to be more conscientious about their eating habits and were encouraged to take pride in their ability to go without or limit their consumption of certain foods. Songs like Joe Hill's "The Preacher and the Slave" (1911), a permutation of the Christian song, "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," reinforced the notion that gastronomic enjoyment and indulgence was an event unrealistic for the here and now:

Long-haired preachers come out every night,  
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;  
But when asked how 'bout something to eat  
They answer with voices so sweet.

You will eat, bye and bye,  
In that glorious land above the sky;  
Work and pray, live on hay,  
You'll get pie in the sky when you die.<sup>74</sup>

The song mentions authority figures telling people "what's wrong and what's right," encouraging hungry individuals to stave off their hunger with thoughts of the feast awaiting them in the next life. Doing without, particularly *choosing* to do without, was a distinctly racialized action, at least in the minds of many twentieth-century white

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<sup>73</sup> Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>74</sup> Cited in Susan Honeyman, "Gastronomic Utopias: The Legacy of Political Hunger in African American Lore," *Children's Literature*, Vol. 38 (2010): 48.

Americans. Foregoing the food that one desired or needed was a politically charged decision that, according to “the many people steeped in the era’s racist evolutionary thinking,” depended on two purportedly “distinguishing traits of whiteness”: intelligence and discipline.<sup>75</sup> In fact, this logic upheld self-control as the definition of white adulthood and as evidence of one’s capacity for “self-discipline and political self-government”; only adults who could control their appetites were believed to be “deserving of full political participation.”<sup>76</sup>

Yet, as Helen Veit points out, it was much more than mere intelligence and common sense that determined who knew both how to eat properly and to refrain from eating. White, middle-class Americans were targeted with information about nutrition and the best ways to sustain the body’s health. Meanwhile, poor Americans and very wealthy Americans (whose hired hands often did the meal planning, ingredient purchasing, and meal preparation), often went without the funds or knowledge needed in order to purchase healthy foods. Nutrition and the process of attaining it became appealing because knowledge about nutrition was possessed only by some and not by all.<sup>77</sup> Veit cites a Cream of Wheat advertisement printed in 1922 (and painted by Edward Brewer, discussed in the Introduction) that demonstrates nutritional naiveté in the familiar black figure of Chef Rastus (Figure 29). He holds a chalkboard on which he has written: “Maybe Cream of Wheat aint got no vitamines. I don’t know what them things is. If they’s bugs they aint none in Cream of Wheat but she’s sho’ good to eat and cheap. Costs ‘bout 1c fo’ a great big dish.” Rastus has signed his name under the inscription,

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<sup>75</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 31.

<sup>76</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 31.

<sup>77</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 49.

certifying that he is the author of the message, and he smiles proudly at the viewer. While Veit reads this image as a contrast to the privileged knowledge many whites would have possessed about vitamins and nutrition, valuing such knowledge as “an elite form of scientific modernity,” I see other dimensions at work in the image that convey powerful messages about race and humanity.<sup>78</sup>

First, Rastus’s voice is presented in dialect, a choice that was not common for Cream of Wheat advertisements but all too familiar in the history of American visual (and literary) culture. Thus, Rastus is portrayed as a strangely dichotomous character: he is both an authority figure employed to promote Cream of Wheat (a product long marketed as a healthful food) and a buffoon whose jovial ignorance testifies to his condition—he is no longer enslaved and now wears a tidy chef’s uniform, but his true capacity has not improved, as he still lacks knowledge about what truly makes for a nutritious meal. This assertion also implies that he himself goes without proper nutrition, owing to his lack of knowledge on the matter. Furthermore, Rastus’s explanation for what makes Cream of Wheat a good choice for the customer is the fact that for only one penny she can purchase enough food to make “a great big dish” of hot cereal. Not only that, but he states that the food is “sho’ good to eat.” Rastus’s priorities, in other words, are that the food he is familiar with (and advises others to eat) tastes good and can be made in large quantities for a small amount of money. Thus, more than merely presenting a contrast to white Americans who presumably knew what “vitamines” were, Brewer’s illustration is a complex and highly-charged message conveying ideas about African-

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<sup>78</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 50.

American ignorance and capacity for participation in the most vital aspects of American life.

Although Veit's book discusses in great depth food as a political tool and even a war weapon, she is careful to remind her reader that despite efforts to ration and control American consumption, Americans were not in fact starving themselves for their own or the greater good. Indeed, she cites a statistic that makes this point very clear, pointing out that "From 1909 to 1913, the daily calorie consumption of Americans averaged about 3,500 per person," and comparing that number to Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, whose citizens averaged somewhere between 500-1,000 fewer calories each day.<sup>79</sup> Thus, while Americans were *eating*, there was immense anxiety about eating appropriately, particularly when racial fitness was at stake.

At the turn of the twentieth century, childhood malnutrition racked the United States. Poor diet, paired with immigration and a steady decrease in births among the white upper class resulted in "fears of race suicide and national degeneration."<sup>80</sup> The success of eugenics depended not only on breeding among whites but, perhaps more importantly, proper nourishment of the children born to them.<sup>81</sup> According to Veit, particularly in the Progressive Era, food and race were understood to be so intertwined that they were "even mutually constitutive."<sup>82</sup> In the early twentieth century, euthenists argued that environmental factors—for example, proper diet, fresh air, and good hygiene—had significant impacts upon the "physical and intellectual development" of the

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<sup>79</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 69.

<sup>80</sup> A. R. Ruis, "'Children with Half-Starved Bodies' and the Assessment of Malnutrition in the United States, 1890-1950," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (Fall 2013): 382.

<sup>81</sup> Ruis, "Children with Half-Starved Bodies," 383.

<sup>82</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 102.

races.<sup>83</sup> Diet was conceived to be an increasingly powerful tool for ensuring future generations of white Americans. With advances in nutritional science and better understandings of calories, dietary needs, etc., people gained more knowledge about how eating impacted the body. In the 1900s Theodore Roosevelt feverishly warned of white “race suicide,” blaming white middle class women for having “willfully abandoned” their fertility and creating a steady decrease in birthrate.<sup>84</sup> White American housewives often carried a large portion of the responsibility for continuing American fitness, as they were charged with bringing up the next generation of healthy, fit white men.<sup>85</sup> These concerns quickly became national anxieties during World War I, when the very men presumed to be the “the cream of the population” were volunteering for war and the men less fit were left behind “to father their kind.”<sup>86</sup> Even as late as the 1940s, white women faced scrutiny about how to appropriately feed their children. A 1944 article in *The American Journal of Nursing* made the following warning:

Forcing food, haste in feeding, too great concern on the part of the adult feeding the child hinder rather than encourage the progress one expects an infant to make. Encouragement, poise, patience, a confidence which brings expectancy...stimulates learning on the part of the child and prevents the detrimental emotional reactions which slow learning.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 103.

<sup>84</sup> Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>85</sup> Parkin discusses this in great detail in her book, *Food is Love*.

<sup>86</sup> Tucker, “Distribution of Men Physically Unfit,” 378-379; and McCann, *This Famishing World*, 21, as cited in Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 107.

<sup>87</sup> Helen J. Hubbell and Florence G. Blake, “Feeding Children in Wartime,” *The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (May 1944): 447.

My point is that while food rationing, etiquette about what and how much to eat, and events such as war and the Great Depression surely impacted how and how much Americans ate, it seems unlikely that the explanation behind racist images such as the ones discussed in this chapter is merely that white society was hungry and reveled in images of black bodies eating. This may have been the case to a point, but I argue that the roots run far more deeply. Tensions about race, American fitness, and social participation fueled fires of conscious consumption, creating a stage for images that used small but ubiquitous windows for communication—such as advertising cards and postcards—to address, promote, and disseminate looming issues and concerns.

### **Oral Fixations and the Hungry Black American**

Images of hungry black figures are pervasive in American advertising from the years following the end of the Civil War and well into the 1930s. Eugenics played an important part in arguing that racial purity could be accomplished through “proper” sexual reproduction and environmental factors. While eugenics took hold in the United States in the twentieth century, its impulses are evident in imagery from decades earlier. Echoing theories like those put forth by Gliddon and Nott, eugenics supported ideas about some humans being inherently superior to others and advocated for their separation. Eugenics appeared in all facets of American life, particularly food and diet. For instance, white people were presumed to have a “natural diet,” usually comprising wheat and beef, while other foods were believed to be more suitable or favorable for

nonwhites.<sup>88</sup> One underlying concept critical to this stereotype was that African Americans really needed very little in order to survive; they liked most food, and would sustain themselves on a lot of only a few food groups. Whereas African Americans could subsist on the bare minimum, white people required finer foods and nourishment that would be sensitive, nutritious, and appetizing enough for their delicate bodies. Veit cites a journalist who avowed that “poor African Americans could eat anything ‘from horse-shoe nails and billy-goat tin cans up to elephant hide.’”<sup>89</sup> Not only were African Americans purportedly capable of eating “anything,” but their stomachs were imagined to be tolerant of meals comprising a variety of “mixed foods”; whites, on the other hand, were believed by many to have sensitive systems that could not be taxed with foods other than those that were plain, bland, and simple.<sup>90</sup>

Such presumptions present an anxious notion of African Americans, one whose complexities are evident in American advertising imagery and ephemera. On the one hand, African Americans were purportedly inferior enough as human beings that they did not need nutritious foods like wheat, bread, and beef, for example; yet at the same time they were humorously and perhaps literally imagined to be capable of eating inedible objects, meaning that they could survive in ways that whites could not. For eugenicists and those who aligned themselves with the ideologies of eugenics, this must have been a deeply troubling concept, as black bodies would be more naturally inclined for survival, regardless of proper nutrition or access to food.

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<sup>88</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 103.

<sup>89</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 104.

<sup>90</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 129.

The idea that “you are what you eat,” which grew to be increasingly popular after the turn of the century, became a source for reexamining racial difference. In fact, particularly during the closing decade of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, many believed that one’s food choices affected their outward appearance, making consumption another indicator of otherness.<sup>91</sup> Not dissimilar from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pseudoscientists, who believed that they could identify a person’s origins by examining the shape and appearance of their skull, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century Americans asserted that they could assess someone’s diet by examining the person’s facial features.<sup>92</sup> Food, for some, was believed to be a tool for racial improvement, as proper diet and self-control could presumably contribute to the development of “a new, superior race.”<sup>93</sup> More than simply a component of proper etiquette and know-how, one’s dietary choices in reality reflected a powerful opportunity for exercising independence and in fantasy had the potential to affect one’s racial identity.

The black body’s transformation into the very food it consumed (as in Chesnutt’s story, “Dave’s Neckliss” and in images like Fig. Swinburne’s from Chapter 1) was a familiar concept in nineteenth-century American literature, in which whiteness and blackness were distinguished and reaffirmed in the act of eating. As Kyla Wazana Tompkins explains:

[Whiteness] is revealed in [some nineteenth-century] texts both *in process* and *as process*. Eating is an act through which the body maintains the fictions of its materiality, both discursively and

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<sup>91</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 104.

<sup>92</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 104.

<sup>93</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 104.

biologically. In nineteenth-century terms, the body *is* what it consumes on a deeply literal level, a belief structure that returns us, somewhat forcefully, to the symbolic status of that which is eaten. Eating in the nineteenth-century text is a performative nexus through which physicality and political subjectivity coalesce in the flesh as it is ritualistically constituted through the repetitive ingestion of materials.<sup>94</sup>

The concern with black appetites and the almost perverse fascination with their mouths as they ate underscore the belief that Tompkins points out, namely that what a person ate—and how they ate it—demonstrated and affirmed their racial status. The notion that “the body *is* what it consumes” plays out in several of Chesnutt’s tales, as the black body becomes physically, literally part of the food it ingests. Whites’ careful attention to black people’s consumption is underscored at the beginning of “Dave’s Neckliss,” when the white narrator, John, explains that he watched Julius—the primary black character and storyteller in many of Chesnutt’s stories—eating ham that John’s wife had provided him, saying:

He ate with evident relish, devoting his attention chiefly to the ham, slice after slice of which disappeared in the spacious cavity of his mouth. At first the old man ate rapidly, but after the edge of his appetite had been taken off he proceeded in a more leisurely manner. When he had cut the sixth slice of ham (I kept count of them from a lazy curiosity to see how much he could eat) I saw him lay it on his plate.<sup>95</sup>

The language is similar to the imagery in American advertising and ephemera, in which the black figure’s meal is one of volume—emphasized here by the words “slice after

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<sup>94</sup> Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “‘Everything ‘Cept Eat Us’: The Antebellum Black Body Portrayed as Edible Body,” *Callaloo*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Winter 2007): 206-207.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Waddell Chesnutt and William L. Andrews, *Collected Stories of Charles W. Chesnutt* (New York: Penguin Group, 1992), 89.

slice”—and, as in pictorial stereotypes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the black man’s mouth is described as a “spacious cavity.” Furthermore, Julius is completely occupied by his consumption of the meat and only slows his eating after “the edge of his appetite had been taken off;” this detail underscores his ravenous urgency. Significantly, at the conclusion of “Dave’s Neckliss,” John states that the morning after hearing Julius’s story about Dave’s tragic fate, his wife told him that there was no leftover ham to eat for breakfast and says, “The fact is...I couldn’t have eaten any more of that ham, so I gave it to Julius.”<sup>96</sup> John’s wife is so disturbed by Dave’s transformation into the ham that she gives away their food to the hungry black character whom her husband watched eat at the opening of Chesnutt’s story. Her fear is that if she and John eat the ham—the ham from which Julius ate and like that which Dave allegedly ate—they, too, might somehow transform; their very whiteness would be jeopardized.

Images of black figures eating usually reveal an oral fixation on the subjects: mouths, lips, teeth, and tongues are often disproportionate, oversized, or otherwise distorted. In addition, they typically picture the moment of food entering the oral cavity, highlighting a particular appeal in the sensuous process of eating, particularly when paired with the black body. The brightly colored label on a can of oysters, for example, attests to the significant attraction of such imagery, with its red label and eye-catching yellow lettering and bold design (Figure 30). It features on one side a large oyster (or the interior side of its half-shell) as the backdrop for the words “York River Oysters.” On the other side appear the words “Use Nigger Head Brand,” paired with an image of a black man putting an oyster into his mouth. His eyes pop with great anticipation of the meal

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<sup>96</sup> Chesnutt, *Collected Stories*, 101.

and his bright red lips, white teeth, and red tongue command the viewer's attention with their overly large size. The oyster is bulbous and immense, and on it is inscribed the brand name, "Nigger Head." The black figure functions as exemplar, witness, and testament to the delicious taste and quality of the oysters; however, he also presents what may have been a "pleasant" kind of passive-aggressive attitude toward the figure in that he is depicted as eating something marked as "Nigger Head." In this way the image depicts both pleasure and implied violence, making the black figure a gluttonous consumer and cannibalistic scapegoat all at once. Indeed, cannibalism is a recurrent theme in many of these kinds of images, as the black hybrid body consumes itself in an attempt to quell its hunger. Historian Itai Vardi refers to this imagery as a kind of "symbolic self-erasure: if the food is conflated with the body, the black [person eating] is ultimately consuming his own self."<sup>97</sup> The fantasy of blacks being willing to devour themselves—knowingly or unknowingly—emerged from notions about their basic, untamable desire to gorge themselves.

That a black figure adorns the oyster can is significant also in its participation in the fantasy that African Americans always sought food that was both easily accessible and abundant. In fact, raw oysters were so plentiful and popular in the late nineteenth century that they were "perhaps the closest thing to a classless food."<sup>98</sup> As we will see throughout this chapter, ideas about African-American hunger and needs (or the lack thereof) for nourishment made images like that on the oyster can label and the

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<sup>97</sup> Itai Vardi, "Feeding Race: Eating Contests, the Black Body, and the Social Production of Group Boundaries through Amusement in Turn of the Century America," *Food, Culture & Society* Vol. 13, No. 3 (September 2010): 380.

<sup>98</sup> Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table* (1988), as cited in Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*, 146.

aforementioned advertising of the boy competing with a dog (Figure 31) resonate with implications about black Americans not needing—and not wanting—the most nutritious, expensive, or “proper” comestibles. Instead, they were usually depicted as being primarily concerned with easy access to large portions of food.

Such ideologies and imagery ran rampant in trade cards and postcards. An undated postcard titled “A Dream of Paradise” pictures a sleeping black man who dreams of a parade of chickens marching one by one into his distended, gaping mouth (Figure 32). He rises up with his eyes still closed in sleep, his large lips open wide, with his hands out by his side as if ushering the chickens toward their fate. The chickens walk a plank, bridging the gap between a sunny field and the black man’s enormous mouth. The postcard’s image and its title suggest with presumably humorous intent, that the black man’s “Dream of Paradise” would be an endless supply of food (particularly chicken), one that does not cease even when he sleeps. This image is, in fact, a gross simplification of the desires of a large portion of American citizens, declaring that for African Americans, food is the ultimate American dream—not, for example, fair employment, civil rights, education, adequate housing, or political representation. Such an assumption would have been on the one hand unsettling, owing to the perception of black bodies as being endlessly hungry, and on the other reassuring, because it relegated the black figure to the realm of mere survival as opposed to social integration.

In fact, African Americans’ stereotyped love for food became a kind of lynchpin for their affections for anyone and anything. A postcard from the early 1900s shows a black boy and girl standing close together, the boy in blue overalls and a hat and the girl wearing a red and white pinstripe dress. She holds her hands demurely in front of her as

the boy confesses, “Honey, ah lubs yo / more dan watermelon / or chicken an dat / sho am lovin some” (Figure 33). The boy compares his affection for the girl to his “lovin” of watermelon and chicken, perhaps the most well known and overused stereotypical foods associated with African Americans. The fact that he loves her “more” than both of those foods is meant to serve as testimony to just how much he adores her, the suggestion being that his love *must* be strong if it overpowers his love of watermelon and chicken, which was often considered to be an innate affinity for blacks. The postcard and, in fact, the sender, effectively “sells” this idea to the viewer.

Picturing black figures fantasizing about endless consumption was part of a textual and visual history of gastronomic utopias. Gastronomic utopias illustrate scenarios of plenty, in which the subject is surrounded or presented with opportunities to partake of some kind of cornucopia. The feast, as Susan Honeyman observes, is often a trap that ensnares the hungry subject and punishes him for indulging in gluttony.<sup>99</sup> Europe has a long history of such narratives in the form of tales of the Land of Cockaigne, which usually feature “no work, roasted birds ready to fly into your mouth, rivers of wine, honey, or syrup...and pancake or bread houses.”<sup>100</sup> This is the very kind of narrative at work in images like “Dream of Paradise,” in which the black figure does not have to work for his food but rather enjoys it walking directly into his mouth. Honeyman cites Luisa Del Giudice’s assertion that “Gastronomic utopias reflect culturally determined tastes and shared cravings,” arguing that “When an entire culture creates, retains, and shares tales of food utopias, it is intuitive to conclude that they were

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<sup>99</sup> Susan Honeyman, “Gastronomic Utopias: The Legacy of Political Hunger in African American Lore,” *Children’s Literature*, Vol. 38 (2010): 47.

<sup>100</sup> Honeyman, “Gastronomic Utopias,” 45.

prompted by hunger. Such tales constantly reflect the unreliability of sating the most basic desires for sustenance.”<sup>101</sup> This argument suggests that images such as those emblazoned on advertising cards and postcards were the product of a shared, communal hunger and quest for fulfillment of the “most basic” human desires. At the same time, however, Honeyman notes that more than mere “hungry dreams,” gastronomic utopias “can be fantasies created to fool and control their audience....[as] lures that invite audiences to concentrate on desires that cannot be fulfilled, ultimately undermining their own power, even if only symbolically.”<sup>102</sup> From this perspective, images like “Dream of Paradise” functioned as visual lures, narratives of impossibility owing to the purported incapacity of African Americans to fairly and adequately provide for themselves (and, as we will see, for their families).

### **Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: The Limits of Hunger**

Around the 1890s, the decade that historian J. Stanley Lemons describes as “the virtual black abyss of black degradation in post-Civil War America,” two chromolithographs made black hunger a kind of public spectacle for white amusement.<sup>103</sup> The first illustrates a black boy running off with a pie (Figure 34). His legs are spread wide as he sprints away from the angry black woman standing at the kitchen window, where she had put the pie out to cool. He runs, barefoot, grinning at the meal before him,

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<sup>101</sup> Honeyman, “Gastronomic Utopias,” 45.

<sup>102</sup> Honeyman, “Gastronomic Utopias,” 47-48.

<sup>103</sup> J. Stanley Lemons, “Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring 1977): 106.

as she stands shouting after him, angrily shaking her fist. Oddly, a well-dressed white woman stands in the background, giggling as she brings her hand up toward her chest in amusement. While not an advertising card or postcard, this printed image was made for viewers who would presumably purchase it for display in their homes. This suggests that it was an appealing image, one that, we might imagine, the artist thought would make the viewer chuckle in much the same way that the scene makes the white onlooker laugh in the background.<sup>104</sup>

A second chromolithograph pictures four black boys crowding around a watermelon, which one of them has just sliced in half (Figure 35). They gather around the melon with ferocious enthusiasm, giving them a distinctly bestial character. The boy on the left is depicted as particularly apelike as he sits in anxious anticipation of the feast: he crouches on one knee, his arms steadyng him with his hands folded such that his knuckles meet the ground. The other boys lean over one another, their arms and knees bent, in their eagerness to reach the melon. Their haste in getting at the fruit emphasizes both their intense hunger and their lack of self-control. Furthermore, all of the boys look very similar, with no distinguishing features: their dark eyes and highlighted lips accentuate their bestial appearance, making them appear more animal than human. Meanwhile, a genteel, well-dressed white couple stands in the background, smiling as they watch the boys surround the melon. They are dressed and poised as if participating in a tour or traveling an exhibition, this spectacle of hunger being their source of

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<sup>104</sup> Lacking any provenance information for these two images, one can only speculate as to where they were printed, who possessed them, and how and where they were displayed. These were likely part of a larger series, perhaps part of an advertising calendar, book, or collectible set of scenes. I would imagine that they would have made for popular, “humorous” prints that white Americans may have hung in their kitchens, for example.

entertainment. One small detail underscores this impression: the knife that split the watermelon is stuck in the melon's flesh. Rather than one of the boys holding the knife and slicing it in the moment, the boy at center is shown reaching for it, suggesting that they found the melon already sliced and served. This detail, along with the white couple's presence, implies that the melon was sliced and left for hungry black bodies to find and devour for white public entertainment.

Spectacles such as this were not mere artistic fantasy; in fact, "from the mid to late 1800s onward, whites regularly planned and staged eating contests between blacks within a variety of social settings. Such competitions proved especially popular as featured 'light entertainment' during club meetings, civil organization forums, and professional conferences."<sup>105</sup> These events took place nationwide and, as in the two engravings discussed above, the foods blacks were racing to devour were usually "watermelon, pies, crackers or rice."<sup>106</sup> In his article, "Feeding Race," historian Itai Vardi argues that white supremacists "devised endless schemes and practices," eating contests among them, to prove their beliefs that blacks were more apelike and animalistic than human. Staging such events in a "self-fulfilling, circular fashion," organizers considered these contrived displays of blacks' eating behaviors to be performative evidence that ratified their own racist ideas.<sup>107</sup> Black Americans, believed by many to be more susceptible to loss of self-control, were imagined to be unwilling and indeed physically incapable of restraining themselves in the presence of food. American advertising

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<sup>105</sup> Vardi, "Feeding Race," 374.

<sup>106</sup> Vardi, "Feeding Race," 374.

<sup>107</sup> Vardi, "Feeding Race," 378.

consistently reinforced the notion that black people would stop at nothing for their next meal, even going so far as to engage in public spectacle.

In addition to their insatiability threatening a food shortage or exemplifying the sin of gluttony, African Americans' supposed extreme hunger was also seen as risking lawlessness. Once again, there are traces of motifs present in the Land of Cockaigne tales, which often suggested that hungry people should not be provided with sufficient food because, accustomed to being hungry all the time, they will act with greed and without restraint when finally presented with enough food to calm their growling bellies.<sup>108</sup> White Americans reveled in images of African Americans resorting to acts of desperation to secure a meal. In fact, advertisements did not stop at picturing blacks in the act of poaching their food; indeed, they often depicted them as going hungry even after their conquest was made. Consider, for example, an advertising card from around 1890 for a Charleston, South Carolina store's sale of Ashepoo Phosphate Company fertilizer (Figure 36). The card pictures in full color detail two black male figures sucking sugar from canes in (presumably) a white man's field. One of the men sits on the fence post and happily sucks out the sugar while his conspirator crouches down behind the sugar canes, unsuccessfully trying to quickly suck out the juice and complaining: "Golly, I can't get no juice out of dis nohow." Like many others, this image is loaded with meaning, as the black men are not only stealing (suggesting both their desperation and duplicity) but also only partially successful in sating their appetites. Only one of them gets sugar out of the plant, and—even more significantly, perhaps—neither of them get nutritious sustenance from their thievery. Sugary foods were often what poor Americans

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<sup>108</sup> Honeyman, "Gastronomic Utopias," 50.

scrimped by on, and, more than that, consuming sugar only “leaves one wanting more, thus prolonging and intensifying hunger.”<sup>109</sup> Advertising illustrations created a kind of tit-for-tat in which black Americans pictured as lawlessly sating their voracious appetites were subsequently pictured as starving. This pictorial cycle provided a reassuring vision for Americans fearing what ends blacks would go to in order to meet their reputedly animalistic needs.

As detailed in the following chapter, images of black figures stealing foodstuffs represented a common pictorial choice among advertisers, and such vignettes almost always included an indication of the thief’s impending punishment, either at the hands of the (white) person stolen from or at the jaws of an animal. Hungry black men were seen as real and looming threats to the well-being of white Americans. As Turner puts it, “Hungry men threatened the social order: without enough to eat, they might steal, strike, or riot.”<sup>110</sup> Hungry *black* men were perceived as all the more threatening owing to their presumed lack of self-control and their voracious, insatiable appetites.

It is helpful to return to Charles Chesnutt and his short stories, as they underscore the ways in which stereotypes about African Americans, in particular, overlapped and intermingled to create vividly terrible and persistent caricatures of black figures in American culture. Just as Chesnutt explored the concept of the transformed black body in “Dave’s Neckliss,” so does he grapple with the body’s changeability in “The Goophered

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<sup>109</sup> Sidney Mintz (*Sweetness and Power*, 149) and Andrew Warnes (*Hunger Overcome?*), as cited in Honeyman, “Gastronomic Utopias,” 57.

<sup>110</sup> Katherine Leonard Turner, *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working Class Meals at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 18.

Grapevine," which was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1887.<sup>111</sup> Significantly, the tale also addresses the stereotype of the ravenous black man, who ultimately must be physically transformed as a punishment for giving in to his hunger. In the story, the well-to-do white man, John, aims to relocate to the South and purchase a plantation with land suitable for cultivating wine-producing grapes. His plans go well until he meets Uncle Julius, the older black man who lives on the McAdoo plantation and tells of its troubled past.<sup>112</sup> According to Julius, the plantation is "goophered," bewitched by a conjure woman who poisoned the grapevines such that any black person who ate the master's scuppernong grapes would die within a year. The blacks' urge to devour the scuppernongs is so great that not only do they diminish most of the crop, but they are so insatiable that only magic—and death—can deter them from consuming them at will.

What is striking about this particular tale is that one of the black characters becomes the very sort of hybrid seen in the very common biomorphic images on advertising cards, which pictured black figures as part-plant (usually cotton or watermelon) and part-human. When Henry, a new slave, arrives at the plantation and (not knowing that they are goophered) eats one of the scuppernongs, the overseer agrees to ask the conjure woman to save him. She prevents the magic from killing Henry, but her spell joins him with the scuppernong vine such that when the grapes are in season, Henry is full of youthful vitality, and when they shrivel up, so does he wither with old age: "Befo' dat, Henry had tol'able good ha'r 'roun' de aidges, but soon ez de young grapes begun ter come, Henry's ha'r begun to quirl all up in little balls, des like dis yer reg'lar

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<sup>111</sup> Heather Tirado Gilligan, "Reading, Race, and Charles Chesnutt's 'Uncle Julius' Tales," *ELH* Vol. 74, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 204, accessed July 21, 2011, doi: 10.1353/elh.2007.0003.

<sup>112</sup> NB: John and Uncle Julius are the same characters from "Dave's Neckliss."

grap' ha'r, en by de time de grapes got ripe his head look des like a bunch er grapes.”<sup>113</sup>

Just as cotton bolls sprout from the heads of black figures in the trade cards discussed earlier, so in this tale does a scuppernong vine grow from the top of Henry’s head.

Furthermore, the man’s head—the very center of his identity and intelligence—is described in terms of its supposed similarity in appearance to that of a fruit, his hair ripening into curls like “little balls,” making him look “des like a bunch er grapes.”

Moreover, Henry, though saved from death, ultimately becomes a very part of the plant he ate and was responsible for cultivating.<sup>114</sup> The fact that images with illustrations of enslaved, biomorphic bodies circulated after African Americans’ emancipation makes Chesnutt’s tale all the more resonant and suggestive of contemporary efforts to reaffirm ties between blacks, the land, and—as discussed in Chapter 4—labor.

Chesnutt’s tale grapples with the notion that enslaved people were somehow naturally obsessed with foodstuffs, so much so that the most extreme measures had to be taken to control their voracious appetites. And as we saw in the previous chapter, this stereotype persisted into the twentieth century. In stories, as well as in visual culture, when their appetites could not be controlled, blacks became victims to—and indeed physically part of—the food they ate. Tormenting the bodies of black men and women (as in Chesnutt’s “The Goophered Grapevine”), brutally punishing them, and abusing

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<sup>113</sup> Charles Waddell Chesnutt and William L. Andrews, *Collected Stories of Charles W. Chesnutt* (New York: Penguin Group, 1992), 8-9.

<sup>114</sup> Kyla Tompkins discusses in her article, “Everything ‘Cept Eat Us,” that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* features a similar use of the “trope of [a character’s] edibility” as Chloe’s “physicality comes to essentially embody her labor.” Stowe’s narrator describes Chloe’s appearance in very visual terms, but more importantly, in terms that echo her duties as a servant. The result, Tompkins argues, is that with “the value of [Chloe’s] labor is collapsed into the value of her very flesh.” Tompkins’ article underscores the fact that the notion of the black body as food was very much present in nineteenth-century literature. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, ““Everything ‘Cept Eat Us,’ 211.

their psyches were the means of keeping African Americans' senses in check. The white narrator's observation of Uncle Julius in "Dave's Neckliss," describing him as a man unsure of his own freedom to feel, reveals the extent to which the black mind and the physical senses were simultaneously salvific and burdensome:

While he [Uncle Julius] mentioned with a warm appreciation the acts of kindness which those in authority had shown to him and his people, he would speak of a cruel deed, not with the indignation of one accustomed to quick feeling and spontaneous expression, but with a furtive disapproval which suggested to us a doubt in his own mind as to whether he had a right to think or to feel, and presented to us the curious psychological spectacle of a mind enslaved long after the shackles had been struck from the limbs of its possessor. Whether the sacred name of liberty ever set his soul aglow with a generous fire; whether he had more than the most elementary ideas of love, friendship, patriotism, religion—things which are half, and the better half, of life to us; whether he even realized, except in a vague, uncertain way, his own degradation, I do not know. I fear not; and if not, then centuries of repression had borne their legitimate fruit.<sup>115</sup>

"A mind enslaved long after the shackles had been struck" was a matter of powerful curiosity in the years following emancipation. American culture took up the subject with earnest fervor, picturing especially the various imagined outcomes of black bodies set free. While federal law granted new opportunities for the participation of blacks as citizens and offered some protections against discrimination, racist Americans nonetheless found ample means of inflicting harm on African Americans. While many times this harm was physical and very real, often it was metaphorical, symbolic, and

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<sup>115</sup> Chesnutt, *Collected Stories*, 90-91.

psychological and played out in the realm of American consumer culture, smearing itself across advertisements as if selling brutality instead of goods.

Often illustrated as poor, haggard individuals with holes in their clothing and ramshackle housing, African Americans were granted little empathy in advertising, nor were they given credit for their own subsistence. Their poverty, in fact, was held up as a symbol of their inherent inferiority, not as a symptom of their historic enslavement and oppression. Moreover, advertising rendered their hunger comical, as African Americans' thin bodies were pictured as incessantly undernourished, owing in large part to their struggles to provide for themselves and their families. "Part of what defines poverty in any era is the inability to make free choices about necessities such as food. Poor people must eat what they have, or somehow manage to buy food with the money they can earn, and they must fit the time required to cook and eat into the grueling task of earning enough money to live."<sup>116</sup> In the midst of the shift to free labor and in the wake of increasing opportunities for employment, African Americans were confronted with an abundance of imagery suggesting their incorrigible, unceasing hunger, their innate animalism, and their lack of morality.

All of the widely disseminated print materials purveyed the same underlying message: that black Americans would steal any available food, no matter how easy or difficult their access to it. Images underscoring the stereotype of the incessantly hungry black figure—who is threatening both in his voraciousness and in his ability to survive on next to nothing—provide further testimony to the appeal of images of black hunger to white audiences. Looking at illustrations of desperately hungry black figures apparently

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<sup>116</sup> Turner, *How the Other Half Ate*, 7.

was so satisfying for white viewers that these scenes were chosen for everyday materials that could be reprinted, framed, inscribed, collected, and distributed to friends and strangers alike.

### **Watermelon: A Sweet and Treacherous Fruit**

Advertising images pairing black figures with watermelons were profuse in advertising and print matter alike; indeed, watermelons were unquestionably the most illustrated comestible associated with African Americans. And while scholars have not ignored the stereotype of the melon-hungry African American, I read a distinct anxiety in these images that is rooted in food—access to it, hunger for it, and its relation to the body. In her book, *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies* (1994), Patricia Turner argues that images pairing black children and watermelons

convey dual messages. First, they imply that blacks naturally prefer foods they can eat with their hands. Second, the image of [a] small black child's head peering over an oversized chunk of watermelon suggests that his or her nutritional needs can be supplied by easily accessible crops that grow profusely.<sup>117</sup>

I agree with Turner's claim that watermelons and their abundant availability served as an appealing food to imagine blacks eating, yet I believe that this argument can be taken further. In fact, the fantasy that African Americans were satisfied with sustaining themselves on a food that grows rapidly and "profusely" would have been appealing in its

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<sup>117</sup> Patricia A. Turner, *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 15.

presumed effect, which was that blacks would pose no competition with whites for access to other, more costly, nutritious, or more refined sources of food.

There is another aspect to what Turner describes, however, and that is the tendency in imagery for the watermelon to dwarf the mouth that consumes it even when the depiction of that mouth is grossly distended and oversized. Time and again, black figures are literally dwarfed and belittled in relation to the foods they are pictured as desiring or devouring. And the size or amount of what they are shown eating testifies once again to their purported excessive voraciousness. Again, there seems to have been a certain comfort in imagining the abundance of food being greater than the number (or size) of people craving its nourishment. Yet there was another facet to this trope in that it suggested the absurdity of black people's appetites and their inherent nature, which precluded them from participating in modern American society in any meaningful way. As discussed in Chapter 1, advertising images frequently paired African Americans' faces and watermelons to imply a similarity between the two. But images also visually aligned black faces with slices of the fruit in a kind of extreme juxtaposition, creating the impression that the African-American body hungered for food that was *too big*: the consequence of which was that blacks were deemed to be *too hungry*.

Let us take a step back and grapple with the stereotype at work here—that of the black figure and his overarching fondness for watermelon. Recently, historians have taken a closer look at this all too familiar trope, probing the matter of its origins. Just last year, William Black, a graduate student at Rice University, published an article titled "How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope," in which he explains how the fruit was in fact a powerful crop that African Americans planted, harvested, consumed, and made a

profit from in the post-emancipation period. He argues that the watermelon was in fact a symbol of black freedom that white Americans transformed into “a symbol of black people’s perceived uncleanliness, laziness, childishness, and unwanted public presence” owing precisely to its integral role in African Americans’ increasing independence.<sup>118</sup> Black elaborates upon the watermelon as a useful site for othering: the watermelon’s dripping, juicy messiness made it a metaphor for uncleanliness; its ease of growing, paired with the fact that it is a food one has to “sit down and eat” made it a metaphor for laziness; and its bright red color, sweet taste, and lack of significant nutritional value made it a metaphor for childishness.<sup>119</sup> And as Black points out, while African Americans had grown and eaten watermelons during slavery, when they did so as free people “it seemed...as if blacks were flaunting their newfound freedom, living off their own land, selling watermelons in the market, and—worst of all—enjoying watermelon together in the public square.”<sup>120</sup> Black refers to a number of texts and images to demonstrate how this stereotype took shape and played out in American culture, all of which make the point that the trope of the watermelon-eating black figure was intended to suggest the unpreparedness of black people for freedom.<sup>121</sup>

A postcard, likely from the early 1900s, features an old black woman sitting on the front porch of a wooden cabin, smiling as she prepares to take the first bite of a giant slice of watermelon (Figure 37). Her surroundings are bare but for some sunflowers growing off to the side, their yellow hue matching the bandana on her head. Her dress,

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<sup>118</sup> William Black, “How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope,” *The Atlantic* (December 8, 2014), para. 3, accessed May 18, 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Black, “Racist Trope,” para. 4.

<sup>120</sup> Black, “Racist Trope,” para. 7.

<sup>121</sup> Black, “Racist Trope,” para. 10.

meanwhile, is green and white striped, like the melon's skin; again, color and design establish visual analogies between the watermelon and the black body, implying that they were of the same flesh. The focal point of the image, however, is the enormity of the fruit slice as compared to the mouth intending to eat it. The black woman's mouth, a common site of interest in images of this kind, hovers over the center of the watermelon and is positioned in the exact center of the card. Her lower lip is colored red, blending with the red of the watermelon. The absurdity of the consumption about to commence is suggested both by the extreme size of the fruit slice and by the woman's lack of teeth. In fact, she appears to have only two teeth with which to eat the enormous meal, making her task seem farcical, if not impossible. It is not just the food that suggests the absurdity of the woman's attempt to sate her hunger, but rather her body, too—her mouth, in fact—contributes to the folly of her pursuit. As in so many other images, the black body is presented as defunct and ultimately incapable of enjoying the kind of nourishment enjoyed by white consumers.

"Humor" was often at work in these types of images, and the degrading implications were no less powerful, always hovering near the surface for interpretation. Consider, for example, a postcard from 1911, in which a black child is pictured glaring at the viewer while holding a large mostly-eaten watermelon slice with both hands (Figure 38). S/he clutches the fruit possessively, while the text in emphatic capital letters reads "MINE, ALL MINE." Despite the fact that the child has eaten all of the watermelon, leaving nothing but the rind, s/he still makes clear to the viewer—both with body language and the image's caption—that s/he is unwilling to part with the fruit. The black

figure's gluttony is so overpowering that s/he is willing to defend even the presumably inedible remnant of the fruit.

In fact, watermelons, as they appeared in advertising and postcards, seemed to have the power to make African Americans delirious with their sweetness and delectability. In 1934 John C. Buckbee, Jr. advertised his sale of Northrup, King & Co.'s seeds with an image entitled "Satisfaction" (Figure 39). The card features a gold background and red lettering across the top announcing the company's "Golden Anniversary." The accompanying image depicts a black girl in a blue gingham shirt and red bandana, her tresses of hair tied with yellow bows. She holds a giant slice of watermelon that she has started eating. She puckers her lips and her eyes go wide and appear to roll back in her head in "Satisfaction." The card was one of the popular see-through variety, which instructed the viewer to hold it up to the light to see a "surprise image" shine through. In this case, the girl's eyes comprise the "surprise image"; however, unless the viewer holds the card up to a light source, the girl's eyes look entirely vacant, giving her a deranged appearance and creating the impression—underscored by the title—that she is delirious with pleasure from eating the melon.

Despite the apparent pleasure in picturing black figures contentedly consuming watermelons, there was also a bizarre, parallel tendency to depict them using the fruit in ways that were as absurd as the often gigantic slices they were pictured devouring. African Americans appear time and again as resourcefully—or ignorantly—using watermelons for non-consumptive, non-traditional purposes. A black girl and baby are the focus of an advertisement for Sanford's Ginger (Figure 40). The girl, with ponytails and red lips, wears a red dress with lace trim. Her nice clothing and tidy appearance are

betrayed by her bare feet, the swarm of flies hovering beside her head, and the fact that she uses a carved out watermelon to cradle a crying black baby. She is the quintessential multitasker, but her priorities seem to be self-centered, for although the baby wails and reaches for the ginger tonic for comfort, the older child smiles as she feasts on a slice of the melon, as evidenced by the bite taken out of its center. More than that, however, the image attests to the older girl's ignorance in her choice of cradle; she seems happily unaware that a sliced fruit, which can spoil and rot, does not make for a safe or suitable container for a baby. She can also be read as not ignorant of the choice but instead as confidently having *made* the choice of a watermelon cradle, which echoes notions about blacks' supposed obsessions with foodstuffs and inability to get enough: they must not only eat the food accessible to them but also use it for their day to day needs.

A postcard made by Martin Post Card Co. in 1909 presents a photomontage showing four black figures positioned in and around a colossal watermelon (Figure 41). The image's title, at bottom center, identifies the scene as "A Kans[as] Bungalow" and suggests that this is a typical homestead one might find if they were to visit the state. In 1879 thousands of African Americans migrated to Kansas both to escape racial violence. That the African-American homestead in Kansas is pictured as an enormous watermelon is loaded with implications about the conditions and livelihood of freepeople. The watermelon abode is complete with a wooden porch (on which rest various household objects, including a broom and baskets), a door, and a window, out of which pops a black figure. A rotund black woman sits in a chair on the porch and two black men stand on either side. Vegetation surrounds the enormous melon, creating a sense of proportion that greatly diminishes the size of the human figures. Picturing the black figures living inside

a watermelon undermines the notion that they have a better life in the state sought by many as both a safe haven and a gateway to opportunity. The namesake of the postcard company, William H. Martin (1865-1940), created numerous postcards presenting aspects of daily life in Kansas, and the postcards were even used for special events in the state. This postcard, for instance, was appropriated by Palace Clothing Company to advertise a raincoat sale in the Arts Building of the Topeka Fair Grounds.<sup>122</sup> This detail is important in reminding us of the significance of postcards and advertising cards alike, as both were reused and reappropriated for commercial as well as personal purposes. The cards had emotional, political, and social meanings that people and companies employed to their own unique advantages, often with powerful outcomes.

### **The Vulnerable Henhouse: White America's Preoccupation with Chickens**

A trade card for N. B. Stevens, a Boston seller of refrigerators, uses large, bold, capital letters to state its wares: REFRIGERATORS. The image on the card, however—which takes up the majority of the ad space—is titled “Ole Zip Coon,” and pictures a black man stealing chickens (Figure 42). The image is a typical, indeed stereotypical, scene of buffoonery. The black man is caught in the act of perfidy, falling over the fence that was meant to keep him out of the farm, the seat of his pants catching on a treacherously jagged picket. Clutching two squawking chickens in his right hand, his left hand braces for the fall, allowing the third chicken to run off in a hurry. Meanwhile, his large, bulging eyes look backward toward the angry white man who hurries after him

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<sup>122</sup> “A Kansas Bungalow,” Kansas Historical Society Archives, Unit 221423.

with rifle in hand and his faithful dog by his side. The viewer is thus informed that the guilty black chicken-thief will surely be caught and brought to justice by the white man and his dog. Yet the image has broader resonance and implications. The scene also recalls tales and images of the pursuit of runaway slaves, wherein the white master is often pictured with his dog, who heads up the hunt, sniffing out the fleeing property. This card demands that we ask why N. B. Stevens chose this image to market his refrigerators. What did he imagine this image would make his targeted customer feel? Want? Do? While it is possible that Stevens simply liked the image, finding humor in it, perhaps, it is worth asking these questions because this advertising card was intended to spread his name and notify potential customers of his shop and its wares. The card was, in essence, Stevens's chance to make more money, ensure his livelihood, and feed his own family. In this sense, his choice could not have been so trivial. Furthermore, if we consider that the goal would have been to distribute the card in hopes of appealing to and earning as many new customers as possible (and solidifying the loyalty of current customers), then it seems logical to read the image as one that would have conveyed meaning—and appeal—to a wide and largely white audience.

The trope of black Americans' preference for chickens was so firmly ingrained that picturing black figures choosing a foodstuff other than chicken was used to assert the quality of other products. In her book, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs*, Psyche Williams-Forson writes: "So much of what was represented in popular culture of the Reconstruction era increased the belief that the legacy of blacks in America was that of an infantile, savage, chicken-loving (in the extreme) people. Constant edification of this

ideology sought to keep blacks in mental bondage.”<sup>123</sup> And while many aspects of American life contributed to this project in legal ways, everyday objects such as advertising cards and postcards participated in this process in sociological and deeply psychological ways.

In the late 1800s McFerran, Shallcross & Co. in Louisville, Kentucky, selected an image printed by Louisville Lithographing Co. for its advertising card to market winter-cured Magnolia hams (Figure 43). It pictures a black man and boy carrying a number of large hams along a path beside a field. The moon hangs in the background, indicating that they are out at evening time, and their clothes are tattered and worn. Both the moon and the tattered clothing are reminiscent of images of escaping slaves or, in modern advertising, of blacks trying to steal food. Unlike the vast majority of images depicting black theft, however, no one chases after the two figures. Instead, the man smiles out at the viewer, and the caption presents his words: “Dont Talk Bout Henhouses To Me.” Both the text and the imagery speak to hard and fast associations between black people—males in particular—and food, especially chickens. In this case, however, the man carries two large hams, one under each arm, and balances one atop his head; meanwhile, the boy’s face is hidden behind the large ham he carries with both arms. The enormity of the hams and the figures’ labors in carrying them allude to stereotypes of black insatiability. The man and boy do not carry one ham or two—they carry three and balance one—all suggestive of their immense, insatiable appetites and their disregard for proper portions. Those appetites, though, are also key to the advertisement’s success in selling Magnolia

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<sup>123</sup> Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 35.

hams: here, the man and boy betray their stereotypical interest in chickens in favor of dining on winter-cured ham. Image and text work together to convey to the viewer/consumer that, if the black man and boy choose to take hams over chickens, then the ham must by all means make a more satisfying meal. At the same time, the image does not depict them eating the hams, again relegating the black figure to a station of hunger rather than satisfaction. More than insatiable and ever-hungry, however, the men are explicitly identified as thieves, both by the night scene and the fact that they carry many hams, almost more than they can manage. Additionally, the black man's reference to henhouses implies their thievery by suggesting that instead of raiding the henhouse, they have instead stolen from the white farmer's smokehouse. This element is part of a popular stereotype in which black men who are pictured as having successfully secured a meal for themselves or their families are at the same time cast as suspicious, deceptive, or immoral beings.

### **Feast or Famine: Hyperbolic Pictures of Hungry Black Americans**

In an oddly dichotomous pattern, black men in particular are pictured as both capable of snagging live food and always incapable of providing enough food to feed their own families. The explanation to this simultaneous abundance and dearth is, rather unsurprisingly, race: black figures seem always capable of making the “big catch” when the food is for the benefit of a white consumer, and they are always contributing meager food sources for the nourishment of their own bodies or those of their black family members. Images in which black figures are depicted successfully feeding themselves or

their families typically feature narrative elements indicating that the figures attained the food through duplicitous means, usually by stealing, and sometimes by sheer luck. A Cream of Wheat advertisement from Christmas 1899 (Figure 44) depicts the brand's interlocutor, Rastus, shown in his usual chef's uniform, holding up the steaming dish of cereal. In his right hand, however, he holds a massive turkey by its legs. The turkey's head dangles at Rastus's hips and the bird's tail reaches well beyond the height of the chef's hat. He smiles out at the viewer, making his hold on the enormous bird seem effortless. The accompanying text reads: "Christmas / Breakfast / would be as cheerless without / Cream of Wheat / as the dinner would be without a Turkey. It promotes good health, and good health is a thing to be thankful for. On Christmas Day let part of your praise be of Cream of Wheat." The caption identifies the cereal as an integral part of the white American family's Christmas meal. It also instructs that the white housewife that serving Cream of Wheat will not only bring Christmas cheer, but also grant her family "good health," which "is a thing to be thankful for." The Christmas feast is abundant, according to Cream of Wheat, just as their representative character, Rastus, effortlessly provides both breakfast and dinner. In this case, the black character has acquired enough food for a large and nutritious meal; however, the meal is explicitly reserved for the white family.

Meanwhile, a black man bringing a turkey home to his family is the subject of an advertising card dating from about 1880 (Figure 45). The card includes the advertiser's name and specialty—Clarence Brooks & Co.'s fine coach varnishes—but its imagery focuses on a hungry black family. The father holds the scrawny, featherless bird up for his kin to see, dangling it from one thin leg. The mother rests both hands on the table

between them and looks up at him, as if for an explanation, which the caption provides: “Won At The Raffle. / ‘De Breed am small, but de Flavor am Delicious.’” With a wife and five children, it is painfully obvious that the man will not be able to nourish his family with one small turkey. One of the children even peeks into his father’s basket to see if he brought home anything more to feed them. Both the image and its text imply that the man is a defunct provider, incapable of feeding his dependents. Furthermore, the image title, “Won At The Raffle,” indicates that the man did not catch or purchase the turkey himself, but acquired it by sheer luck. As in most instances, the figures are pictured wearing worn and tattered clothing, and their hunger is featured as a basic human requirement that, by fault of their own and particularly by the black male “breadwinner,” is always unfulfilled. This image and others like it participate in paternalistic discourses dating back to slavery, when whites advocating for the institution argued that enslavement was beneficial to blacks, providing them with food and shelter. Circulating less than 20 years after emancipation, it is likely that this image was intended to present a modern-day (imagined) example of how blacks were, in fact, not better off as free people, and were instead suffering deprivation as a result of their independence.

Indeed, it seems that crediting black men with securing food by their own hands was not a concept much in favor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When they *did* secure food in popular imagery, it was with surprising ease—as in the Cream of Wheat advertisement—and because of their supposed nature, which, according to images like a postcard from around 1930, was duplicitous. It shows an older black man scaling a tree to catch a possum (Figure 46). As in other images of well-dressed black figures, the man’s actions betray his propriety: he not only resorts to climbing a tree to

catch his meal, but also is going after a wild animal whose connotations during this era were of meanness and deception (hence the familiar phrase, “playing possum”). The stereotype of the black possum-eater grew to imply an inherent link between African Americans and possums as, in the words of one postcard, “Two of a Kind” (Figure 47). Not only were both presumed to be lazy, but the idea that African Americans often *consumed* possums made for an explicit fantasy of their similarity, following the familiar “you are what you eat” hypothesis. A postcard from 1913 emphasizes this imagined link between African Americans and possums, again picturing a black man climbing a tree in pursuit of the animal (Figure 48). The image is a photograph, suggesting the legitimacy of the scene as something that actually took place, and the title, “Dixie Land / The Land of Possum,” emphasizes the idea that this scene is one that anyone could expect to witness in the South. Postmarked September 8, 1913, from Hay Springs, Nebraska, the postcard includes the sender’s message, which is scrawled around the postcard’s printed text describing the illustration on its recto:

Dixie Land, the Land of Possum. / The possum, a small, but fat animal, with a rat-like tail, lives usually on trees, and form a great part of the negroes [sic] daily menu, a class of people who enjoy life in idleness, and find ample food growing wild throughout the country. Fruit of all kinds, fish in plenty and possum resting on the trees in large numbers complete the demands and requirements of those easily contented people.<sup>124</sup>

The message is loaded with stereotypes, “educating” the viewer about the “class” of African Americans one would supposedly encounter in “Dixie Land, The Land of Possum.” African Americans, by this postcard’s account, are scavengers, “enjoy[ing] life

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<sup>124</sup> Postcard, “Dixie Land / The Land of Possum,” 1913.

in idleness,” eating equally lazy possums “resting on the trees,” and consuming the variety of “ample food growing wild throughout the country.” The black figure is described much like a wild animal himself, roaming the land and surviving on what grows around him. Echoing the ideas put forth in much of the imagery discussed in this chapter, the text concludes by stating that African Americans’ “demands and requirements” are easily met by the land—its possums and its fruits—because they are by their very nature “easily contented people.” Just as pseudoscience blurred the lines between man and ape, images like this one conveyed notions about black Americans’ supposed animalistic nature, arguing that they were less than human and, in turn, exempt from the requirements of proper sustenance and participation in American gastronomic culture.

### **Man or Beast?: Table Manners and Eating Habits in American Advertising**

In the years approaching and following the turn of the century, Americans increasingly considered self-discipline pertaining to food to be a “moral virtue,” both “in its own right but also because it bespoke a general ability to forego immediate gratification and to control animal impulses in the interest of what people knew, intellectually, to be good and right.”<sup>125</sup> Contrasts between how white and black Americans ate—and what that process *looked like*—gained increasing importance as a visible indicator of racial difference. Popular images of black mouths eating and whites dining were loaded with arguments about identity as a performance at the table.

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<sup>125</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 4.

A recipe booklet published by Knox's Gelatine Company in 1896 alerts the consumer that "These recipes are for making jellies that mould solid without being tough. A jelly that will not dissolve in the mouth without chewing is unfit for the table."<sup>126</sup> This statement, which advises use of Knox's gelatine in terms of its conformity to modern American manners and dining etiquette, reinforces the bizarre—or perhaps mandatory—fixation on picturing black mouths as about to or in the process of chewing, as evidenced in the images discussed below.

Particularly in the South, concepts of whitening "infiltrated nearly every form of life...including gastronomic habits."<sup>127</sup> The white or light color of dishes and utensils used for dining became increasingly important as a distinguishing factor between what whites and blacks—who as slaves had used wood and tin dining materials—used to eat their meals. "Instituting such distinct, ritualized eating constituted a particularly important objective for powerful whites as it served to alleviate the anxiety inherent in the recognition that the biological necessity of eating 'might reduce all involved to an animal level of appetite and competition.'"<sup>128</sup> Indeed, it was a real concern that "civilized" white Americans would be "reduced" to behaviors ascribed to hungry blacks, including warring over food in order to try to quench their insatiable appetites.

An 1896 recipe booklet picks up the threat of gluttony, marketing its product as a food that cannot be overeaten (Figure 49). The title depicts the company's recognizable black mascot, who dons nothing but a chef's hat. While later versions of this child

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<sup>126</sup> Rose Markward, "Knox's Gelatine: Dainty Desserts for Dainty People," 1896: 5. University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections Department.

<sup>127</sup> Vardi, "Feeding Race," 373.

<sup>128</sup> Vardi, "Feeding Race," 373, quoting Heneghan 2004:16.

portray her rather clearly as a girl, with curly black hair and feminine facial features, earlier depictions such as this one are more androgynous and leave the character's sex open to question. The child on the cover of the recipe book approaches the viewer with a large dish of fresh gelatine and his/her words, centered beneath its walking feet, read: "Taint nun too much, kus its Knoxes." The child's dialect is thick and its grammar is broken, if not absent. The booklet presents its black character as a child whose familiarity with "too much" endorses over-indulgence as a testament to the quality of the food s/he prepares and serves. Yet Knox marketed his gelatine product as a food kept in stock by "High-Class Grocers," suggesting its appropriateness, and the message that there is not "too much" argues for the food's nutritive value and abates the potential for overconsumption.<sup>129</sup>

But marketing went beyond appealing to good taste and aesthetics. Knox also branded the product as a health food that could make all the difference in the world in growing white American families. An insert in the "Knox's Gelatine: Dainty Desserts for Dainty People" recipe booklet reads: "**Save the Children.** Do not ruin their digestion, health, and future happiness by allowing them to eat rich pastry and desserts....Today the daintiest, most delicious, and healthful desserts are made from KNOX'S GELATINE. They're fashionable, too."<sup>130</sup> The text is paired with Knox's tagline, "It's Not Like Pie / It's Healthy."<sup>131</sup>

Picturing Americans as possessing or lacking good manners and self-control contributed to the visual process of segregating "proper" American citizens from those

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<sup>129</sup> Markward, "Knox's Gelatine," back cover.

<sup>130</sup> Markward, "Knox's Gelatine," Insert 01.

<sup>131</sup> Markward, "Knox's Gelatine," Insert 01.

deemed “other” or unfit for citizenship and all its benefits, political, social, economic, and culinary. In fact, as historian Helen Veit points out in her book, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, “an astonishingly broad group of Americans in [the Progressive] era held up ascetic self-control as a virtue and as the enlightened pathway to mature citizenship.”<sup>132</sup>

In this regard, an advertising card dating sometime post-1876 and marketing Magnolia Hams for McFerran, Shallcross & Co. makes a rather vicious statement about black appetites, self-control, and political engagement (Figure 50). The scene depicts three curly-haired black men who voraciously cut open a Magnolia Ham. As we saw in images discussed earlier in this chapter, the grossly oversized ham dwarfs the three men, so large that all three can stand in front of it and feast. The ham is not yet even removed from its wrapper, but the men begin cutting into it. The man at left bites into a large hunk of ham while the man in the center slices into the ham with a gigantic knife.<sup>133</sup> To the right, a third grasps avidly for his portion of the food. The caption, meanwhile, invests the image with a pointedly political slant: “What’s De Use Talking ‘Bout Dem ‘Mendments.”

While the image suggests that black men are hungry beings who are animal-like when provided food, ravenously carving into a ham with relish rather than with self-control, the caption capitalizes on these suggestions by arguing that black Americans have more interest in access to food than they do in access to equal rights. The card’s caption refers to the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, which respectively abolished slavery, granted citizenship to former slaves, and gave black men the right to vote. The Fourteenth Amendment was particularly controversial, with Tennessee being the only

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<sup>132</sup> Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 4.

<sup>133</sup> The knife is an allusion to violence, a theme I discuss in Chapter 3.

Southern state to willingly ratify it. The remaining Southern states were forced to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment with the passing of the Reconstruction Act of 1867, which required them to do so in order to be readmitted to the union.<sup>134</sup> Contrasting big issues like politics, with which African Americans certainly concerned themselves, advertisements like this one depicted blacks as easily distracted by foodstuffs and base impulses. Pictured as lacking in the kind of self-restraint demanded by participation in a democratic society, as was believed by many to be the case, black figures in moments of indulgence were capable of being written off as exempt from participation in the most crucial facet of American citizenship: political life.

Blacks in advertising, especially, were imagined to be uninterested in political issues and were sometimes construed to be minstrel-like figures whose knowledge of American politics was meager if not misconstrued. The St. Louis Beef Canning Co. promoted these fantasies with a series of advertising cards featuring black figures in patriotic clothing. Several of the images are unabashedly explicit in their portrayal of African Americans as ignorant subjects unfit for political participation or equal rights. The first such image depicts a balding black man with white tufts of hair, spectacles, a red, white, and blue suit and a large yellow bow tie (Figure 51). Standing atop a box of St. Louis Beef Canning Company's Solid Corned Beef, he proudly holds his head up and pinches his elaborate shirt collar with his right hand. The caption records his words: "My friends!! De candidate dat eats dis / yeah Beef is de man to be 'lected." Despite his patriotic garments, the man is noticeably not well put together; his top hat has fallen off

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<sup>134</sup> "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow: The Fourteenth Amendment Ratified," Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2002, accessed December 17, 2015, [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories\\_events\\_14th.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_14th.html).

his head and while he wears white spats, his shoes are nowhere to be seen. These details, paired with his full, red lips and dandified comportment, echo the stereotypes presented in his speech, which is thick with dialect. He stands atop the corned beef box as if giving a stump speech; however, his knowledge of how the political system works is defunct, as evidenced by his statement that whichever “candidate” eats the beef in his hand will be “de man to be ‘lected’ to some unspecified position. His stereotypical appearance, along with his bare feet, signify his supposed ignorance, inferiority, and bestial nature, making him a comedic figure whose interest in political process is entirely superficial.

Another card distributed by the company follows a similar pictorial theme. Again we see a black man, this time sitting on a box of the corned beef (Figure 52). He holds another box of the product under his left arm and raises his right hand in the air. His eyes are large and his mouth gapes open in excitement as he exclaims, “No Sah!! don’t jine no Exodus so / long as dis Beef lasts.” As in many other ads, the man’s full lips and teeth are a focal point of the image, reinforcing associations between blacks’ appetites, oral fixations, and hunger. His clothing, however, testifies to his improved situation, as he wears nice pants and shoes, and his jacket is in fine shape, save for a patch at the elbow. The patch is important, serving as witness to his past troubled times of poverty or hard work, and it underscores his claim that since he has the beef at hand, he feels no need to leave town. The caption refers to the Exodus of 1879, led in large part by scores of black tenant farmers and sharecroppers, who hoped that Kansas (as well as Oklahoma and Colorado) would grant them the liberty to “freely exercise their rights as American citizens, gain true political freedom, and have the opportunity to achieve economic self-

sufficiency.”<sup>135</sup> This event startled and outraged white Southerners in particular, who were chagrined that black workers would flee rather than acquiesce to their roles as “a cheap, compliant labor force.”<sup>136</sup>

According to advertisements such as this one, however, black Americans were content to stay in the South as long as they had steady and reliable access to food. This might be interpreted one of two ways: first, that blacks could be satisfied living under oppression if their basic human sustenance was secure (bolstering companies like the St. Louis Beef Canning Co., which would reap the monetary benefits of having that customer base), or second, that blacks could be impelled to leave if white Americans limited or cut off their food sources. Either way the viewer/consumer took it, the image and its text made black figures seem relatively harmless. Hungry, yes, but naively pliant.

This notion is reinforced by yet a third card, which pictures a rotund black man reclining against a large stack of boxes containing corned beef (Figure 53). He wears an empty box on his head, like a hat, and holds up another box in his right hand, smiling out at the viewer. The caption states that he is “Well fixed!! what more can a Nigger want.” Again the suggestion is that black Americans really *are not* that “American.” They were imagined to live for food alone, which white Americans increasingly considered to be the ultimate sin. While whites attempted to sate their appetites through poised, informed consumption, devoid of indulgence or gluttony, black figures were pictured as beings motivated by those very taboo impulses. Although unsettling, the image and its text

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<sup>135</sup> Damani Davis, “Exodus to Kansas: The 1880 Senate Investigation of the Beginnings of the African American Migration from the South,” *Prologue*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Summer 2008), accessed September 17, 2011, <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2008/summer/exodus.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Davis, “Exodus to Kansas.”

assuaged tensions and anxieties by communicating to the viewer/consumer that blacks were rendered complacent with food, needing nothing else in the way of life's greater comforts—or political security. These stereotypes, compulsively repeated, presented a kind of salve to the festering tension about American political life becoming an experience shared equally by both white and black citizens. Picturing black figures as content to take a back seat to political events and participation, images such as those employed by the St. Louis Beef Canning Co. assured white viewer/consumers that the political arena was their stage for performing whiteness and that this exclusivity was justified due to African Americans' innate backwardness.

## **Conclusion**

Hunger was more than an inconvenient or uncomfortable occurrence experienced by Americans of all ages, races, and social stations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; it was a powerful site of racial anxiety. Hunger was an opportunity for white Americans to demonstrate their racial “fitness” and enjoy the nourishing benefits of knowledge about how best to eat, not only what to eat, but how and how much. Black Americans, often excluded from the metaphorical American table, were subjects of much scrutiny at the turn of the century, as old stereotypes about their bodies, their appetites, and their humanity continued and developed into contemporary portrayals of animalistic insatiability. By picturing black figures as people distinctly *other* than those American citizens with democratic self-control and sound gastronomic decision-making, white artists and the companies and consumers that used their illustrations

sought to visualize the imagined differences between the white and black races. In so doing, they both were complicit in and shaped national discourses about who was fit for participating in the most basic and the most important aspects of American life. As we will see in the following chapter, those determinations were commonly imagined as necessitating acts of control, often depicted through images of violence against the black subject.

## *The favorite breakfast of every member of the family*

Father loves it—and as for the children . . .

FATHER says he prefers a hot plate of Aunt Jemima Pancakes to any other breakfast. He says that on the days he has pancakes he doesn't seem to get hungry along towards noon. Then he feels lighter throughout and feel more clear-headed all afternoon. And breakfast always seems to be on time on pancake days.

The children—well, they don't know just why, but they certainly do like them!

Mother says they're so easy!  
And so economical!

Mother likes to have Aunt Jemima Pancakes for breakfast because everyone else enjoys them so much. Even Father's paper is cast aside—that can wait till he's on the car!

She knows, too, how good they are for the children—for they are made of rich cereals, carefully ground and blended, and contain sweet milk.

And Aunt Jemima Pancakes are so wonderfully easy to make—it's no trouble at all to mix up the flour with a little water; the cakes are done before she has fairly begun! She herself marvels at the way they turn out the same every time—always so tender and delectably brown!

Aforeeconomy—Mother has rejoiced ever since she discovered that an Aunt Jemima breakfast for the whole family costs only a few cents!

Have Aunt Jemima Pancakes  
tomorrow!

Your family, too, will speedily vote Aunt Jemima Pancakes their favorite breakfast! Make Aunt Jemima waffles and muffins! And Aunt Jemima Buckwheat Cakes—made from the flour in the yellow package—are as light and fluffy as the pancakes—and as easy to make. Aunt Jemima Mills Company, St. Joseph, Missouri.



### Richer because of the milk that's in it!

Sweet milk, powdered and mixed in the flour, gives Aunt Jemima Pancakes the flavor that has made them America's favorite breakfast. You need add nothing but water to have rich, full-flavored cakes.

### Send for the jolly Rag Dolls

Look on the top of any package of Aunt Jemima Pancake or Buckwheat flour and you'll see how the jolly Aunt Jemima Rag Dolls, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Mose and two gay little schoolchildren all come in bright colors, ready to cut and stuff. Send for one of them, or for the whole famous family.



Fig. 26

"The favorite breakfast of every member of the family," 1919. Print advertisement.

*Ladies' Home Journal*. Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 8.



Fig. 27

"Everybody want's New England Oyster Co.'s Celebrated Providence River Oysters," n.d. Advertising card. The Baltimore Lith. Company (printer). New England Oyster Company.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

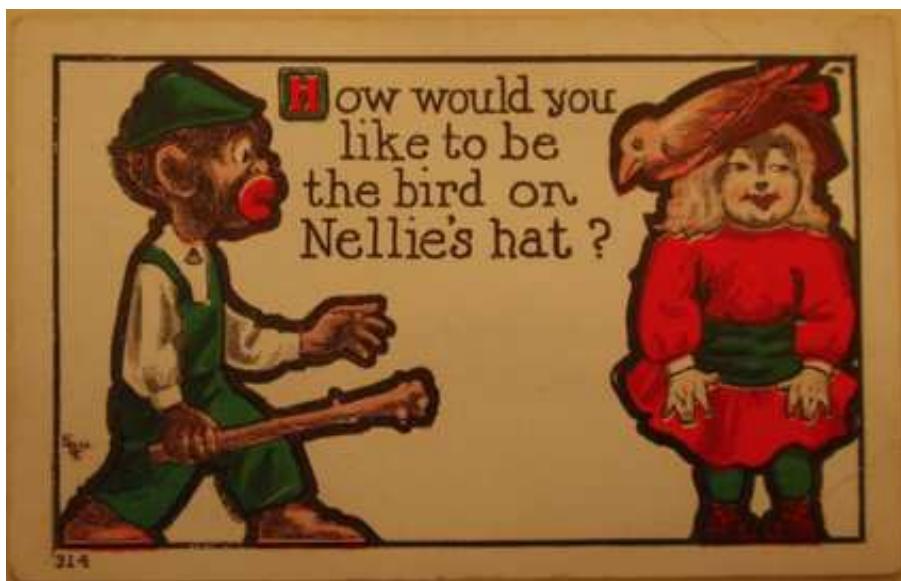


Fig. 28

"How would you like to be the bird on Nellie's hat?," c. 1909. Postcard. E. B. & E. Company (printer).

College of William & Mary, Earl Gregg Swem Library, Special Collections.

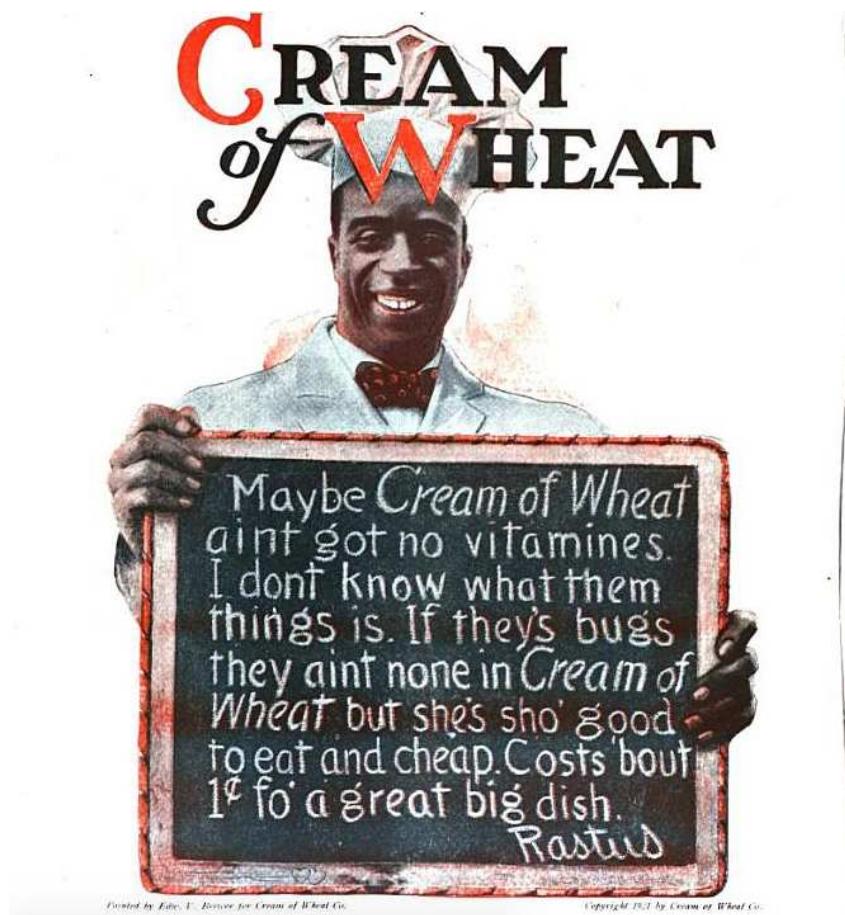


Fig. 29

"Maybe Cream of Wheat aint got no vitamines," 1922. Print advertisement. *The Youth's Companion*. Edward V. Brewer (artist). Cream of Wheat Company. *The Youth's Companion*, vol. 96, no. 1 (January 5, 1922), 56.



Fig. 30

"York River Oysters," n.d. Can label. York River Oysters. Aughinbaugh Canning Company (Baltimore, MD).

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. Accessed 2012.  
<http://www.authentichistory.com/diversity/african/>.

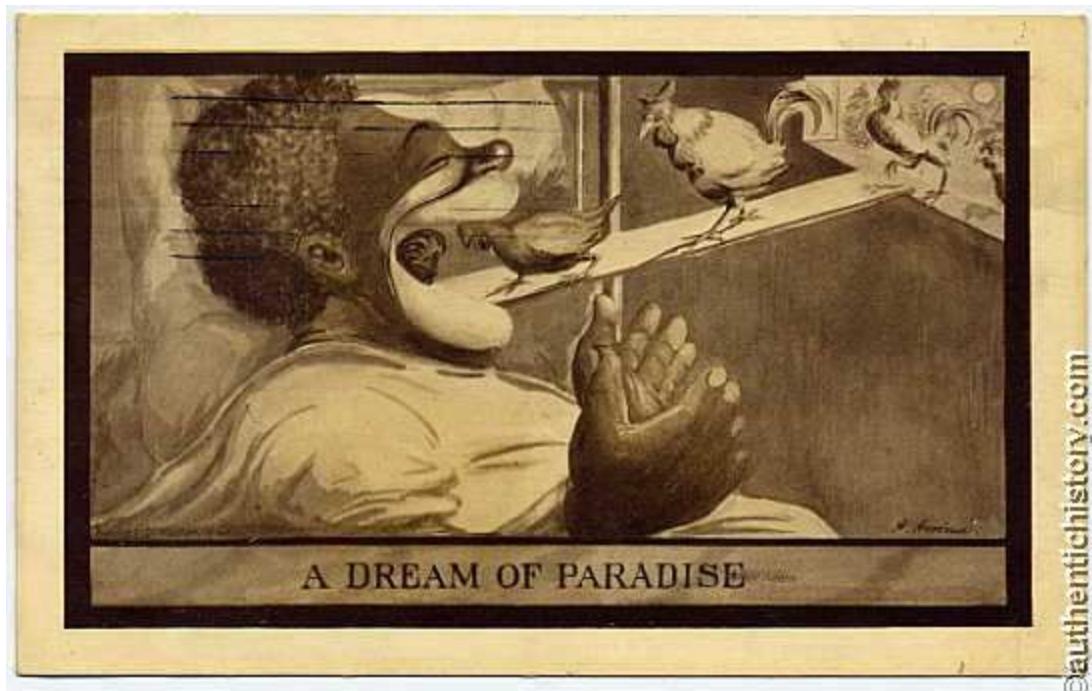


Fig. 31

"A Dream of Paradise," c. 1900s. Postcard. H. Horina (artist).

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "The Coon Obsession with Chicken & Watermelon."

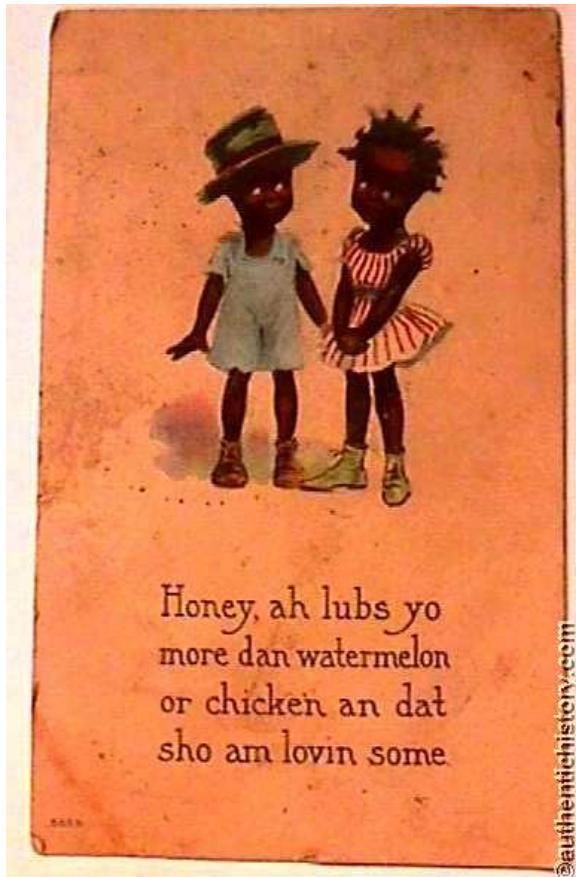


Fig. 32

"Honey, ah lubs yo," c. 1900s. Postcard.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "The Coon Obsession with Chicken & Watermelon."

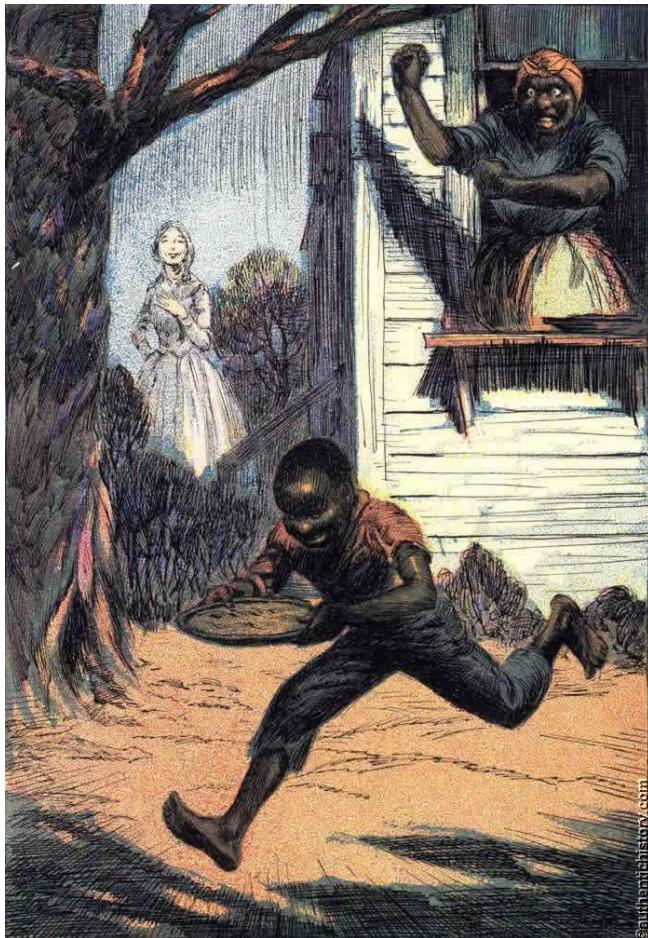


Fig. 33

“Boy Running with Pie,” c. 1890s. Chromolithograph.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. “The Coon Obsession with Chicken & Watermelon.”

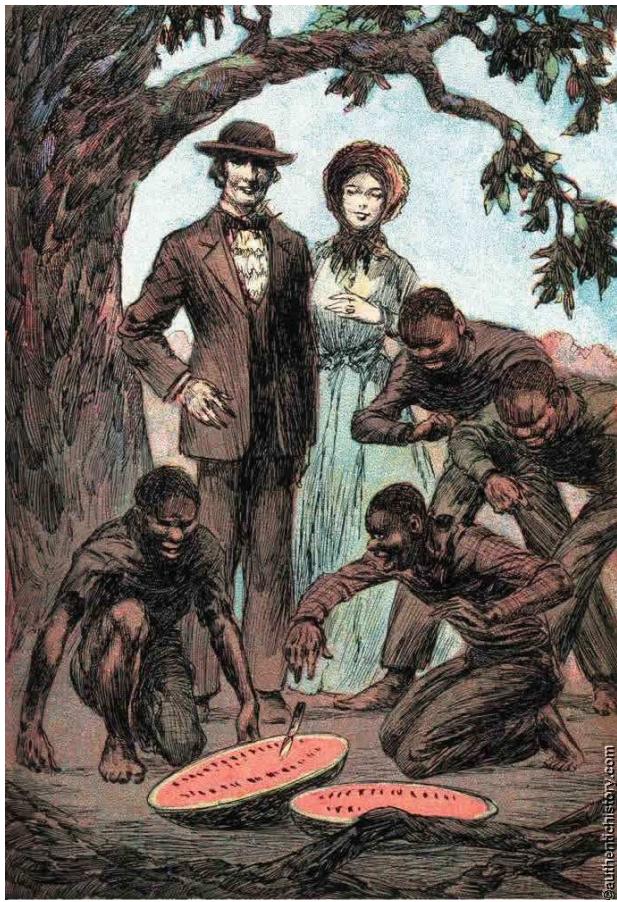


Fig. 34

"Watermelon Spectacle," c. 1890s. Chromolithograph.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "The Coon Obsession with Chicken & Watermelon."



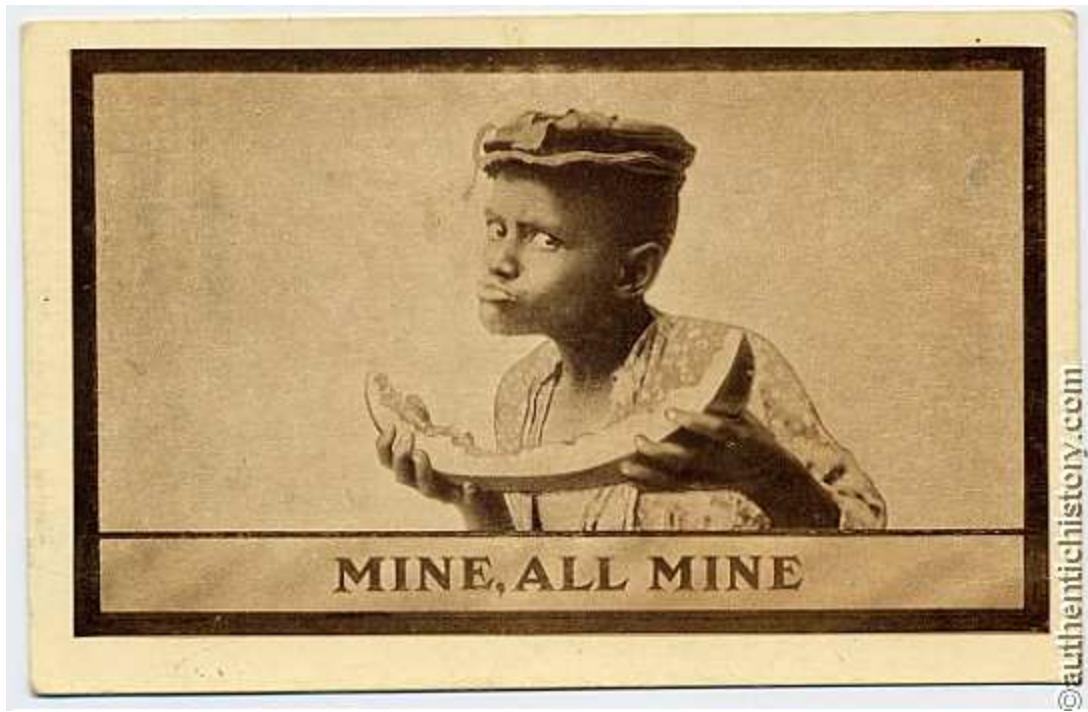
Fig. 35

"Dis am all juice," n.d. Advertising card. Ashepoo Phosphate Company (Charleston, SC). The Calvert Lith. Company (printer).  
The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "Caricatures of African Americans: The Pickaninny."



Fig. 36

"One of the Good Things Grown in California," c. 1915. Postcard.  
The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "The Coon Obsession with Chicken & Watermelon."



©authentichistory.com

Fig. 37

"Mine, All Mine," 1911. Postcard.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "The Coon Obsession with Chicken & Watermelon."

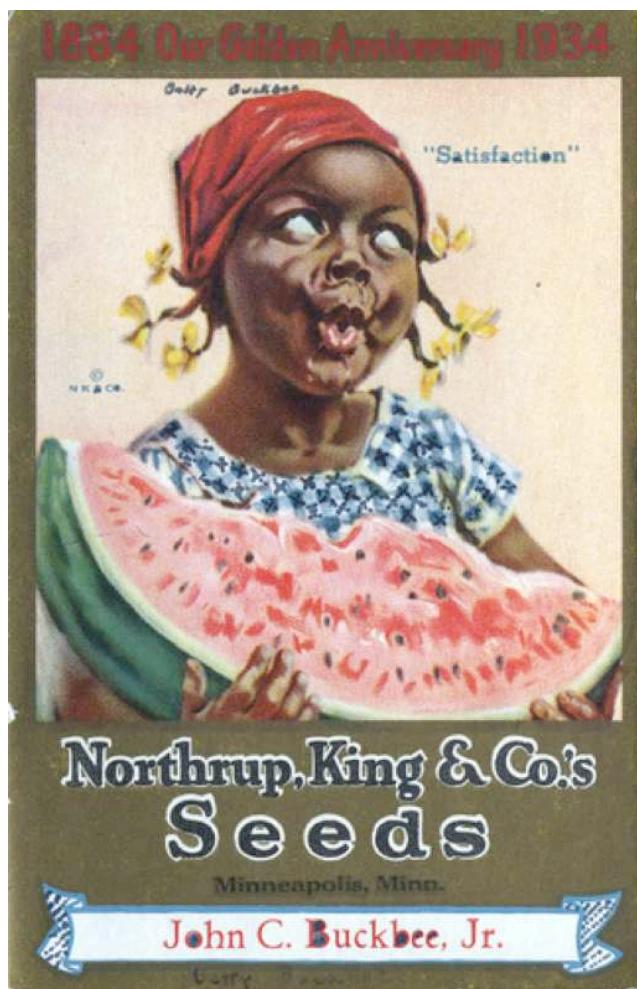


Fig. 38

"Satisfaction," c. 1934. Advertising card. Northrup, King & Company (Minneapolis, MN). John C. Buckbee, Jr.

Miami University, Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Shields Trade Card Collection.

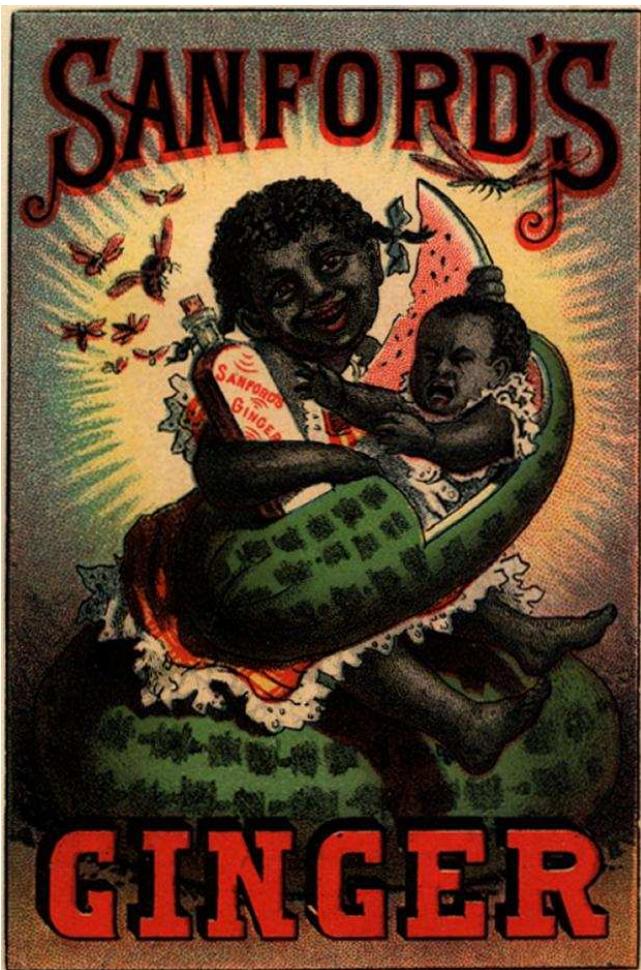


Fig. 39

"Sanford's Ginger," c. 1880. Advertising card. Potter Drug & Chemical Company. Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Advertising Ephemera Collection 1850s-1980s.



©authentichistory.com

Fig. 40

"A Kans. Bungalow." 1909. Postcard. Martin Post Card Company.  
The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "African American  
Stereotypes: Chicken & Watermelon Themes."

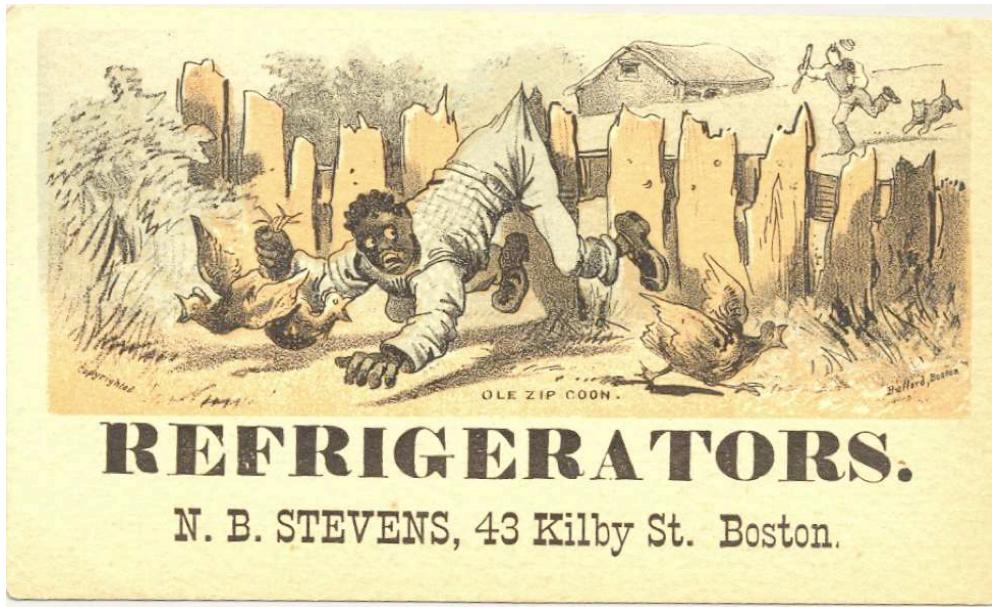


Fig. 41

"Ole Zip Coon," n.d. Advertising card. N. B. Stevens (Boston, MA). Bufford (printer). Newton Free Library.

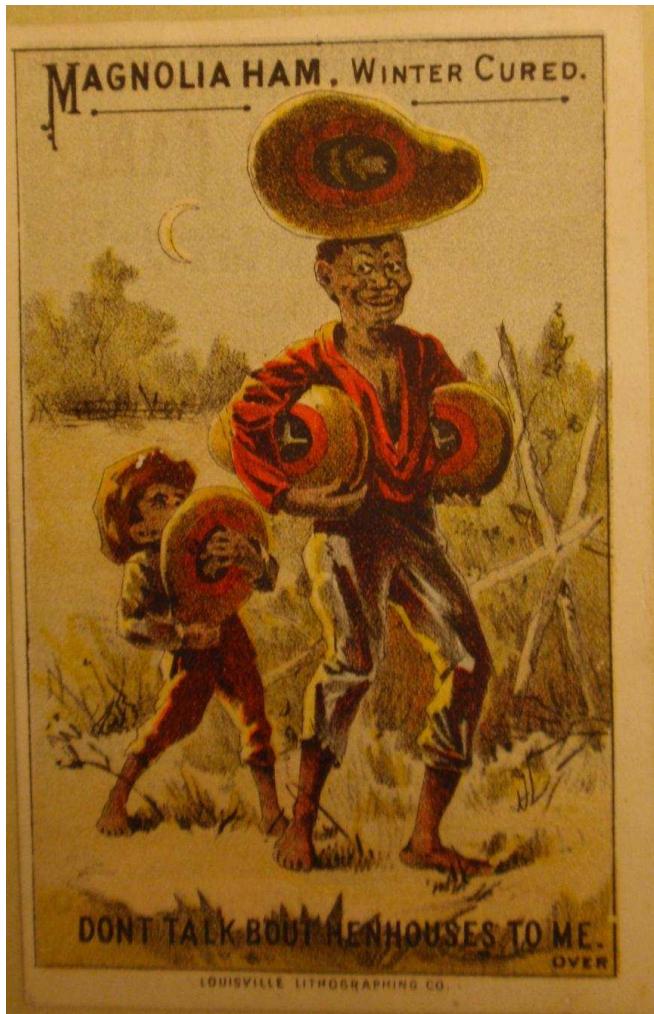


Fig. 42

"Dont Talk Bout Henhouses To Me," n.d. Advertising card. Magnolia Ham. Louisville Lithographing Company (printer).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

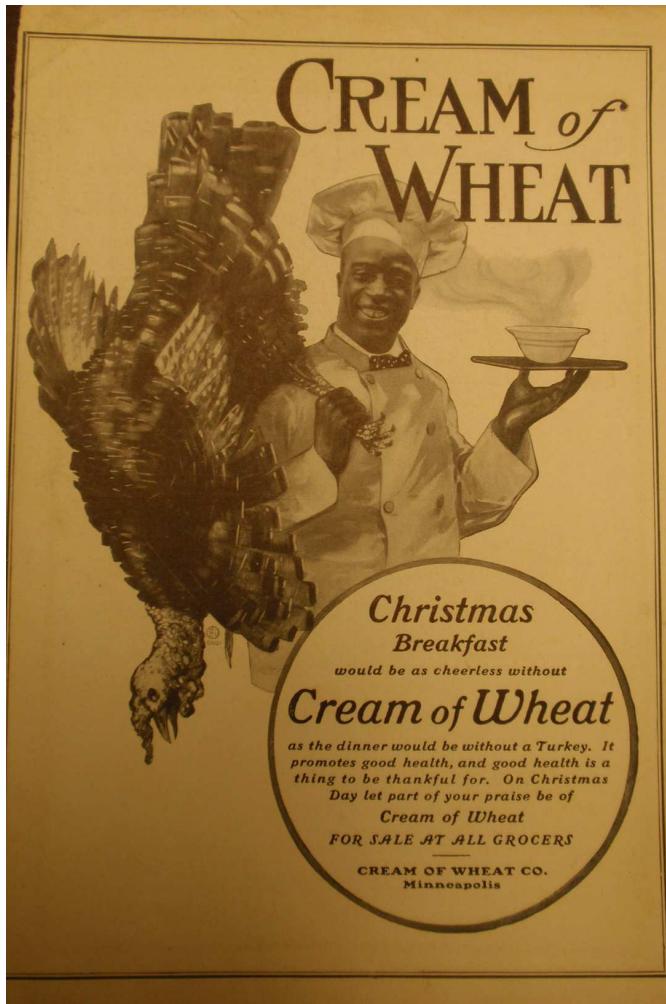


Fig. 43

"Christmas Breakfast," 1899. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Cream of Wheat Company.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History.



Fig. 44

"Won At The Raffle," c. 1880. Advertising card. Clarence Brooks & Company (New York, NY).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 45

"A Coon Tree's A Possum In Dixieland," c. 1930. Postcard. Curt Teich & Company.  
Private collection.

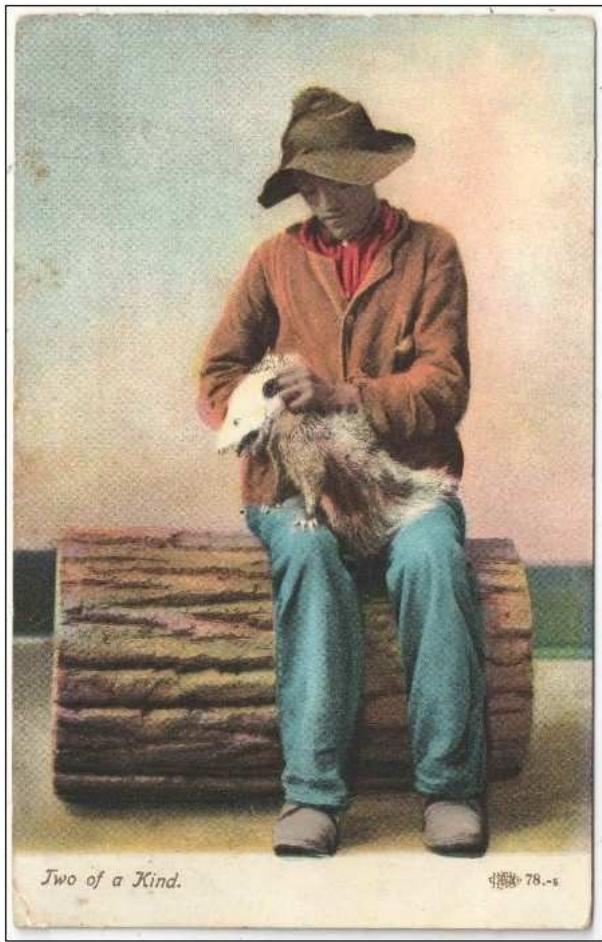
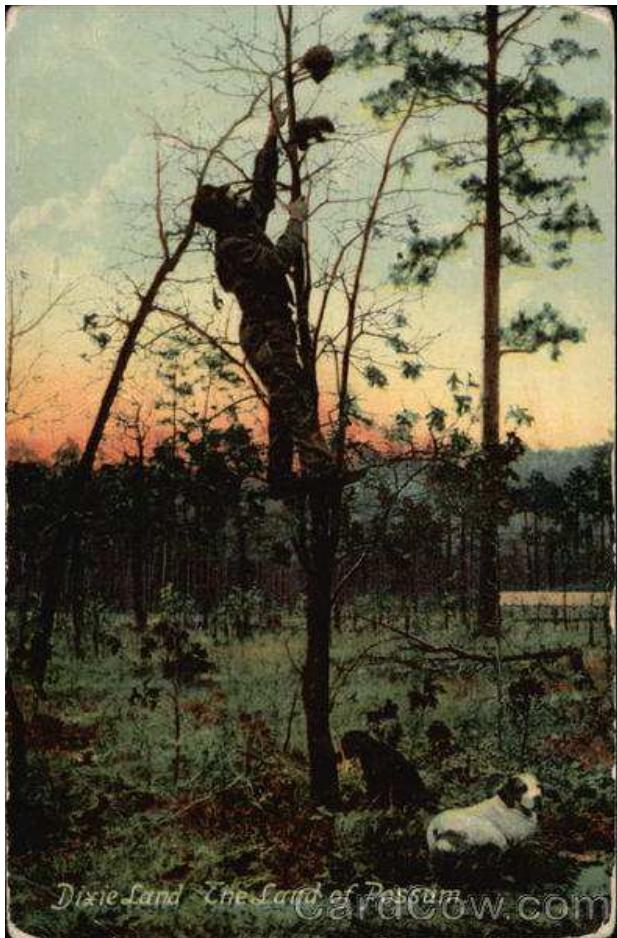


Fig. 46  
“Two of a Kind,” n.d. Postcard.  
Private Collection.



Figs. 47 & 48

"Dixie Land, the Land of Possum," 1913. Postcard.

CardCow Vintage Postcards & Collectibles. Accessed January 2016.  
<https://www.cardcow.com/62134/dixie-land-possum-animals/>

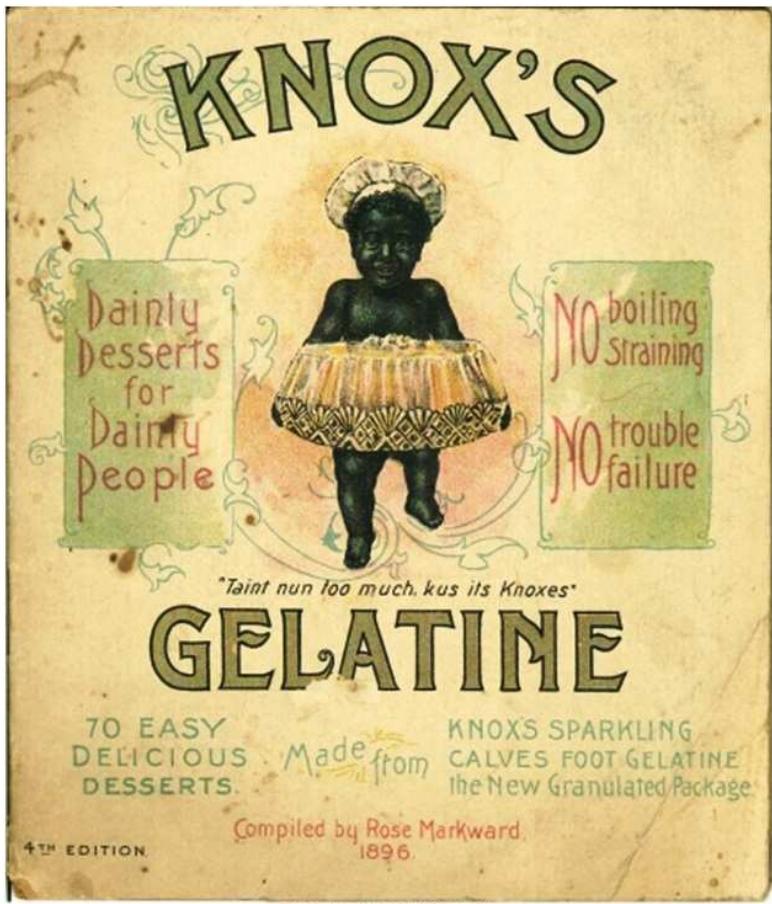


Fig. 49

"Dainty Desserts for Dainty People," 4th Edition, 1896. Recipe booklet. Front cover.  
Rose Markward. Knox's Gelatine Company.  
University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections Department.

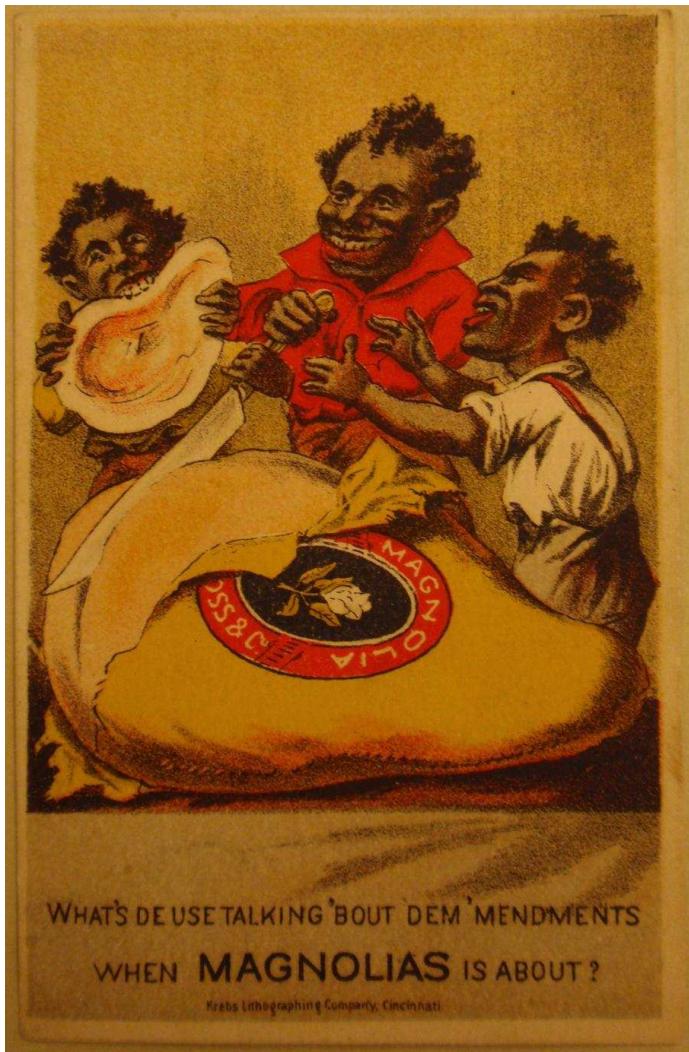


Fig. 50

"What's De Use Talking 'Bout Dem 'Mendments," n.d. Advertising card. McFerran, Shallcross & Company (KY). Krebs Lithographing Company (printer).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 51

"My friends!!," n.d. Advertising card. St. Louis Beef Canning Co. (MO). W. G. Bell & Co. (MA)

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

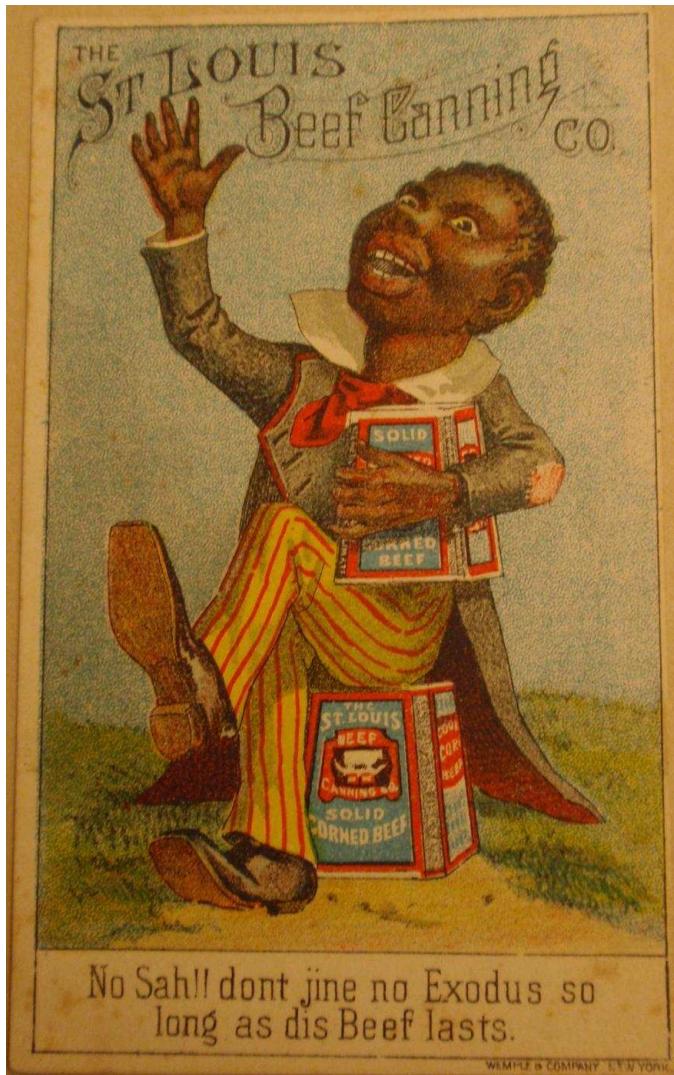


Fig. 52

"No Sah!!," n.d. Advertising card. St. Louis Beef Canning Co. (MO). Koons, Schwarz & Company (PA). Wemple & Company (printer)  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

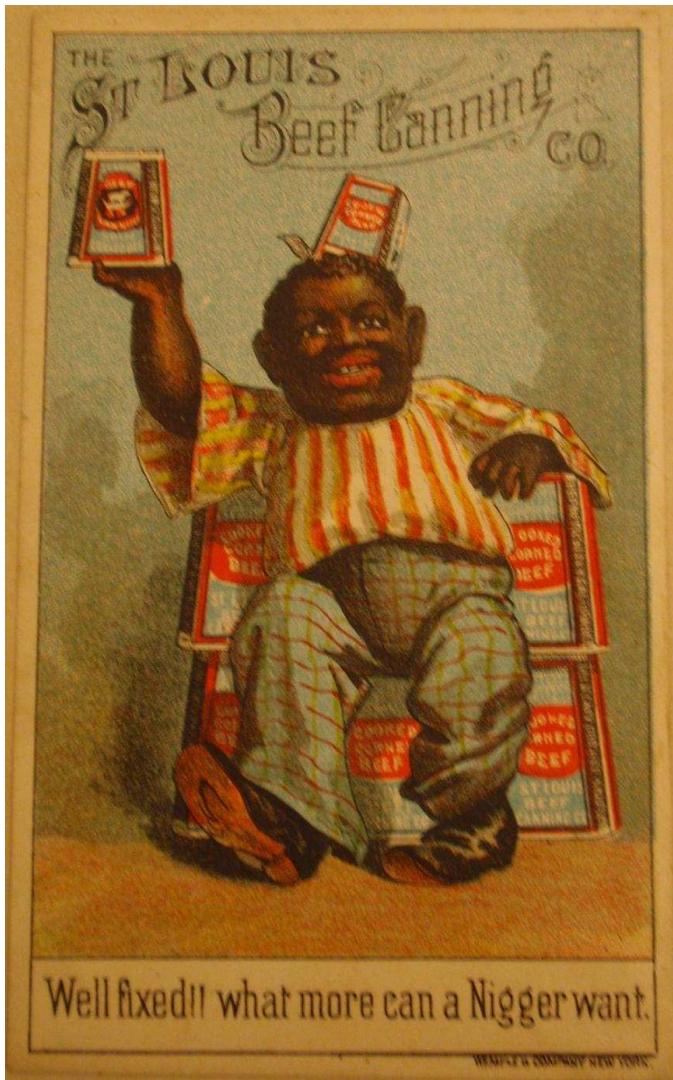


Fig. 53

"Well fixed!!," n.d. Advertising card. St. Louis Beef Canning Co. (MO). Wemple & Company (printer).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

### Chapter 3

#### Menacing Figures: Violence and the Black Body

An advertising card from the 1880s depicts a black man who has been decapitated by an oversized pocket knife (Figure 54). His hands are raised in alarm and his severed head looks upward in despair. The text reads “The Knife shut up, / His head dropped off, / ‘He didn’t know twas loaded.[’]” The narrative, though incomplete (how did the man’s neck get between the blade? Why is the knife so large? What triggered the knife to “shut up”?) has an unquestionable thrust: the black man was so ignorant of the knife’s mechanisms that he foolishly brought about his own demise. He knows no difference between a gun, which is loaded and can go off, and a knife, which relies on a person’s manipulation to open and close. Even the man’s facial expression suggests that he is bewildered by what has taken place. Clearly, the image is less about H. Sears & Son, the advertisers, and more about picturing the black man as an ignorant buffoon who will bring about his own undoing. Another interesting aspect of this illustration is the absence of any indication of pain and suffering. The black man’s head looks up at his decapitated body, appearing surprised and bewildered but not in agony (or deceased, as we would expect). Moreover, the scene lacks any blood or other signs of trauma to the man’s body, undermining the man’s humanity by imagining him as an insensate “thing,” rather than a person capable of being hurt. This card is one of many that picture black figures in various states of harm; in fact, scenes of injury against African Americans were a popular choice for late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century ephemera, from advertisements to postcards, from toys to prints.

The pervasive nature of stereotype and its necessary and compulsive repetition underscores its ubiquity and its relevance to the everyday American experience, particularly in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when visual and textual material—advertisements especially—constituted the principal form of the propaganda Americans digested on a regular basis. The same racist stereotypes that formed and festered in the earliest days of pseudoscience and eugenics continued to permeate American life, saturating all corners of the population’s richly complex visual and material culture. In fact, between the mid-1870s and the early 1890s, African-American stereotypes constituted some of the most popular imagery purchased by Americans in the form of the extraordinarily popular *Darktown* lithographs produced by Currier & Ives printers. The New York firm, which touted itself as “Printmakers to the People,” produced lithographs that “were well within the understanding and price range of the average American,” explaining in part their mass appeal and lasting popularity.<sup>137</sup> Currier & Ives made 75 different prints as part of their enormously successful *Darktown* series,<sup>138</sup> which overwhelmingly illustrated black figures in various scenes of chaos, injury, and self-harm. Despite the fact that these images are obviously offensive and explicitly racist to twenty-first-century viewers, in its time, Currier & Ives described the *Darktown* series as “pleasant and humorous designs, free from coarseness or vulgarity, being good natured hits at the popular amusements and excitements of the times.”<sup>139</sup> The series included

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<sup>137</sup> Robert Kipp, *Currier’s Price Guide to Currier & Ives Prints, Second Edition* (Brockton: Currier Publications, 1991), 17.

<sup>138</sup> The series was in fact “one of the firm’s most prolific and profitable series,” with one of the *Darktown* prints, illustrated by artist Thomas Worth, having sold 73,000 copies. Kipp, *Currier’s Price Guide*, 27.

<sup>139</sup> “History in Context: Currier & Ives ‘Darktown Comics,’” Albion College Archives: Exhibits, Stockwell-Mudd Libraries, Special Collections, November 2005, accessed January 5, 2016,

images such as the “Great oyster eating match between the Dark Town Cormorant and the Blackville Buster,” of circa 1866 (Figure 55), which pictures “The Finish” as two grossly caricatured black men gorge themselves on oysters. Two men hurriedly shuck oysters for the competitors to eat while another man holds out a pocket watch, his words presented in the caption: “Yous is a tie - De one dat gags fust am a gone Coon.” The man on the right avidly shovels an oyster into his mouth as his shirt and pants rip open around his swollen, stuffed body; meanwhile, his competitor’s eyes bulge out in distress and he grips the side of the table, as if wondering how much more he can consume and still remain intact. The image is reminiscent of depictions in advertising of black figures filling their mouths with food, in particular the “Nigger Head Oysters” can label and the Magnolia Hams trade card discussed in Chapter 2, both of which focus on the black figure’s mouth as it hungrily takes in food. Yet the *Darktown* print invests the black figures’ voracious feeding with dangerous implications, suggesting that the out-of-control, hungry black bodies will bring about their own undoing. The referee’s words, that whoever gags first will be crowned the winner, emphasize the brutality of the scene, in which the men eat so much that their bodies are distended and engorged and must ultimately purge the food (or explode the body) in order to bring an end to the competition. Black bodies are pictured as sources of entertainment at their own expense, ostensibly amusing and titillating the white viewer with the fantasy of whose body will give in first.

Other contemporary genres of images quite literally made black bodies sources of white entertainment by inviting the viewer/consumer to break them apart, as in an 1874

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20090716184547/http://www.albion.edu/library/specialcollections/exhibits/curer&ives.asp#history>.

puzzle titled “Chopped Up Niggers” (Figure 56). The image on the puzzle box depicts three highly caricatured African-American males: the man at right plays a banjo, the man at left dances to the music, and the man at center stands and smokes a cigar. The men represent the epitome of the dandy stereotype and their behavior stands as a contrast to their appearance; even though they are dressed like gentlemen, their clothes are gaudy and they act out the familiar racist stereotypes of dancing Jim Crow (man on left), lazy dandy (man at center), and banjo-plucking ex-slave (man on right). Presumably the puzzle itself featured this image, which invited the consumer to break apart these men’s stereotyped forms. Picturing African Americans as bodies capable of being consumed, stuffed, abused, broken, and pieced apart made for a popular approach to controlling and containing the black subject who, as we saw in the previous chapter, was often imagined to be hungry, duplicitous, and incapable of self-regulation. Fantasies of indirect oppression and overt violence are the focus of this chapter, as American advertising imagery constituted a powerful dimension of the everyday conversations taking place nationwide about equality, opportunity, and race. Everyday ephemera of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—particularly advertising cards and postcards—gave powerful visual form to the verbal and physical manifestations of racism that plagued African Americans in the post-emancipation years. This chapter focuses on the ways in which American visual culture, particularly in advertising imagery, imagined the black body as something that could be violated, manipulated, and consumed at will as a means of both exploring and ameliorating white anxieties about free black citizens.

In 1909 the Cream of Wheat Company printed an advertisement that appeared in magazines, titled “A Case of Desertion” (Figure 57). The image, illustrated by Denman

Fink, pictures a black boy sitting atop a wooden crate and eating a bowl of the cereal. Behind him rests half of a watermelon with a slice cut out and a knife stuck upright in the crate. The title, “A Case of Desertion,” tells us that the boy has abandoned his watermelon for a meal of Cream of Wheat. As in so many other advertisements, the black figure’s abandonment of a watermelon is testament to the quality of the product marketed in the ad. Yet this image is concerned not only with hunger but also violence. The scene appears harmless enough, particularly with affable Chef Rastus smiling in the background; however, the knife behind the boy’s back introduces an ominous note, with its sharp blade poised upright, its shadow like a dagger pointing toward the boy.

This is one among many advertisements from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that pair black bodies with threateningly sharp objects and weapons. It epitomizes a theme used in advertising in which the black subject is unassuming and ignorant to the danger at hand. The tendency in advertising to picture black bodies notwithstanding, suffering, or inflicting pain demand attention in that their imagery, while ostensibly intended for “humor,” discloses deeper tensions in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American society. Most of these kinds of violent images adorned postcards and advertising cards that were not marketing weapons or tools, revealing the extent to which their illustrations carried entertainment, or symbolic, or ideological value as opposed to practical value. Advertisements and postcards that depict violence against the black body were so popular that they demand interrogation as powerful carriers of meaning and as visual remnants of a culture deeply concerned with controlling those considered both out-of-control and menacing in their freedom.

## Cutting Up: Anxious Images of Armed African-American Men

Around the turn of the century, someone identified only as “J.B.” mailed a postcard picturing a black man holding up a gigantic knife (Figure 58). The figure looks out at the viewer with a somewhat sinister gaze and his oversized red lips form a slight grin. He stands over a pie, which he will presumably slice with the enormous knife. The caption identifies the man as “A regular cut up.” If we imagine the black figure holding a small knife more suitable for slicing a small pie, the image might take on a less intimidating tone. Yet the large, menacing knife, held at the ready, transforms the image into one that is loaded with danger and malice, particularly since the figure makes eye contact with the viewer as he wields the terrifying blade. Furthermore, the caption suggesting that this man—or his means of slicing food—is “regular” makes the image all the more troubling, as it implies that all black men are as fearsome as this figure. This trope—of the caricatured, knife-wielding black man—appears not only in postcards such as this but also across American advertising, indicating that scenes of black men armed with knives were popular if also intriguing in their ability to evoke a sense of danger and implied violence.

In 1888, Imperial Mills was established in Duluth, Minnesota, and by 1892 it had become the largest flour mill in the world, churning out 6,300 barrels each day.<sup>140</sup> Around the turn of the century, the company ran two very similar magazine

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<sup>140</sup> “Flour Milling (1888-1957),” from Tony Dierckins and Maryanne C. Norton, *Lost Duluth: Landmarks, Industries, Buildings, Homes, and the Neighborhoods in Which They Stood* (Duluth: Zenith City Press, 2011), accessed February 17, 2016, <http://zenithcity.com/zenith-city-history-archives/duluth-industry/flour-milling-1888-1957/>.

advertisements. While both are undated, making it impossible to determine which was printed first, a comparison of the images reveals a key difference: the inclusion and exclusion of danger. In Figure 59, we see the sack of flour, stamped with Duluth Imperial's name, and beside it a black man in a chef's uniform holding a plate of bread in one hand and resting his right hand on a barrel of flour, also marked Duluth Imperial. He looks out at us and smiles, and the scene appears innocent, even friendly. In the nearly identical Figure 60, however, a sharp knife has been added to the chef's right hand, pointing to the company's name on the barrel. While he still grins at the viewer, the chef's presence now has a somewhat threatening note, as the knife resembles something like a dagger.

It seems that Duluth Imperial's advertising designers valued the inclusion of the knife, as it shows up again in a different, likely later, vignette. Again the ad is undated, but it is a similar chromolithograph picturing a black chef in uniform holding a loaf of bread (Figure 61). This time, however, he does not offer the loaf up for the consumer; instead, he holds it before him, smiling at it almost hungrily. Before him on the table is a large knife, the blade pointing toward him. Even the title suggests violence: "Without a Rival" uses combative language to indicate that no other company can match the Duluth Imperial Mill's quality of flour. The word *rival*, defined as "a person or thing that tries to defeat or be more successful than another," has violent connotations.<sup>141</sup> One could read the image, in fact, as suggesting that the chef might contend with someone over the loaf of bread. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, many American advertisements

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<sup>141</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 16 June 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rival>.

during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pictured blacks as hungry, insatiable beings willing to go to almost any lengths to satisfy their appetites.

The similarity of the Duluth Imperial Chef to Cream of Wheat's Chef Rastus is likely not coincidental, as an undated sign for Duluth Flour makes clear (Figure 62). The chef in this instance is a very clear copy of the standard images of Chef Rastus (cf. Figure 63). In this instance, the artist has simply replaced the steaming hot bowl of Cream of Wheat that Rastus holds with a loaf of bread. Significantly, whereas Chef Rastus often holds a small pot in his right hand, the Duluth chef wields what appears to be a large saw. His starkly highlighted face, the dark shadows around him, and his presentation of the saw invest the Duluth chef with a particularly ominous presence.

Companies often printed advertising calendars, which assured that consumers would come in contact with their ads on a daily basis, see their logos, and enjoy their vignettes whenever they checked the date. One such calendar card for August 1885, printed for Williams, Clark & Co., a fertilizer company in New York, features a black man (or boy) standing outside next to a large watermelon (Figure 64). He wears tattered clothing and a straw hat, and stands barefoot, smiling out at the viewer with large, red lips. In his left hand he holds a large blade with a wooden handle and beneath him are the words "I'll Cut You Deep." The scene combines the impoverished looking black man with the threat of violence to determine who gets possession of a watermelon. The readings are twofold: the black man may be saying that he will cut the watermelon deep for a meal, yet the image and text also imply that the viewer is at risk—(s)he is allowed to look at the watermelon, but not vie for it, lest the black man should wield his blade to battle over the fruit. The black figure, in this instance and many others, is not only hungry

and possessive over his meal, but is also willing to resort to violence to ensure that the watermelon is his to enjoy.

Rumsey & Co., a manufacturer of pumps, fire and garden engines, and other hydraulic machinery, printed an ad in the late nineteenth century that is similar to the 1885 advertising calendar page (Figure 65). The advertisement reads “We’ll Cut You Deep,” words imputed to the black man and woman sitting together on a wooden fence. Both wear bedraggled clothing; the woman holds a tattered parasol and smiles at her barefoot companion, who sits with an enormous watermelon in his lap. His right hand grips the melon and his left hand holds a knife. Both smile and appear friendly, but the text is menacing. Is the woman threatening to cut the man? Is the man referring to cutting the watermelon? Are they threatening the viewer, who might try to take their fruit? Despite the ambiguity, the associated text indicates threat and implies violence. Something, it seems, about pairing the black body with weapons appealed to both advertisers and consumers during this time.

In both Figures 64 and 65, the men hold folding straight razors, also known as “cut-throat razors,” whose fiercely sharp edges required deft handling. In both images the blades are exposed, giving them a particularly menacing presence that underscores the advertisements’ titles and their stereotypical depictions of black men as violent, hungry beings who refuse to go without a meal. The men holding the razors wield them for defense of themselves and/or the watermelons, and the fact that the artists of these images armed the black figures with “cut-throat razors” instead of knives appropriate for slicing melon makes clear the men’s menacing characterizations. Both the calendar scene and the card for Rumsey & Co. rely on a narrative that is pervasive in particularly nineteenth-

but also early twentieth-century advertisements: black men, but also children, are pictured as resorting to violence in order to secure or protect their next meal. Food, for black figures in advertisements, is of such great importance that it trumps all attempts at self-control. Rather than communicating, negotiating, or sharing, black figures are pictured as aggressive, menacing competitors vying for sustenance.

### **All in the Family: Black-on-Black Violence, Self-Consciousness, and Self-Control**

On January 3, 1857, Americans read the first issue of *Harper's Weekly*, an illustrated periodical that gained mass readership and popularity. *Harper's* became known for its inclusion of illustrations concerning both everyday life and national politics. According to the publisher, John Adler, "*Harper's* was aimed at the middle and upper socio-economic classes, and tried not to print anything that it considered unfit for the entire family to read," and both its articles and illustrations "played a significant role in shaping and reflecting public opinion from the start of the Civil War to the end of the century."<sup>142</sup> In 1874, *Harper's* ran an illustration captioned "Who Struck De Fustest!," created by artist Solomon Etinge, Jr. (1833-1905) (Figure 66). The vignette pictures a black father scolding two children, one who cries, and one who looks at the other guiltily. Both of the children wear shredded and tattered clothing. Three children sit on a fence in the background and laugh, while a girl stands inside the cabin at left and looks on with concern. Besides a few sunflowers growing in the yard, the landscape is sparse and the

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<sup>142</sup> John Adler, "Background: *Harper's Weekly*," HarpWeek, accessed October 11, 2014, <http://www.harpweek.com/02About/about.asp>.

scene exudes poverty. The father holds a switch in his hand, as if preparing to punish the culpable child, whichever one of them answers his question as to who struck first.

Soon after this vignette ran in *Harper's Weekly*, the Morse brothers selected a recreation of the image for an advertising card promoting their product, Rising Sun Stove Polish. Like the scene in *Harper's*, the image pictures a black family convening outside their cabin after an altercation has taken place between the children (Figure 67). While the picture is a close copy of the image printed in *Harper's Weekly*, these characters have been rendered grotesque and bestial in appearance, their faces wrinkled and oddly shaped, and their skin is a blue-black, inky color. They have bright red lips, oversized ears, and large heads that are grossly disproportionate to their bodies. Here, the little girl from the *Harper's* illustration has been replaced with a mother figure who has just finished polishing the family stove with the Morse brothers' product (the cat looking at its reflection in the stove serves as testament). The sunflowers are gone, replaced by a sunrise in the distance, a play on the product's name. Yet the grossly caricatured depiction of the black family members is not the only significant liberty the artist has taken with the image printed in *Harper's Weekly*. The artist has also intensified the violence implicit in the scene: the switch is much larger and more prominent, and a stream of bright red blood pours from the face of the crying child.

The scene presents a cycle of violence that was presumed inherent in people whose bestial nature makes physical punishment the most fundamental reaction to misbehavior: the two black children fought and injured one another and their father will injure them as recompense. The dialect in the caption and the family's grotesque, apelike features were intended to make the violence humorous and palatable. Indeed, the violence

is normalized by the suggestion that it is inflicted upon less-than-human bodies that know violence as a part of daily life, as both child's play and as discipline.

Picturing threats of violence as a means of censuring African-American thieves—particularly those stealing foodstuffs—was a particularly popular motif in advertising. A trade card advertising Mrs. Potts' Cold Handle Sad Irons depicts a black woman, clad in torn and patched clothing, scolding a black boy for having eaten watermelons (Figure 68). She shakes her finger at the boy with her left hand and brandishes a presumably hot iron toward him with her right. Again, there is an allusion to *Harper's Weekly*, which ran a series of images known as “Blackville,” of which the “Who Struck De Fustest!” image was a part. The title of this trade card’s scene is “The Watermelon Season At Blackville.” The text narrates the woman’s words to the boy: “Ah, Chile, You’s Bin Eatin’ Dem Watermillyons. / Come Yere Honey I’ll / Just Put Dis Ere / Mrs. Potts’ Iron / To Yer Stomach, It Retains De Heat An! / Will Help Yer, Dis Season Is Bad For / De Chillum.” The vignette is disturbing, both textually and visually. The boy’s skin color is depicted as grayish and pallid, perhaps indicating his fear of being branded by the angry woman’s hot iron. He holds his hands up, his body rigid, as if debating fight or flight, the fateful watermelon rinds discarded on the ground behind them. What is frightful is the woman’s suggestion that placing the hot iron on the boy’s stomach “will help” him control his appetite during watermelon season, which she rues is “bad for” children like him. Barefoot and in tattered clothing, the female takes on the role of a punisher who not only can exercise control over her own hunger, but can also set straight the black male whose appetite led him astray in a moment of lack of self-control. Here, the sad iron being

marketed to white housewives is pictured simultaneously as a violent remedy for the black American whose willpower is jeopardized by the availability of food.

Another black woman attempts to control a black boy's behavior in an advertising calendar card dating from January 1880 and printed for Clarence, Brooks & Co., a New York operation specializing in varnishes. The vignette pictures an African-American woman clad in a fine red dress and yellow cape grasping the arm of a black boy, whom she suspects has stolen some of her chickens (Figure 69). The caption reads, "I Aint Seen Nuffin O'Yer Chickens! See Any Chickens About Me! / Treat A Boy Spectable If He Am Brack!" The image, though relatively simple in composition, is complex in its multiple meanings. First, the dialect indicates the boy's ignorance—the only words he can pronounce correctly are mostly monosyllabic, except for the word "chickens." Second, the black woman, identified on the building behind them as a shop-owner, is betrayed by her own misspellings. The text on the wood-framed building reads, "Mrs. Johnson. / Egs & Poltry / For Sail." Despite all the trappings—the clothes, the comportment (she holds her shoulders back proudly), and the shop—the woman has the same caricatured facial features, the same minimal knowledge of linguistics, and is ultimately losing money from people like the thieving boy, who robs her of her livelihood. And while this image stops short of picturing violence against the disobedient black body, it does picture the African-American (male) figure as dishonest and subject to disapproval and reprimand from other black (female) bodies.

These images, and others like them, suggested that whites were not the only ones suspicious of free African Americans, nor were they the only ones willing to harm them if necessary to bring their bodies back into order. In fact, images like the 1887 *Darktown*

pair published by Currier & Ives make African Americans' suspicions of other African Americans explicit. The first image, "A Darktown Trial — the Judge's Charge," shows the initial courtroom scene, in which a black man (at center) is being accused of stealing chickens (Figure 70). The setting is complete with a full cast of caricatured figures, including the elderly judge at right, a stenographer below him, a portly police officer, and a scraggly lawyer in a suit at left. At the back of the room is the jury. All of the men in the room have large lips, most with their mouths gaped open in confusion, bewilderment, or ignorance. As in so many other images, the men's comportment, particularly their neat or professional garb, is not enough to hide their ineptitude when it comes to carrying out civil affairs and business. Furthermore, the judge's heavy dialect, presented in the caption, emphasizes the stereotypical elements at work in the vignette: "Gommen ob de Jury, if dem Chickens can't be counted fur, dat culled pusson must be foun guilty."

The following scene, "A Darktown Trial — the Verdict," depicts the judge in the act of acquitting the accused man, proclaiming, "We finds de prisnur not guilty cos dem chickuns am counted fur" (Figure 71). This time our view of the scene is from behind the jury, who we now see has conspired with the defendant in stealing the chickens: two men have chickens stuffed inside their jackets and seven men dangle chickens behind their backs. The defendant, having tricked the judge, sticks out his tongue, holds his thumb to his nose and waves his fingers out behind the judge's back, reveling in his acquittal. The scenes suggest black duplicity, indicating that African Americans were so deceptive and immoral that they would lie and cheat even members of their own race.

These images, created by white artists for a white audience, promoted the idea that African Americans were so innately duplicitous that they would deceive members of

“their own kind” in order to satisfy their selfish desires, which were almost always food-based. By implying that African Americans were suspicious of one another, this imagery attempted to rationalize white hostility toward blacks, creating a complex “us versus them” dynamic in which the “us” were the honest and the “them” (read “other”) were the dishonest. Yet African Americans, as we have seen in the previous chapters, were considered to be innately backward, inferior, and incapable of the same moral fiber as whites; thus, they were always already the “other,” the “them” against whom stereotypical imagery depicting black duplicity worked.

More than swindle and suspect one another, however, black figures were often depicted coming to blows with one another, as illustrated in a 1909 postcard (Figure 72). The postcard features a highly colored photograph of two black boys fist fighting, each landing blows on the other’s head. Before them rest three watermelons. The caption at the side reads, in heavy dialect, “To De Wictor B’Long De Spoils.” Images of African Americans threatening to injure or in the act of harming each other were likely a source not only of racist entertainment but also of picturing the black body being forcibly brought under control by other black bodies. Such fantasies would have attempted to normalize and rationalize the kind of white-on-black violence that continued to take place nationwide in the form of lynchings, mob riots, murders, and even less physical acts of violence in the form of discrimination. As we will see, however, images of black-on-black brutality did not mitigate the production and popularity of depictions of white figures injuring black figures.

## **White-on-Black Violence: Crime and Punishment**

A postcard postmarked November 14, 1912 features large text situated between two men, one black and one white (Figure 73). The text reads “I Want To / Grasp You / By The Hand,” and presents a sticky situation in which the white man offers his hand to the black man, who looks perplexed and unsure of what to do next. The caricatured black man holds two fingers up to his bright red, enormous lips, while his other hand hides a chicken behind his back. Though the white man smiles and seems affable, his legs spread wide in a hasty approach and the large bat in his hand indicate that he is ready to punish the black man if he catches him red-handed. The fact that the black man ponders his next move allows for the scenario in which he accepts the white man’s hand and exposes himself as a chicken-thief. The textual and pictorial narrative, though open-ended, allows the recipient of the postcard to imagine the violence that will almost inevitably take place.

Most images in American advertising and ephemera that depict violence by white bodies against black bodies appear in scenes of African Americans stealing from whites. Not surprisingly, in the vast majority of cases, the black figures are stealing foodstuffs. In this sense, the violence is presented as regulatory and justified, picturing the measures that white people are forced to adopt in order to protect their property against thieving blacks. The sheer abundance of images picturing such crimes invites a closer consideration of their meaning and their function as advertising illustrations. Indeed, the images range from outright violent to waggish to bizarre, indicating that pictorial

narratives of black thievery and white vindication were interesting, enjoyable, and relatable to a wide audience.

Depictions of white-on-black violence and black thievery often were used on cards that served either for entertainment (as in stereographs and postcards) or cards advertising products that had nothing to do with violent imagery. For instance, an 1897 stereograph shows an older white man standing poised with his shotgun and aiming out toward a scarecrow in his watermelon patch (Figure 74). The man's expectation of finding a black man raiding his melon patch is so strong that he mistakes his own scarecrow for an intruder. The caption conveys his anxiety: "Jinks, I could'a sworn I saw a leetle darky in the melon patch." The seemingly ever-present suspicion that African Americans would take any opportunity to poach whites' food goods, particularly watermelons, resulted in imagery that relied on picturing a sentinel on duty for keeping constant watch. In many cases, this protector took the form of a dog, depicted as always ready and willing to chase, bite, and attack black offenders.

Interestingly, dogs are pictured as a deterrent but one that is not always enough to keep black thieves out of the tempting melon patch. For instance, an advertising card from circa 1900 promotes its product, Alden Fruit Vinegar, at the top; however, the entire space of the card is given over to the depiction of a black person jumping a fence after presumably having attempted to steal melons or other foodstuffs (Figure 75). A large dog jumps up on its hind legs in pursuit of the bandit, and all we see of the person is his rear end, which displays torn pants, perhaps just nipped by the angry sentinel. Presumably the temptation of access to the sweet fruit was too much to prevent this black figure from risking being caught by the dog. The risk/reward dynamic appeared continually, as in a

postcard from 1905, in which a black figure's face is seen peeking over a fence, where a bulldog stands guard, chained to a post next to two large watermelons (Figure 76). The figure's words are presented at the bottom of the illustration: "Thou art so near and yet so far." His eyes bulge with excitement as he contemplates his choice to stay outside the patch and avoid the dog's attack or give in to temptation and hope the risk pays off.

Advertising cards demonstrate similar themes, urging us to question why vendors and businesses would choose such images for marketing their products and services. One circa 1880 example is a stock card design stamped with the advertiser's name—E. L. Samson (Figure 77). The fact that this card is a standard design used by many, who could simply stamp their name, location, and specialty in the empty box, signals the popularity of the image. In this scene, two black boys attempt to steal watermelons, only to be caught by a large dog. One boy falls headfirst over the fence, his legs in the air above him, while his companion tries to jump the fence, holding two watermelons tightly in his arms. The dog holds the boy back with his teeth in the boy's trousers. One melon lies broken on the ground and the other two are desperately wedged under the boy's arms. In the background, a white man runs after them, brandishing a gun. The title reads "Which Will Let Go First The Dog Or The Darkey." While the ad seems plain enough, stating that Samson sells watches, clocks, and jewelry, the image and its title suggest a playful bet, inviting the viewer/consumer to imagine how the scene will play out. On both sides of the fence, though, there is danger. Just outside the white man's fence is a clearly dangerous drop, evidenced by the boy who has fallen face first onto the ground; on the white man's side of the fence is the danger of his rifle and his ferocious dog. The black

boys seem doomed either way, and the broken watermelon suggests empty stomachs even if they escape.

Some years later, Briggs Bros. & Co., a seed company in Rochester, New York, distributed a card featuring a bestial looking black man fleeing a white man's watermelon patch (Figure 78). The man appears to leap out at the viewer, looking as if he might jump right out from his two-dimensional state. His mouth is open wide in a grimacing yell as he gets snagged in a barbed wire fence. The watermelon he was attempting to steal cracks open just before him. In a field full of melons behind him, an angry white man races toward the black culprit with a gun. The black man's agony is palpable. His grimace is expressive and his arms, splayed out as if reaching for the broken watermelon, bespeak his grief at its loss.

### **Mutilating the Black Body**

Alongside images of the imagined threat posed by African-American men, especially, American advertising and ephemera explicitly pictured scenes in which the black body was harmed or threatened with harm. Just as many images depicted black figures as threatening, others depicted them as being abused and, as such, being contained, controlled, and punished for stereotypical, imagined injustices. In fact, mutilating the African American figure was a trope that persistently reappeared in American daily life, both in the form of imagery and in the form of products that called upon the consumer to participate firsthand in the act of abusing or breaking apart black bodies. Imagery and objects, particularly those targeting children, such as games and

toys, referred to the violated, dismembered, or extinguished black body in order to sell goods, create “humor,” and appeal to white users of all ages. Indeed, children’s products unabashedly incited violence against African Americans, as in the puzzle from 1874, titled “Chopped Up Niggers: Puzzles to put Together,” mentioned above (Figure 56). While the image on the puzzle’s box lacks any explicit violence, it illustrates three familiar stereotypes—Jim Crow, the dandy, and the quintessential banjo player—and as such enacts a definite kind of assault against the black figures by reducing them to racist tropes. The title, however, is a brazen site of mutilation, describing the puzzle as comprising “Chopped Up” black bodies. A gruesome descriptor, its language and its imagery were intended to appeal to white Americans whose animosities toward African Americans could be metaphorically acted upon by piecing together and breaking apart black bodies. This fantasy dominated American advertising, selling anything from sports equipment to food goods.

Two other games make this point more explicitly. The first is an early twentieth-century bowling game titled “Darkey Five Pins” (Figure 79). The game comes in a box featuring an image of a bowling ball knocking over five bowling pins and a black male figure. The figure is barefoot and as he falls backwards, his hat flies off and his legs fly up from underneath him. The picture visualizes the game’s objective, which is to use a small blue ball to bowl down five identical black male figures, all of them holding a watermelon and smiling with their mouths wide open. Another game, manufactured by Milton Bradley from 1890 to 1915, featured a black male figure in the stereotypical garb of a dandy, including straw hat, large red and white striped bow tie, jacket, pants, and black shoes (Figure 80). Titled “Jolly Darkie Target Game,” the toy invited players to

throw three wooden balls into four holes: the banjo and tambourine held by the man, the drum on which he sits, and his enormous, gaping mouth, which could open and close. The figure's mouth, with its stereotypically large, red lips, pulled wide to reveal the tops of his teeth, is the game's primary target or "bullseye," making hitting the black man's head the main objective of the game. Entertainment, in the case of both games, came from throwing hard objects at the bodies of black figures. Furthermore, the figures' mouths are accentuated in both toys and, in the case of the target game, the mouth serves as the primary site of violent impact. The black body, threatening in its potential delinquency, and the black mouth, the site of imagined insatiability and uncontrollability, comes under literal and metaphorical attack for the purposes of white play and amusement.

These types of images and products were manufactured and consumed during and following years of intense racial violence in America, sometimes referred to as the Jim Crow period (roughly 1880s to 1950s), when laws and extralegal violence alike attempted to control African Americans' lives, both public and private. And while the South experienced an abundance of hate crimes, northern states were by no means exempt from racial turmoil. Especially in the years following emancipation, the jobless, wandering, hungry black man was seen as an enormous threat. "The 'nigger loose'—without place, without the restraining, taming, legitimizing white-man link to the white man's world—was the worst of all social crises in Southern communities," and created anxiety in the North, which absorbed the great influx of migrants looking for work.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 58.

The black man “loose” was the African American released from the supposed benefits of a paternalistic system of bondage, in which his new freedom often was viewed by whites as a potential source of excess, violence, and destruction of white supremacy. Williamson explains in *Crucible of Race* the post-emancipation black experience:

Out of place and out of law, they were sometimes lynched, they were sometimes quietly murdered, and they were sometimes slaughtered in murderous riots. More often they wore the stripes and chains of convict labor. In most Southern states convict labor was leased out to private entrepreneurs who used it hard and ate up black lives like some monstrous ogre.<sup>144</sup>

Williamson’s language is powerful and relevant to my discussion, as he describes the violence against blacks as a multifaceted evil that bridged individual racists and the masses, included physical harm and abuses of labor, and, perhaps most significantly, *consumed* African-American bodies, having “used” and eaten up “black lives like some monstrous ogre.” Bill Brown discusses racist objects and paraphernalia, including the “Jolly Darkie Target Game,” describing representations of black figures as “plantation darkies” as tools for perpetuating the “fixity of the stereotype.”<sup>145</sup> He observes that three-dimensional objects, in particular, “compensate[d] for the new heterogeneity of black America; the nostalgic embodiment of some fantasmatic past compensate[d] for uncertainties about the future place and role of African Americans in the U.S.”<sup>146</sup> Both two- and three-dimensional objects, featuring racist stereotypes participated in a larger national process of possessing and controlling the black body, which often entailed abusing it or threatening violence against it. A popular subject for imagery in many forms

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<sup>144</sup> Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 57-58.

<sup>145</sup> Bill Brown, “Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Winter 2005): 186.

<sup>146</sup> Brown, “Reification,” 186.

of American culture, harming the black body was a means of exercising control over the minds and bodies of those who were supposedly out-of-control.

In fact, the “Chopped Up Niggers” puzzle and other popular children’s playthings from the nineteenth century, as well as twentieth-century toys such as the Raggedy Ann doll discussed below, reveal a trajectory of sanctioned violence that was made relatable to both adults and children alike through imaginative play. As Christopher Barton and Kyle Somerville point out in their article on children’s “Play Things,” the fact that “marketing directly towards children” did not take place until the 1900s indicates that “racialized toys are much more reflective of adult views and values, and were made to appeal to adults who would purchase them.”<sup>147</sup> This is particularly true in the case of playthings made to represent African Americans, the most abundantly depicted racial group in Victorian children’s toys, which portrayed them as jolly, lazy, inferior beings usually depicted either performing or working.<sup>148</sup> I contend that the same trend of marketing to adults and transferring adult concerns onto children’s toys continued to manifest even in later years, as with the creation of Raggedy Ann, whose body, as one scholar has recently argued, was a special site for racialized play and violence. Children’s toys reveal tangible “reactions to perceived threats envisioned by white America in the form of migration movements, ideologies of racial purity, and employment competition from a distinct ‘Other.’”<sup>149</sup> Figures such as Chef Rastus, who, though a popular advertising character, presented some degree of professionalization and skill in his station as a uniformed chef, were transformed into playthings that could be held, manipulated, and possessed.

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<sup>147</sup> Christopher P. Barton and Kyle Somerville, “Play Things: Children’s Racialized Mechanical Banks and Toys, 1880-1930,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 16, Issue 1 (March 2012): 52.

<sup>148</sup> Barton and Somerville, “Play Things,” 60-62.

<sup>149</sup> Barton and Somerville, “Play Things,” 63.

Furthermore, just as white adult anxieties were inherited by children through play, so too were they communicated through consumption and advertising, as miscellaneous objects and images used and read by Americans of all ages (and races) reinforced stereotypes and legitimized violence against black figures.

Images of raced bodies being injured, as we have seen, were not uncommon in the world of advertising. Illustrations that might appear odd and confusing to modern viewers presumably would have had humorous and familiar resonances for Americans of the 1800s and 1900s. An undated card from the late nineteenth century pictures two toddlers, one white and one black (Figure 81). The white child sits behind and above the black child and smiles, laughing as he pulls the hair of the black child. The black tot cries, looking distressed by the white child's fun. The card is very simply labeled "Bulldozer," perhaps indicating the company (or the product) being advertised. What value is there in pairing one's company with an image of racialized childhood conflict? Perhaps the image was meant to make the viewer laugh or to relate to it, remembering a time when he, too, bullied a black child. Either way, the image takes pleasure in adolescent racial power play. Not only is the white child literally above the black child, but he derives amusement from tormenting the black boy. The image calls into question who aches and who dominates, who feels and who controls human sentience.

An overwhelming number of advertisements utilize the black body as a site of violence, both in name and in image. This fact must push us to ask why the black figure was so frequently pictured in states of mutilation, particularly for advertisements marketing objects that in no way relate to African Americans or their bodies. A prime example is Nigger Head Tees, a brand whose printed boxes in the early nineteen teens

featured a caricature of a black man's head shaped as a golf club (Figure 82). His bulging eyes and his huge, red lips complete the caricature. The image shows a sharply pointed golf tee, with ball atop, stuck in the man's temple. While not explicitly violent, perhaps, the image takes pleasure in creating a caricature of the mutilated or violated black body. More than that, however, it focuses—as so many other images do—on the figure's head and implies that his head and face, as a golf club, would be forcefully swung against the ball. Indeed, attacks on the black person's head in advertising imagery are particularly frequent, suggesting an assault on the very seat of black life and intellect. As we will see, the heads of black figures, if not directly injured, as in the image for Nigger Head Tees, are frequently pictured as empty or filled with cotton, a trend discussed below.

Picturing the black body in a state of mutilation, overt and implied—particularly a state of painless and even purportedly “humorous” mutilation—acted as a salve aimed at assuaging festering fears of racial equality and black economic, social, and political ascendance. However, it was not solely economic competition that sparked and fueled fires of violence against the black body; additionally, political tides churned race relations in ways that undercut the status quo. One example, cited in “Lynching and Urban Racial Violence,” is the “brief period of southern Populism, which initially joined blacks and whites in the Farmers’ Alliance, [and] threatened newly established white supremacy organizations and long-standing rule by the white planter class.”<sup>150</sup> Economic anxieties fueled racial fires, spurring debates over who should work, how, for how much, and to what end. And no matter what happened in the physical world, images allowed

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<sup>150</sup> Susan Olzak, “The Political Context of Competition: Lynching and Urban Racial Violence, 1882-1914,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Dec. 1990): 397.

whites to work out their anxieties in the pictorial realm, using the black body as a whipping boy.

### Picturing the Professional African American

Imagining black ignorance in advertising was a “humorous” way to ease social anxieties about larger issues in American life, particularly as African Americans’ increasing opportunities to participate in business, economic, and political affairs. Picturing black Americans—especially males—as bumbling and inept at fulfilling the roles of their new paid jobs and as unaware of current events was a task ideally suited for advertising cards, which made their pictorial arguments legible to a vast consumer audience. Two African-American professions in particular were targeted in American visual ephemera as subjects for mockery: barbers and doctors.

In 1905, Cream of Wheat printed an advertisement in *Everybody’s Magazine* that depicted Chef Rastus as a doctor (Figure 83).<sup>151</sup> The image, while not overtly violent, comprises key elements of racist stereotypes that depicted skilled African Americans as ultimately inept and potential inflictors of harm. The image shows the familiar chef in his typical uniform, but with the addition of a spotted bow tie and black top hat. He looks out at the viewer and smiles, as usual, carrying in his left hand the inevitable bowl of hot cereal and in his right hand a medical kit. Both of these details are significant. First, the bowl of Cream of Wheat, rather than having the usual wisp of steam snaking from the top, instead has a billowy steam that makes the hot bowl resemble a chef’s hat, a not-so-

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<sup>151</sup> I discuss further implications of the imagery in this advertisement in Chapter 5.

subtle reminder that Rastus is ultimately a chef, not a doctor. Second, his “doctor’s bag” is actually a box of Cream of Wheat, suggesting that Rastus’s “tools of the trade” are really just the one thing he knows best—Cream of Wheat. Were he to make a house call, he would only have the cereal, an obviously ineffective tool for performing medicine. This detail is underscored by both the main text of the ad, “The best Doctor / Cream of Wheat,” and the large prescription note, which identifies the doctor as “Cream of Wheat M. D.” Rastus, the black figure, is undermined as the medical professional he pretends to be; instead, it is the Cream of Wheat itself that allegedly possesses healing power.

Other black figures pictured in roles of skill and authority were treated, particularly in prints, less kindly than the familiar and beloved Chef Rastus. For instance, Currier & Ives’s *Darktown* series, in particular, created a distinct pattern in which African Americans “were shown as incapable of advancing beyond their dependent, childlike state to assume roles similar to those played by more ‘civilized’ whites.”<sup>152</sup> In fact, while Southern stereotypes in particular often emphasize the “paternalism” of slavery, images like the two Currier & Ives barber shop prints are the epitome of common Northern stereotypes, which “assumed the African American’s innate incapacity to progress politically, economically, or socially, seemingly proven by his...apparent pleasure with his role as a social buffoon.”<sup>153</sup> While Bryan LeBeau studies the stereotypes at work in the *Darktown* series in his book, *Currier & Ives: America Imagined* (2001), successfully addressing the implications of African Americans’ supposed inability to properly participate in what were imagined to be everyday aspects

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<sup>152</sup> Bryan F. LeBeau, *Currier & Ives: America Imagined* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 216.

<sup>153</sup> LeBeau, *Currier & Ives*, 217.

of white American life (e.g. lawn games, political debates, and hunting), my focus is on the overwhelmingly frequent injury that takes place in the series. Illustrating African Americans as bumbling buffoons was one thing, but the *Darktown* series seems to have taken great pleasure in underscoring the buffoonery with elements of violence and self-harm. More than picturing black figures as inept, in other words, the series depicted black figures as bodies that were inevitably being broken, injured, or in peril. Likewise, if not experiencing injury themselves, the black figures in *Darktown* are pictured as foolishly bringing potential injury to other black figures' bodies.

In a pair of *Darktown* prints, a black surgeon is both a potential hack and a body brought under violent control. As two black men prepare to engage in a duel, “An Affair of Honor,” a surgeon stands by to provide medical services to whichever man is shot (Figure 84). The surgeon is illustrated as a complete farce: he (like the other figures) is not only highly caricatured, with huge red lips, but also carries with him his medical kit, which is a wooden box marked “SURGEON,” containing myriad objects completely unfit for performing any kind of medical procedure. His arsenal of medical equipment includes a hammer, saw, and horseshoe (as seen more clearly in the subsequent image). Were the surgeon’s services needed, he would surely do more harm than good with his box of tools, suggesting that, if anything, he would only add insult to the injury caused by the men’s guns.

Yet the surgeon is harmed in the print that forms the pair (Figure 85). The men’s duel, unsurprisingly, goes awry when the one of the duelers runs off (a display of cowardice), leaving the other dueler and his partner to fall over one another. The dueler’s gun goes off, shooting the surgeon in the foot. The surgeon’s hat drops from his head, his

toolbox loses its contents, and his eyes roll in his head with agony as he holds his injured foot. His face writhes in a grotesque caricature, his large red lips exposing three teeth, and his face contorting in pain. The pair of images is significant in that not only must the pair of men attempting to perform a “white” duel of “honor” be harmed by their own cowardice and incapacity, but also the figure of authority and professionalism—the surgeon—must be both explicitly capable of harming and be harmed himself. This is a trope of cyclical violence, in which black figures, particularly those in any kind of position of power, are pictured as dangerous and/or as being endangered by their own ignorance.

An advertising card for W. A. Hoyt & Co., maker of colognes and perfumes, provides a prime example of the trope of the unprofessional professional who jeopardizes the wellbeing of his patron (Figure 86). The title of the scene, “Strict Attention To Business,” is in jest, as the black barber is so busy reading his client’s funny pages that he is seconds away from slicing off the white man’s ear with his shears. The implications are twofold: the black man is inadequate at his profession, and his “business,” to which he pays “strict attention,” is not his work as a barber but rather the comics: humor, revelry, and fun. Such implications would have struck chords of tension about competition for jobs, particularly in urban areas experiencing an influx of African Americans looking for higher pay and greater job opportunities. As in the image discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the black man slicing his own head off with a pocket knife (Figure 54), the suggestion that blacks, left to their own devices, will bring about their own downfall created a degree of reassurance for whites who found successful, entrepreneurial African Americans particularly troubling, indeed, menacing.

Quincy Mills argues in his recent book, *Cutting Along the Color Line* (2013), that barber shops were “private spaces in the public sphere...spaces of economic, cultural, and political resistance outside of the purview of white society.”<sup>154</sup> Barbering, Mills observes, was a “transformative” process “of grooming individual and collective identities.”<sup>155</sup> This process required a relationship of “trust and public intimacy” between the barber and the customer, making black barbers “uniquely situated as conduits of racial politics.”<sup>156</sup> Barber shops were also, however, commonly segregated spaces where grooming tools were not shared among white and black patrons.<sup>157</sup> Mills compares this separation to the “hysteria” surrounding swimming pools as spaces that whites, particularly, deemed unsuitable for sharing with blacks.<sup>158</sup>

Barbers were very often ex-slaves and free blacks, which made many white Americans consider the profession unsuitable for their kind.<sup>159</sup> Barbering, like laundering and tailoring, was one of the professions that white Americans did not commonly object to African Americans performing because they were jobs that “most white men did not care to do.”<sup>160</sup> Yet particularly with the influx of black migrants to northern cities between 1900 and 1930, African-American entrepreneurs formed a *petit bourgeoisie* that, according to imagery of the times, was a source of white anxiety.<sup>161</sup> Even though white

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<sup>154</sup> Quincy T. Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>155</sup> Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line*, 7.

<sup>157</sup> Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line*, 7-8.

<sup>158</sup> Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line*, 8.

<sup>159</sup> Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line*, 10.

<sup>160</sup> J. H. Harmon (1929), cited in Robert L. Boyd, “Demographic Change and Entrepreneurial Occupations: African Americans in Northern Cities,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (April 1996): 130.

<sup>161</sup> Robert L. Boyd, “Demographic Change and Entrepreneurial Occupations: African Americans in Northern Cities,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (April 1996): 130.

Americans often considered barbering to be a “low-prestige vocation” that demanded too many hours of work at too little pay, African Americans found it to be a profession that they could easily learn and that afforded them the opportunity to advance into shop ownership.<sup>162</sup> In fact, barbering was likely a profession particularly targeted by racist imagery owing to the fact that owning and running barber shops “brought [African Americans] within the boundaries of nineteenth-century popular notions of republican independence and citizenship,” the very kind of liberty and opportunity squelched by racist, stereotyped, and caricatured representations of blacks in American visual ephemera.<sup>163</sup>

Rather unsurprisingly, Currier & Ives’s *Darktown* series picked up stereotypes of the incompetent and potentially dangerous black barber. Two of the prints, both illustrated by artist John Cameron, draw upon skill and intelligence, wielding them as weapons against the successful black American barber. “Tonsorial Art in the Darktown Style” (1890) shows two black barbers, each of them grooming a black male patron (Figure 87). The skill and success with which both barbers complete their tasks are dubious: the barber on the left is highly caricatured, with an apelike face, small ears and oversized lips, and he holds up a pair of enormous shears before him. The size of the scissors and their open position underscore their menacing implications. The scene’s threatening tone is reinforced by the barber on the right, who appears to be in the process of setting his customer’s hair on fire, exhibited by the smoke wafting up from the man’s

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<sup>162</sup> Boyd, “Demographic Change,” 133-134.

<sup>163</sup> Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line*, 10.

head.<sup>164</sup> As a potential customer—also highly caricatured and holding his arm up in a particularly apelike gesture—walks in at right, one of the barber’s shoos him off, the caption presenting his words: “Go to de next shop—We done dont handle common niggahs.” The barbers and their customers, each of them well dressed, are revealed to be not unlike the bedraggled customer they send away. The barbers’ ineptitude, the speaker’s heavy dialect, and the customers’ ignorance of their barbers’ risky behaviors betray the facade of professionalism exhibited by the shop and the barbers’ comportment. In addition, the barber’s reference to the potential customer as one of the “common niggahs” suggests an elitism on the part of the dandified barbers whose own identification as being above the “common” mass of African Americans is betrayed by the scene taking place.

The second print, “Scientific Shaving on the Darktown Plan” (1890), depicts a similar scene, with two black barbers grooming patrons (in fact these appear to be the same barbers as those in “Tonsorial Art,” identifiable by their socks and shoes) (Figure 88). This time, however, the barbers give their customers a shave while a third customer waits in a chair at right, reading the *Darktown Times* newspaper and smoking a cigar. The barber on the right uses a large straight razor on his customer, the same kind pictured in the images discussed earlier in this chapter, with its overtones of violence and potential injury. The skillful handling necessary for utilizing the straight razor is brought into question by the image title and caption, which again presents the barber’s words: “Nuffin but fustclass artists am ployed heah.” The two prints’ consistent references to barbering

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<sup>164</sup> Setting the patron’s hair on fire, in fact, was a common theme among stereotypical images of black barbers.

as both an art and a science are presented as a farce: both images are explicit in their depiction of the black barbers as cocky buffoons whose confidence in their profession in fact jeopardizes both the appearance and physical safety of their patrons. Using the terms art and science sarcastically highlighted the visual undercutting of what was for many African Americans a skilled profession that gave them not only social but economic upward mobility.

## **Conclusion**

In the frequent depictions of black figures falling, being pierced and cut apart, being assembled and reassembled, American visual culture contributed to the impulse of violence that manifested literally and physically, as well as psychologically and metaphorically throughout the nation. Depictions of black Americans as ignorant buffoons incapable of upward economic and social mobility formed a dialogue (one-sided as it was) in advertising and print culture about race and opportunity, creating illusions about white exclusivity in attaining the good life. Imagining African Americans as menacing figures who could not be trusted encouraged the profusion of imagery and objects that depicted and acted out reconciling black “backwardness” through violence. As African Americans continued to move, settle, and establish themselves economically and professionally, white stereotypes of black bodies created fantasies of recommitting black Americans to subjugated positions of forcible labor.

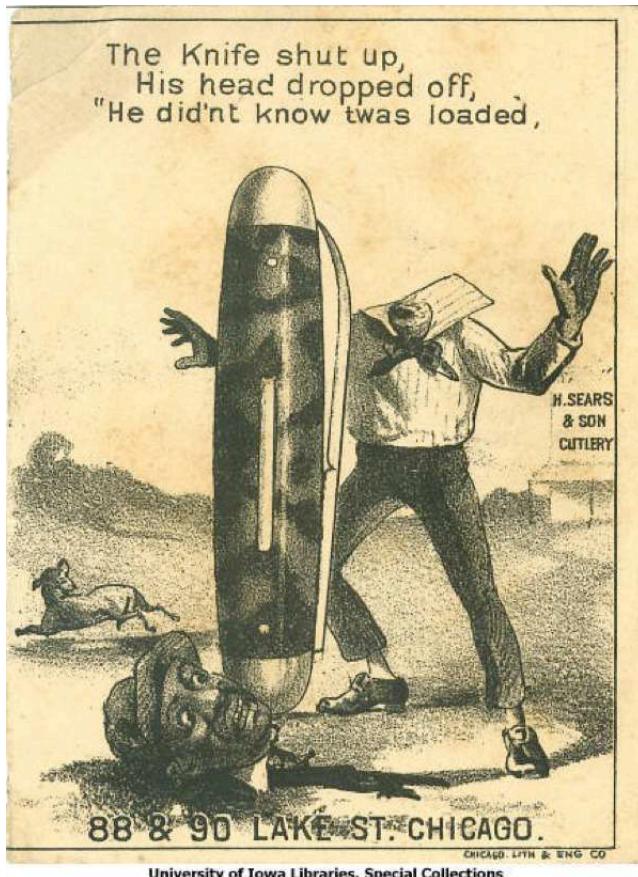


Fig. 54

"The Knife shut up," c. 1880. Advertising card. H. Sears & Son (IL). Chicago Lith. & Eng. Company (printer).

University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections Department.

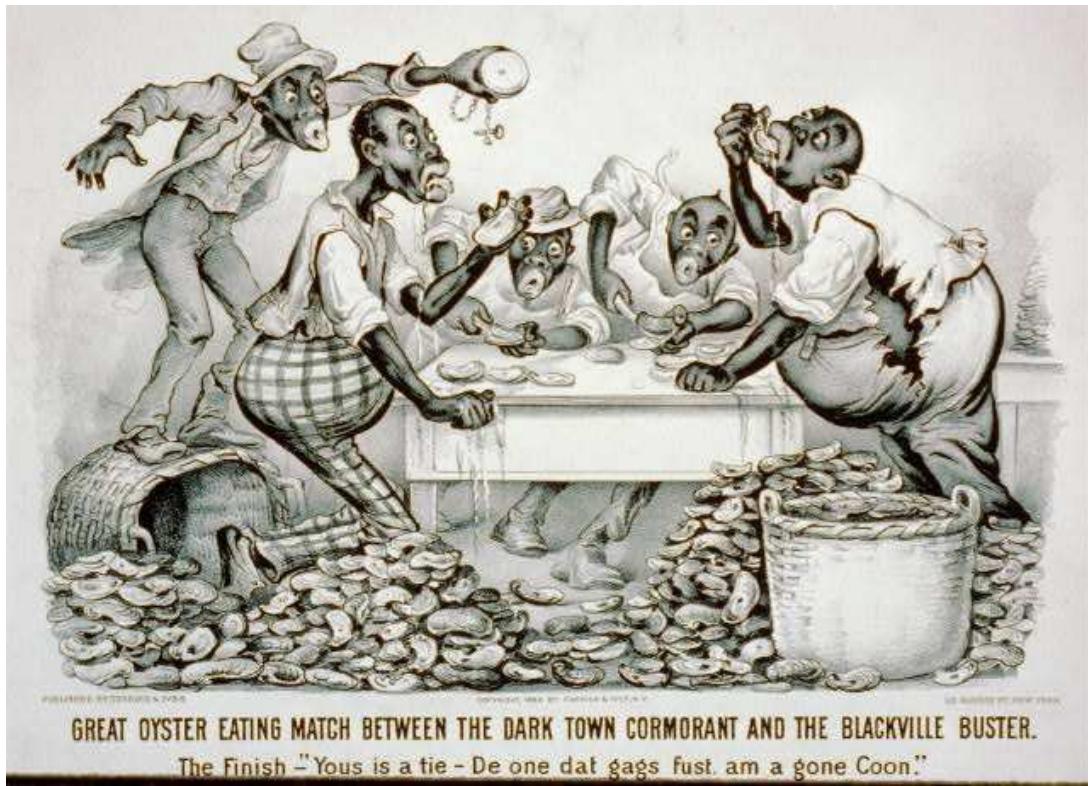


Fig. 55

"Great Oyster Eating Match Between The Dark Town Cormorant And The Blackville Buster," c. 1866. Print. *Darktown* series. Currier & Ives.  
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC2-2525.

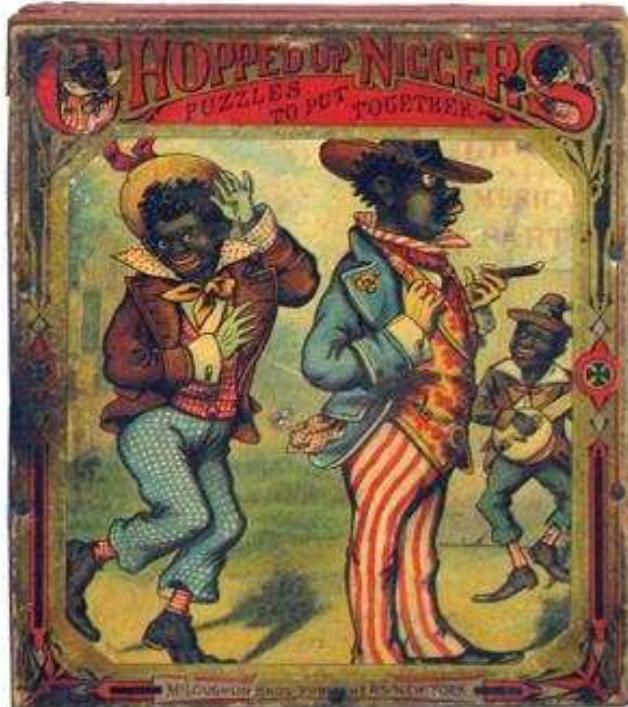


Fig. 56

"Chopped Up Niggers: Puzzles to Put Together," 1874. Puzzle box. McLoughlin Bros. (NY).

Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Michigan.

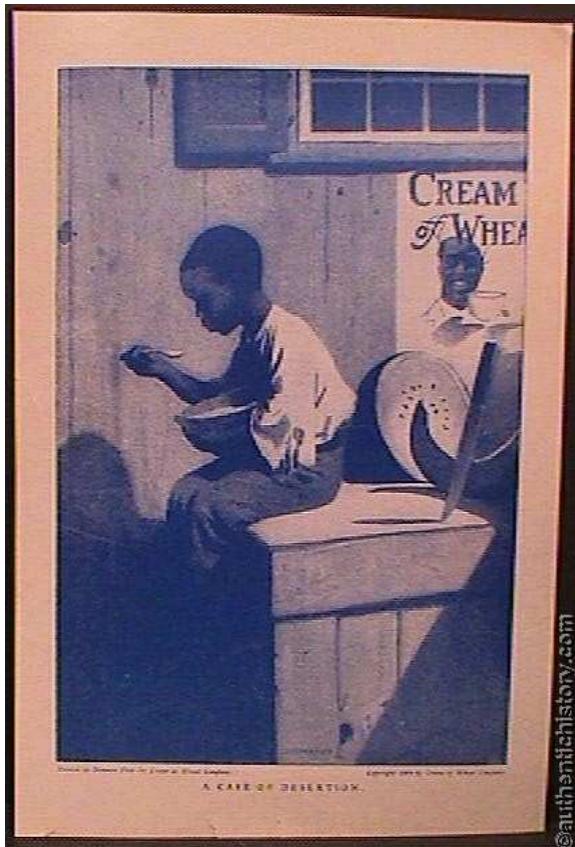


Fig. 57

"A Case of Desertion," 1909. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Denman Fink (artist). Cream of Wheat Company.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "Caricatures of African Americans: Tom."

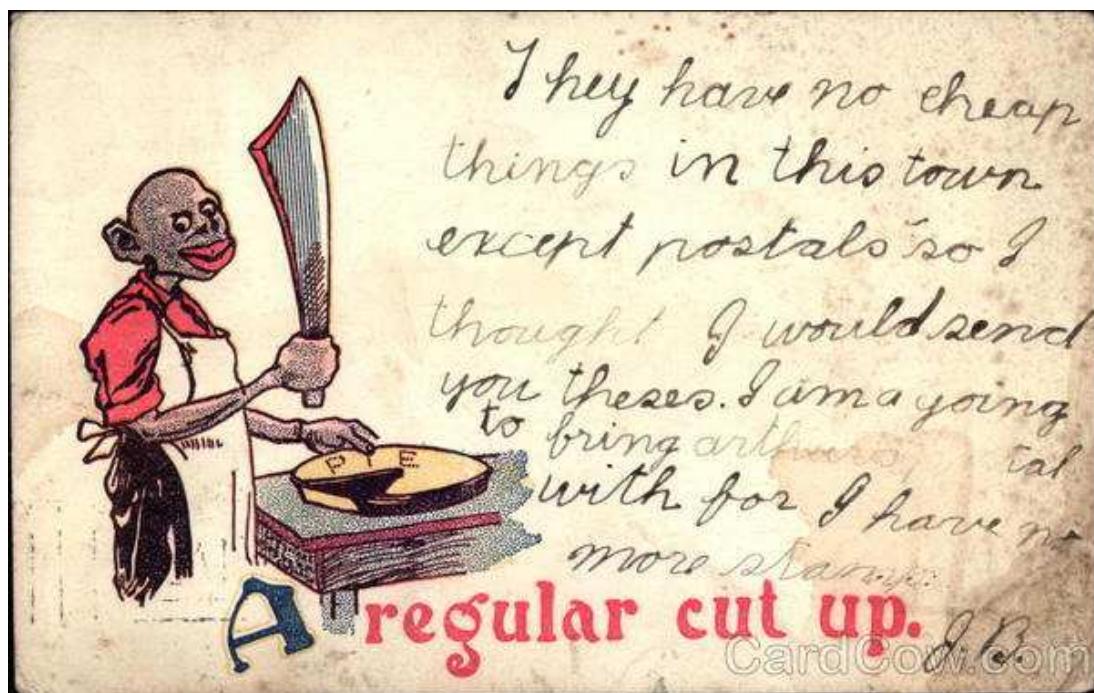


Fig. 58

"A regular cut up," c. 1905. Postcard.

CardCow Vintage Postcards & Collectibles. Accessed January 2016.  
<https://www.cardcow.com/383522/regular-cut-up-ethnic-black-americana/>.



Fig. 59

"Duluth Imperial," n.d. Advertising card. Duluth Imperial (MN).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 60

"Duluth Imperial," n.d. Advertising card. Duluth Imperial (MN).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

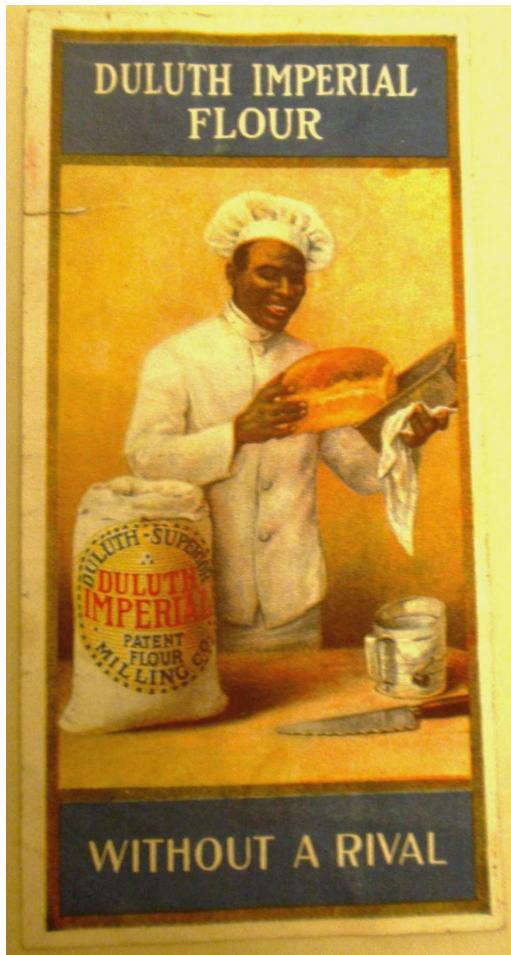


Fig. 61

"Without a Rival," n.d. Advertising card. Duluth Imperial (MN).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

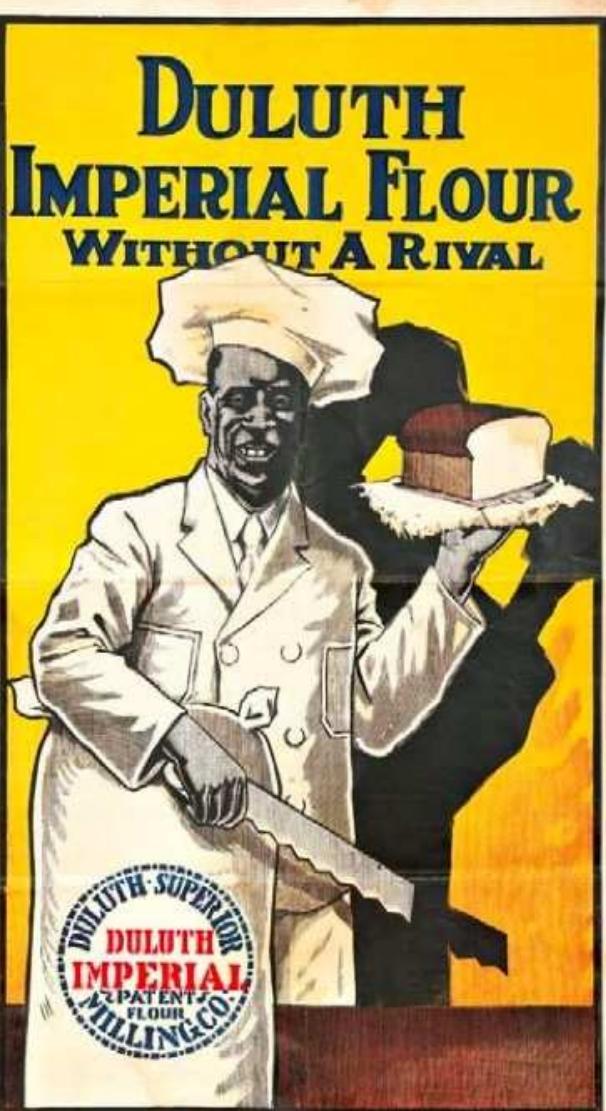


Photo Courtesy © Wm Morford Auctions Morfauction.com

Fig. 62

"Duluth Imperial Flour," n.d. Sign. Duluth Imperial (MN).  
Private Collection. Sold by Wm. Morford Auctions.



Fig. 63

"Cream of Wheat for Thanksgiving Day," 1907. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Cream of Wheat Company.  
Private collection.

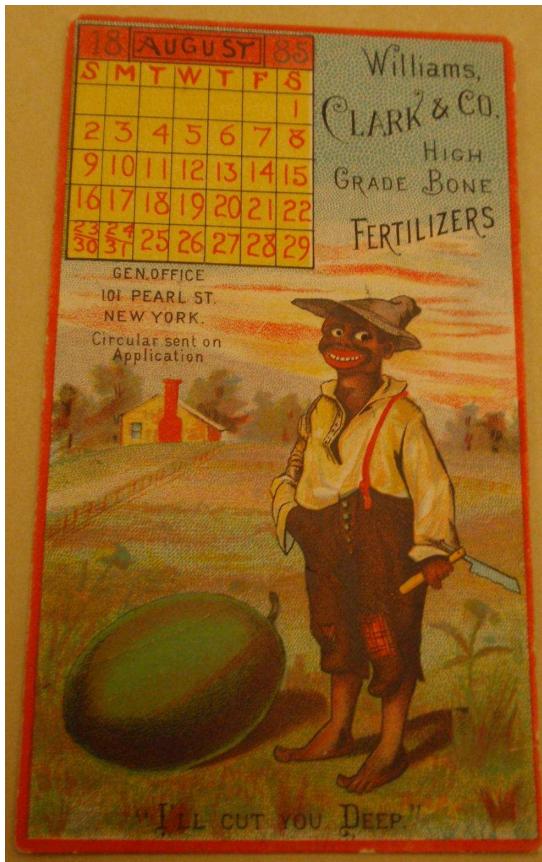


Fig. 64

"I'll Cut You Deep," August 1885. Advertising calendar card. Williams, Clark & Company (NY).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 65

"We'll Cut You Deep," Advertising card. Rumsey & Company (NY). Rochester Lithography Company (printer).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

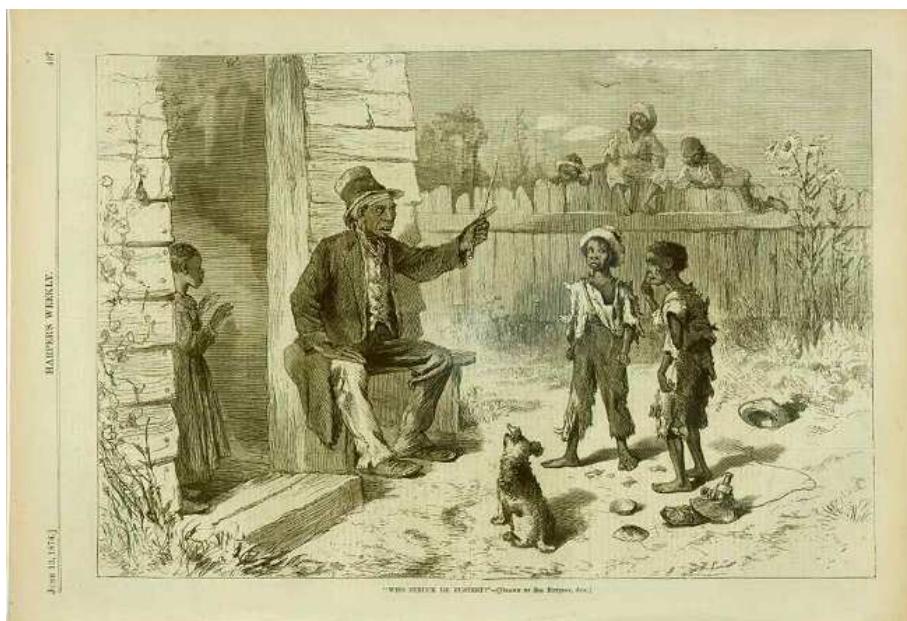


Fig. 66

"Who Struck De Fustest?", June 13, 1874. *Harper's Weekly*. Sol Eytinge, Jr. (artist).  
<http://www.philaprintshop.com/blackville.html>. Accessed October 11, 2014.

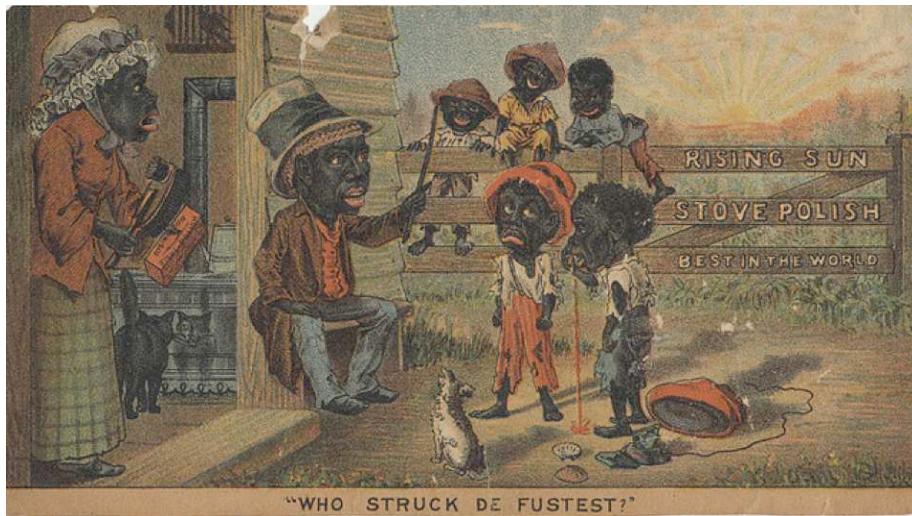


Fig. 67

"Who Struck De Fustest?," c. 1900. Advertising card. Rising Sun. Morse Bros. (printer). Miami University, Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Shields Trade Card Collection.

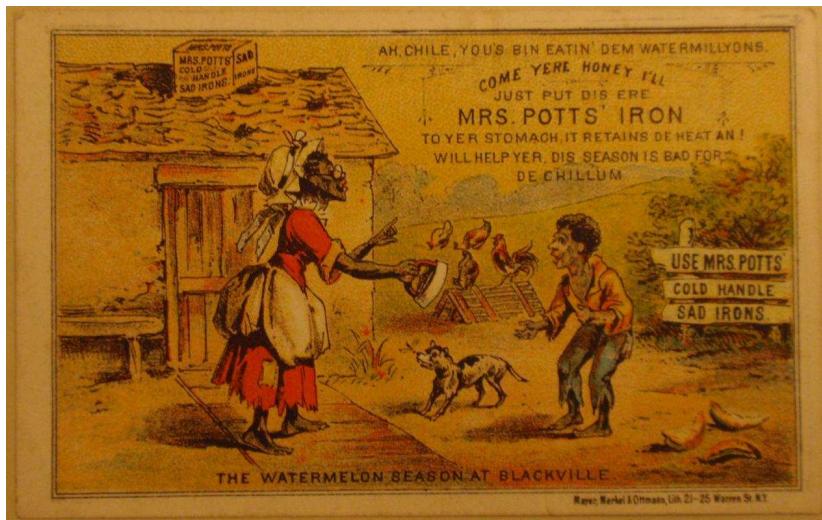


Fig. 68

"The Watermelon Season at Blackville," n.d. Advertising card. Otis D. Dana (MA). Mayer, Merkel & Ottmann Lith. (printer). Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 69

"I Aint Seen Nuffin O'Yer Chickens!" January c. 1880. Advertising calendar card.  
Clarence Brooks & Company (New York, NY).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 70

"A Darktown Trial — the Judge's Charge," 1887. Print. *Darktown* series. Currier & Ives. Albion College, Stockwell-Mudd Library, Special Collections, *Darktown Comics* Collection, Box 3.

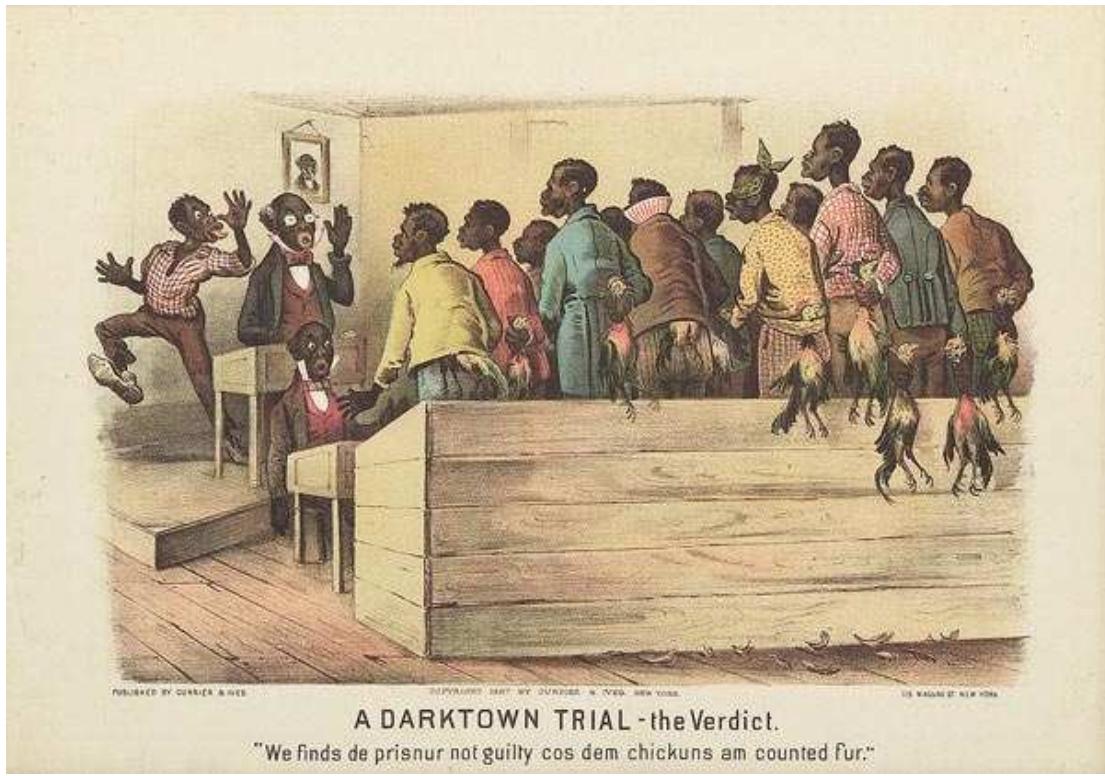


Fig. 71

"A Darktown Trial — the Verdict," 1887. Print. *Darktown* series. Currier & Ives. Private collection.



Fig. 72

“To De Wictor B’Long De Spoils,” 1909 Postcard. Raphael Tuck & Sons.  
CardCow Vintage Postcards & Collectibles. Accessed January 2016.  
<https://www.cardcow.com/383518/de-wictor-blong-spoils-ethnic-black-americana/>.



Fig. 73

“I Want To Grasp You By The Hand,” 1912. Postcard.  
CardCow Vintage Postcards & Collectibles. Accessed January 2016.  
<https://www.cardcow.com/>.



Fig. 74

"Jinks!", 1897. Stereograph. Underwood & Underwood (printer).  
The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "The Coon Obsession  
with Chicken & Watermelon."



Fig. 75

"The Alden Fruit Vinegar," c. 1900. Advertising card. Alden Fruit Vinegar. M. E. Farrar (CO).

Miami University, Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Shields Trade Card Collection.

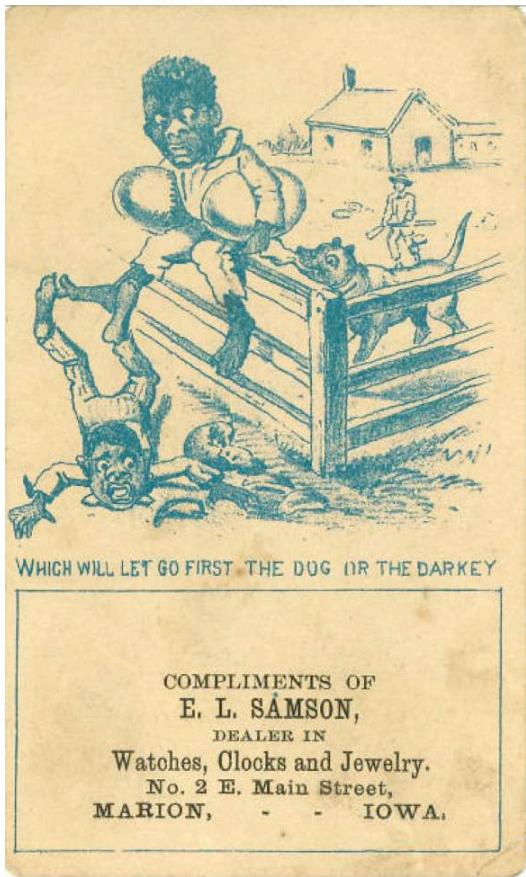


Fig. 76

"Thou art so near and yet so far," 1905. Postcard.

CardCow Vintage Postcards & Collectibles. Accessed January 2016.

<https://www.cardcow.com/383516/thou-art-so-near-yet-far-ethnic-black-americana/>.



WHICH WILL LET GO FIRST THE DOG OR THE DARKEY

COMPLIMENTS OF  
E. L. SAMSON,  
DEALER IN  
Watches, Clocks and Jewelry.  
No. 2 E. Main Street,  
MARION, - - IOWA.

University of Iowa Libraries. Special Collections

Fig. 77

"Which Will Let Go First The Dog Or The Darkey," c. 1880. Advertising Card. E. L. Samson (Marion, IA).

University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections Department.



Fig. 78

"Buy Briggs Bros. & Co.'s Seeds," n.d. Advertising card. Briggs Bros. & Company (Rochester, NY). Karles Lith. Company (printer).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

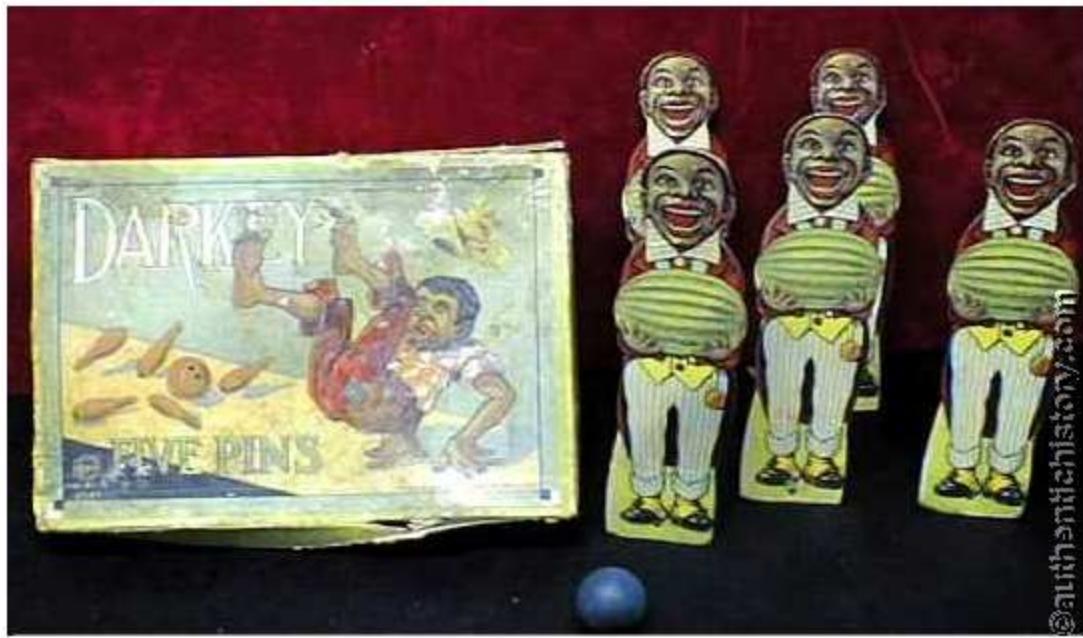


Fig. 79

"Darkey Five Pins," c. 1910. Game.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "The Coon Obsession with Chicken & Watermelon."

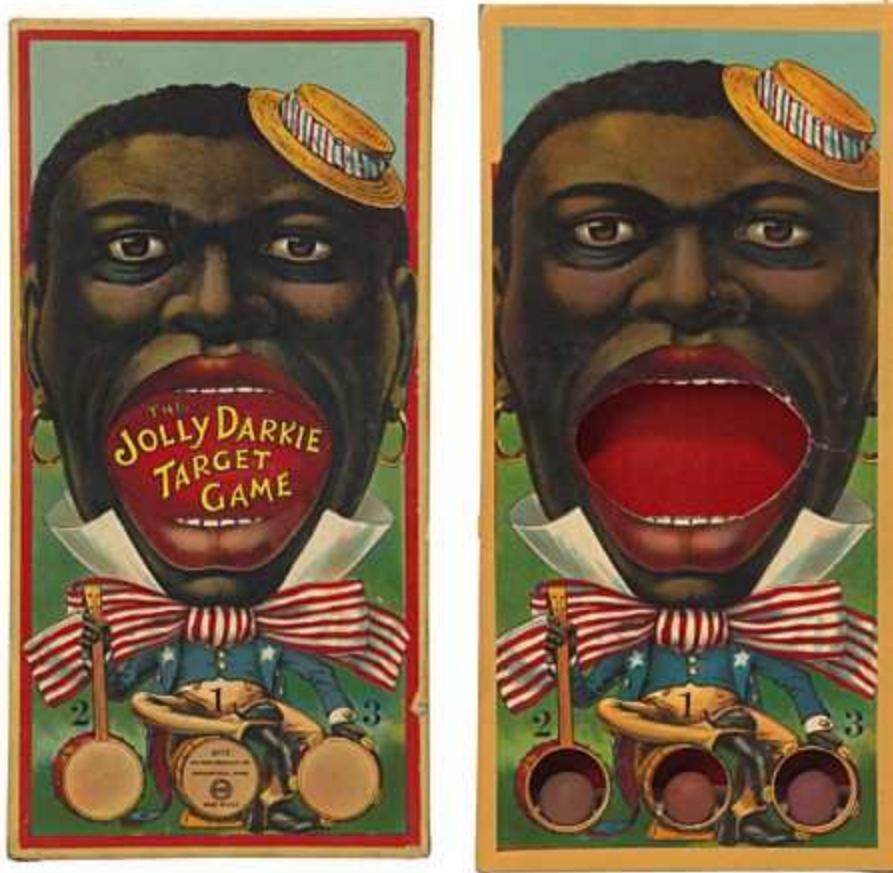


Fig. 80

"The Jolly Darkie Target Game," c. 1890-1915. Game. Milton Bradley.  
Private collection.



Fig. 81

"Bulldozer," n.d. Advertising card. Bulldozer.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

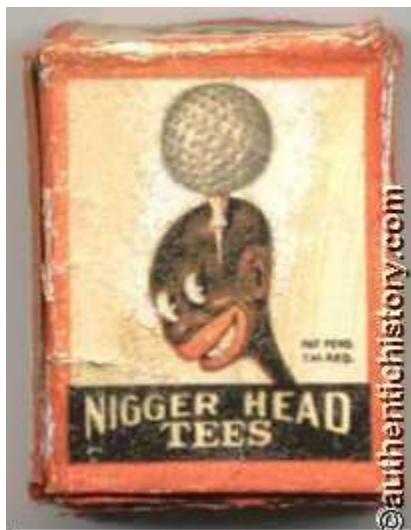


Fig. 82

"Nigger Head Tees," c. 1920. Box.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "Caricatures of African Americans: The Coon." Accessed 2012.

<http://www.authentichistory.com/diversity/african/3-coon/1-history/index.html>.

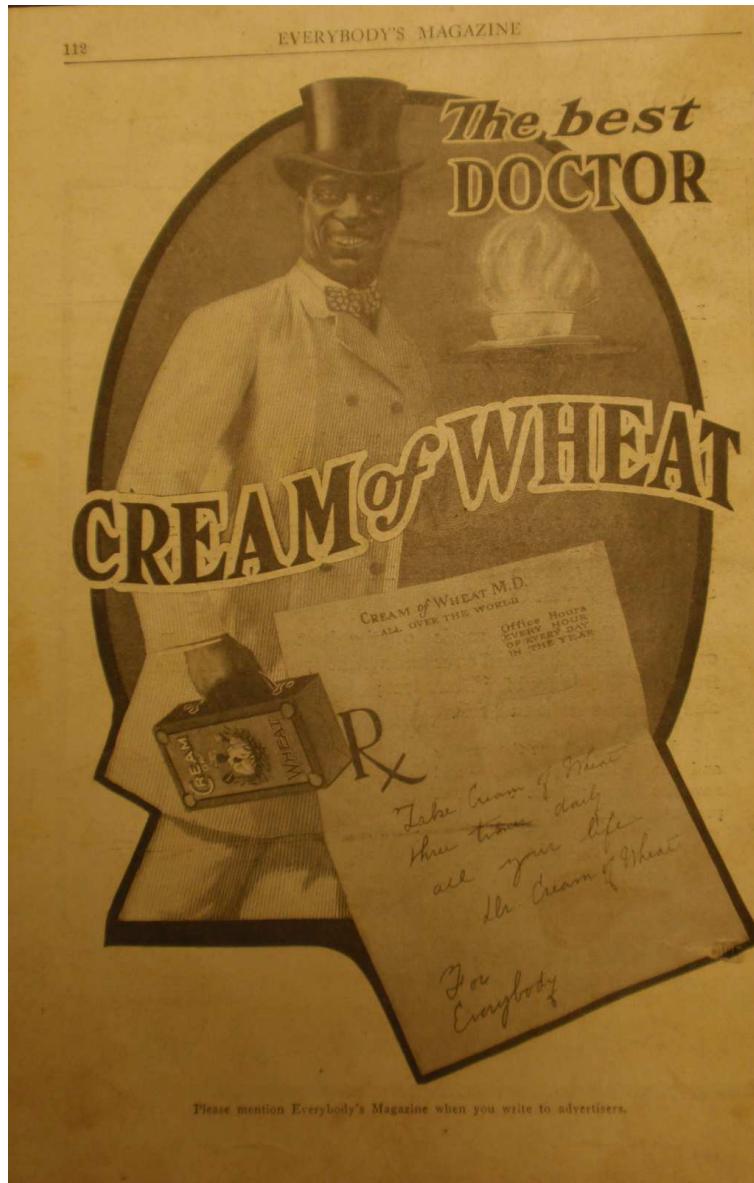


Fig. 83

"The best Doctor," 1905. Print advertisement. *Everybody's Magazine*. Cream of Wheat Company.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 4.

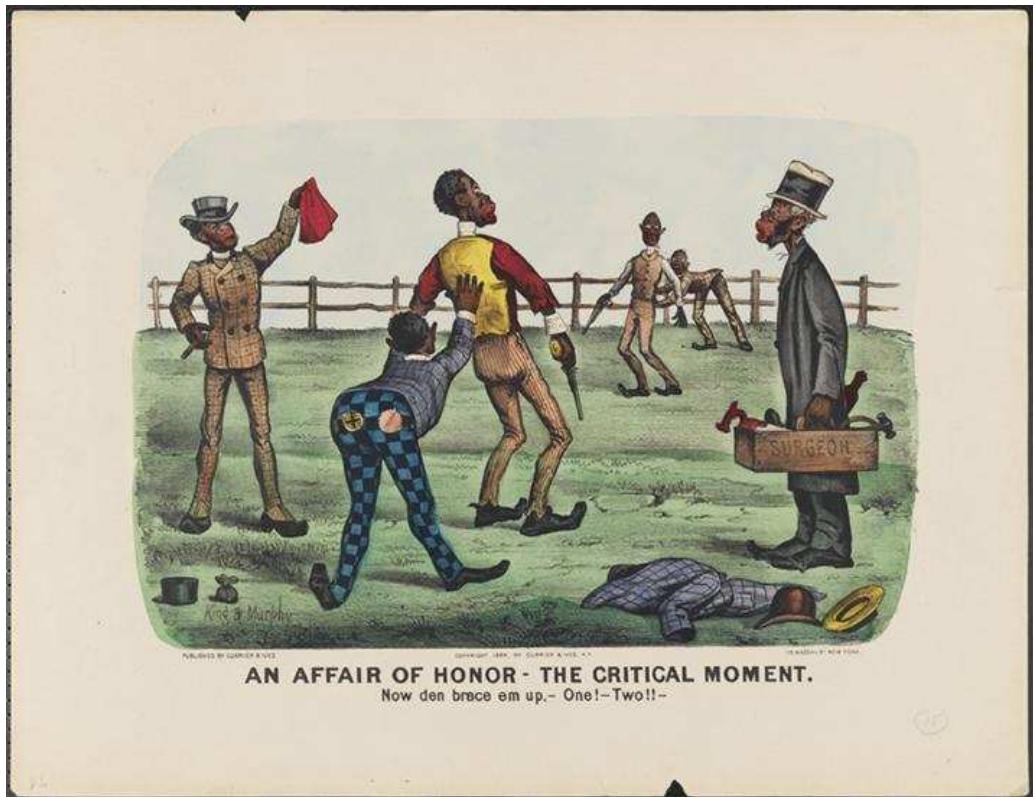


Fig. 84

"An Affair of Honor - The Critical Moment," 1884. Print. *Darktown* series. King & Murphy (artists). Currier & Ives.  
Museum of the City of New York, 57.300.222.

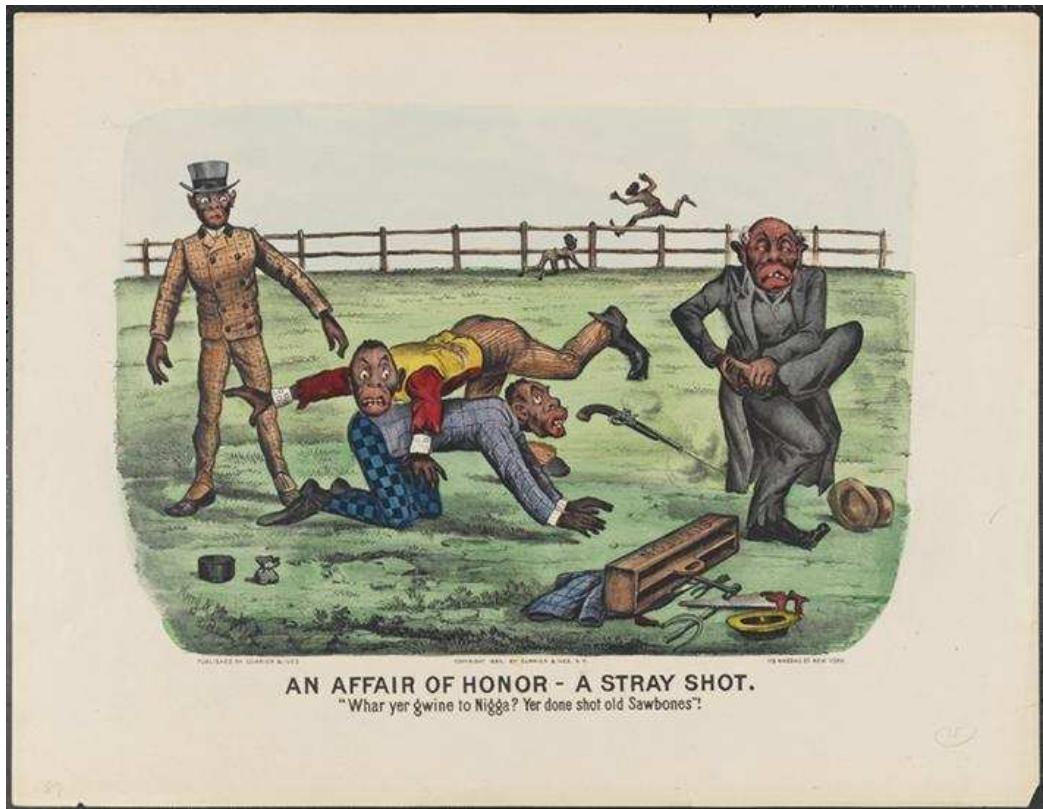


Fig. 85

"An Affair of Honor - A Stray Shot," 1884. Print. *Darktown* series. King & Murphy (artists). Currier & Ives.  
Museum of the City of New York, 57.300.223.

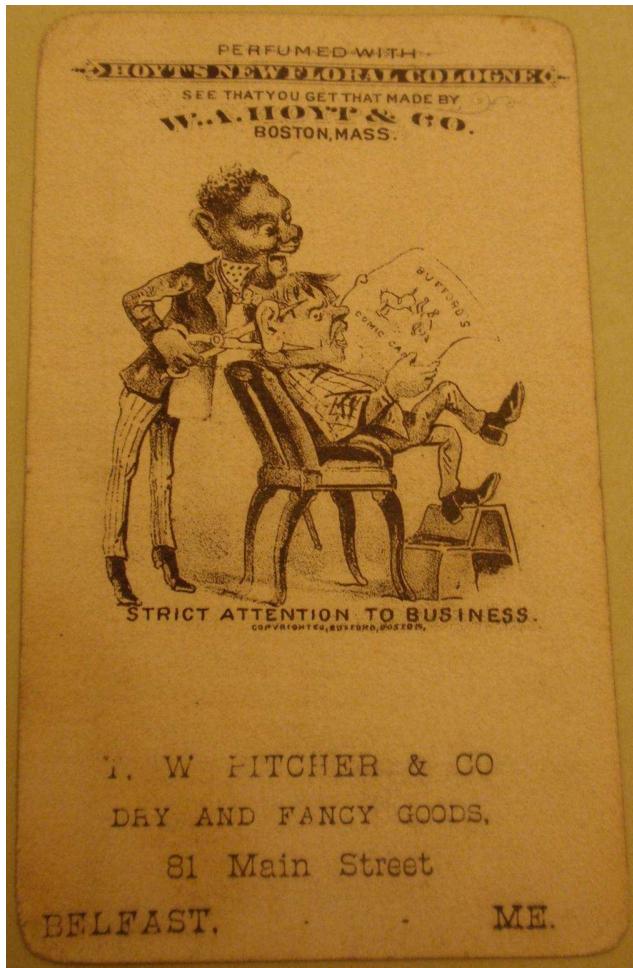


Fig. 86

"Strict Attention to Business," n.d. Advertising card. W. A. Hoyt & Company (Boston, MA). T. A. Pitcher & Company (Belfast, ME). Bufford (printer).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

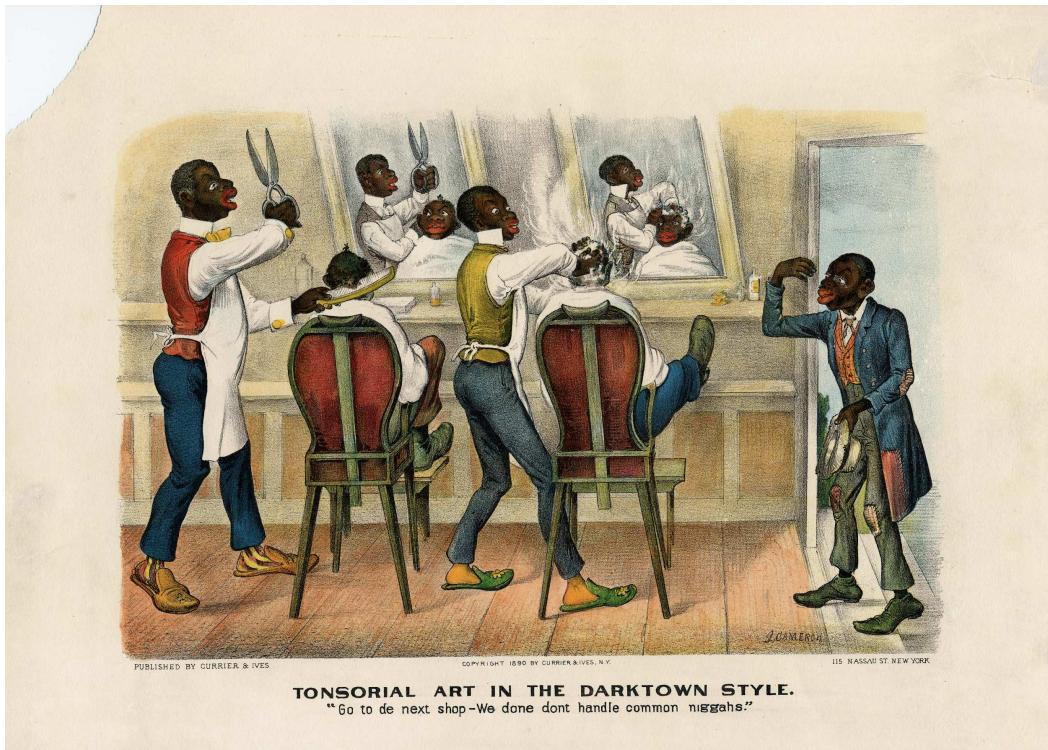


Fig. 87

"Tonsorial Art In The Darktown Style," 1890. Print. *Darktown* series. John Cameron (artist). Currier & Ives.  
Albion College, Stockwell-Mudd Library, Special Collections, *Darktown* Comics Collection, Box 3.

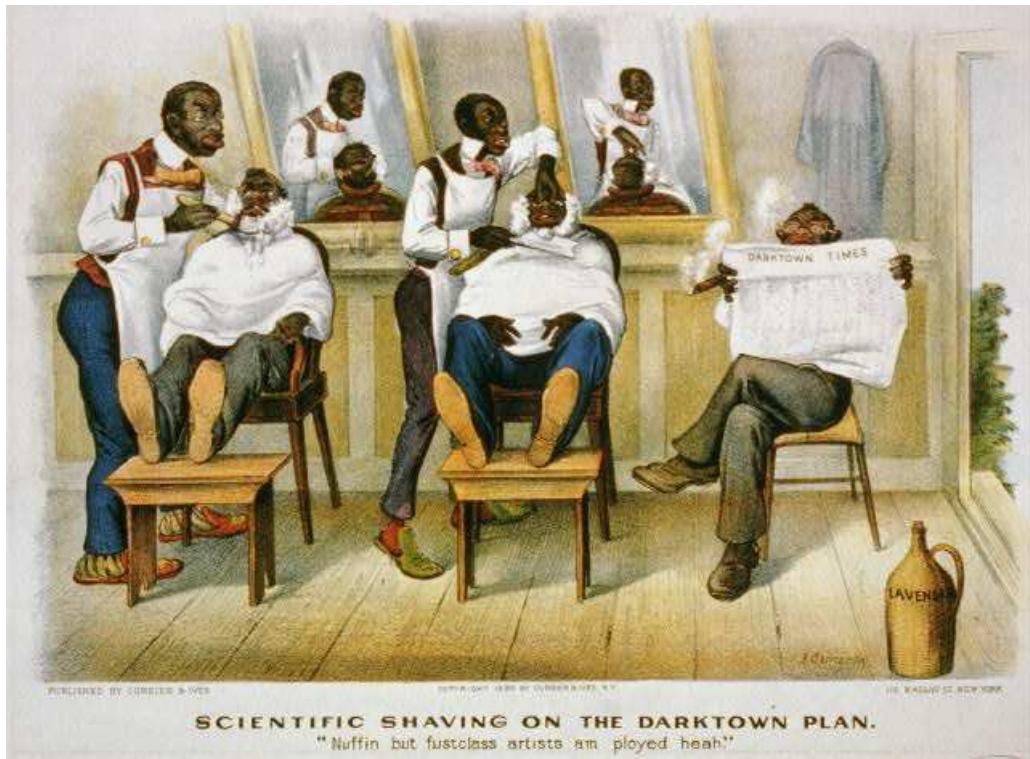


Fig. 88

"Scientific Shaving On The Darktown Plan," 1890. Print. *Darktown* series. John Cameron (artist). Currier & Ives.  
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

## Chapter 4

### Lightening the Load: Laboring Bodies

A postcard from about 1900 features an older black woman carrying a woven basket (Figure 89). White tufts of hair spring out from underneath her hat, and her glasses give further testament to her age. She smiles out at us, presumably enjoying her chore of laundry, which sways in the breeze on a line behind her. What is most interesting and telling about this image, however, is the woman's clothing and her strange presentation. The woman's garments, as in many other images of the time, show signs of wear: the edges of her blouse are frayed and her apron is torn. Her chest, however, features one large gash over each of her breasts. While the wear and tear on the rest of her clothing appears slight, the rips across her breasts are drastic, violent looking slashes that command the viewer's attention. In fact, while scholars have often explained the effective desexualization of the stereotypical mammy figure, this older black woman is, if anything, hypersexualized for the sake of violence. Her breasts appear more like melons than flesh, with their too-perfectly-round shape. They look full and taut, as if on the verge of bursting through her blouse. Despite her advanced age, she is a sexual object that has been violated. Her dark skin showing through the gashed blouse calls the viewer to indulge his voyeurism and to imagine the sight of her breasts in their entirety.

Not merely a sexual body available for looking at and ravishing, however, the older woman's body is also a consumable product, made explicit by her melon-like breasts. Their shape and the familiar slice through them echoes images with gash-like slices cut out of watermelons lusted after by stereotyped African-American figures. The image suggests that the woman's body is always available, both for sex and consumption,

no matter her age or physical condition. More than being available to the viewer/consumer, she is furthermore untroubled by her presentation as an object of voyeurism, lust, and devouring, presenting herself fully frontal and with a smile on her face, directly engaging her audience.

Fascinations with and fears about black female sexuality were nothing new in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, nor were fears of interracial sex. Yet the sudden obsession with picturing sex in relation to economics—that is, picturing bodies as simultaneously sexual objects and as comestibles—points toward an imagined link between human bodies and consumable goods, the availability of both, and the consequences of consumption. Ultimately, the key to expressing and easing white anxieties about black sexuality was the perpetually reinforced link between black bodies and agricultural products. Imagining African Americans as working and workable bodies innately connected to the land they labored during slavery created nostalgic fantasies in which blacks fulfilled the tasks “unsuitable” for whites.

In October 1920 the Chicago *Daily Tribune* ran the following poem inspired by the beloved doll, Raggedy Ann:

‘I kin play eny bumpity game / Wuth my Raggedy Ann—’n she’s ist  
the same; / Never gits sick ‘er breaks ‘er head / ‘Enever she tumbles  
wite out o’ ‘er bed. / I love ‘er ‘n spank ‘er ‘z much ‘z I can, / But that  
never bothers my Raggedy Ann.’<sup>165</sup>

The poem ran in the *Daily Tribune* “barely fifteen months after race riots devastated African Americans in that city,” making its words hauntingly relevant, even if the victim

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<sup>165</sup> Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 193.

of violence was a stuffed doll.<sup>166</sup> In her book, *Racial Innocence* (2011), Robin Bernstein does an exceptional job of explaining how the Raggedy Ann character was birthed by blackface minstrelsy and developed into a doll whose body invited abuse and, in so doing, echoed and reinforced historical violence against the black body. She astutely points out that “the Raggedy Ann doll was first mass-marketed by the Non-Breakable Toy Company, whose name announced its toys’ mission to accommodate violence.”<sup>167</sup> The joint marketing of the Raggedy Ann dolls and books, Bernstein argues, continually underscored the source of Raggedy Ann’s unbreakability: her cotton body was impervious to being hurt.<sup>168</sup> Like the happy laborers illustrated in American advertising in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “Raggedy Ann, as insensate to pain as any other imagined faithful slave, any other pickaninny, enjoys being thrown, boiled, wrung out, skinned, and hanged. It’s racially innocent fun.”<sup>169</sup> Cotton’s history as one of the major products of plantation labor made its use in inviting violence against the black body even more complex. Images and objects that visually and literally stuffed the African-American figure with cotton powerfully linked the black body to its enslaved past, working long hours, bending over with an aching back, and carrying heavy loads of cotton that, when picked, often resulted in bleeding fingers.

Beginning in the 1920s, even the beloved Chef Rastus was available for children to cut, stuff, and play with, in the form of a small fabric doll (Figure 90). The instructions that came with one version of the doll were delivered in the form of a letter to parents,

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<sup>166</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 193.

<sup>167</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 186.

<sup>168</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 186.

<sup>169</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 193.

stating: “Here is the jolly ‘Cream of Wheat’ doll you asked for, ready to be cut, sewed and stuffed. We feel sure this familiar figure will find a hearty welcome from the little folks.”<sup>170</sup> He is presented with his usual smiling face and his body is carefully contoured such that his face and arms are immovable. His head cannot move and his arms are frozen in position, pictured holding a hot bowl of Cream of Wheat. Interestingly, his two legs are moveable and his hat looks to be removable, allowing access to his head. The chef’s uniform is changed in that while he wears his usual white chef’s hat and jacket, his pants (which are usually solid white but sometimes black) are now red and white striped. This detail, paired with the fact that his legs are moveable, give the Rastus doll a particularly minstrel-like quality, as if inviting the child consumer to make their Rastus doll dance and kick. His soft, stuffed body, like that of the popular Raggedy Ann doll, would have made him a welcome site for racialized play. Bernstein’s assessment of the material makeup of Raggedy Ann sets up the ideas reinforced in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertising imagery:

Cotton materially and symbolically connected dolls to the labor of African American slaves and sharecroppers. For...Gruelle [Raggedy Ann’s creator], and many others, the key property and virtue of cotton was that it was “yielding”—i.e., submissive—and therefore able to endure “rough usage.” But cotton does not only render Raggedy Ann fit for rough usage; cotton functions also as an essential force that constitutes personality and actions. In particular, Raggedy Ann’s cotton interior enables the doll to move endlessly without tiring and always to maintain a cheerful attitude.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> David Stivers, *The Nabisco Brands Collection of Cream of Wheat Advertising Art* (San Diego: Collectors’ Showcase, Inc., 1986), 137.

<sup>171</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 187.

I would argue that, while children's dolls used cotton to connect playthings to laboring bodies, advertisements, which were read—literally and metaphorically—by children *and* adults, also used cotton to connect real black bodies to the forced labor of their past. Whereas cotton invited American children to play out violence against inferior bodies, cotton enabled American adults and children alike to imagine black bodies as forever enslaved and restricted in both their movement and their experience as free Americans.

A prime example of this is present in a trade card from the late 1800s (Figure 91). While the back of the card is ruined from being pasted onto a page, its face advertises a very potent racist stereotype. The image depicts an impish black man dancing with a stick, which he holds like a baton. His leg lifted high, he merrily smiles at us. A large cotton boll emerges from the man's head and his eyes are completely white, suggesting that the cotton sprouts from and fills his head, taking place of his inner organs, in particular his eyes and his brain. Just as Raggedy Ann's cotton body allowed her “to move endlessly without tiring and always to maintain a cheerful attitude,” so does the black man's cotton head allow him to dance and jig and work in freedom just as he would have in slavery.<sup>172</sup> After all, he is viewed as essentially—that is, by his very make-up—rooted to the land upon which he labored. His physical sameness or hybridity with the cotton he picked makes him who he is presumed to be—a happy, pain-free, tireless servant and laborer.

While violence was one means of imagining bringing black bodies under control, representing their bodies as being confined to labor was another means, one that was popular in American imagery in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

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<sup>172</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 187.

Moreover, imagery in American advertising and ephemera did not settle for simply suggesting a natural, inextricable relationship between black bodies and the foods that they produced and/or consumed. Rather, this scenario was merely one facet of a larger argument that African Americans, as beings who were supposedly naturally born of the land, were suited and destined for returning to American soil for both work and survival. Black figures were imagined and reimagined as reproducible, inexhaustible sources of agricultural labor, in particular, but also as reliable and nostalgic figures whose history of enslavement could be recaptured in American advertising at a minimum and in reality at best. They were pictured as new versions of the familiar stereotype of the happy slave, as well as tireless bodies whose toiling was not only free of fatigue, aches, pains, or strife, but was also a source of pleasure. Post-emancipation, American advertising became a source of visual re-enslavement wherein white Americans were reinstated with forcible sources of labor, and the best part was that anyone could own them for the cost of a box of cereal, a souvenir, or a collectible trade card.

### **Pliable Products and Pliant Producers**

American advertisements and ephemera ceaselessly link cotton and the laboring black body. In fact, most advertising cards that picture biomorphic black people depict them as part-human, part-cotton plant. While numerous biomorphic trade cards such as the one mentioned above are undoubtedly ethnically and racially tinged—with Native Americans depicted as part-corn and Irish men as part-potato, for instance—their renderings of blacks and whites are particularly telling. White bodies are commonly

hybridized with objects synonymizing beauty, like butterflies and flowers, whereas black bodies are hybridized with agricultural products such as fruits and cotton. Significantly, when white figures are conjoined with plants, their plant parts are usually removable and in turn identified distinctly as adornment as opposed to actual body parts.<sup>173</sup> As demonstrated below, however, this is not the case with images of African Americans.

Trade cards featuring biomorphic humans—or veggie people as many archives call them—were extremely popular, particularly among seed and fertilizer companies. The cards depict funny little illustrations of people who look like various fruits, flowers, or vegetables. There are striking differences, however, between biomorphic images of black and white people. First and foremost, black people are almost always depicted as half-cotton plants. There are exceptions to this, but regardless, their heads are *always* part-plant. In other words, while white people (by “white” here I mean anyone without dark skin) have abdomens, legs, or arms that are vegetative, *all* of the black figures have plant matter that *constitutes* or involves the area within and around their heads. Let us take as a comparison two cards advertising Rice’s Seeds. One card, dated 1897, advertises Rice’s Mikado or Turner Hybrid Tomato (Figure 92). It features a robust, distinguished looking man in a top hat who also has a round tomato stomach. Though both the fruit and its leaves compose his body, they also function as the man’s garments. Upon closer inspection, we see that the green jacket he wears is in fact the tomato’s leaves, which also make up his bowtie. While the green leaves appear to form his limbs, we can actually see his hands and feet contoured underneath the leaves. We see his hand

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<sup>173</sup> While it is true that not *all* white biomorphic figures have removable or accessory plant parts, the distinct fact that blacks *never* do is significant.

grip the cane, and his feet have distinctly human shape. The man is not an odd caricature as much as he is a fanciful gentleman. Additionally, the words advertising the Turner Hybrid Tomato rationalize his image; he is, like the Turner Hybrid Tomato, a hybrid—part man, part tomato.

The other Rice's card, titled "A Cotton Ball," simply advertises Rice's Seeds as opposed to a specific fruit or vegetable (Figure 93). The figure on this card is an African-American woman who holds up her skirt while doing a jig. She peers out at the viewer and grins. An enormous cotton boll emerges from her head. While the rest of her body is human, her head looks heavy from the gigantic boll. This is not a dainty, distinguished figure but rather a familiar caricature of a black woman on display for the purpose of entertaining the viewer. Although we cannot be certain that the cotton was not intended to be a hat, the visual implication is that the cotton grows inside and overflows from the top of her head. We saw this same pictorial representation in the dancing man with cotton filling his head and eye sockets, both of which are presumably empty owing to the fact that the cotton that fills them is readily visible (Figure 91).

### **Fertile Fields, Fertile Bodies: Hybrid Figures in American Advertising**

In the late-nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century, biomorphic "sprouted," overwhelmingly female black bodies, constituted popular imagery in American advertising. Samuel Doll, maker of "Perfection" combination coffee, seems to have understood the appeal of such illustrations; his circa 1890 advertising card features an image created by Bufford, titled "Cotton Exchange" (Figure

94). The vignette, intended to be both humorous and titillating, pictures a tall, thin black woman stuffing her corset with large handfuls of cotton. Her hair is up, her shoulders exposed in a state of mid-dishabille, and she looks out at the viewer and smiles as if amused at being caught in the act. Though her smile and her small, beady eyes make her look somewhat wild-eyed and goofy, there is a sense of this voyeuristic moment being a tease. She is, after all, modifying her appearance so as to seem more beautiful and sexually appealing, and she is also taking it upon herself to perform her own bodily hybridization. She is, in fact, both a sexual and consumable product offered up to the viewer. Her upper body is disrobed and her skirt is tattered, exhibiting mended patches, suggesting to the viewer her state of easy undress and violation. Moreover, her use as a sexual object is emphasized by her act of stuffing her corset with cotton, meant to accentuate her bosom. Here, as in other ads and postcards discussed in this chapter, the fluffy fiber of the cotton plant is made synonymous with the woman's own private body parts. The word "Exchange" suggests that the cotton and the woman's breasts are equal and each can be exchanged for the other. Both enticing and desperate, both humorous and sexual, the illustration is meant to capture the viewer's attention, yet it also reinforced familiar tropes linking the black female body and the cotton plant. Her body is pictured to be just as pliable and consumable as the cotton she stuffs in her bodice and the fact that she performs this hybridizing process suggests her willingness to be available as both a workable body and a consumable one.

Images like "Cotton Exchange" and "A Cotton Ball" introduce a key difference between depictions of black and white women in trade cards with biomorphic figures. Overwhelmingly, white women in advertising cards are depicted as *wearing* plant matter,

while black women are depicted as *being* plant matter. As discussed below, most biomorphic representations picture white women in flower dresses, flower hats, or with flower accessories. The plants accentuate the women's visual purpose: to serve as objects of beauty on display. Yet black women have bodies physically composed of plants, specifically cotton. In fact, a Williams, Clark & Co. advertising card from 1883 (Figure 95) is an interesting and complex one, for it pictures the black woman as an abundantly fertile cotton plant. While other biomorphic images on trade cards also depict white women with plant bodies (cf. Figures 96 and 97), this African-American woman's body lacks a human shape. The Peanut and Corn Ladies have bodies that resemble the product they advertise; however, the woman in the Williams, Clark & Co. advertisement has only one human characteristic: her face. The remainder of her body is completely plantlike: in place of arms and torso, and indeed in place of legs and hands and feet, there are cotton bolls, dangling from cotton plant limbs. Furthermore, true to the earlier argument that racist trade cards obsessively gave black figures heads that were topped with or filled by plant matter, this woman's head sprouts numerous bolls of cotton. Her biomorphic body is more plant than human, more harvestable crop than an agent with free will. This idea is underscored by the placement of a woven basket full of cotton at the bottom left, reinforcing plantation slavery narratives and linking the woman's body to the familiar laboring of black bodies in cotton fields.

There is also the issue of sex. In place of the woman's body on the Williams, Clark & Co. card is a profusion of cotton bolls, ripe for the picking. Many of the bolls are tiny, like babies sprouting from her body, suggesting the black woman's fertility. Her smiling face, with full lips framed by little cotton boll earrings, is attractive and enticing,

and her body offers up all she has, willingly inviting the viewer/consumer to harvest her. In contrast, artists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) made images used in advertising cards of white girls and women that, if sexualized, suggested the risks and certain downfall of promiscuity and touted the benefit of virtue. Kevin MacDonnell's recent discussion of Gilman's "Three Ages of Woman" offers a thorough and fascinating synopsis of the artist's careful choice of flower for each of her female figures, with specific flowers denoting particular virtues or traits (e.g. the Calla Lily as referencing Christianity and the Morning Glory suggesting affectation).<sup>174</sup> Most important to the present argument, however, is Gilman's use of flowers in relation to female bodies and their virtues. In Gilman's advertising card for Brooklyn Crockery Co. (n.d.), we see a white girl holding a cattail and standing in water. Her body is well covered and her breasts are not defined (Figure 98). She wears a dress featuring a large Calla Lily hood that rises up behind and around her head. The girl's body is human, as defined by her exposed arms, head, and neck. The dress is an accouterment meant to signal her Christian virtue and purity. She is by no means a sexual figure and her body is not up for offer. In a similar vein, Gilman illustrated a nun for an advertising card (Figure 99). She wears a habit and clasps a strand of rosary beads. Her head is framed by the spreading petals of a violet, symbolic in the Christian tradition of modesty and maidenhood. The flower, again, is adornment with symbolic value. Indeed, even in Gilman's depictions of less-than-pure women, as in the Yellow Poppy Girl, the female's body is her own (Figure 100). H. W. Bartlett from Massachusetts chose this particular image to illustrate his advertisement.

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<sup>174</sup> Kevin MacDonnell, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Trade Card Designs," The Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America (2001). <http://www.abaa.org/member-articles/charlotte-perkins-gilmans-trade-card-designs>. First published in *The Advertising Trade Card Quarterly* 8:3 (Fall 2001).

The girl, with a deep red dress and yellow poppy hat, wears a milk maid's outfit and carries a pail overflowing with milk. A bodice cinches her waist, making her breasts readily apparent. The splashing milk and freshly picked flowers in her hand both allude to her fertility. Unlike the black woman with the cotton plant body, however, the young white maiden looks away from the viewer and carries on about her business. She has a task, she is in control of her body, and her representation is pictured for a teachable moment rather than as an invitation to the viewer to harvest or deflower her.<sup>175</sup>

An advertising card from around the 1880s provides a useful image for this discussion. The card, promoting Rathbone, Sard & Co.'s Acorn stoves and ranges, shows a black girl and a white boy standing close together (Figure 101). The black girl looks fondly at the white boy, who returns her gaze with a sidelong glance. The girl holds a doll and smiles. The doll, in fact, is an interesting part of the composition, as it wears a blue-green dress that reveals white arms and legs. The doll's head, however, is missing, and in its place sprouts a small plant. It is a strange image picturing controlled race relations, as the white boy turns his back on the black girl whose affections he appears to have acquired. This is a one-sided love connection. The doll, with her plant head, appears utterly bizarre. She hangs limp in the black girl's hand, looking almost dead. And her head is not only lacking, but has been replaced by a rogue plant (perhaps the Acorn brand suggests her head has been replaced by an acorn that has sprouted?). Even the black child's plaything must be natural, biological, earth-based. No love, no friendship, no quality plaything; just a dead doll with a sprouted head.

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<sup>175</sup> MacDonnell, "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Trade Card Designs."

## Changing Times, Changing Work

Just as great changes and shifts occurred in American labor and food production during the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, so did American advertising transition in its imagery and its messages. I identify advertisements in the latter half of the nineteenth century as picturing white anxieties about the lost slave labor that planted, sowed, harvested, and cooked food; advertisements in the first third of the twentieth century followed changes in both production and consumption by picturing concerns about who—or often *what*—was preparing that food. By the early decades of the twentieth century, “The path food took from farm to kitchen had changed almost beyond recognition” thanks to advances in food refrigeration, technology, and transportation.<sup>176</sup> Swiftly vanishing knowledge about both whose hands were making Americans’ food goods, and where those comestibles were being prepared and packaged, resulted in a profusion of nostalgic images depicting black farmhands and cooks, whose faces and bodies were familiar and comforting as staples of the farm and table. As machines, factories, and railroads became the new cast of food production characters, black figures became the nostalgic, mourned-for subjects of modern American progress.

Ruth Schwartz Cowan spells out the extent of the modern American shift in production, which must have been in many ways startling to families so used to producing their own foods, clothing, and remedies:

Butchering, milling, textile making, and leatherwork had departed from many homes by 1860. Sewing of men’s clothing was gone,

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<sup>176</sup> Katherine Leonard Turner, *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 36.

roughly speaking, by 1880, of women's and children's outerwear by 1900, and finally of almost all items of clothing for all members of the family by 1920. Preservation of some foodstuffs—most notably peas, corn, tomatoes, and peaches—had been industrialized by 1900; the preparation of dairy products such as butter and cheese had become a lost art, even in rural districts, by about the same date. Factory-made biscuits and quick cereals were appearing on many American kitchen tables by 1910, and factory-made bread had become commonplace by 1930. The preparation of drugs and medications had been turned over to factories or to professional pharmacists by 1900, and a good many other aspects of long-term medical care had been institutionalized in hospitals and sanitariums thirty years later.<sup>177</sup>

This tremendous shift in the manner in which products of everyday life were made demanded that advertisers create ads that would assure the viewer/consumer of the quality, reliability, and trustworthiness of the product being sold. In particular, as the production of commodities changed, their benefit to the consumer became valuable terrain for selling ideologies about race, labor, and health. It is this period of flux and anxiety with which the boom in trade cards and advertising imagery coincided, making them all the more legible and powerful as carriers of national concerns.

As Robert Zieger discusses in his book, *For Jobs and Freedom* (2007), in the years following emancipation and into the early decades of the 1900s, white Americans viewed even the most “modest success” of blacks as threats to their perceived racial superiority and their economic well-being.<sup>178</sup> In terms of labor, in particular, “Evidence of black prosperity threatened to disrupt the supply of cheap, tractable labor both on the

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<sup>177</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 78.

<sup>178</sup> Robert H. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 18.

farms and in the households of white elites.”<sup>179</sup> Yet it also disgruntled lower-class white Americans, whose own poverty and economic downfall was highlighted by African Americans’ economic successes.<sup>180</sup> Blacks also came under scrutiny for creating competition for industrial jobs; when they took hard jobs that were physically demanding or generally unpleasant—the “heavy, hot, and dirty work” that white men often turned down<sup>181</sup>—it was reassuring to whites; when they sought mainstream labor or took employment intended to cut wages or undermine unions, however, whites were greatly displeased.<sup>182</sup> Imagery of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pictured African Americans as perpetual domestic and agricultural labors, reassigning them to the very jobs from which they had been emancipated just decades before. While the imagery in advertisements often metaphorically re-enslaved black figures, I argue that, on the whole, it was not merely about compulsively wanting or picturing blacks to be slaves again but also about wanting blacks to be hindered from having equal access to the American dream, which, in large part comprised good health, a livable income, and a clean home. Only a small percentage of people would have been or come from slaveholding families, making literal re-enslavement a fantasy they could only fabricate from the stories of those who knew it firsthand; however, access to a healthy and nourished daily life was something everyone could have, if they had the resources. In his book, *Sold American* (2006), Charles McGovern argues that advertising put forth a “material nationalism,” by which Americans performed their cultural identity by

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<sup>179</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 18.

<sup>180</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 18.

<sup>181</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 77.

<sup>182</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 76-77.

purchasing and consuming products that were understood “as embodying ideal and intangible qualities that made them truly ‘American.’”<sup>183</sup> Participation in consumer culture was an increasingly powerful route for asserting and performing one’s belonging in American life, with commercial goods wedding “self, society, and nation.”<sup>184</sup> Advertising sold this very notion, namely that the resources for a healthy and happy lifestyle were only a purchase away, often at the expense of the health and happiness of black bodies. The fact that black figures in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertising were overwhelmingly excluded from the role of consumer and strictly assigned the role of producer was a visual and psychological means of hindering their participation in the “material nationalism” that white Americans and even immigrants were encouraged to enjoy.<sup>185</sup> Often their exclusion from participation in consumer culture echoed harsh realities of black American life in the years following emancipation.

Outlawed in 1867, the system of debt peonage, which trapped African-American laborers in cycles of perpetual indebtedness, created lasting reverberations in the form of later labor systems, particularly sharecropping and the convict lease system. Debt peonage was a literal means of tying black bodies to the land on which they worked, binding African-American workers to endless back-and-forth credits and loans. As a result, they were frequently unable to save money to leave jobs that earned them little money and freedom and were instead obligated to recommit themselves to working for

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<sup>183</sup> Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 104, 120.

<sup>184</sup> McGovern, *Sold American*, 121.

<sup>185</sup> McGovern observes that consumption was a means of molding immigrants and workers “into a modern, assimilated, and unthreatening American,” and I argue that black figures in American advertising of the time were overwhelmingly exempt from this same kind of transformation (*Sold American*, 124).

powerful white merchants.<sup>186</sup> Cotton, a cash crop, was a practical means of securing a loan that was, as a result, a crop grown by African Americans in an attempt to earn credit and get ahead. The result, however, was often further indebtedness, such that the laborers became “locked in to cotton production.”<sup>187</sup> Black workers became, in essence, ensnared within cotton culture, making the images in contemporary advertisements seem particularly daunting and demoralizing.

From the 1880s to the mid-1900s, the reaches of Jim Crow affected free labor, supporting systems of hard work and little freedom that, although better than slavery in important ways, were also limiting in affording black workers the financial and social means of establishing improved lives and jobs for themselves.<sup>188</sup> Many black Americans worked as sharecroppers, renting farm plots from white landowners, taking responsibility for independently cultivating crops and claiming a share of the resulting harvest.<sup>189</sup> This system allowed African-American laborers to earn and save money in hopes that they could eventually purchase their own land; and they often did. Yet sharecropping was hardly a perfect system: as a “family-based labor system,” sharecropping allowed the black male head of the working family to organize the labor of his wife and children.<sup>190</sup> This often meant that the white landowner benefited from the agricultural work of women and children who, though they worked long, hard hours, were “unpaid

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<sup>186</sup> Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 163.

<sup>187</sup> Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom*, 162.

<sup>188</sup> For detailed accounts of the history of African-American labor post-emancipation, see in particular Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom*; and Steven A. Reich, *A Working People: A History of African American Workers since Emancipation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013).

<sup>189</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 34.

<sup>190</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 35.

dependents of the male head of household.”<sup>191</sup> Moreover, Steven Reich observes in his book, *A Working People*, that even when black workers saved enough to buy their own land, “black landownership only expanded in tandem with white goodwill,” as their transition from renting to owning was usually established “through personal connections with white people of influence—former landlords and masters, or merchants and moneylenders with whom they had conducted business as renters—who helped them to negotiate many formal and informal barriers to black landownership.”<sup>192</sup> As a result, Reich argues, white “sponsors” of black land buyers kept tight control over which African Americans could become landowners and which lands they could acquire.<sup>193</sup>

White Americans expected blacks to labor on the land and found means of enforcing that expectation. At the local level, African Americans who could not show proof of employment could be arrested under the statutes of vagrancy laws. They could also be held “criminally liable” for breaking labor contracts.<sup>194</sup> There were even laws that barred “farm tenants from selling agricultural products after dark,” making it difficult for laborers who had worked during the day to sell goods to make money for their family in the evening, thereby solidifying white “planters’ control over black households.”<sup>195</sup> Such laws and strictures oppressed black workers not only literally but also psychologically: Reich claims that African Americans, particularly those whose economic advancement “rested on white goodwill...took great care not to appear too successful or to transgress

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<sup>191</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 35.

<sup>192</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 36-37.

<sup>193</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 37.

<sup>194</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 38.

<sup>195</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 38.

racial boundaries.”<sup>196</sup> The laboring black body, in other words, was manipulated fiscally, physically, and mentally in hopes that their participation in free labor society would be stalled and controlled by white Americans. In a pattern that continued for decades, black Americans were mired in a difficult situation wherein they were needed and wanted as laborers but often only in accordance with whites’ expectations and desires in terms of hours, pay, and opportunities for advancement. According to historian Joel Williamson, the African American was “assaulted for working during the depression when white men needed his job, and he was assaulted for not working during prosperity when white men needed his labor.”<sup>197</sup> In American visual culture, this irony manifested itself in nostalgic and stereotypical images of black figures that were always available and willing to work and were uncomplaining in their efforts.

### **Who’s in the Kitchen?: Cooking, Feeding, and Matters of Authority**

The threat of the kitchen, its products, and the people who worked in its quarters often became synonymized with products themselves, particularly in advertising. Before 1920, the task of going out and shopping for foodstuffs lay with the white American husband or, in urban middle-class homes, a servant; the average housewife spent little time outside the home selecting such goods.<sup>198</sup> This fact helps to explain why, in the late nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century, black figures are shown as

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<sup>196</sup> Reich, *A Working People*, 39.

<sup>197</sup> Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 442.

<sup>198</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 81-82.

producers for the white household (as they often still were) and why, particularly in the 1920s and ‘30s, advertisements depict black female figures especially as nostalgic sustenance providers (because they were decreasingly filling that role). As the white housewife took on increasing responsibility for providing her family with food—not simply purchasing but also cooking and presenting it to her kin—images of African-American bodies performing kitchen labors became increasingly appealing; they reminded white housewives of what had been the nostalgic “way things used to be” and relieved them of the pressure to measure up to black cooks who had historically mastered the kitchen domain.

The Cream of Wheat Company ran an advertisement in 1904 that underscored the peace of mind that came with knowing who prepared one’s meals (Figure 102). In this ad, Rastus’s torso emerges from the center of sheaves of wheat. The text accompanying the image identifies it as a positive one, stating (with flawed grammar) that “There a Few Dealers / Who Don’t Know / The Chef // It Pays to Know // Cream of Wheat.” The text alludes to an increasing sense of danger expressed in advertising at this time; perceived dangers, not only about health—especially during children’s developing years—but also about the risks involved in buying goods from disreputable or shifty sellers were pervasive during this period. The text also inextricably links the black man with the white product, metonymically identifying the “Chef” as “Cream of Wheat” (a product, rather than a person). “It Pays to Know” the chef, the company suggests, because the product is economical and—perhaps more importantly—because there is less risk in having food provided by someone you know intimately enough to trust them with your family’s

health and nutrition.<sup>199</sup> The positioning of Rastus among the wheat underscores the nostalgic implications of slavery and visually mires his legs within the very product he harvests (and presumably planted, sowed, and cooks for the white consumer). As a familiar and beloved figure in American advertising, Rastus was frequently pictured as a stereotypical, nostalgic version of the “happy slave”—complete with constant smile, eagerness to serve, and often a thick dialect—making his analogy with the product itself reassuring and appealing. Eating Cream of Wheat, according to the advertisements, was comparable to eating food made by the reliable cook of the Old South.

Even as recipe books became more widely accessible and ladies’ home magazines more popular in offering household advice, white women seem to have been responsive to advertisers’ appeals to nostalgia through the visual employment of a magical mammy figure whose knowledge and prowess in the kitchen rivaled the newest cooking wares and the most popular recipes alike. The Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour Company relied heavily upon its creation of the heroic and mystical mammy to sell its product to white consumers. One ad, printed in magazines in the early twentieth century, pictures the Aunt Jemima character mixing flour and milk to whip up a fresh batch of pancakes for the

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<sup>199</sup> This theme of trustworthiness was wedded to notions of goodness, which appears throughout the bulk of Cream of Wheat advertisements. A 1905 ad, for instance, stresses the “rightness” of the product, claiming the following: “It will be Right There / and it will be Right when it is there // Cream of Wheat is the right part of the wheat for nerve and muscle, is right in the way it is prepared at the mill, and is right in serving. It is popular, and has the right of way among all cereals.” (“It will be Right There,” Cream of Wheat advertisement, 1905).

I read the frequent practice of picturing Rastus from the waist up as a means of emasculating him, which was common in many representations of black men during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This desexualization is reinforced textually in some cases; for example, a 1904 ad shows Rastus, doubled, standing on either side of the image and holding sheaves of wheat, with a white girl sitting in the middle of the sheaves. The text states that Cream of Wheat is the ideal product because it is “wholesome...and does not heat the blood,” the latter part having certain sexual undertones and assuring the customer that both they—and the little girl in the image—are safe. (“All the Strength of the Wheat,” Cream of Wheat advertisement).

white family she happily serves (Figure 103). Her hair is drawn up in a bandana, leaving only the dark skin of her face exposed. Her arms and hands are well articulated, with light hues of brown and cream giving them a clean, soft appearance. In fact, while her face is stereotypical of representations of African Americans, with prominent nose and red lips pulled back to reveal white teeth, her arms and hands are whitened, perhaps to convey her cleanliness. The language of the ad, moreover, underscores the black woman's special qualities as the family's cook and emphasizes her knowledge of making food that, as the text boasts, "cannot be bought in stores today." Not only do her recipes call for "special ingredients" known only to her, but also "Her way of measuring and mixing is known only to the millers of Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour." The "special" (and as we will see in other ads, "magical") quality of the black woman's recipes create an exclusivity that both requires the woman to continue in her role of cooking for white families and suggests an innateness to her knowledge and skill. Purchasing a box of the company's flour, the ad suggests, will endow the white housewife with the secret formula for creating a healthy and delicious meal for her family.

Yet it is not simply the black woman's body that conveys meaning in the ad; the imagined setting in which she works makes the brand's product particularly appealing. Conveniently, the background of the black cook's environment is invisible; in fact, all we see are the tools of her employ. Omitting the space in which she works allows the viewer to imagine what is most pleasing to her—either her own kitchen or, as the advertisement's text suggests, the plantation of the black subject's previous enslavement:

Pancakes with the old-time plantation flavor! The very word, "plantation", is magic when we think of good things to eat. And, as we know, it was in the old South before the war, where flavor in

food meant even more than it does today, that Aunt Jemima's pancakes first became famous....Only her master's family and his guests could enjoy her golden-brown, tender pancakes in those days. No other cooks could guess her recipe—or equal her flavor, try as they would. The recipe was a secret—just as it is today.<sup>200</sup>

By this description, Aunt Jemima pancakes' link to the old plantation of the pre-war South imbues them with a flavor that is exclusive to her history of enslavement. Yet that troubled past is reformulated in terms of a "magic" plantation "where flavor in food meant even more than it does today." In fact, the ad tells us that the plantation setting required that food be made whose recipes could be kept "secret" and provided "Only [for the] master's family and his guests." Not only has the plantation itself taken on an exclusive and marvelous persona, but the cook herself has become a magical figure with skill that derives explicitly from her enslaved past.

As late as 1933, Aunt Jemima's plantation roots were still on display for customers (Figure 104). In another advertisement run in magazines, the title reads "Now..In *Your Pancakes* / Aunt Jemima's own / Plantation Flavor," and the vignette paired with the text pictures a pristine "plantation" setting "Within full view of Mississippi steamboats." The illustration is sterilized and devoid of the dirty, rough, unseemly elements of plantation life. Only the rudiments of imagined slave life—the fantasy version—are present: a meticulous, like-new slave cabin (with working fireplace, sizable windows, and sunflowers in the yard), two chickens, two well-dressed men chatting, and a steamboat on the river in background. To complete the image, the artist has included a framing element: an oversized, delicately arching branch of a cotton plant,

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<sup>200</sup> Advertisement, unknown publication, n.d. "Her special ingredients cannot be bought in stores today."

with two large bolls burst open to reveal soft white pillows of cotton fiber. Aunt Jemima looks out and smiles knowingly, holding up her right hand and pointing toward the cotton. Underscoring the pristine plantation scene, the language of the ad reinforces notions of Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour's quality and authenticity, employing words that connote cleanliness and perfection, describing the pancakes as "delicately light," "dainty," and having a "special lightness" that comes from "old-time goodness." Even the Aunt Jemima character herself is cleansed and ready for food preparation; a bandana covers her head, making not one strand of hair visible, her clothing is clean and well-fitting, and her sleeves are rolled up, baring her arms as if she is ready to go to work in the kitchen at a moment's notice. What would likely have been a hot, cramped, sweaty, odorous environment has been transformed for white audiences into a spacious, clean, breathable and nostalgic space well suited for nourishing modern American families.

Imagining black employees, particularly cooks, in the early twentieth century required (re)visions that contrasted common urban realities such as cramped quarters, poor ventilation, the lack of or unclean running water, and disease. Katherine Turner writes that "'Environmentalist' theories suggested that people could be changed by their surroundings: bad food made bad people, but good cooking could make better citizens....Food and cooking were steeped in tradition and superstition, but now rational inquiry could determine the 'best way' to select, cook, and serve food."<sup>201</sup> Picturing the black body as having derived from—and in turn inherently carrying with him/her—a clean, healthy, plantation environment depended upon an ignorance of what plantation kitchens really looked like and what took place inside them, as well as a denial of what

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<sup>201</sup> Turner, *How the Other Half Ate*, 19.

real-life conditions were for many urban working-class African Americans throughout the first few decades of the 1900s. Before emancipation, the kitchen in white households was a shared space that the “mistress of the house, when she visited there, did not in fact rule.”<sup>202</sup> It was, instead, “an arena of enormously complex interaction, in which there were two conflicting authority structures: the social institution of slavery and patriarchy and the sovereignty of individual skill, effort and competence.”<sup>203</sup>

Nostalgia and pure food goods are repeatedly linked in American advertising, which indicates that the household was considered a comforting and trusted site of home economics, food production, and consumption. Interestingly, this link depended on the conflation of food and body, and of producer and product. Even as late as the 1930s, Pillsbury’s used this connection to market its own brand of pancake flour (Figure 105). The image depicts a white passenger riding in a train car. He sits at a nicely appointed dining table and smiles as he gestures to a black server. The text beneath the image suggests a cordial familiarity, but not one between gentlemen as we might initially expect; rather, it tells us that “On a long and lonely trip, Ernest McGroucher meets an old friend from home—Pillsbury’s pancakes.” The image works with the text to create a metanarrative that conveys meaning on multiple levels. First, it identifies the white figure as a customer with high standards; second, it associates Pillsbury’s pancakes with a happy home; and third, it conflates the black man’s body with the food product.

The white man is pictured as a finicky—menacing, even—customer by his pointed nose, lowered eyebrows, and toothy grin. He is well groomed and well dressed,

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<sup>202</sup> Varnell Badgett, “Someone’s in the Kitchen with Dinah,” *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (October 2003), 37.

<sup>203</sup> Badgett, “Someone’s in the Kitchen,” 37.

both indicators in advertising of the ideal or respectable consumer. More importantly, however, his name, Ernest McGroucher, implies his forthright grouchy and fastidious demeanor. This is a man who, according to the ad, would only be pleased by the best—in this case, Pillsbury's—pancakes during his travels, just as at home. This is where the idea of "home" is substantiated as a site of quality and good taste, where the housewife makes the house a "home" whose food nourishes and pleases discriminating husbands like McGroucher. The text at the bottom of the ad avows that Pillsbury's pancakes are "made of the same pure, high quality ingredients you use in your own kitchen." While the housewife cannot sustain her husband during his travels, according to Pillsbury's she may rest assured that he can be equally fortified by their food goods, which are a welcomed "friend from home." This brings us to the black figure, who smiles at McGroucher as he lifts the silver service to reveal a perfectly browned stack of Pillsbury's pancakes. During McGroucher's "long and lonely trip," he meets "an old friend from home," the friend being "Pillsbury's pancakes" and *not* the black man to whom he points and smiles. In fact, McGroucher points to the black man, whom we might read as the "old friend," only to be corrected by both the caption and the black figure himself, who redirects the consumer's attention to the pancakes. Rather than the image picturing a cordial rapport between a white man and a black man, it depicts a consumer-provider relationship underscored by old stereotypes linking the black body to consumable goods, particularly the ones produced by that body.

Furthermore, in this instance, as in many others, "home" becomes transportable and to some extent producible by black laborers across the country, who recreate and reproduce the comfort of its fondly-remembered food. And much like the imagined old

homestead—the antebellum plantation—the black provider is presented as happy and eager to produce the goods and services of home. Indeed, the reimagined nostalgic old homestead of the pre-war South depended upon the reification of its black and white “characters,” particularly the black mammy, reimagined as the black cook, and the white mistress, reimagined as the white housewife.

Importantly, nostalgia was closely linked with notions of quality, and ties to the Old South were continually tapped into as a means of picturing white housewives’ capacities for feeding their families. Time and again early twentieth-century advertisements pictured instructive scenes in which older black women shared their specialized culinary knowledge with white women. In 1905 Charles Knox had such an ad produced (Figure 106), which depicts an interior setting with an aged African-American woman sitting closely beside a young white girl at a worn wooden table. The setting is reminiscent of the quintessential cabin or antebellum kitchen, with rustic walls and the trappings of cookery. The white child holds close a bowl of strawberries and carefully balances a single fruit on a spoon. She watches closely as the black woman carefully arranges the strawberries in a pattern atop the freshly made gelatine. This is a tutoring scene, in which the older black woman (likely an ex-slave) demonstrates how to produce a beautiful dessert. The hearth behind them, as well as the old pots, imagined to be the very ones that, years earlier, she would have used to cook for a white family, serve as symbols of the woman’s culinary knowledge and ability. The modern housewife, whether or not she had the kind of tutelage pictured in the advertisement, can produce desserts comparable with those directly taught by cooks of the Old South—or the cooks themselves—simply by purchasing Knox’s Gelatine.

Black women, especially, were consistently pictured in advertising as authority figures, not only in terms of cooking, but also with regard to kitchen implements and furnishings. An undated advertising card for the Redwood portable range features an illustration depicting an elderly black woman advising a genteel white woman on which stove to purchase for her home (Figure 107). The text reads, “Dont [sic] Buy Your Kitchen Stove / Honey, Till You Have Seen The Redwood.” The black woman is clad in assorted vestments, all brightly colored, including a large hat and eyeglasses. She holds a large loaf of bread in front of her, as if demonstrating the superior food that can be made with a Redwood stove. The white woman exhibits all the trappings of an upper class socialite. She stands much taller than the elderly woman, and her tiny face is a stark contrast to the black woman’s face, with its bold red lips. She holds a large white feather fan, wears a bright yellow dress and white gloves, and the refined setting suggests that this encounter is taking place inside the white woman’s home. In this instance, as in many others, the black woman is a symbol of culinary authority, advising both the illustrated white woman and the imagined consumer on the best stove to purchase for her home. Though this aged black woman wears garments indicating a lifestyle distinct from the hard laboring she would have performed years prior to emancipation, her age, her offer of food, and her employment as a figure of authority reinforce and depend upon the association of her body with its history of work.

Despite the fact that many white women took up kitchen work in the twentieth century, advertisements frequently, if not usually, imagined white women as informed about but relinquished from culinary labor. Two advertisements for Aunt Jemima Pancakes demonstrate this dynamic particularly well. The first, printed in *Ladies’ Home*

*Journal* in 1917, uses both text and imagery to convey its point (Figure 108). The image shows a well-to-do young white woman dining with her husband, both of whom are well dressed and idealized. The table, decked with fine cutlery and flowers, pays tribute to their class status. The woman looks demurely at her husband and gestures toward the pancakes. The text accompanying the image defines her as “The cleverest little bride in the world.” Beneath this epigram, several paragraphs discuss the superior quality and ease of making Aunt Jemima pancakes. Yet while the young bride looks on with great anticipation to determine her husband’s satisfaction with the breakfast, the advertisement’s text suggests that he can only imagine such a quality meal coming from someone else’s hands: “This is what this young husband says over his steaming pancakes. / He asks: ‘How did you get such a wonderful cook—from the South? Surely only the old-time cooks of the South know how to make pancakes like these!’” While the assumption is that the genteel young woman prepared the pancakes, the text and the image itself, which defies any indication of her labors, draw upon nostalgic notions of an old Southern (African-American) cook having made the delicious meal. In fact, while the text delivers a jab to the assumed black cook, it also indicates that the white woman’s only valuable culinary knowledge is to purchase Aunt Jemima brand pancake flour: “But the little bride smiles—she knows that Cook is no genius. She knows that she is ‘a clever little bride’ only because she is wise enough always to order Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour!”

Interestingly, black females in the kitchen are pictured as authoritative figures with innate culinary knowledge and as beings whose usually thick dialect reveals their purportedly infantile nature. Just as white American housewives took on more

responsibility for providing meals for their families, their new and advancing culinary knowledge pushing them forward, black women were pictured as nostalgic, beloved figures whose abilities in the kitchen bound them to their past. In his book, *Slave in a Box* (1998), Maurice Manring argues that the mammy figure was a key stereotype in American life, observing that “She was more than a servant of white folks; the mammy of the Old South mythology was a collaborator in their society, a reassuring figure who, despite her breeding, comforted her white betters, offered advice...and put hot food on the table.”<sup>204</sup> Advertisements provide testimony of her importance as a “collaborator” in white society, as she is often pictured in contrast to the white housewife, her role being reinforced as the laborer and the white woman’s role being underscored as the consumer. Aunt Jemima’s race, moreover, was always front and center, emphasized by heavy dialect and stereotypical features. According to historian Grace Elizabeth Hale, Aunt Jemima and similar black advertising “characters” “signified and magnified whiteness with their uncomplicated subservience.”<sup>205</sup> Aunt Jemima’s visual presentation as plump and happy, her thick dialect, and her eagerness to serve the consumer worked together to create a nostalgic yet potent contrast to modern whiteness, which—unlike ads’ depictions of blackness as linked with production—depended largely upon consumption.

The imaginary mammy figure “soothed white guilt over slavery and uplifted white womanhood through sheer contrast and by keeping white women out of the kitchen,” and indeed, advertisements for Aunt Jemima in particular continually reinforced

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<sup>204</sup> Maurice M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 23.

<sup>205</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 161.

the notion that the kitchen and its labors were under the purview of the black woman and explicitly exempted the white woman from its responsibilities.<sup>206</sup> Manring asserts that while white women often did not have hired servants, “the ads seem to be saying to white women, you can approximate the lifestyle once created for plantation mistresses by the efforts of female slaves through purchasing the creation of the former female slave. The ads urged white housewives to have Aunt Jemima, not to be Aunt Jemima.”<sup>207</sup> What they were purchasing when they bought Aunt Jemima pancakes, in other words, was “the idea of a slave, in a box.”<sup>208</sup> The following advertisement makes this idea clear.

In 1936 the Aunt Jemima company made the nostalgic intent of their advertising more explicit (Figure 109). Again the depiction of tutoring is a crucial element, as a “real” Aunt Jemima character is shown in a series of photographs teaching a beautiful white woman how to make pancakes using Aunt Jemima pancake flour. Including the full text paired with the photographic series is useful here:

One! Two! Three!  
An’ Yo’ Got Perfect Hot Cakes!

Just watch me here while Aunt Jemima shows this sweet little lady from the big Broadway Show, “Boy Meets Girl,” how dawgone easy ‘tis.

1 You mix Aunt Jemima’s Ready Mix with the same amount of milk or water. That’s all. Don’t prepare nothin’!

2 Have the skillet just hot enough. Here’s how I tell. Pour a drop o’ water, and if it bounces around a second before goin’ up in steam,

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<sup>206</sup> Manring, *Slave in a Box*, 23.

<sup>207</sup> Manring, *Slave in a Box*, 140.

<sup>208</sup> Manring, *Slave in a Box*, 140.

griddle's just right. If it goes Z-Z-Z-Z and pops right up in steam,  
griddle's too hot.

An' *remember*, spread your grease on with a pad—don't pour it!

3 Now, just let 'em bake on each side to a golden brown. Then  
scoop 'em up tender like, and stack three or four to a plate.

This narrative textually and pictorially reinforces cooking as a black woman's labor, one that she can share with the modern white woman but which the white woman has no need to execute herself. The woman featured as the pupil is not an average housewife, even, but rather a Broadway actress. Her clothing and body language set her apart from the labors at hand; unlike the Aunt Jemima character, who wears stereotypical "mammy" clothing—including a checkered blouse, scarf, bandana, and apron—the celebrity wears an outfit inappropriate for the kitchen and more suitable for a social engagement. Additionally, while she watches her instructor and smiles, her hands are folded tightly behind her back, removing her from participation. In the third and final photo, she is shown eating the pancakes, reinforcing her role as the consumer rather than the producer. Furthermore, the text, in dialect, continually reminds the white woman that little, if anything, is required of her, stating "Don't prepare nothin'!" and using simplified language (e.g. "mix Aunt Jemima's Ready Mix with the same amount of milk or water. That's all." and "Now, just let 'em bake....") to detail the process of cooking the pancakes. The language reinforces the notion of "how dawgone easy 'tis" to make perfect pancakes in "One! Two! Three!" easy steps.

## **Doing the Dirty Work: Laundry and Household Chores at the Turn of the Century**

As Ruth Schwartz Cowan is quick to point out in her book, *More Work for Mother* (1983), the shift from the American household as a site of production to one of consumption did not translate to a shift in white housewives having less productive work to do; rather, the new technologies that made housework easier or more efficient in fact increased household productivity.<sup>209</sup> Cowan explains the complex dynamics involved in hiring domestic work:

The [housework] itself was sheer drudgery, since the whole point of employing a servant was to have someone do the work the housewife herself did not wish to do. The conditions under which the [housework] was done were abysmal when gauged by whatever standards were thought to be appropriate in any given time; whether they were working or resting, servants were expected to occupy the parts of the house into which the family itself would not deign to set foot....And ultimately, if the system of domestic service had worked in the way in which employers wanted it to work, the employment of domestic servants would have denied to those servants precisely that social arrangement that the employers themselves were trying to preserve—that is, private family life.<sup>210</sup>

Advertising imagery recommitted, if only visually, African Americans to the labor that white women, in particular, did not want or feel qualified to do. At the same time, however, it pictured black figures as contrastingly unclean members of an inferior group and as pristinely nostalgic figures who historically had taken responsibility for nourishing white bodies during their own enslavement.

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<sup>209</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 69-70.

<sup>210</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 123-124.

This complex approach to selling products for use in the home allowed white Americans to create their own personal narratives of consumption; it allowed them to either shun black labor, viewing such workers as unfit producers, or purchase their bodies—by purchasing products that featured them—for metaphorical employ, in a way reclaiming the safe and familiar past in which black servants worked with little or no control over the conditions of their labor. Despite this fact, advertising cards and print advertisements alike continued to depict household labors as tasks suitable for black bodies, so much so that when white women are depicted in such advertising vignettes, they are pictured either as needing modern conveniences for reprieve or as having completed a task to their supreme satisfaction. In contrast, black women and children are represented as working tirelessly—yet happily—with need of assistance. While such images were likely intended to offer an appealing fantasy of relief from strenuous housework, they often presented a distorted version of a new American reality in which the alternative to the white housewife’s hard work was “to have someone else do it altogether—common practice in many households in the nineteenth century and even in the first few decades of the twentieth.”<sup>211</sup>

In 1892 a trade card advertising James Pyle’s Pearline Soap circulated that pictured a pink-cheeked white girl preparing to clean the house (Figure 110). The child is cherubic, with a round face, blonde curls, a button nose, and small red lips. She wearily gazes out at the viewer while carrying massive tools for her housework: an enormous dustpan, an oversize bristle brush, and a wooden bucket with a huge box of Pearline soap inside. The caption underscores the enormity of the tasks before her, reading, “My Busy

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<sup>211</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 98.

Day.” While the girl wears a blue bandana reminiscent of images of women working in the home, her nice red dress with lace collar defies her identity as a domestic. The oversize tools only emphasize her unfitness for the hard work of keeping a clean home. In fact, while many advertisements picture white women in the home performing its daily duties, they are almost always sterilized in the sense that the ad depicts white women’s ease of labor due to the brand being marketed, often representing her as examining the finished product of her work rather than depicting her in the messy and arduous process of the task (cf. Figure 111).

The burdens of housework are rarely pictured as troublesome, backbreaking labor for black women. To the contrary, black women are frequently presented as being perfectly fit for—and even enjoying—the labors of keeping a household clean and orderly. While one could imagine that such advertisements were intended to appeal to the modern African-American female consumer, the opposite is the case, as evidenced by the overwhelming use of dialect and array of visual stereotypes reminiscent of the old mammy caricature. A late nineteenth-century (c. 1870-1900) series of advertising cards for Higgin’s soap provides an excellent example of this mode of depiction. The series comprises a set of cards, one for each day of the week. Each day features a black woman performing a different household chore. The cards include a block of text in which the black woman’s heavy dialect spells out a brief monologue inspired by her labors. Let us examine three of these cards.

The Higgins card for Wednesday depicts a young black woman on her knees in the process of washing the floor (Figure 112). Her clothes are vibrantly colored; she wears her hair in braids under a bright bandana, and she looks out at the viewer and

smiles. The text above her reads, “Go Way Trouble, / And Neber Come / Again, For I Neber / Will Sigh Any More, / For Higgins’ Soap / Gives Me Great / Joy, When I Am / Scrubbing Of / The Floor.” The next day’s card, “Thursday,” shows the same woman standing inside, scrubbing clean the paint on a door (Figure 113). Her mouth is open in a smile as she works, and the caption beside her face states, “I Use Higgins’ Soap On / Thursday, When Clean- / Ing Of The Paint, For / When De House Am Nice / And Clean, I Feel Jist / Like A Saint.” The woman appears on Friday’s card sitting on a windowsill washing the windowpanes (Figure 114). This time she looks out and smiles gleefully, glancing over at the caption, which reads, “Use Higgins’ Soap / In De Mornin, / A Washin Of De / Winder, / For Wif Good / Soap And A / Merry Heart, / Dar’s Nothin / For To Hinder.” The Higgins soap advertisements create a collectible series of trade cards that establish a weekly cycle of chores to be completed, not by the white American housewife, but rather by the happily obliging black woman. In fact, the texts accompanying her smiling visage reaffirm her pleasure and ease in completing various household tasks. The joy and facility with which black bodies were presumed to undertake even the most labor-intensive duties became a key narrative in American advertising.

In 1923 N. K. Fairbank Company officially changed its name to Gold Dust Corporation, paying homage to its best-selling product, Gold Dust washing powder. The company chose to market its brand by using images of two distinctly asexual black

children who became known as the “Gold Dust twins.”<sup>212</sup> The company’s advertisements picture the children performing household washing, usually laundry or dishwashing, and they always seem to be having a good time carrying out their tasks. The ease of their chores is consistently underscored by the advertisements’ text. Consider, for instance, Figure 115, in which the children are depicted pressing and folding linens. The company’s slogan, “Let the Gold Dust twins do your work,” is centered at the top of the ad, and beneath it one of the twins irons while the other smiles out at the viewer, presenting freshly pressed white laundry. He or she wears a flared skirt, like a tutu, inscribed with the words “Gold Dust,” and beside the two figures stands a large box of the product, complete with their bodies in the logo. The text beneath the image states “Snow white clothes are the result of using / GOLD DUST / It makes light the labors of washing. Turns wash day into play day. Better than any Soap / and more economical.” This message is significant, as it suggests the quality of the product in yielding “Snow white clothes,” the supreme standard of purity. Furthermore, it “makes light the labors of washing,” transforming “wash day,” what had long been a day-long, “arduous and dreaded chore,” into “play day.”<sup>213</sup> For the black twins, “play day” involves the work visualized in the advertisement; for the white viewer/consumer, however, “play day” entails relief from the difficult tasks imagined to be taken up by black bodies.

The company promoted the work performed by the twins as being completely unfit for white housewives, as illustrated in an advertisement from 1901 (Figure 116). Its

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<sup>212</sup> “Casualty of Social Change: Gold Dust Washing Powder,” History of Product Packaging, Hagley Museum and Library, accessed March 23, 2015, [http://www.hagley.org/online\\_exhibits/packaging/casualty.html](http://www.hagley.org/online_exhibits/packaging/casualty.html).

<sup>213</sup> Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11.

text and imagery work together to underscore the notion that housework was more appropriate for enslaved bodies than for the bodies of white women. The bottom of the ad shows a white woman bound by thick rope to a scrub brush, clenching her fists, lifting her head and crying out in discomfort. The text is loaded with language that underscores racialized notions of labor, drawing particularly upon the language of slavery:

Bound hand and foot to household drudgery, scrubbing and rubbing day in and day out, doing your cleaning in the hard old fashioned way—woman, why do you do it? Break away and use // GOLD DUST / The Best Washing Powder // This famous cleanser has proven the emancipation of thousands of other women—why not yours? Let GOLD DUST do more of the work—you do more of the play.<sup>214</sup>

Unlike the African Americans who were forced to labor “day in and day out” less than five decades prior to the publication of this ad, the white woman has the opportunity—and is indeed encouraged—to “break away” and claim “emancipation” from “household drudgery,” and instead occupy herself with “play.” In fact, in this advertisement but even more explicitly in others featuring the company’s “Gold Dust twins,” the reality that after purchasing Gold Dust Powder (the agent of “emancipation” from household work), the white woman must *use* it is entirely ignored.

Such advertisements surpassed metaphorically re-enslaving black bodies to domestic labors by making the process more literal, using language that removed the responsibility of chores from white women and reattached them to black figures. Two examples of Gold Dust advertisements illustrate these essential issues; both ran in *Home and Flowers* magazine in 1902 and depict the familiar “Gold Dust twins” performing

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<sup>214</sup> Gold Dust advertisement, 1901, N. K. Fairbank Company, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 4.

housework. The first pictures the two children, naked as always but for their diminutive “Gold Dust” skirts or aprons, cleaning a wooden chair (Figure 117). One child sits backward in the chair and uses a cloth to scrub the back while the other child, bent at the knees, smiles and holds a dish containing the Gold Dust washing powder. The text reads, “Slave if you will, but if you prefer to make housework easy, use GOLD DUST / It makes home brighter and care lighter.” The word “Slave” carries a double meaning here, signifying on the one hand to work hard and, and on the other, to work as one who was enslaved, a reality at the time still less than four decades past. Significantly, though, for the white housewife, to “slave” is a choice she can make by not purchasing Gold Dust washing powder. Indeed, the ad tells us that her labors can easily be lessened merely by purchasing a particular product; her very act of being a consumer effectively frees her from being in any way like a “slave.”

The second advertisement is even more explicit in its language. It shows one child standing on the other’s back while cleaning a sconce (Figure 118). The child bent over for support looks precariously over their shoulder while balancing a large bowl on his head for the other child’s use while cleaning. The text unabashedly recalls the history of American slavery and reifies its pain and suffering as an appeal to white housewives, asking them, “Are you a slave to housework?” The remaining text informs the consumer that “Gold Dust has done more than anything else to emancipate women from the back-breaking burdens of the household. It cleans everything about the house—pots, pans, dishes, clothes and woodwork. Saves time, money and worry.” By asking the white female consumer if she is “a slave to housework,” the ad invites her to imagine herself as relating to the experiences of former enslaved blacks, telling her that she can easily

“emancipate” herself simply by purchasing Gold Dust washing powder and visually re-enslaving the Gold Dust twins. Note that the advertisement does not imply that she must *use* the washing powder to “emancipate” herself from “the back-breaking burdens of the household,” as it is the black child’s bent-over body that sustains the weight of the task and the companionate black body that performs the tedious chore. The brand’s slogan, “Let the Gold Dust twins do your work” further emphasizes this idea.

While documentation of domestic servants, particularly in the nineteenth but also the early twentieth centuries, is scarce, we know that before industrialization one-third to one-half of American households had resident domestic servants, and while in the nineteenth century the number of households employing full-time servants likely declined, “the absolute number was still fairly high,” with numbers finally dropping in the twentieth century.<sup>215</sup> Women in the 1920s and ‘30s were sometimes discouraged from spending their money on commercial laundering, since this often led to clothes being “lost, damaged, or improperly cleaned, touched as they were by strangers.”<sup>216</sup> And while Suellen Hoy asserts that “The fact went unnoticed that, for years, African-American women had cleaned white women’s clothes, houses, and babies,”<sup>217</sup> advertisements prove the opposite. This fact was very much on the minds of advertisers, especially, throughout the late 1800s and during the first three decades of the 1900s, with black female figures serving as common subjects of labor in imagery marketing myriad household and personal care products.

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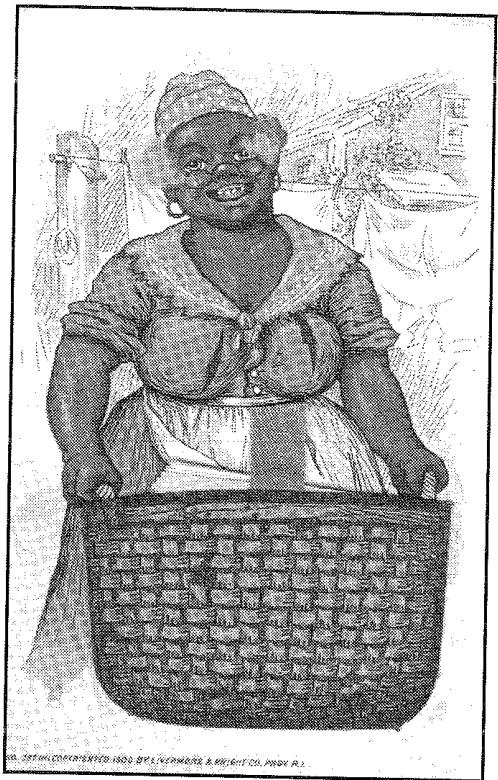
<sup>215</sup> Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 121-122.

<sup>216</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 156.

<sup>217</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 156.

## **Conclusion**

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertising pictured black labor as a familiar, appealing, and reassuring staple of American life. Saturated with both nostalgia and grotesque distortions alike, the pictorial components of American advertisements created scenes of “everyday life” that sold health, happiness, and ease of toil, often at the expense of the black body. Tensions over needing black Americans, loving them and loathing them, boiled over in advertising when companies and individual manufacturers alike chose illustrated vignettes that showed African Americans as sources of wisdom but also ignorance, allowing for fantasies in which black figures were not only sites of knowledge about how to do things the old and “right” way, but also harmless buffoons whose true skills lay in physical labor and domestic work. Though the black laborers pictured in cooking, washing, and cleaning scenes were nostalgic reminders of the forced labor less than a century in the past, advertising imagery picturing laboring black bodies created a more literal sense of re-enslavement, reanimating black subjects for the performance of white American fantasies.



*Livermore & Knight, Applique  
Basket with Adv. Pull-out of  
Schamberg Rattan Furniture*

Fig. 89

“Woman with Basket,” n.d. Postcard.

Mashburn, Joseph Lee. *Black Americana Postcard Price Guide: A Century of History Preserved on Postcards*. Enka: Colonial House, 1996.



Fig. 90

"Rastus Doll," c. 1930-1970. Doll. Cream of Wheat Company.

Minnesota Historical Society, The Richard Ferrell Flour Milling Industry History Collection, 2007.64.1064.



Fig. 91  
“Dancing Cotton Man,” n.d. Advertising card.  
Virginia Historical Society.



Fig. 92

"The Mikado or Turner Hybrid Tomato," 1897. Advertising card. Rice's Seeds. Miami University, Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Shields Trade Card Collection.

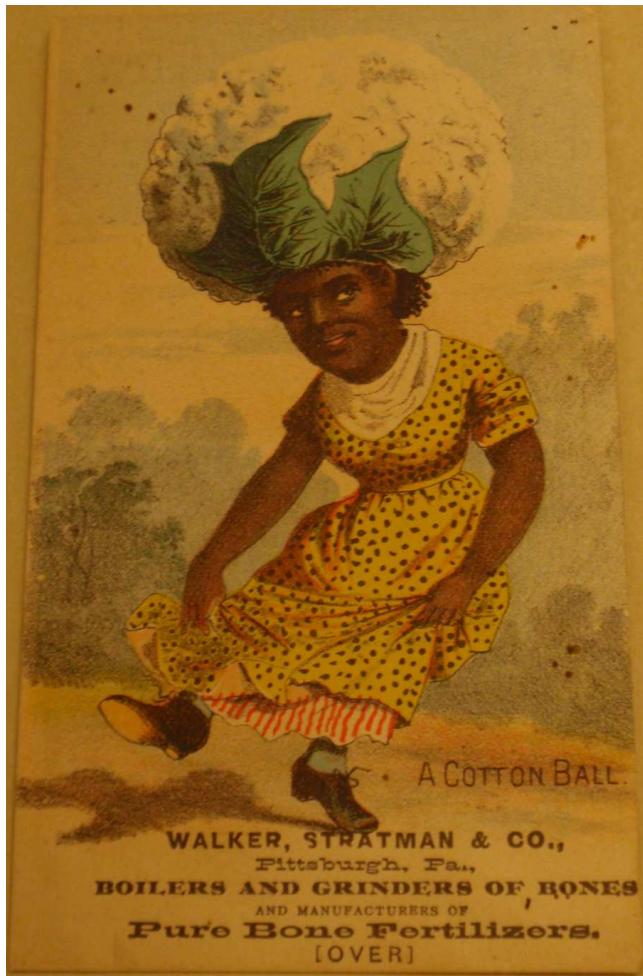


Fig. 93

"A Cotton Ball," 1889. Advertising card. Walker, Stratman & Company (Pittsburgh, PA). Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, The Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Fertilizer, Box 3, Loose Trade Cards, Folder: Walker, Stratman & Company: Boilers & Grinders of Bones: Manufacturers of Fertilizers, Pittsburgh, PA.



Fig. 94

"Cotton Exchange," c. 1890. Advertising card. Samuel Doll. Bufford (printer).  
Miami University, Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Shields Trade Card Collection.



Fig. 95

"Grown with Williams, Clark & Co.'s High Grade Bone Fertilizers," 1883. Advertising card. Williams, Clark & Company (Schaufele, NY).

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, The Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Fertilizer, Box 3, Williams, Clark & Co.

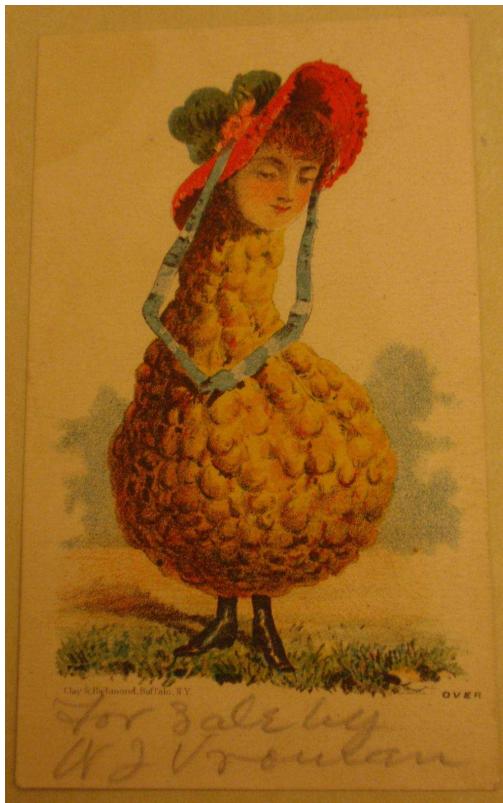


Fig. 96

"Peanut Woman," n.d. Advertising card. L. L. Crocker (NY). Clay & Richmond (printer). Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

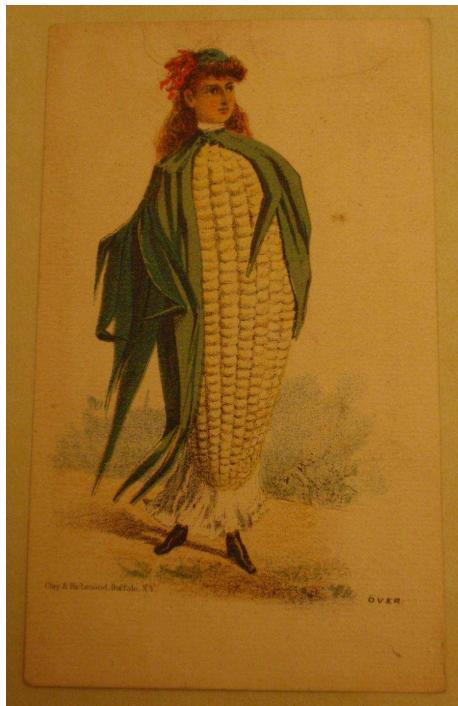


Fig. 97

“Corn Woman,” n.d. Advertising card. L. L. Crocker (NY). Clay & Richmond (printer). Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 98

"Calla Lily," n.d. Advertising card. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (artist). Brooklyn Crockery Company (NY).

Brooklyn Public Library, Fulton Street Trade Card Collection.



Fig. 99

"Nun," n.d. Advertising card. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (artist). H. W. Bartlett (Newbury Port, MA).

Newton Free Library. Trade Card Collection.



Fig. 100

“Milk Maid,” n.d. Advertising card, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (artist). H. W. Bartlett (Newbury Port, MA).

Newton Free Library. Trade Card Collection.



University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections

Fig. 101

"Acorn," c. 1880. Advertising card. Rathbone, Sard & Company (Albany, NY). Toms & Smyth (Marion, IA).

University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections.

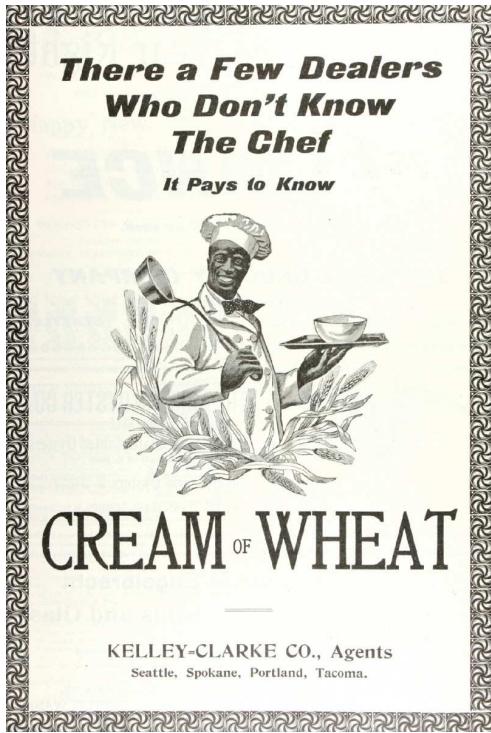


Fig. 102

"There a Few Dealers Who Don't Know the Chef," 1904. Print advertisement. Cream of Wheat Company. *Trade Register*, vol. 23 (27), p. 6.  
[http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item\\_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/advert&CISOPTR=474](http://content.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/advert&CISOPTR=474).



Fig. 103

"Her special ingredients cannot be bought in stores today," n.d. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour.  
Duke University, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, 1936-2006 and undated, Box 8.



(detail)

Fig. 104

"Now..In Your Pancakes," 1933. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour.

Duke University, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, 1936-2006 and undated, Box 8.



Fig. 105

"Pillsbury's Pancake Flour," 1930s. Print advertisement. Unknown publication.

Pillsbury's Pancake Flour.

The Authentic History Center, Michael S. Barnes, © 1999-2011. "Caricatures of African Americans: Tom."



Fig. 106

"Knox," 1905. Advertising card. Knox's Gelatine Company.  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 107

"The Redwood," n.d. Advertising card. Spicers & Peckham (Providence, RI). Mayer, Merkel & Ottmann, Lith. (printer).  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 108

'The cleverest little bride in the world,' December 1917. Print advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal*. Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 8.



Fig. 109

"Glory Be, Folks!" 1936. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Aunt Jemima Pancake Flour.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 8.



Fig. 110

"My Busy Day," 1892. Advertising card. Pearline.  
Boston Public Library, Print Department.



Fig. 111

"Reckitt's Blue," 1925. Print advertisement. William H. Baribal (artist). Reckitt's Crown

Blue.

Private collection.

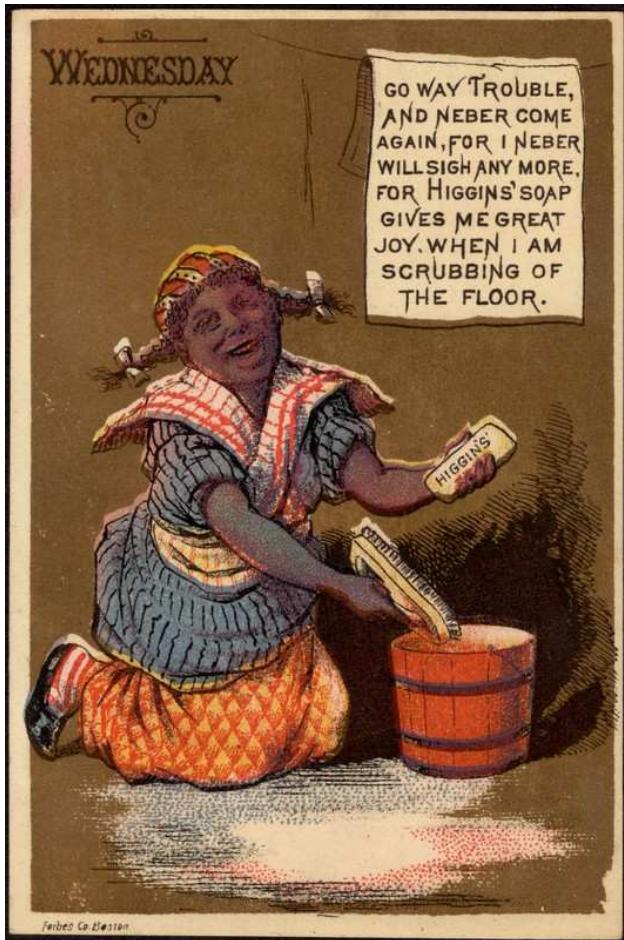


Fig. 112

"Wednesday," c. 1870-1900. Advertising card. Higgins'. Forbes Company (printer). Boston Public Library, Print Department.

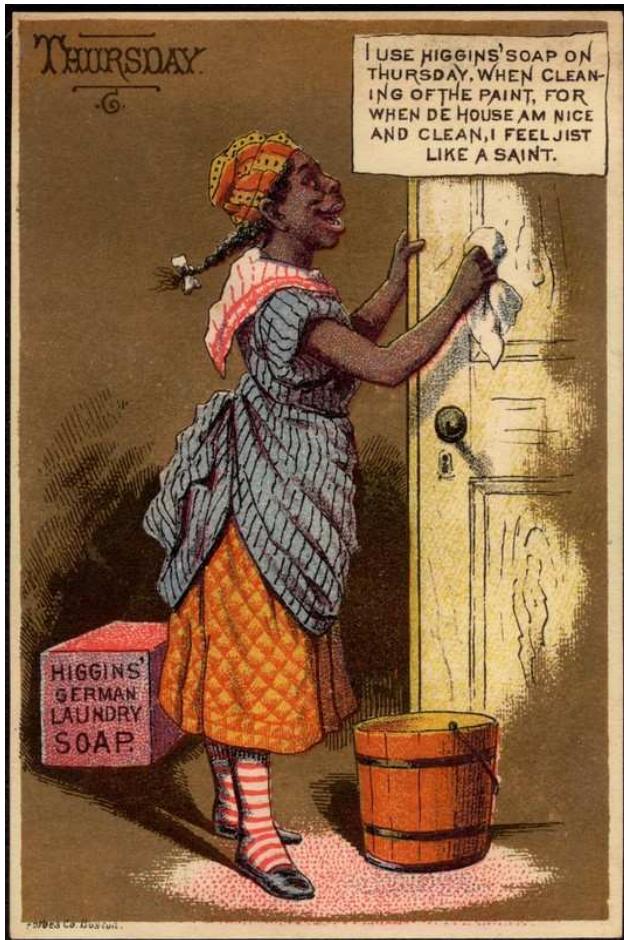


Fig. 113

"Thursday," c. 1870-1900. Advertising card. Higgins'. Forbes Company (printer). Boston Public Library, Print Department.

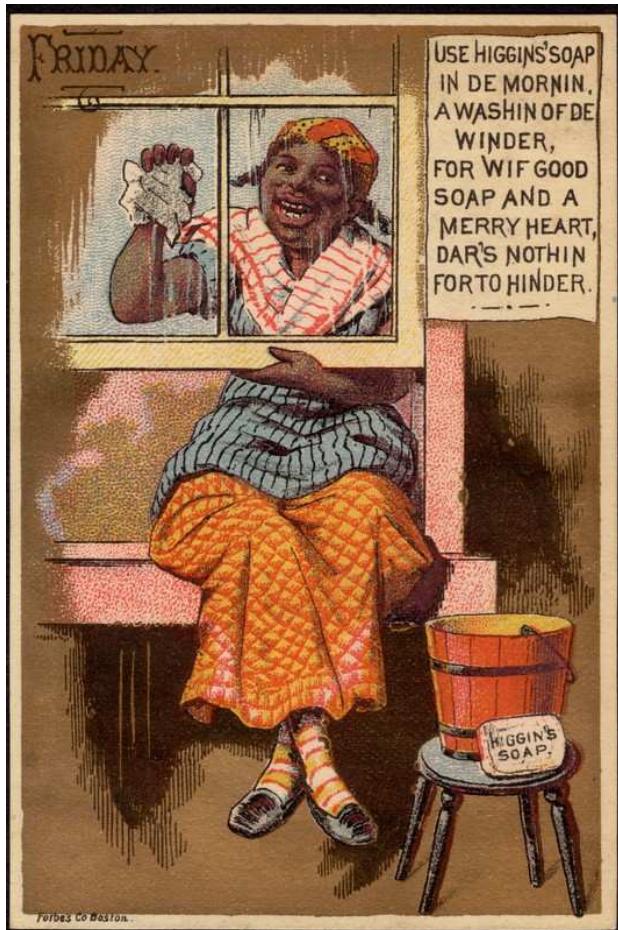


Fig. 114

"Friday," c. 1870-1900. Advertising card. Higgins'. Forbes Company (printer).  
Boston Public Library, Print Department.



Fig. 115

'Let the GOLD DUST twins do your work,' 1902. Print advertisement. *Illustrated Family Magazine*. Gold Dust. N. K. Fairbank Company.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 4.

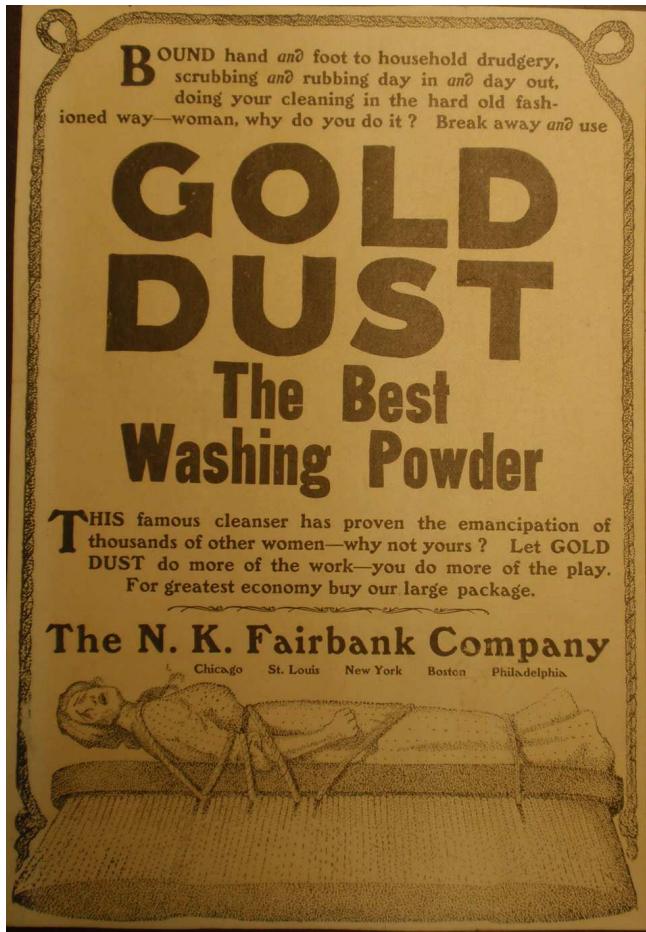


Fig. 116

"The Best Washing Powder," 1901. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Gold Dust. N. K. Fairbank Company.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 4.



Fig. 117

"Slave if you will," 1902. Print advertisement. *Home and Flowers: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Home Beautiful*, vol. 11, no. 1, page 19. Gold Dust. N. K. Fairbank Company.

Google eBook. Accessed March 24, 2015.



Fig. 118

"Are you a slave to housework?," 1902. Print advertisement. *Home and Flowers: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Home Beautiful*, vol. 11, no. 1, page 161. Gold Dust. N. K. Fairbank Company. Google eBook. Accessed March 24, 2015.

## Chapter 5

### Healthy Bodies, Clean Bodies: Scouring Black Americans

In 1903, Knox's Gelatine Company produced an advertisement that, like so many others, pictured a black figure serving a white consumer the product being marketed (Figure 119). As did some of the ads discussed in the previous chapter, it exempts the white woman from imagining herself using the product and working to prepare the meal; instead, it shows the company's "character," an androgynous black child, bringing the product—already made, presumably by him or her—to the white female consumer. The separation between producer and consumer is graphically emphasized by the gelatine's change of hands, which occurs at the center of the ad, the two figures framed (and hence separated) by white text boxes displaying the advertisement's message to the viewer/consumer. The image is visually charged with meaning, both about the product being advertised and about race and notions of quality. The fact that the transparent gelatine is at the advertisement's center is crucial in that it suggests a transparency of the transaction taking place, i.e. the black child cook's provision of a meal to the white housewife and, presumably, the white family. Furthermore, the notion of transparency is underscored by the child's body, which is presented half-clothed for the viewer's inspection. Donning only a chef's hat and an apron, his or her arms, hands, chest, and legs are exposed to the viewer/consumer, suggesting in a particularly voyeuristic way that the company's "character" producer has nothing to hide. Knox's gelatine is "clear as spring water," the ad proclaims, further testifying to the idea being sold by the advertisement's images and text—that Knox's gelatine is the epitome of a "pure" product.

Purity is and has always been a complex word with many connotations, definitions, and applications. Particularly when used in reference to race, the word is charged with meaning that has historically been used to signify those who belong to a “superior” group and those who are distinctly “other.” It is also a term that lends itself, as demonstrated in American visual culture around the turn of the century, to pictorial representation—or exploration—due to its qualification as something that can be *seen*. Scholars have produced significant work on the issue of “purity” and its various resonances throughout history, not just in America, but in other countries as well. Art historians Carolyn Dean’s and Dana Liebsohn’s article, “Hybridity and Its Discontents” (2003), examines colonial Spanish American *casta* paintings, which illustrated the racial “types” produced by miscegenation and their corresponding place within the social hierarchy based on their relative “purity of blood.” Reading these paintings was an explicitly visual experience, as race and “culture” were presented as not only biological but also physically marked and perceived visually.<sup>218</sup> The fact that racial “purity” and “hybridity” were matters of concern both within and without America’s borders is important, because it reminds us that the body as a readable text was a concept that held meaning for centuries and throughout the world.

In his article, “From Greek Proverb to Soap Advert” (1995), art historian Jean Michel Massing studies soap advertisement imagery and its fascination with picturing the erasure of the black body’s pigment, arguing that the imagery of the ads originates from the expression “‘To wash an Ethiop [Blackamoor] white’ ...meaning to labour in vain, to

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<sup>218</sup> Carolyn Dean and Dana Liebsohn, “Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2003): 9-10, accessed July 8, 2011, doi: 10.1080/1060916032000084749.

attempt the impossible.”<sup>219</sup> Massing traces this expression through history, citing the Biblical, philosophical, and popular manifestations of its origin and use. It is perhaps Erasmus whose reflection on skin color and its implications holds the most meaning for our purposes, avowing: “This [the expression “To wash the Ethiop white”] is usually said of those who will never change their nature. For that which is inborn is not easily altered.”<sup>220</sup> Massing observes that in many of the interpretations of the Ethiopian’s blackness throughout the centuries and throughout the globe, the moral was always the same: “one cannot change the defects of the body, but the soul can be purified by care and attention.”<sup>221</sup> Significantly, skin color and the human soul are distinct from one another, largely in part by their difference in changeability. Even if a black person improves or cleanses their soul, his skin color will always reveal his inferiority; in fact he is forever trapped in a state of otherness, regardless of his actions. While Massing studies numerous images of white figures bathing black bodies, the ideological notion that the blackness is a “stain” that, when scrubbed not only remains but can even darken, persists throughout as a metaphor of futility.<sup>222</sup>

American advertising and ephemera continued the tradition of picturing black figures as bodies in need of scrubbing, cleansing, and changing. And while a number of them picture African Americans’ skin being effectively lightened by the bathing process, there are key continuities in the imagery: first, that the bath is always performed by a white figure, and second, that the black figure’s head is always impervious to being

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<sup>219</sup> Jean Michel Massing, “From Greek Proverb to Soap Advert: Washing the Ethiopian,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 58 (1995): 181.

<sup>220</sup> Erasmus, as cited in Massing, “From Greek Proverb to Soap Advert,” 183.

<sup>221</sup> Massing, “From Greek Proverb to Soap Advert,” 183.

<sup>222</sup> Massing, “From Greek Proverb to Soap Advert,” 198-199.

totally whitened. During the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries concerns about Americans' health, hygiene, and racial identity reached a fever pitch, and American visual culture participated in the national dialogue about these issues with an abundance of imagery pairing black and white bodies, contrasting them in ways that made explicit the idea that race was an unchangeable marker of otherness. Yet blackness was complex: more than an indication of inferiority, it was in many ways a nostalgic signifier of the way things used to be. Likewise, the concept of "purity" had multi-faceted implications when applied to the American body, not just in terms of the body's outward appearance but also in terms of what it ate, where it lived, where it worked, and how it survived.

### **Consumerism as a Remedy for what Ails**

Between 1890 and 1930 Americans saw huge advances in healthcare. Nursing was no longer the daunting responsibility solely of American housewives, having been professionalized and supported by a boom in the establishment of hospitals for patient treatment. In addition, the 1890s saw the spread of "scientific medicine," which demanded that surgeries be performed under sterile conditions, with anesthesia and proper care of wounds to impede infection.<sup>223</sup> In this context, white American women especially were under pressure to maintain a clean, safe, and hygienic home. Companies took advantage of opportunities to appeal to Americans' anxious desires for optimal health in a world teeming with sickness, particularly since the source of ailments was

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<sup>223</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 76-77.

often unknown. Food products, as well as soaps and cleansing agents, became sites for picturing American health and comfort via product consumption.

Despite the advances in medical science and gradual increases in knowledge regarding germs and what made people ill, everything from filth to insects was seen as a possible culprit of disease. In fact, in the opening years of the twentieth century, a woman named Alice Hamilton received much acclaim for her work on flies, which she initially thought were the cause of typhoid. She observed that Chicago slums were overrun with the disease and believed that flies were the explanation, since they often infested such spaces. Her research was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and met with much praise. While she later abandoned the theory in favor of the argument that contaminated water was to blame for the rapid spread of typhoid, her work on flies found support in the public health community, which encouraged Americans to keep their homes pest-free.<sup>224</sup> Hoy reveals that one of the messages widely spread by word of mouth and in print was this fervent cry:

We must learn the simple fundamental laws of health and hygiene.  
Foremost, WE MUST BREATHE CLEAN AIR! EAT CLEAN  
FOOD! DRINK CLEAN WATER! HAVE CLEAN HOMES!  
HAVE CLEAN BODIES! LIVE CLEAN LIVES!<sup>225</sup>

Advertising cards took up this call, showing Americans with images what they could do to rid their homes of germy pests and what they could avoid with helpful products such as fly paper since, even if not the main culprit of typhoid's rage, flies were nonetheless carriers of typhoid bacteria.<sup>226</sup> Black figures, once again, took center stage in the

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<sup>224</sup> Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 105-106.

<sup>225</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 111.

<sup>226</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 106.

vignettes, complicating their characterization as at once nostalgic figures of good housekeeping and inferior subjects forever dirtied by their skin color.

The Eureka Poisoned Fly Plate Manufacturing Company distributed at least three different versions of their advertising card (Figures Fly Plate 120, 121, and 122). Each card shows a black figure attempting to rid an interior environment of flies. Only one illustration pictures the fly plate as the sole eliminator of insects, however, while the other two depict a black figure using alternative means—in one case a palm frond and in the other a broom—to shoo or collect the pests. Each card presents a thin, aging, sickly, or poorly clothed black body as responsible for keeping flies out of the home. Although, in each card, the black subject attests to the success of the Eureka fly plate—indicated in the vignettes' captions, usually thick with dialect—each illustration features a swarming profusion of flies, suggesting that the home, in every instance, is rife with the bacteria-toting insects. While the company's choice of black figures for their advertising cards may seem like a minor, albeit odd, choice, other advertising cards reveal that the pairing of black bodies with bugs was not uncommon.

In fact, the association was made in cards marketing products totally unrelated to eliminating insects. A trade card for Sanford's Ginger features a black girl cradling a black infant in a watermelon (Figure 123). A small swarm of insects hovers just to the right of her head. She smiles in her ignorance, both that the insects are buzzing around her and that a watermelon is not a suitable cradle (discussed in Chapter 2). A similar advertising card, this one promoting a brand of flour, depicts a small black boy holding an enormous watermelon slice in his lap, his hand raised as if to swat a giant wasp (Figure 124). He looks worried, and his grotesquely caricatured facial features make him

appear almost as fantastical as the oversized insect menacing him and his oversized melon slice. We might ask, are these insects following black figures to get to the fruit? Or was this pairing of black bodies with insects yet another commentary on the inherent uncleanness of African Americans? While there may be no definitive answer to these questions, it is clear that black figures were frequently illustrated in advertisements marketing products for white Americans' adherence to the mission proclaimed in the message "WE MUST BREATHE CLEAN AIR! EAT CLEAN FOOD! DRINK CLEAN WATER! HAVE CLEAN HOMES! HAVE CLEAN BODIES! LIVE CLEAN LIVES!"<sup>227</sup>

Food and drug products, in particular, took up this mission statement and argued for their suitability in advertising. And as before, black figures seem to have been critical actors in the creation of "clean," healthy living. A 1905 Cream of Wheat advertisement (discussed also in Chapter 3) depicts the familiar Chef Rastus in his chef's uniform and a top hat, carrying in his left hand a steaming dish of the hot cereal and in his right hand a doctor's kit made from a box of Cream of Wheat (Figure 125). The text reads, "The best DOCTOR // Cream of Wheat." The accompanying text is presented on an Rx note from "Cream of Wheat M.D.," prescribing the viewer/consumer to "Take Cream of Wheat three times daily all your life." A similar ad also employs a black man in the role of healer, this time in an advertising card for Ayer's Cathartic Pills (Figure 126). In this image, the black man is a figure of comfort. The scene shows an older black man, with white beard, hat, and suit, sitting in a chair and tending to a black infant. The small child sits in his lap and frowns as the man holds a tin of Ayer's Cathartic Pills, proffering a

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<sup>227</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 111.

single pill in his right hand for medicating the baby. Meanwhile, a black boy sits on his knees beside them, looking on with a smile. Ayer's pills were intended to cure a variety of ailments caused by "the derangement of one or more of the digestive and assimilative organs," including constipation, indigestion, dyspepsia, biliaryness, heartburn, loss of appetite, foul stomach, headache, numbness, diarrhea, dysentery, rheumatism, gout, neuralgia, dropsy, kidney problems, and the common cold. The back of the trade card lists all the conditions remedied by the pills, and assures the customer that "Ayer's Pills are made of **vegetable ingredients only**, and may be administered even to children with perfect safety" [boldface in original]. In both the Cream of Wheat and Ayer's advertisements, the black figure brings relief to the consumer, serving as a source of knowledge (albeit limited) and safety.

As in the Cream of Wheat ad, which markets the cereal as a healthful food capable of keeping the body in good order, foods were often purported to remedy the body's ailments. A 1901 advertising booklet for Hires Rootbeer proclaims the beverage as "The Great Blood Purifier" (Figure 127). It blurs the line between consumer product and medicine, promoting the idea that sickness could be avoided by "cleansing" the blood, stating:

**The First Sign** / that your blood needs cleansing, that your system needs toning up, is a feeling of general weariness and lassitude. Nothing will do it better than **Hires** Rootbeer. No medicine acts more quickly upon the blood, nor does more permanent good. It soothes the nerves and increases vitality. // **Yet It Isn't A Medicine—It's A Beverage—** // the most wholesome, refreshing beverage ever made. No danger of giving the children too much; everything in it is fresh and pure. **Hires** Rootbeer gives pleasure and good health to young and old, making clear complexion and rosy cheeks. Drink **Hires** Rootbeer now and it will make you well. Drink it always and it will keep you well. // **Hires Rootbeer** Is

Made Of **Roots.** / Beware Of The “Other Kinds” [boldface and underlining in original].

The beverage is explicitly referred to as a “medicine,” which the company claims will put the body in proper condition, doing it “permanent good.” By ameliorating the body’s aches and fatigue, Hires Rootbeer could be enjoyed at liberty, since its benefits were numerous and its dangers none. As with many other ads of the time, the booklet warns the consumer against “Other Kinds” of similar products, emphasizing that Hires brand rootbeer is the natural choice due to its being made only of roots. While the booklet, titled “Jingle Jokes for Little Folks,” clearly targets children with the rhymes and tales it contains, its text addresses the conscientious mother, assuring her that giving her children Hires brand rootbeer is the safest and healthiest choice.

Suellen Hoy argues in *Chasing Dirt* that in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, germ theory was poorly understood; instead, the dominating idea was that unclean air or “miasmas” caused illness.<sup>228</sup> In the latter decades of the century, sewer gas theory—the belief that harmful vapors emanated from sewers and filth in the streets—“raged.”<sup>229</sup> A woman named Harriette M. Plunkett considered plumbers and women to be key agents in protecting Americans from deadly air by installing pipes for sewage and dirty water in American homes and by enforcing closed systems of contamination in their households. Her 1885 publication, *Women, Plumbers, and Doctors*, “showed how outside pollutants threatened their families’ lives. Sewer gas and germs alike could enter private living quarters through ‘overlooked channels of infection’ that included leaky sewer

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<sup>228</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 31.

<sup>229</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 72.

pipes, contaminated wells, broken drains, impure ice, and unclean milk.”<sup>230</sup> These threats blurred the boundaries between external and internal danger in that they exposed contaminants that were brought in from the outside, making it necessary that both the people and products that entered the home be clean. Companies acknowledged this fear by advertising the purity, transparency, and natural quality of their products, assuring the customer that bringing their goods into the domestic space was a beneficial, rather than a risky, decision. In fact, Hoy claims that “At the turn of the century most people believed that women had ‘certain intuitive convictions’ when it came to matters of ‘order and cleanliness,’”<sup>231</sup> underscoring the important role of the white American housewife in keeping her family clean and healthy.

In 1906, concerns with the healthful properties and benefits of foods and medicines came to a head with the enactment of the Pure Food and Drug Act. Together with its partner bill, the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the legislation aimed at preventing the manufacture, sale, or distribution of any “adulterated or misbranded” foods or drugs.<sup>232</sup> The act required all drugs to be sold under a name or brand acknowledged by the United States Pharmacopoeia or Natural Formulary, and made it unlawful for any drugs to be sold that did not specify on the bottle their adherence to the U.S.P.’s standards for “strength, quality, [and] purity.”<sup>233</sup> The act prohibited the use of “deleterious” ingredients for confections and explained six instances in which a food product could be ruled “adulterated,” including using substances that diminish the food’s

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<sup>230</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 72.

<sup>231</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 72.

<sup>232</sup> “Pure Food and Drug Act, 1906,” *The Statutes at Large of the United States of America, from December 1905, to March 1907, Concurrent Resolutions of the Two Houses of Congress* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907): 768-772.

<sup>233</sup> “Pure Food and Drug Act, 1906.”

quality and potency; substituting a substance for what is sold as the product itself; partially or wholly omitting an important part of the food; having “mixed, colored, powdered, coated, combined” the food in a way that damages the food or decreases its quality; adding any poisonous or harmful ingredients; and using any part of a “putrid animal or vegetable substance,” including a diseased animal or one that died by a means other than slaughter (a process regulated by the companion bill).<sup>234</sup> A critical component of the act’s legislation was the standards applied to product advertising, which made it unlawful for someone to sell a product (food or drug) with a label that was dishonest in any way about the product’s contents, its appearance, or its uses.<sup>235</sup> The act underwent various amendments, including being replaced by the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938, which required drug manufacturers to “show that a product was safe before it could be marketed.”<sup>236</sup> For the first three decades of the twentieth century, Americans saw tremendous changes in food and drug regulation. While individuals and companies alike had long labeled their products as unique and warned their customers of imitators, they now were required by law to be transparent about their products’ ingredients, composition, and uses. Unsurprisingly, foods such as gelatine and household goods like translucent soap, were considered safe and trustworthy based largely upon their transparent appearance.

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<sup>234</sup> “Pure Food and Drug Act, 1906.”

<sup>235</sup> “Pure Food and Drug Act, 1906.”

<sup>236</sup> “Promoting Safe and Effective Drugs for 100 Years,” *FDA Consumer Magazine* (The Centennial Edition, January–February 2006), accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/WhatWeDo/History/CentennialofFDA/CentennialEditionofFDAConsumer/ucm093787.htm>.

## The Sparkling Homestead: Knox's Gelatine

In the opening year of the twentieth century, Knox's Gelatine Company ran an advertisement for their product, employing both image and text to convey to consumers the quality of their gelatine. The advertisement exempts the white housewife from the actual work of making the dessert (an advertising trend we saw in the previous chapter) and uses race as a reinforcement for notions of purity. It pictures a finely dressed white woman sitting at a table, eating a dish of gelatine (Figure 128). She is a vision of poise and refinement and she looks out at the viewer, smiling. The black Knox's "character" sits or stands (we cannot tell because his/her lower body is omitted from depiction) with elbows on the table and head in hands. S/he smiles out at the viewer with satisfaction, presumably of having prepared a meal that satisfies the "dainty" white woman. His/her body, unclothed except for a chef's hat, and informal positioning, provides a stark contrast to the white woman's lavish dress and jewelry and her rigid posture. The text of the ad reads: "KNOX'S GELATINE / has revolutionized the gelatine trade of America. Housewives marvel at its lack of odor and at its transparency....It is a *pure* calves'-stock gelatine—that's the whole secret" [italics in original]. The advertisement is determined to convey, both visually and textually, the "purity" of Knox's product, emphasizing not only "its transparency" but also its distinct "lack of odor."<sup>237</sup> These qualities were part of

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<sup>237</sup> Jackson Lears observes that in the early decades of the twentieth century, Americans became preoccupied with odors, so much so that there was "a general revulsion" against the body's fluids and processes, as well as "a change of sensibility that may have been tied up with the desire to draw sharper boundaries between human culture and animal nature...." (Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 172.) The Knox's ad implicitly addresses concerns with cleanliness and quality. Lears's observation suggests that the ad's explicit claim of a "lack of odor" distinguishes its quality in much the same way that the presence or lack of a person's body

Knox's Gelatine Company's effort to create for itself the reputation of a progressive, clean, efficient, and trustworthy producer of a popular American dessert: qualities that, with each passing decade, held increasing importance in American culture.

As both a quality and a concept, "purity" often depended upon some notion of transparency and/or whiteness. In fact, historian Jackson Lears asserts in *Fables of Abundance* (1994) that "As early as the 1850s, clean hands joined white skin, white bread, and white sugar as emblems of refinement."<sup>238</sup> The degree of a person's, product's, or food's purity hinged upon its unspoiledness and its being visibly perceivable as such. Advertisements for gelatine products often pictured these characteristics by emphasizing gelatine's transparency, making powerful assertions about quality—not only the quality of food, but also of the bodies that make and eat it. An 1899 magazine advertisement for Knox's Gelatine pictures the familiar black child chef serving up a dish of gelatine (Figure 129). The figure holds the platter up in front of his or her face and looks out at us, smiling, through the gelatine. The text beneath the image underscores its principal message, that "The Transparency Is Proof Of Its Purity." The caption reinforces the idea that the product's "Clear and sparkling" appearance is testament to its "Absolute purity," owing to the fact that it "needs no clarifying" to get it to appear just right. Knox's Gelatine is perfect just as it is, and without any additional preparations or additives to sully its pristine essence: its transparency serves as an indicator both to the customer and their potential dinner guests that they have made the optimum choice in food. In fact, the advertisement also asks the customer, "Will You

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odor distinguished him from or as part of the elite classes whose performance of class and taste depended greatly upon maintaining certain standards of cleanliness.

<sup>238</sup> Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 164.

Oblige Me In This?,” by including an invitation to send off for a booklet of gelatine recipes, aptly titled “Dainty Desserts for Dainty People.” More than defining consumers of Knox’s Gelatine as “dainty,” refined people, the text also implies, in collaboration with the picture, that it is *white* people who are “dainty” consumers. The black child wearing a chef’s hat and proffering up the dish of gelatine, is decidedly *not* the consumer, but rather the producer and the server.

The industrial factory, which in the early twentieth century changed the landscape of food production, jobs, and labor, often met with considerable scrutiny and distrust. Dehumanizing the food industry, it posed both pros and cons to the ways in which Americans selected and enjoyed potable products; while symbolizing the scientification of food processing and manufacturing, it also frequently symbolized the long, arduous, and dangerous labor of men, women, and even children. Charles B. Knox, founder of Knox’s Gelatine Company in Johnstown, New York, capitalized on the factory’s stark and relatively unfamiliar environment to transform it into the consumer’s idea of the American homestead. This transformation, while integrating numerous tropes of science, hygiene, and domestic duty, also fundamentally relied upon an adherence to old concepts of racial order aimed at softening and easing white Americans’ embrace of the modern factory.

A special edition of *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book* of 1924 opens with an introduction dedicated to the history of the Knox Gelatine Company.<sup>239</sup> The author, Nelson Greene, begins by locating the Knox factory as being outside of the chaos of the

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<sup>239</sup> *The Old Mohawk Turnpike Book* was associated with the Mohawk Valley Historic Association, Inc., and covered points of interest and topics related to the area spanned by the New York to Buffalo Highway, stretching from Schenectady to Rome, New York.

city, “in a section of the country where ideals are less tarnished and the finer things in life are more sought after than they are in huge commercial centers.”<sup>240</sup> Not only does Greene describe the factory in organic terms that underscore its separation from the dirt, noise, and disease of the city, but he also situates the factory within the cultural landscape of suburban America:

This plant has grown side by side with the later growth of the city [Johnstown]. Each owes much to the other. Each takes great pride in the other, for though one is a city and the other a factory, they are united by the same fundamental platforms of cleanliness, honesty and fair play. No unsightly slums mar the fair city. No grumbling, underpaid workers mar the factory. The streets and beautiful homes of Johnstown are fresh and exude the wholesomeness of their Colonial heritage. The factory, growing in this environment bears the same indelible stamp.<sup>241</sup>

The factory (or plant, as Greene calls it) enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the city, as each profits from and builds upon the other. By nourishing both American families and Johnstown, the Knox’s Gelatine factory “grow[s] side by side” with them, maturing and contributing to communities with its anthropomorphic dedication to “cleanliness, honesty and fair play.” The factory participates and contributes to the City Beautiful movement of the 1890s and early 1900s, which clung to “ideologies of clean streets, tasteful design, and a well-ordered urban environment.”<sup>242</sup> The Knox factory (Figure 130), with a symmetrical form, clean lines, and decorative architectural elements, adheres to standards of modern suburbia, where the dirt, smoke, and disease of the industrial city are invisible and the order of the ideal American neighborhood is on full display.

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<sup>240</sup> Nelson Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book (The Charles B. Knox Gelatine Co., Inc. Edition)* (Fort Plain: Mohawk Valley Historic Association/Nelson Greene, 1924), accessed February 7, 2015, fulton.nygenweb.net.

<sup>241</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

<sup>242</sup> Gregory Alexander Donofrio, “Feeding the City,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Fall 2007): 30.

The booklet describes the inside of Knox's factory as a space of enlightenment and sanitary production intended explicitly for the benefit of the consumer. Greene boasts that one cannot find a spot in the place where light from the outdoors does not reach, with "Large windows on all four sides of the building and also in the portions connecting the rooms, arranged and shaded in a scientific way, give the best light and ventilation it is possible to obtain."<sup>243</sup> The factory functioned, at least symbolically, as a scientific laboratory where high-quality, pure foods were processed; the factory employees, in turn, took on the roles of scientists. The Knox Company hoped to claim pioneering status in this venture in asserting that it had "anticipated future laws of sanitation," in turn requiring that packing department employees "wear white coats and aprons" and use packing and filling machinery "so that at no time does the pure sparkling gelatine come in contact with hands."<sup>244</sup>

The new American homestead is rosily described as Charles and Rose Knox's own home, the seat of their business prowess and healthful ideas: it "stands among beautifully landscaped grounds, and although built in modern times, its pure Colonial architecture harmonizes pleasantly, in the mind of the visitor, with the historic surroundings, the tales and the aura of romance that will hang forever over Johnstown."<sup>245</sup> While the homestead's mistress, Rose Knox, was in many ways the brains of the Knox's Gelatine operation—creating recipes, writing the company's recipe booklet, and designing the new factory, among other things—she was both given credit and kept in place in accordance with early twentieth-century social protocols. In fact, it is

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<sup>243</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

<sup>244</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

<sup>245</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

her very womanly nature that was credited for both her skill in designing the new Knox's factory and the beauty and welcoming ambience of her home:

In designing and laying out the new building, she kept the thought in mind that she must have a large, airy, convenient kitchen on the upper floors, where the gelatine was to be handled, and the main floor was to represent the immaculate every-day home where cleanliness, order and system prevailed, and where one found comfort in his surroundings, and, with the instinct of a good housewife of experience, she proceeded to make it so....

Perhaps the best part of the [Knoxes' private] homestead is the fact that it is a real home of kindly and gracious hospitality. Mrs. Knox, although a business woman, acknowledges that woman's first duty lies in her home and what is more, she practices what she preaches.<sup>246</sup>

While the author, a friend of the Knoxes, acknowledges Rose's sharp thinking in planning out the company factory and in providing a safe and happy home for her family (and guests), he saturates his account with feminine language of comfort, warmth, and domesticity. Her success, according to Greene, stems from the "instinct of a good housewife," which grants her insight as to how to merge the industrious factory setting with that of the "immaculate every-day home where cleanliness, order and system [prevail]."<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, by defining Rose with the words "although a business woman," Greene identifies her as housewife first and business woman second, praising her for recognizing "that woman's first duty lies in her home."<sup>248</sup>

Rose's most beneficial quality was her status as a "good housewife," and intrinsic to that title were good taste and social status.<sup>249</sup> She must not have minded the role of Knox's Gelatine Company's housewife-in-residence, however, because she perpetuated

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<sup>246</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

<sup>247</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

<sup>248</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

<sup>249</sup> Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book*.

the association between food quality and consumer status by titling her company recipe book “Dainty Desserts for Dainty People.” In addition, the company’s advertisements marketed its product as a staple of proper hosting and a fundamental dessert for wholesome meals. An ad printed in *Ladies’ Home Journal* in 1914 (Figure 131) avows that “The housewife who uses Knox Sparkling Gelatine soon gains an enviable reputation for her table.” Purchasing Knox’s Gelatine was, according to the company’s advertisements, a means of accessing and claiming the enviable housewife’s knowledge. This is the message put forth in an earlier ad, printed in 1902 (Figure 132), which defines Knox’s Gelatine as “The unanimous choice of a pure-food generation.” By making this claim, the company suggests that it is keeping up with the times and that anyone who participates in the “pure-food” movement will unwaveringly choose the company’s product over others. More importantly, it signals a sense of both peer pressure and self-scrutiny in urging the consumer to “Be like the others and use *Knox’s only*, if you value health and know ‘what’s good’” [italics in original]. Should the consumer opt for a gelatine *not* made by Knox, she not only risks standing apart from the crowd, but also gambles with feeding her family a gelatine not of the “pure-food” standard, thereby revealing her naiveté regarding the “value” of health and the knowledge of “what’s good.” By purchasing Knox’s Gelatine, the modern American housewife participated in fashioning an identity for herself as an informed, fastidious, and caring housewife and mother.

There was also, however, an element of shaming involved in such ads for Knox’s Gelatine. Employing peer pressure, implications of exclusion and the demand to “know what’s good,” the company effectively admonished and shamed shoppers who might

purchase competing brands. The 1902 advertisement in particular instructs consumers to select Knox's brand gelatine "only" and "if you value health." Such language implicates women who purchase other brands as acting haphazardly or without careful attention to what's right, and marks them as distinctly *not* valuing the health of the people they feed. Shopping for food goods, in this way, became a process of establishing a sense of shared belonging, values, and taste. Here was one of the crucial selling points, of not only Knox's factory and his gelatine, but also his brand. It claimed superior hygiene for its product's place of manufacture and of those who manufactured it. Clean hands equated to clean food, and such standards of purity reinforced Knox's factory as a new American homestead, where science and cleanliness were key modus operandi and the key players—the hands working in the factory, the black brand face, and the discerning white housewife consumer—all took on new and important roles in selling both a product and a set of ideas about who works, who serves, who consumes, and whose bodies benefit from the consumption of "pure" foods.

### **Food, Health, and the American Body**

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, roughly half of the average American working class family's income went toward the purchase of food.<sup>250</sup> What working-class people were putting into their bodies became an issue of epic proportions, compelling "journalists, nutritionists, doctors and nurses, philanthropists, social workers, and government researchers" to examine and record the details of what the people were

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<sup>250</sup> Katherine Leonard Turner, *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 1.

cooking and eating.<sup>251</sup> Among their tasks of study were the following: calculating prices of food versus wages earned; recording the caloric intake of individual members of the working class family; inspecting kitchens; and weighing the children of immigrants. All of these tasks, as Katherine Turner points out in *How the Other Half Ate*, were riddled with “social bias and political intent.”<sup>252</sup> From 1870 to 1930, industrialization, railroad development, immigration, migration, and food processing rapidly changed the food culture of America, and it was also during this time that “the food of ordinary urban working-class people became part of the national culinary identity.”<sup>253</sup> Interest in and concerns (even if selfish) about working people’s health and diets reflected a larger unease about food; that is, interest in what working Americans were consuming could translate into the middle- and upper-class white American household, where working-class women in particular might enter and prepare food for white families.

The health and cleanliness of the family’s cook was paramount. Between 1860 and 1930, disease ran rampant in American urban spaces. The kitchen, with its germ-breeding heat and its demands of human contact with ingredients, was a perfect environment for the spread of bacteria and disease. In cities in Pennsylvania, for example, “children and adults got sick from contaminated water, unclean milk, and filthy conditions in homes without running water and streets without sanitation.”<sup>254</sup> Typhoid and tuberculosis haunted the working class, often afflicting family members one after the other. Purchasing food goods, such as milk, from families with diseased relatives could

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<sup>251</sup> Turner, *How the Other Half Ate*, 2.

<sup>252</sup> Turner, *How the Other Half Ate*, 2.

<sup>253</sup> Turner, *How the Other Half Ate*, 7-8.

<sup>254</sup> Turner, *How the Other Half Ate*, 14.

result in the passing of infection from producer to consumer.<sup>255</sup> Similarly, the possibility of spreading infection outside of the household was increased by the fact that working class women often “took in” housework to contribute to the family’s income; for instance, she might clean and press other families’ laundry, take in boarders, or sell food.<sup>256</sup>

While working-class people of all backgrounds and ethnicities suffered poor health and susceptibility to communicable illness, African Americans were most frequently plagued by disease. In 1925, the *Baltimore Sun* stated the following:

Baltimore’s Negro death rate is nearly twice that which obtains among the white population....In this simple statement is seen the result of conditions against which serious protest has been and will continue to be lodged by all who appreciate their significance. Poorly constructed houses of bad design, and in need of repair, streets and alleys with defective drainage, congested living conditions...are some of the factors which prevent the Negro from attaining the standards of health which the white race reaches without difficulty. In large measure they are beyond the power of the Negro to remedy. He must usually wait for the landlord to build his houses. He certainly must wait for the city to drain the streets in the districts where he lives and to open up highways through the dense settlements where he is now crowded.<sup>257</sup>

Baltimore, Maryland, was one of many urban areas in the United States that experienced exceptionally high rates of African-American mortality due to tuberculosis, a disease transmitted most commonly via inhalation of the mycobacterium bacillus, *M. tuberculosis*. The disease was merciless, affecting various parts of the body, including the digestive tract (causing nausea, pain, vomiting, and diarrhea), the joints and bones (particularly in children), the kidney and bladder, the lungs (causing coughing, fatigue,

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<sup>255</sup> Turner cites such an example in her book, *How the Other Half Ate*, 15.

<sup>256</sup> Turner, *How the Other Half Ate*, 16.

<sup>257</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, February 1925, as cited in Samuel Kelton Roberts, Jr., *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009), 19.

sweating, and shortness of breath), the spine (causing a hunched back, paralysis, or death), and could even result in infection of the skin (causing painful nodules, particularly on the face).<sup>258</sup> Tuberculosis racked both the North and South, afflicting everyone regardless of race. Yet African Americans undoubtedly suffered more severely. Even in the more rural twentieth-century South, which had a higher African-American population than the North, tuberculosis ravaged blacks, proving that the disease was not partial only to urban areas. While tuberculosis deaths among Southern whites were never as numerous as among Southern blacks, their numbers rose and fell in tandem.<sup>259</sup> Until the mid-1920s, facts and figures about tuberculosis deaths were recorded (though hit-or-miss), yet “the distribution or prevalence of infection in the United States and its epidemiological significance...were practically unknown”;<sup>260</sup> one can imagine that this relative naiveté about the disease, paired with its overwhelming toll on men, women, and children nationwide, would have resulted in widespread terror.

For many African Americans, hygiene was pitched as a route to acceptance in white American society. While living conditions, particularly in cities, were less than sanitary and riddled with poverty, blacks lived near other members of the American working class, particularly immigrants. For immigrants, however, life in city slums could be impermanent since “they could improve their lives if they worked hard. But African Americans, also burdened by extreme poverty, knew their skin color prohibited their mobility and restricted them to ghettos.”<sup>261</sup> Prominent African Americans such as Dr. Albert Wilberforce Williams and Booker T. Washington encouraged blacks to make

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<sup>258</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 20-21.

<sup>259</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 26-27.

<sup>260</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 36.

<sup>261</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 117.

better lives for themselves through individual improvement, specifically by keeping clean and orderly. Dr. Williams, a physician in Chicago, started a column in 1913 called “Keep Healthy,” which advised fastidious bathing, sanitation, house cleaning, and hygiene; similarly, Washington preached “the gospel of the toothbrush.”<sup>262</sup> This kind of encouragement for preserving health and keeping up one’s hygiene became focused on migrants as black Americans made their influx into cities like Chicago. Members of the African-American middle class “advised these poor Southerners to become industrious, thrifty, disciplined, and clean,” some of them even telling “newcomers ‘to emulate the ‘Gold Dust Twins’ and make the dirt fly.’”<sup>263</sup> Contributing to these discourses were advertisements, which frequently manipulated images of black bodies in order to classify Americans into superior and inferior categories based on health and hygiene; at the heart of those issues, however, lay skin color, a quality over whose (un)changeability Americans obsessed.

While in the early decades of the twentieth century the white housewife took on increasing responsibilities, including some of those historically performed by black laborers, the nostalgic advertisements picturing the Old Southern homestead presented her home as free from toil and sweat. One of the modern housewife’s most crucial roles was not only to feed her family but also to keep a clean home. A clean home increasingly became synonymous with a clean America, which intensified anxieties about air quality, water purity, tidy living quarters, and proper food. As cities became packed with people, Americans vehemently sought to abate the spread of disease through cleaning not only

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<sup>262</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 119.

<sup>263</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 119.

the streets but also the home, bestowing heavier responsibility upon the white housewife; indeed, she was the enforced leader of what would become in the 1920s and '30 a "culture of cleanliness."<sup>264</sup> In order for the housewife to maintain a pristine home, however, she must keep her family within its walls clean and pure as well. In other words, a sparkling homestead required sparkling bodies.

### Bathing the Next Generation: Soap, Race, and Cleanliness

A man by the name of Gene Jefferson penned a song in 1900 that became a hit sensation; its title was "Coon! Coon! Coon!" and the chorus went as follows:

Coon! Coon! Coon!  
I wish my color would fade;  
Coon! Coon! Coon!  
I'd like a different shade,  
Coon! Coon! Coon!  
Morning, night and noon,  
I wish I was a white man,  
'Stead of a Coon! Coon! Coon!<sup>265</sup>

The song's narrative tells of someone who is "clean disgusted" with his life as a black man.<sup>266</sup> The woman he loves refuses to marry him unless he can change the color of his face, which, despite his best efforts, proves unchangeable. The song's popularity gives testimony to the powerful appeal of imagining the permanence of African American's complexions. An amalgamation of fears—of blacks "passing," of whites and blacks marrying and reproducing, and of blacks and whites working side by side with equal

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<sup>264</sup> Hoy, *Chasing Dirt*, 151.

<sup>265</sup> Gene Jefferson, "Coon! Coon! Coon!" (Chicago: Sol Bloom, 1900), University of Mississippi Libraries Digital Collections, Sheldon Harris Collection, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sharris/id/1676>.

<sup>266</sup> Jefferson, "Coon! Coon! Coon!"

opportunity—resulted in a fever pitch of anxiety surrounding skin color, as “racial differences in skin color were essential to maintaining the legal, social, and civil divisions that white Americans used to separate the two races during slavery and segregation. Skin color was, in fact, the only distinction between races that white Americans could rely on to distinguish blacks from whites.”<sup>267</sup>

Fantasies of attempting to whiten black bodies became a common trope in American advertising as picturing bodies as clean or unclean, as superior and inferior, became a racially charged project, particularly in ads for soaps and cleansing agents. In addition, citizenship via consumption was crucial to American advertising. Marketing to mothers of the future generation was a task heartily taken up by numerous companies, particularly those selling cleaning products. Depicting cleanliness as a component of American belonging became a kind of staple in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertising. Company advertisers consistently drew upon contrasts between light and dark to market goods to consumers, claiming that light, transparent, or white goods were products of the highest quality and “purity.” While this contrast appears most frequently in advertisements for cleaning products, it was also utilized in ads for food products, which companies claimed to make the best of by attributing the difference in quality to questions of blackness or whiteness. A 1903 advertisement for Knox’s Gelatine does this matter-of-factly, stating that “Putting it down in / BLACK AND WHITE / is the only way we can tell you here of the merits of / Knox’s Gelatine” (Figure 133). The ad makes a play on words; it suggests that the degree of quality in Knox’s brand gelatine is

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<sup>267</sup> Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77.

so superior to competitors' that it is plain as the difference between black and white, simultaneously drawing upon racist notions of whiteness being superior to blackness. To underscore this double entendre, the text is centered under the company's familiar faces, two child chefs, one white and one black, both looking toward a calf that poses between them. Race as the ultimate contrast was a popular means of conveying difference in advertising, because as Massing recalls in his article on "Washing the Ethiopian," "Contraries being set the one against the other appear more evident."<sup>268</sup>

Many advertisements concerned with quality, however, marketed household products, particularly soap. In most advertisements for cleaning products, the notion of light versus dark aimed at selling cleansing agents as tools for abating the taxing nature of housework. Yet contexts of light and dark varied by product. Soaps, unsurprisingly, claimed to lighten and hence clean. Stove and shoe polishes, however, were said to blacken to the point of having such lacquer that one could see his reflection. Regardless, race was almost always called upon to reinforce the contrast between lightness and darkness, blackness and whiteness.

Soap advertisements often invoked whiteness as a tool of analogy, frequently comparing white female bodies with things considered beautiful and pure, such as flowers. An undated ad for Woodbury's Facial Soap exhibits this trend (Figure 134), picturing a white woman dressed in a white dress and bonnet, standing in an outdoor setting and holding two handfuls of freshly picked white apple blossoms up to her face. She holds them such that the flowers frame her face, and she looks out at the viewer and smiles. The caption to the scene reads, "Spring Beauties," referring both to the woman

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<sup>268</sup> Massing, "Washing the Ethiopian," 192.

and the flowers. The advertisement features a long body of text aimed at both describing the product and targeting its audience, the white American woman:

**Spring Beauties.** The delightful freshness of Spring awakens in all the love for nature. A clear, velvety and perfectly healthy complexion is as beautiful as the apple blossoms. Intelligent care is needed to keep the skin beautiful, and to make it so. // Woodbury's Facial Soap // the only soap made especially for the face, is a valuable tonic. It cleanses thoroughly, but does not injure the most sensitive skin. Soothing, it leaves a delightful sense of freshness and cleanliness. A toilet, bath and nursery soap.

The advertisement draws an analogy between the woman and the apple blossoms, viewing them both as beautiful products of nature that come to life and blossom in the spring. Furthermore, the woman's skin is argued to be as "clear, velvety and perfectly healthy" as the flowers, connoting a fresh, vibrant, yet uncompromised quality to the woman's body. The advertisement also, however, makes explicit who the company imagines will purchase its product, stating that "Intelligent care is needed to keep the skin beautiful, and to make it so." Here is an idea repeated in American advertising, namely that the consumer must not only have the good sense to purchase a particular brand product, but also must possess the knowledge of how to put the product to good use. The Woodbury's ad further avows that the "valuable tonic....cleanses thoroughly, but does not injure the most sensitive skin." Picturing the white woman and citing the toilet, bath and nursery as spaces for the soap's use, the advertisement collectively targets white American women who might choose Woodbury's Facial Soap for use on the delicate skin of their faces and that of their babies.

Indeed, soap was marketed as a kind of luxury product, made for the healthiest and most "American" of consumers. An advertising card for Sapolio makes this case

explicitly, picturing six little cherubs flitting around the top of the Massachusetts State House in Boston (Figure 135). They are hard at work, using brushes and bars of Sapolio soap to scrub the golden dome of the building until it gleams. The text at the top of the advertising card reads, “We Polish Up Our Dome With Sapolio!” and the text in the pediment reads “Souvenir / of the / 250th Anniversary / Of The Settlement of Boston.” The image, paired with its text, merges the Sapolio brand with a sense of nationalism, creating an advertising card intended to serve as a souvenir of the anniversary of one of America’s most historic cities. The dark clouds in the background give way to beams of light reflecting from the shining dome, suggesting that Sapolio, if fit to wash the sacred dome of the Massachusetts State House, must be good enough to wash the dirt from Boston’s—and all of America’s—homes.

In fact, selling soap became a sort of public performance, wherein clean, white bodies were put on display to perform the state of good health and hygiene and African Americans were paraded as bodies in need of cleaning. An advertising card for James S. Kirk & Co. soaps depicts a black boy marching in a line, carrying an enormous cotton branch and pulling a red textile behind him that reads “Satinet” (Figure 136). A gold circle, resembling a halo, surrounds the boy’s head; yet upon closer inspection, we find that tears and missing sections indicate that it is not a halo at all but rather a worn straw hat. Like many advertisements of the time, the image carries little meaning in relation to the product being marketed; on the other hand, it is loaded with meaning about consumerism. The black boy is deployed here as a familiar trope and carries the symbols of his historic enslavement, all of which he dons proudly, marching as if performing his minstrel duties. He is situated specifically outside the realm of consumerism, as his torn

hat, long shirt, overalls, and cotton branch relegate him to the plantation fields, his old site of enslavement. His only relation to the soap being advertised is its name on the banner he drags behind him.

Yet soap had much more to do with American citizenship than may be readily apparent. Soap advertisements allowed for opportunities to picture which bodies were and were not proper bodies; bodies that were clean and self-controlled were those worthy of consuming high-quality goods and worthy of participating freely in American society, while unclean, out-of-control bodies were distinctly “other” and in need of purification before being deemed fit for participation in American consumer culture. Bodies considered fit for participating in American consumerism were white, clean, and unmarred; unfit bodies, or those needing cleaning or whitening, were pictured as inherently less American. Black bodies are repeatedly critiqued on the basis of their color and are compulsively scrubbed and scoured in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertisements, revealing deep anxieties about black coloration—both its permanence and its inherent dirtiness. In fact, advertisements picturing the “dirty”—read “black”—African-American body were popular among various makers of soap. All of these ads share certain assumptions: African Americans are considered dirty because of the color of their skin, and even when their skin becomes lightened, their faces always evidence their “true” and irredeemable character, indicated by blackness.

Some of the advertisements are tame, as far as racially-charged soap ads go. One advertisement, marketing Vinolia Soap, features an illustration picturing a white girl and black boy standing at the seashore (Figure 137). They both wear white frocks and the white girl wears a white hat, black stockings, and white shoes. She holds out a bar of soap

and exclaims, “You Dirty Boy! / Why don’t you wash yourself with Vinolia Soap?” The boy’s skin is as inky black as the text surrounding him, and his facial features are odd, verging on the grotesque. He stands with his hands behind his back and looks back at the girl with a kind of strange, bewildered expression, suggesting either shame, ignorance, or both. The implications at work in this advertisement and others like it center on incompetence, as the black figures always seem caught off guard by the white figures’ advisement to wash their skin “clean.” Yet the image also allows the viewer/consumer to question the black figure’s choice in the matter—is he incompetent, not knowing that he should try to lighten his skin? Or is his negligence a conscious choice? On the other hand, does he lack access to the soap necessary for the task? Or does he simply lack a desire to be “clean”?

An advertising card for Fairy Soap pictures a similar scene, with a white child asking a black child, “Why Doesn’t Your Mamma Wash You With Fairy Soap?” (Figure 138). The white child, with light blonde hair and dressed in a blue gingham dress, blue socks and leather shoes, is a stark contrast to the black child, with her patchy black hair and dirty, worn garments. Yet her question implies that the most unsettling aspect of the black child’s appearance is her skin color, which she naively suggests could be appropriately lightened with Fairy Soap. The black girl looks both ashamed and offended, her feet turned inward, hands clutching her soiled dress, and her eyes looking up at the white child with a kind of distressed embarrassment. As in many other soap advertisements, the black figure is presented as an example of improper decorum—and improper *being*—and the white subject is confused by the black figure’s condition—her

dark complexion—and seeks to amend it. And just as in the Vinolia Soap advertisement, the black figure is silent, seeming both confused and embarrassed.

Pears' brand capitalized upon the concept that blackness could be changed, if only partially, and repeated it on numerous occasions, creating images fraught with racial tension. In her analysis of advertising cards for soap, Grace Elizabeth Hale states in *Making Whiteness* (1998) that most ads picturing the black body being effectively lightened by soap “praised products as almost able to perform the impossible”; yet owing to the fact that cleanliness lay not only in one’s race but also in one’s middle-class status, “Even fine soap...could only accomplish so much.”<sup>269</sup> Three Pears’ ads in particular demonstrate this sense of futility by picturing the process of washing away an African-American child’s blackness. Each of them reveals key nuances that make the images legible and simultaneously render them blatant comments on American racial hierarchies and consumption. The first is the most straightforward in terms of the play on race (Figure 139). The card is divided visually into two scenes; the top is a “before” vignette and the bottom is the “after” scene. At the top, the words “Pears Transparent Soap” frame two children, one white and one black. The white child wears a white cloth around his waist and holds a bar of soap in his left hand and a brush or sponge in his right. A mirror occupies a chair behind him while a black child sits in a wash basin and smiles, leaning forward eagerly as if awaiting his transformation. Below, the words “Improving the Complexion” describe the transformation taking place between scenes, which shows that the black child has been dramatically whitened by his bath with Pears’ soap. He stands up

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<sup>269</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 162-163.

in the bath and looks with joyous wonder at his reflection in the mirror, which the white child holds up for him to see. The black child's body is complex. It presents for the viewer an uncomfortably voyeuristic moment; the white child's body—a site of pure innocence—is covered for modesty, but the black child's body is on full display. At the same time, his body is de-sexed; though exposed, he lacks genitals. And finally, while his entire lower body is now white, his face retains its original color, demonstrating that his new skin color is but a partial cleansing.

The second advertising card is similar in its presentation of “before and after” bathing scenes, again with the bath made possible by the white boy (Figure 140). In this card, the white child hands the black boy a bar of soap while the black child gazes down at his body—or perhaps his reflection—in the water. This time, the white child does not share in bath time as in the previous ad; instead, he is fully clothed and seems present only to help administer the cleansing bath. The scene below shows the results of this process, with the white child holding up the mirror for the black child to see his lightened skin, his pelvic area now discreetly covered with a white cloth. The boy holds his arms out as if surprised to see that his entire lower body is now bleached a pristine white. Again, however, the color of his head remains unaltered. A critical change to this version of the narrative is the inclusion of a framing element, which features four circles enclosing portraits of the advertisement’s target consumers. They are labeled “For Gentlemen,” “For Ladies,” “For Children,” and “For Babies.” All of the portraits depict healthy, attractive white people; clearly missing is any notion of a black consumer. This tells us that the black body is employed solely for the visual demonstration of the

purifying, cleansing powers of Pears' brand soap. It is of such quality that it can clean anything, including the skin color of a black child, even if not entirely changing him.

The final advertising card allows a slight opportunity for double interpretations (Figure 141). Once again the card pictures a pair of before-and-after vignettes; in fact, the illustration is nearly identical to the card previously described, both in its narrative scene and its depictions of the white and black children. This image, however, is surrounded by additional text, including a (mostly illegible) signed testimonial stating: "I have found Pears' Soap matchless for the Hands and Complexion." In addition, a royal symbol adorns the card, centered above the pair of vignettes and flanked by the words "By Special Appointment To / H. R. H. The Prince of Wales," serving as further testament to the superior quality of the soap. Finally, at the bottom of the card are the words, "For the Complexion // Established 1789 / Sold Everywhere // Pure Fragrant and Durable." The key difference in this image, apart from the text, is the circular frame enclosing both vignettes. The frames overlap, such that the left image, the "before" scene, appears to be on top of the image on the right, the "after" picture. However, if we consider before-and-after scenes, we would expect the "before" scene to be underneath, implying its past tense, and the "after" illustration to be on top, taking the most prominent position on the card. Yet this is not the case, suggesting that while the pictorial narrative can be read left to right as a traditional before-and-after sequence, it might also be read right to left, the "top" picture being the result of the transformational narrative, in which case we would read the child's blackness as being applied rather than washed off.<sup>270</sup> While this reading

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<sup>270</sup> I must credit the students in my Fall 2014 course, "Exceptional Empire," for making astute observations about the picture being readable left-to-right *and* right-to-left.

may be unlikely (after all, such a reading would suggest that the soap applied the child's blackness, which would be problematic for the advertiser), it reminds us that these images, while powerful, were always inherently open to more than one reading and that such racially-charged vignettes always underscored the inability to totally purge a person of their blackness.

A different brand of cleansing agent makes this painfully clear. An advertisement for Chlorinol, a brand of bleach, pictures three children sailing in a boat made from a Chlorinol crate, marked clearly on all sides, "Chlorinol Bleaching Soda" (Figure 142). Two of the children are black and smile as they hold up boxes of the product. The third child is lighter skinned and steers the boat, whose sail reads "We Are / Going To Use / "Chlorinol" / And Be Like De / White Nigger." Again the children are unclothed, suggesting a kind of vulnerability and backwardness (white children are usually clothed and often well-dressed), and their bodies are used to testify to the whitening power of the Chlorinol product. While this image is sickening to us now, it was a pictorial concept that was utilized abundantly in advertising during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It is disturbing not only in its language and its imagery, but also in its suggestion that black bodies are inferior and the minds within them ignorant. First, the children's words indicate that they are going to use a laundry cleansing agent on their skin, an act whose absurdity echoes images we saw in Chapter 2, in which black figures use foodstuffs for preposterous utilitarian purposes. There is also a degree of danger lurking in this implied use, as the bleach surely would have been too harsh for use on the children's skin. Second, the language, in dialect, states that the children want to be like the "White Nigger," which the modern consumer would have understood as both an

oxymoron and an impossibility. This notion of infeasibility is underscored in the ad by the third child's body, which defies his transformation: his hair and facial features are identical to the other two black children, and his skin color is not white like the ad's text or the sun rising above him.

In fact, while white bodies were not exempt from needing to be cleaned, white children are most frequently pictured in scenes that depict bath time as a pleasant, even leisurely activity, and soap is imagined as a plaything rather than as an agent of bodily transformation. An advertisement for Pears' soap pictures a white girl after her bath (Figure 143). She is unclothed, but posed such that her body is only visible from the side, with her brown flowing hair and rosy cheeks most visible to the viewer. She sits on a white cloth, in front of a white wash basin, and pets a white cat. White is the most prominent accent color in the ad, reinforcing the cleansing quality of Pears' soap. The scene is calm and pleasant, devoid of the harshness of scrubbing bristle brushes, lathers, or dirt. The girl is, in fact, pure as she is, rendering unnecessary a visualization of the cleansing process, as her body is always already white and, in turn, right.

Two soap companies reinforced the idea of the white body being inherently clean by picturing white children playing with soap rather than washing with it. The first, Lavine, a brand made by Hartford Chemical Works, printed an advertising card depicting six white children at play making bubbles with a dish full of Lavine soap (Figure 144). Four of them stand around a stack of Lavine crates and use the soap to blow bubbles from straws. Meanwhile, a boy and girl chase the bubbles flying through the air in the background. While the crates are marked with the words, "Try / LAVINE / For Washing," the scene illustrates the joy children get from the soap through play. All well

dressed and rosy-cheeked, the children seem to defy the necessity of the soap's cleansing potential. Similarly, in an Acme brand soap advertisement, a finely dressed white girl holds a saucer of soap and blows through a straw, producing a delicate bubble (Figure 145). These images excuse white children from the dirtiness and discoloration ameliorated by soap, presenting them as consumers who can instead use the cleansers in play and leisure.

These advertisements were legible because they drew from the popular notion that black bodies were innately wrong, unclean, and unnatural. Blackness was a condition that needed to be removed, but could not. Removing a person's blackness would correct their inherent wrongness but also create the threatening possibility that they would no longer be identifiable as a black—and hence inferior—body. Hence, blackness was both a site of revulsion and a necessity, a quality in need of amelioration but not total removal. Popular discourses on blackness had strengthened its associations with danger, sexual promiscuity, and madness. Yet the notion that black people were inherently inferior, particularly mentally, was nothing new. As Sander Gilman points out in *Difference and Pathology* (1985), even as late as 1908, men such as William F. Drewry were presenting conference papers arguing that African Americans went insane because of their "hereditary deficiencies and unchecked constitutional diseases and defects."<sup>271</sup> Unlike whites, who by their very whiteness were considered *right*, and even unlike Native Americans—the "disease-free Noble Savage"<sup>272</sup>—African Americans were often considered susceptible to things they could not control, whether it be hunger, desire, or

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<sup>271</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 140.

<sup>272</sup> Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 140.

disease. Yet white Americans still needed them, a fact to which advertising cards and print advertisements attest, with black figures showing up time and again as bodies in need of cleansing.

## **Conclusion**

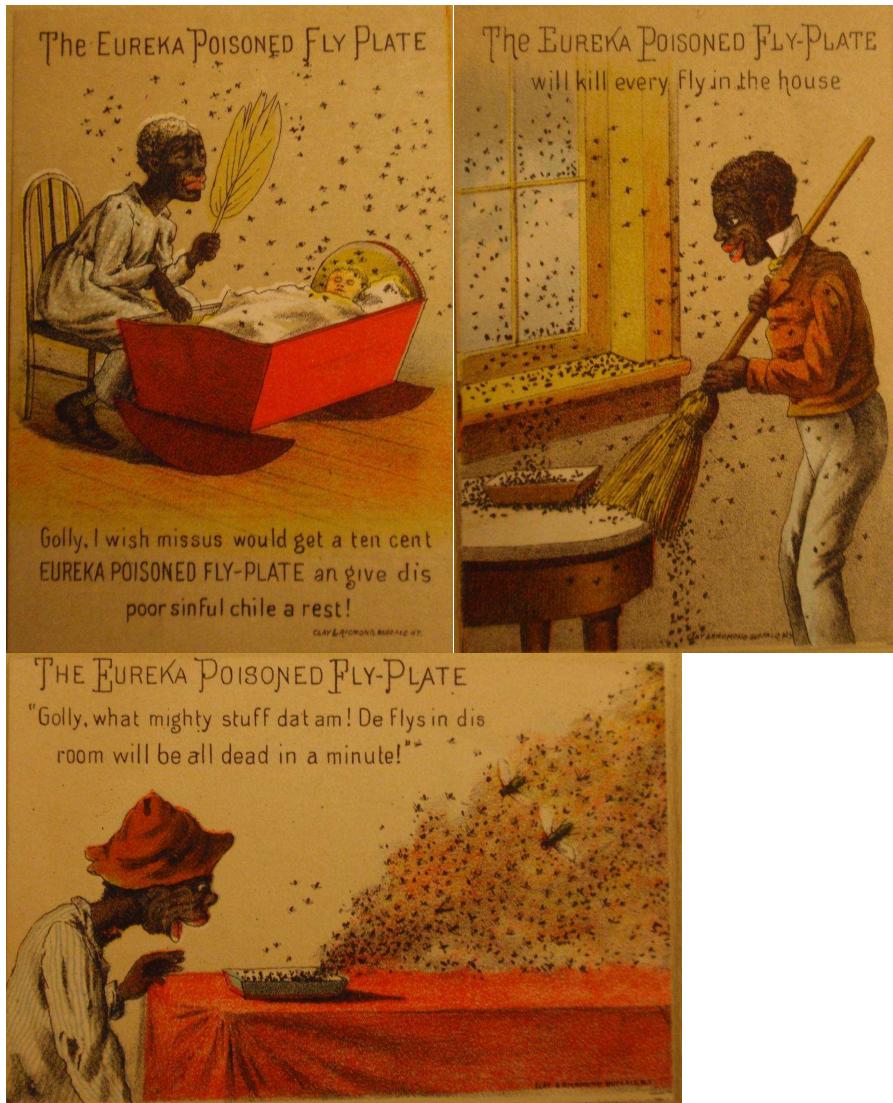
Advertisements pictured African Americans as figures whose bodies were controllable by their very appearance, often depicting them in various states of being scoured, washed, and whitened. In such imagery, national discourses about race and humanity, purity and fitness, were worked out in the realm of advertising and ephemera, which could quickly and succinctly participate in imagining white society's worst fears and most intriguing fantasies about the black body. While black figures were compulsively pictured as being a staple component of white American consumption, black bodies were also anxiously exposed and cleansed such that they were easily readable as being suitable for working for and serving white families. While African Americans' blackness would supposedly always mark them as inherently "other," American advertising portrayed them as nostalgic figures capable of being purified just enough that they were valuable assets to sustaining a comfortable white American lifestyle.



Fig. 119

"Knox's Gelatine," 1903. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Knox's Gelatine Company.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 4.



Figs. 120, 121, & 122

"Eureka Poisoned Fly-Plate," n.d. Advertising cards. Eureka. Clay & Richmond (printer). Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

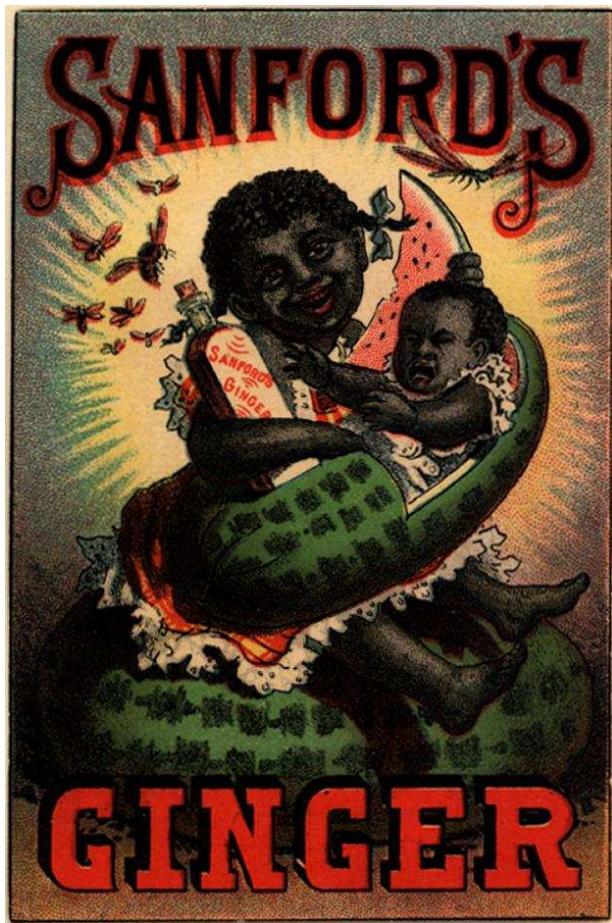


Fig. 123

"Sanford's Ginger," c. 1880. Advertising card. Potter Drug & Chemical Company.  
Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History,  
Advertising Ephemera Collection 1850s-1980s.



Fig. 124

"Best Brands of Flour," n.d. Advertising card. J. H. & J. Williams.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.

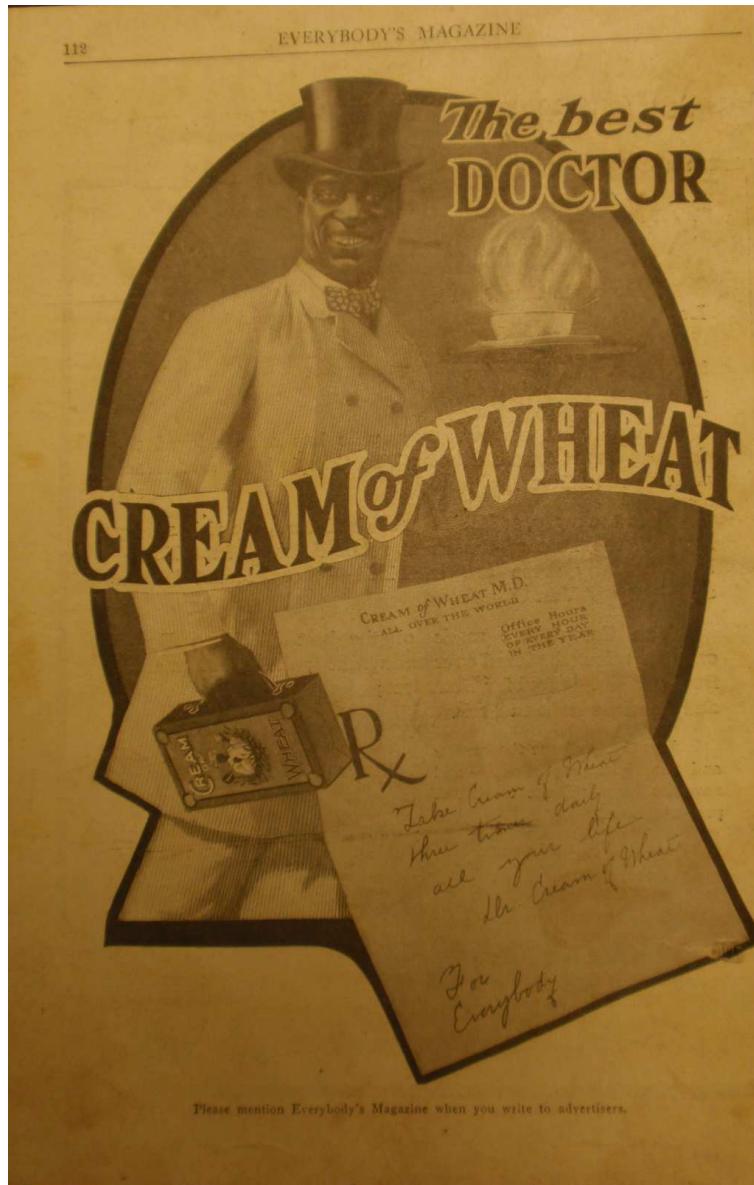
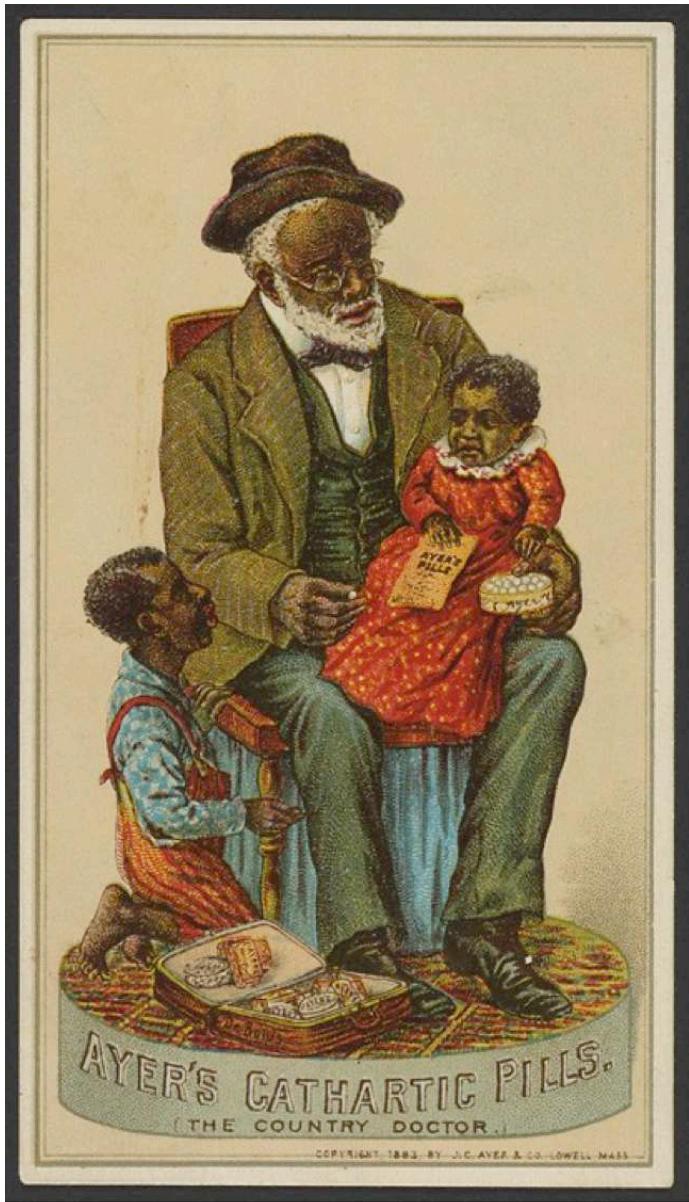


Fig. 125

"The best Doctor," 1905. Print advertisement. *Everybody's Magazine*. Cream of Wheat Company.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection, Box 4.



Harvard University, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, w88116\_1

Fig. 126

"The Country Doctor," 1883. Advertising card. J. C. Ayer & Co. (Lowell, MA).  
Harvard University, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

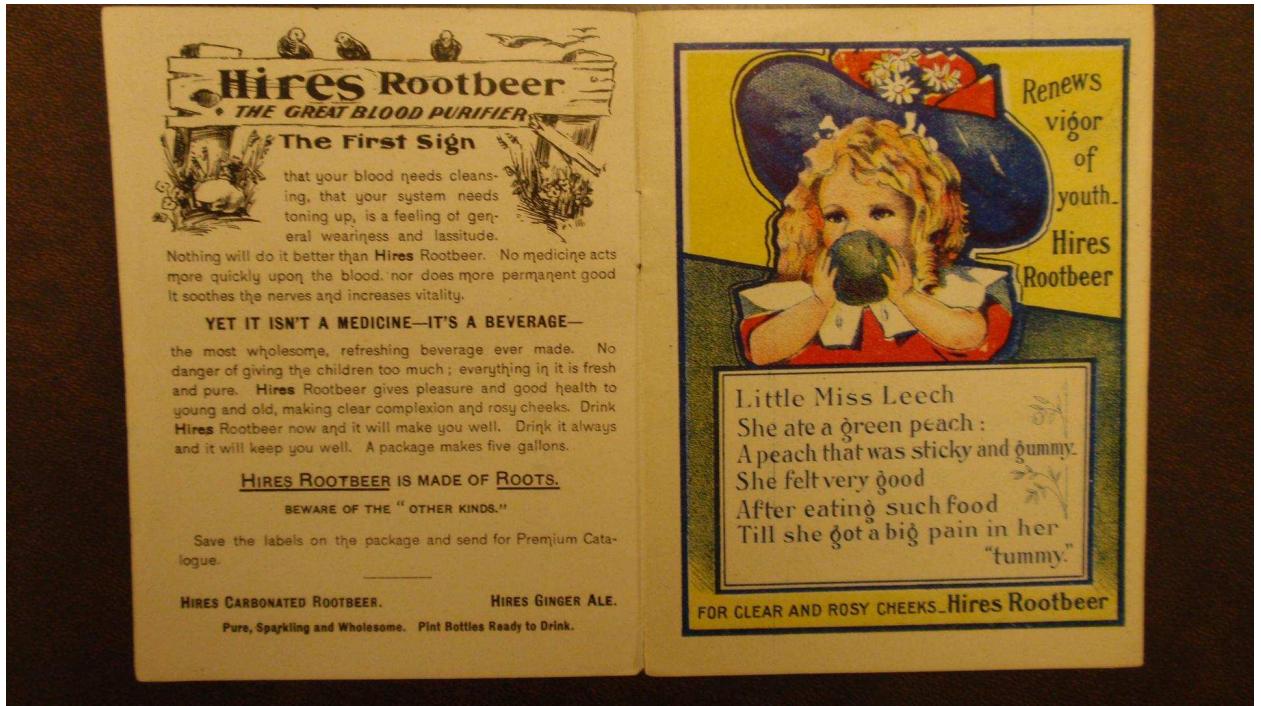


Fig. 127

"Hires Rootbeer," 1901. Advertising booklet. Hires.

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History.

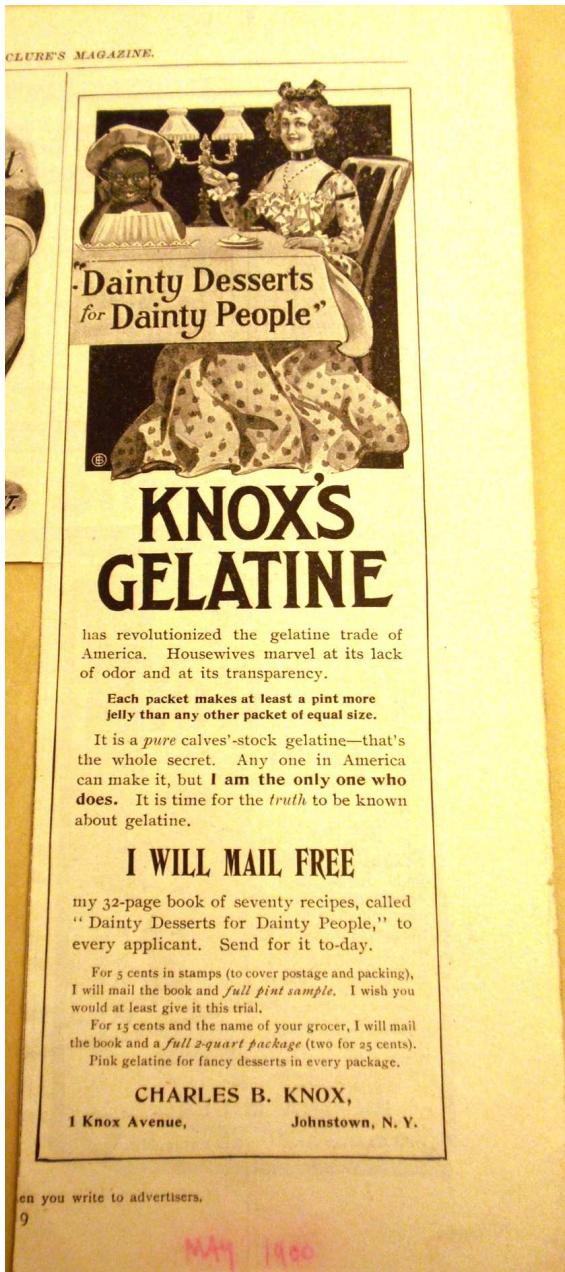


Fig. 128

"Knox's Gelatine," May 1900. Print advertisement. *McClure's Magazine*. Knox's Gelatine Company.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center.



Fig. 129

"The Transparency Is Proof Of Its Purity," 1899. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Knox's Gelatine Company.

Duke University, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, 1936-2006 and undated, Box 4.



Fig. 130

"Knox's Gelatine Factory," From Nelson Greene, *The Old Mohawk-Turnpike Book (The Charles B. Knox Gelatine Co., Inc. Edition)* (Fort Plain: Mohawk Valley Historic Association/Nelson Greene, 1924). [fulton.nygenweb.net](http://fulton.nygenweb.net). Accessed February 7, 2015.



Fig. 131

"Knox Sparkling Gelatine," February 1914. Print advertisement. *Ladies' Home Journal*.  
Knox's Gelatine Company.

Private Collection. <http://ahundredyearsago.com/2014/07/29/1914-knox-gelatine-advertisement/>.



Fig. 132

"Knox's Gelatine," 1902. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Knox's Gelatine Company. Private collection.



Fig. 133

"Putting it down in BLACK AND WHITE," 1903. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Knox's Gelatine Company.  
Private collection.



Fig. 134

"Spring Beauties," n.d. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Woodbury's. The Andrew Jergens Company (Cincinnati, OH).

Duke University, Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History.



Harvard University, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, w87937\_1

Fig. 135

"We Polish Up Our Dome With Sapolio!" c. 1880. Advertising card. Sapolio. Donaldson Brothers (printer).

Harvard University, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Historical Collections.



Fig. 136

"Satinet," n.d. Advertising card. Jas. S. Kirk & Company (Chicago, IL).  
Miami University, Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Shields Trade Card Collection.



Fig. 137

"You Dirty Boy!," 1895. Advertising card. Vinolia Soap.  
Look and Learn History Picture Library. Accessed 2015. <http://www.lookandlearn.com/>.



Fig. 138

'Why Doesn't Your Mamma Wash You With Fairy Soap?,' n.d. Advertising card. Fairy Soap. N. K. Fairbank Company.  
Accessed March 27, 2015. Buzzfeed.com.



Fig. 139

"Pears Transparent Soap," n.d. Advertising card. Pears' Soap.  
Accessed March 27, 2015. Lexiebrown.wordpress.com.

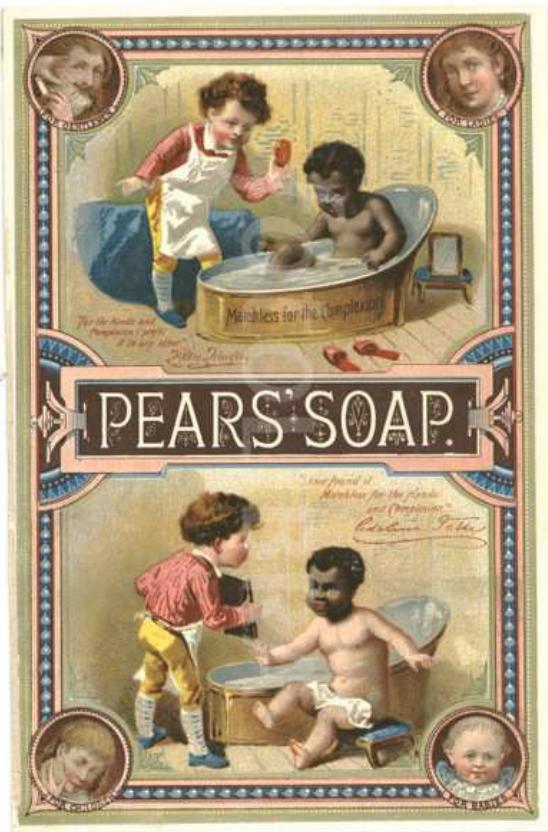


Fig. 140

"Pears' Soap," n.d. Advertising card. Pears' Soap.  
Accessed March 27, 2015. Imgarcade.com.



Fig. 141

'I have found PEARS' SOAP matchless for the Hands and Complexion,"n.d. Advertising card. Pears' Soap.

Accessed March 27, 2015. Creative-ads.org.

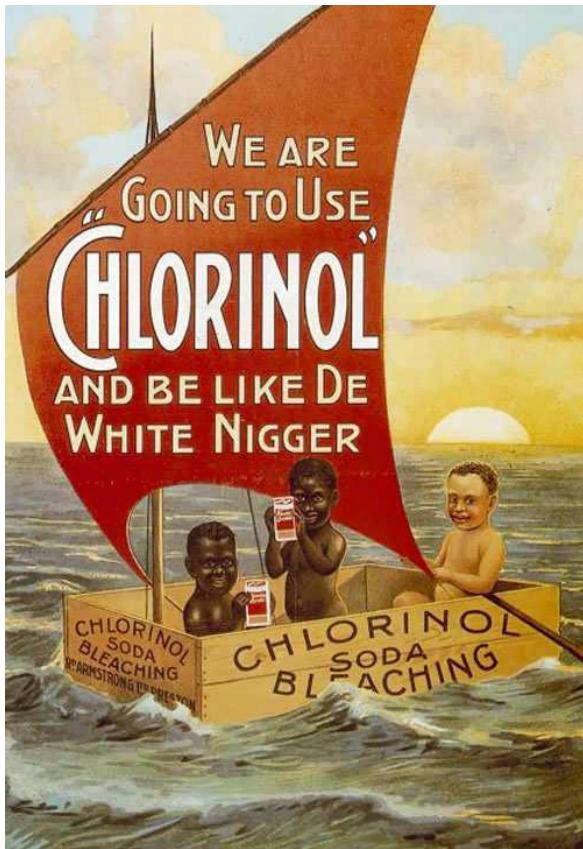


Fig. 142

"We Are Going to Use 'Chlorinol' And Be Like De White Nigger," n.d. Print advertisement. Unknown publication. Chlorinol.

Accessed March 27, 2015. [Brobble.com](http://Brobble.com).

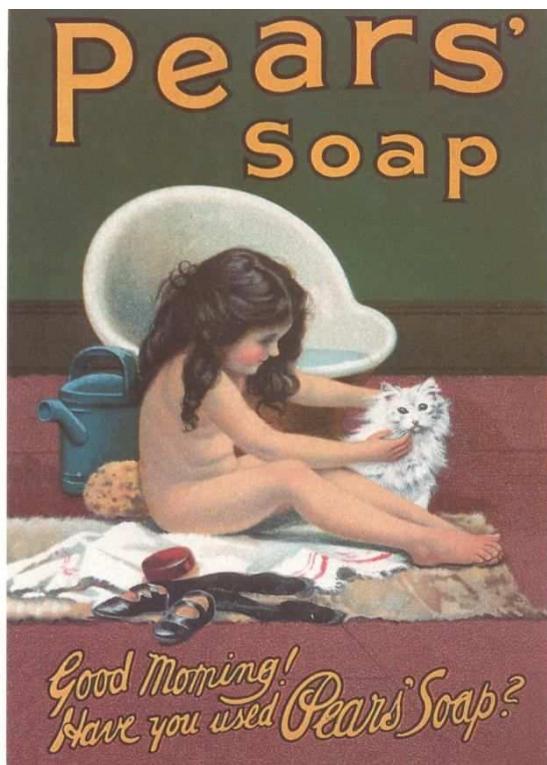


Fig. 143

"Good Morning!" n.d. Print advertisement. Unknown publication.  
Pears'.  
Private collection.



Fig. 144

"Try Lavine for washing," n.d. Advertising card. Lavine.  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, The  
Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, 1838-1953.



Fig. 145

"Use 'Acme Soap,'" n.d. Advertising card. Acme Soap. Lautz Bros. & Co.  
Private collection.

## Conclusion

While many Americans have little or no familiarity with advertising cards, we all have some knowledge of the stereotypes distributed and reinforced by them. We all act as consumers and, by purchasing items with racist roots or outright racist impulses, we purchase the ideas--repackaged, reformulated, reimagined--that have oppressed black citizens since the 1860s (and indeed before). Thus, this dissertation is not merely about examining objects that circulated during a relatively brief heyday and connecting them to a larger discourse; it is about those things, but it is also, perhaps more importantly, about calling us to be simultaneously more aware of and conscientious about the images we consume every day. Despite the fact that many daily tasks such as grocery shopping are in essence veritable explosions of advertising imagery, we generally move through the supermarket aisles with little thought of what the brands, logos, and product designs convey to us on a sociological or political level. Rather than passive consumers who stroll the aisles tossing packages of culinary convenience into our carts, we should be active consumers who recognize that we are also purchasing the images, ideas, and histories on the products we choose to bring home.

This project has grown and developed over six years and has taken shape in its own way as the images I have collected and studied have come together to reveal many layers of meaning. The ephemera that comprises the foundation of this study often lies hidden deep in archives, classified under benign headings like “race,” “African Americans,” or “Black Americana,” when in fact these powerful artifacts are integral fragments of American life as it was during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What began as a project identifying key pictorial themes in American advertising cards

and postcards later metamorphosed into a much more complex analysis of how those pictorial themes contributed to potent national issues playing out in advertising, from the earliest days of hand-drawn local shop ads to mass-produced and widely-circulated print ads of the twentieth century. These images appear in archives at both local and national institutions, testifying to their ubiquity and widespread significance at every level. My task has been not to find every image that circulated or every archive that houses them, but rather to achieve some grasp on how prolific these images were, try to ascertain provenance information, and insert these illustrations into the larger context of American art history and visual culture to fill a void that still exists, not only in scholarship but also in American culture. I have examined these cards as artifacts of visual culture that articulated and propagated ideas about African Americans and their positions with the economic, political and social systems in America from the mid-nineteenth century through the first three decades of the twentieth century.

I made a concerted effort in my research to let the images guide me, rather than purposefully seeking out images that revealed racism or stereotype. In fact, this study's conception grew from patterns I noticed that revealed distinct contrasts between how white figures and non-white figures were portrayed in early advertisements and communiqués (predominantly postcards). From there I began to navigate the troubling waters of racial representation in American ephemera, which steadily revealed all of its many layers. As this path unfolded, I became convinced that these images were not at all mere *ephemeral* artifacts, which is to say that they were not objects whose purpose and meaning took effect for mere moments at a time. Instead, I believe that these were and continue to be artifacts that narrate in excruciatingly honest terms how Americans

thought about race, society, citizenship, health, and labor during a period of intense change and upheaval. As I continued to see how our own twenty-first-century advertising imagery pays homage to the kinds of images printed as early as the mid-nineteenth century, I became utterly convinced that these continuities need to be directly, if painfully, addressed and inserted into the current discussions on race, stereotype, food culture, and advertising.

My first agenda in this study was to examine stereotype, which is a key facet of not only the racial scope of this project but also the visual and material culture aspects. Scholarship has taken up stereotype in many ways, challenging American history and its dependence on generalizations and patterns, both real and imagined. Yet my goal has been to investigate the roots of stereotype as it played out in everyday objects in American daily life, ones that until recently have gone relatively understudied, relegated to the realms of American kitsch and nostalgia. Works on paper such as advertising cards and postcards functioned as regular communications between people of all sexes, ages, and backgrounds, and since their messages were disseminated and read on local, regional, and national levels, both their imagery and texts are worthy of closer inspection. While Americans experienced changes in social relations and the anxieties of political tensions in tangible, legal ways, ephemera such as trade cards and postcards allowed Americans to experience and manipulate those same dynamics in a more personal and ideological manner.

Stereotype functioned in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century ephemera as a tool for expressing anxieties about food, health, and labor, all key facets of American culture that were undergoing significant shifts and, in turn, changing major aspects of

everyday life. In a physical sense, stereotype allowed for the mass-production and - distribution of imagery; this was a tremendously powerful tool in the spread of ideas, not only to consumers but also to Americans as a whole. On an ideological level, stereotype created a site for current tensions to play out and take shape. Post-emancipation and well into the first three decades of the 1900s, the task of producing and cooking food underwent massive changes; the abolishment of slavery and increasing job opportunities meant changing responsibilities and expectations of not only African Americans but also the white American housewife. Stereotype in advertising, especially, allowed white Americans to assuage fears surrounding food quality, production, and consumption by imagining black Americans as being indefinitely responsible for national food production in every sense--from planting to harvesting, from cooking to tutoring in the kitchen. In addition, advertising also suggested that white bodies inevitably would be the deserving recipients of the landscape's bounty, largely picturing white figures as healthy, satisfied consumers and black bodies as ever-malnourished, hungry scapegoats who were always either making food for white families or desperately (and usually unsuccessfully) trying to secure scraps of food for their own kin.

Food and bodies were inextricably linked in American ephemera, and the health and appearance of humans of all ages, sexes, and races became a paramount site of concern that extended into the arenas of health and labor. Health was a critical area of preoccupation for Americans at the turn of the century, with germs and the spread of infection coming into new understanding. The vulnerability of bodies to not only malnourishment but also disease made issues of race all the more dire as Americans became increasingly concerned with who had close interaction with whom and whose

hands touched whose food, especially. Calling upon old notions of blackness and whiteness made for a compelling framework for identifying who was inherently clean and dirty, good and bad, American and other. Advertising became a key vehicle for distributing ideologies about the un/changeable condition of American bodies, resulting in numerous images picturing blackness as a condition in need of amelioration but always never totally removable.

Finally, I have aimed to show how American ephemera took on issues of labor, a highly contested subject at the end of the nineteenth and into the early decades of the twentieth century. With increases in technology and the availability of machines for greater ease and efficiency in household work, Americans witnessed nostalgic fantasies of black labor in American advertising, especially, with black bodies appearing as inexhaustible sources of work. While labor is often studied separately from food, I have attempted to demonstrate how the two subjects in fact went hand in hand, as the nourishment of Americans' bodies was understood as an integral part of their ability to act, produce, and progress.

Without significant provenance information and without firsthand accounts of American consumers' responses to early advertisements, it is difficult to reconcile how the objectives, values, and concerns of advertising agencies and artists were distinct from those of their audiences. It has been my goal throughout this project not to assume racism on the part of the consuming audience and at the same time not to ignore the extent to which the creations of ad agencies and artists must have reflected larger issues and interests. I have tried to be continually conscious of the dichotomous relationship between creator and viewer, while also being cognizant of the fact that images were

created to speak to an audience and, in the case of advertising in particular, those images were produced en masse because they must have carried some legibility and appeal for numerous people.

As stated in the Introduction, this study is by no means complete; indeed, it is only a beginning point for the examination of images of Americans in advertising and ephemera. Scholars could and should tackle how American ephemera and consumer culture imagined other Americans that I did not address, including in particular Asian, Irish, and Native Americans, who are abundantly represented in advertising. While gender studies, food studies, and labor studies all have their merits, bringing them together for more multifaceted analyses is a worthwhile venture and allows us new understandings of the themes and issues present in each of these fields. In fact, this dissertation has sought to bridge these disciplines in an effort to better engage their individual interests and agendas, as really all the fields of inquiry are interwoven and should not stand on their own if we seek more nuanced understandings of our nation's past. Advertising was never just about food, or just about consumers. At its root, advertising was about targeting Americans based on who belonged, who consumed, who produced, and identifying who was truly "American," whatever that moniker meant at any given time. The fact that we still create and consume images intended to represent particular brands, ideals, or products indicates that the tendencies toward stereotype and objectification operate today in much the same way that they did in the late nineteenth century. It is our duty as citizens to interrogate these processes and challenge them, such that we can be not only more knowledgeable consumers but also more conscious viewers.

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