

Racism and Racial Discrimination in the United States

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Abstract

During the days of American slavery, many whites held stereotypes of African-Americans as inferior, unevolved, incapable. In societies such as the United States, which are characterized by unequal cultural power, prejudiced ideologies, usually affected by history, there is a solid reason for which dominant groups (e.g. whites) sustain and legitimate their power over other groups (e.g. African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians). The present paper is designed to see whether stereotypes during Jim Crow have persisted after the civil rights movement, event that was meant to bring equality and push the United States into a post-racial era. Moreover, this analysis aims to extend the current research on the portrayal of ethnic minorities in advertising, especially in the case of African-Americans. After establishing an analytical and theoretical framework based on the relationship between racial ideology and stereotypes of African-Americans, this study investigates how African-Americans are represented in American advertising and how racial ideology is embedded within those depictions.

Keywords: racism; discrimination; stereotype; advertising

DOI: 10.24818/DLG/2022/SP/01

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to investigate concretely and chronologically how African-American communities were portrayed in specific forms of advertising during the two iconic periods in the history of the American society (Jim Crow², post-civil rights movement³). In order to achieve this purpose, a few advertisements, predominantly in the

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² Jim Crow represents the name of the complex legal disabilities expressed through laws and imposed on African-Americans by state and local governments during the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The purpose of the racial segregation implied by Jim Crow laws was to prevent any contact between black and white American citizens, African-Americans being considered second-class citizens (Tischauser, 2012).

³ The civil rights movement, also interpreted as the “Second Reconstruction” by some academics, was an interplay of effort towards social justice and activism by African-Americans aimed to end the racial segregation and gain equal rights

form of advertising posters and postcards will be analyzed individually. Subsequently, a comparative perspective will be included in this study, thus highlighting either differences or similarities. Because of the enormous volume of advertisements during the decades viewed for the present analysis, only a limited number of advertisements have been selected as samples. Throughout my analysis, I have paid particular attention to the following aspects: (1) the roles played by minority characters, (2) the relationship between white characters and African-Americans (where it was possible), (3) the type of products promoted by minority characters, (4) appearances and (5) facial expressions.

This paper seeks to present how the discriminatory (or not) portrayal of African American communities was influenced by some specific periods in which it dominated the industry, that was in turn substantially influenced and administered by racist mentalities and practices. Moreover, the article focuses on printed advertisements because analyzing advertising is an additional and also accurate way of learning about consumers, and therefore about the majority of citizens. Advertising campaigns reflect and most importantly, influence behavior. They reveal information about consumers and their values, as well as about advertisers, companies, products, media and messages. They can be efficiently interpreted as cultural products and when people are used in these advertising campaigns, they are very much likely to highlight information about social class, gender, race/ethnicity and historical context. In this sense, this article has aimed to use different theories as a basis for suggesting how advertising can reveal perceptions and attitudes towards African-American people.

By calling attention to the numerous negative images that have pervaded the American advertising industry, this paper sets out to provide a significant reason for the industry to take a careful look at its minority portrayals. In this sense, the industry might begin to make adjustments in order to promote significant parts of their culture, instead of denigrating it. Moreover, this paper aims to disseminate some knowledge to those who are misguided at times in interpretations of race and racism in the American society, and tend to oversimplify meanings towards the positive angle. The way advertising succeeded in reinforcing inequality so

under the law. It began in the early 1950s and ended in the late 1960s (Bloom, 2019).

effectively is definitely proof that it is also possible to reverse its power in order to reinforce a message of equality. However, conflicts and misconceptions will never come to an end, even though the current era is simultaneously dominated by anti-violence and anti-racist movements, political correctness, equity and equality and numberless events aiming to bring and promote peace. Furthermore, there will always be some criteria based on which people will find excuses to give birth to more prejudiced conceptions, but we should always aim to look forward to creating an inclusive environment for every human being, given that at the end of the day, we are all part of the same “minority”, namely humans.

The study undertaken is predominantly exploratory and descriptive and, to some extent, explanatory and even predictive, by identifying trends considered to be significant. In detail, the research strategy also integrates theoretical aspects. In this sense, the aspect will be discussed on two levels. First, it will present the manner and role of African-Americans in forms of advertising, and second, it will analyze the evolution and changes suffered by visual representation of the African-American community. Therefore, the research methodology used combines qualitative research with observation. Since advertising functions as the accumulated perceptions of what people want to identify with, the present approach to advertising focuses on its performance as a reflection of American ideologies and its role as a mechanism that produces and preserves ideologies.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Race and racism

Racism is real, but “race” is not. We often have the preconceived idea that if we know someone’s skin color, we implicitly know several aspects about them. The theory that human biological differences express distinct criteria that define and separate populations is a fallacy (Perry, 2007). Even though people look different, race is now viewed as a social construction that is recognized by physical appearance, or by phenotype. Furthermore, modern genetics has managed to demonstrate the biological unity throughout the human species, besides visible traits. In this sense, all humans share genes at the rate of 99.9 percent (Perry, 2007).

According to David Reich “What the genetics shows is that mixture and displacement have happened again and again and that our pictures of past ‘racial structures’ are almost always wrong” (Reich, quoted in Kolbert,

2018). When people talk about race, they usually refer to skin color and simultaneously to something more than that. This is what Morton⁴ believed in and developed the science of race in order to auto-validate his own prejudices. However, in the decades before the Civil War, Morton's ideas and beliefs were quickly adopted by the defenders of slavery. Paradoxically, despite many centuries in which people of African descent were considered inferior, the study of genetics has permitted scientists to reconstruct a historical "family tree" of human populations, which allowed them to draw the conclusion that all people alive today are in fact Africans (Kolbert, 2018).

All these misconceptions about race eventually gave birth to what we call "racism". However, despite scientific clarifications of the concept of "race", racism is real enough to produce serious social consequences. Like many other sociological phenomena, it has an everyday use and also an everyday outcome. Moreover, racism as an ideology was historically and also became interdependent with the ideology of nationalism. They emerged together and they also had an influence on each other (Miles & Brown, 2003). According to Audrey Smedley, the phenomenon of racism is also applied to political, economic, or legal institutions and other areas that perpetuate discrimination on the basis of race. Advertising, business, healthcare, education, every system can encounter racism to some extent (Smedley, 2020).

The behavioral manifestation of racism, racial discrimination, is usually the result of power and bias, also known as prejudice. Racial discrimination can also be perceived as a combination between the ideology of racial superiority and the social structures associated with power or dominance that enables certain individuals, organizations, institutions to manifest their need for dominance in multiple ways. In the United States, people are placed into a racial social hierarchy with white people at the top, and people of color at the bottom. This system of

⁴ Samuel George Morton was a Philadelphia physician who collected skulls from all over the world and performed different techniques in order to measure them. Based on his cranial collection, he believed that race can be hierarchically divided. In this sense, Morton's "craniometry" suggested that white people or Caucasians were the most intelligent. He also concluded that people of color had smaller brains, implying that black people were less intelligent than white people (Smedley, A., Wade. Peter and Takezawa, Yasuko, 2020).

oppression in the U.S has made people of color the targets of a wide range of racist acts, including social and economic oppression (e.g., slavery, Jim Crow laws, police brutality, mass incarceration, etc.) Moreover, the negative portrayal of African-Americans in television, film and other forms of media and advertising, mostly controlled by a white-dominant society, has only naturalized stereotypes and made harmful things appear as “normal” (Kirkinis, Pieterse, Martin, Agiliga & Brownell, 2018). In other words, both individuals and institutions can express racism and racial discrimination in different ways.

2.2 Advertising and stereotypes

The development of advertising dates back into the ancient times when societies used symbols or pictorial signs to attract their product users (Britannica, 2019). Subsequently, print magazines, once considered irrelevant in a digital world, have been reimagined in electronic forms. Ads and commercials consist of the following elements, which are usually combined differently: headline, illustration (pictures and/or music), body, copy, slogan, product or service name and standing details. Dunn and Barban (1986) came up with a more complex definition that argues that “advertising is a paid, nonpersonal message from an identifiable source delivered through a mass-mediated channel that is designed to persuade.” (Dunn and Barban, 1986, quoted in Sheehan, 2013, p.3). This definition allows us to assess the role and importance of advertising in society.

Therefore, advertising plays a significant influence considering that everyone is likely to be exposed to it, especially in a consumer-oriented world. Research suggests that both adults and teenagers are capable of filtering out the persuasive intent of advertising (Taylor, 2017). It goes beyond trying to sell products or services, it can create and amplify stereotypes by promoting a certain image in a repetitive way, by presenting the same story over and over again. Ads can also serve as historical documents as they represent one of the best ways to get an insight into a society’s preferences and ways of portraying the world at a given time in history.

Stereotyped portrayals in advertising have received much attention in recent decades and they have been defined in numberless manners (Åkestam, 2017). For the purpose of the present research, a stereotype is best defined as a widely accepted belief about the personal features of members of a particular category, such as ethnicity, phenotype, skin color.

The frequent use of stereotypes in advertising has social effects on individuals. Furthermore, studies on these social effects perceive advertising as having a significant social impact. When particular ideals are being shown more, they can eventually make potential consumers to believe that these ideals are real and valid in real life as well (Åkestam, 2017). Stereotypes also support the maintenance of racial stratification by disseminating inequality.

2.3 Racism in advertising

The way advertising uses race to promote goods and services of a market society has been the subject of long and continuing debates. Approaching racism in advertising has been a very popular trend, but it has become a lifestyle for some racial coalitions or other minorities. Portrayals or representations constitute the biggest issue because their roles are usually limited. The meanings of these representations are normally shaped by integration into narratives, stereotyped images or other forms of symbolic content. To emphasize the idea that the media intervenes in our perceptions of certain aspects, some scholars mention Stuart Hall's statement: "amongst other kinds of ideological labour, the media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the problem of race is understood to be. They help us to classify out the world in terms of the categories of race" (Hall, 1981, quoted in Titley, 2019, p. 36).

Racial stereotyping and racist advertising cannot be comprehended without reference to whiteness, considered the normative center, the symbol from which it emerges. As a standard position, "whiteness is taken to be a natural fact, existing beyond the bounds of consideration. It is not racially marked as white in the way that black is so marked" (Pickering, 2004, p.91). Therefore, when a category becomes racially marked, this represents the first phase of racial stereotyping.

In the United States, mostly characterized by unequal treatment and distribution of power, dominant groups have maintained their power over other groups. Interestingly, advertising was one of the tools that they have been using to highlight racial ideology. In terms of racial ideology in advertising, it was argued that American advertisers placed minorities "in the social fabric of the nation either by ignoring them or, when they are included in advertisements, by processing and presenting them in ways that are most palatable to the predominantly White audience" (Paek &

Shah, 2003, p. 227). In this sense, advertising images basically portray visions and perceptions of racial minorities filtered through the lens of the dominant power, white people. Considering all these theoretical notions, the paper continues with the analysis of the advertisements.

3. Jim Crow vs post-civil rights movement advertisements – a comparative approach

3.1 An analysis of ads during Jim Crow (1870-1965)

This section starts by revising the status-quo of African-Americans in the United States in the period examined for the following advertising analyses. Long before 9/11 2001, African-Americans who lived under the dominance of Jim Crow were already acquainted with the term “terrorism”. Jim Crow laws might appear ridiculous in the twenty-first century but they had a serious purpose, to eliminate any possible contact between black⁵ and white American citizens because of the fear that any potential contact would lead to equal rights for all people, which was considered a peculiar thing at that time. This idea was also perpetuated by theories adopted by craniologists, eugenicists, phrenologists and Social Darwinists, who emphasized that blacks were intellectually inferior to whites. We tend to perceive the end of slavery as an enormous accomplishment for the United States, which it was indeed. However, despite the attempts that were made during Reconstruction to redress the inequities of slavery, the United States still struggled with the question of race in a so-called “free society”. It is quite obvious that a nation with slavery mentioned and incorporated in its constitution, would not become a utopian land of equality overnight. Thus, post-slavery generations of African-Americans started to experience a milder taste of slavery. Therefore, the problem of racism embodied new forms. In this sense, during Jim Crow, the standard African-American transitioned from slave to a subordinated individual, servant, with general restricted access, misinterpreted by the dominant society as incapable, mediocre, sometimes violently abused and eventually murdered. Advertisements featuring

⁵ Throughout this article, the flawed version of the term has been used in order to emphasize the periods that serve as timelines for this article. The use of the term does not have a pejorative, racist meaning and is not used in a hierarchical manner.

African-Americans relied heavily on the above-mentioned characteristics, which were very popular racist stereotypes. Even though some 19th century advertisements portrayed African-Americans in a neutral way, they were much more likely to be represented in a discredited manner. We could say that they were perceived as the “black sheep” of society; besides being politically incorrect by today’s standards, at least this fact emphasizes even more how the black color was and continues to be associated with something bad, problematic, out of the ordinary, especially when it refers to someone’s skin.

Figure A represents an advertisement for N.K. Fairbanks & Co which incorporated the picture of a white girl at play with an African-American little girl (Figure A). The advertisement is for a cleaning product of that time, Fairy Soap. Without any hesitation and in all her sincerity, the white child asks her barefoot playmate: "Why doesn't your mamma wash you with Fairy Soap?"

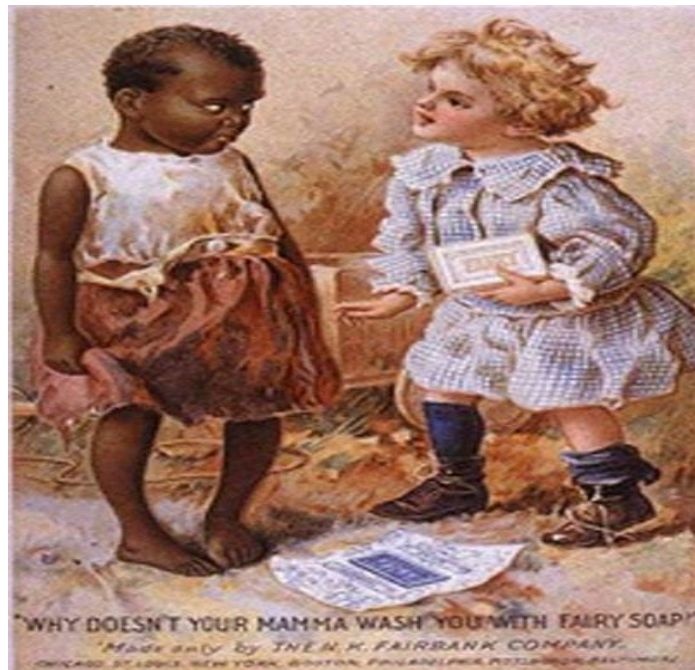


Figure A - Advertising campaign for Fairy Soap, designed by the Chicago advertising company N.K. Fairbanks & Co
(Source: <https://www.businessinsider.com/20-ads-that-changed-how-we-think-about-race-in-america-2013-2>)

One may speculate that, the little white girl, by asking a black child why her mother would not wash her with Fairy Soap, insinuates that she is black from dirt. The purpose of the question was to amuse consumers by playing on the innocence of a white child, who saw dark skin as dirty and unusual, but failed to understand that no amount of soap would change her friend's color. The discrepancy between their looks also speaks for itself, as the racist elements of the image are striking. The African-American girl has ripped clothing pieces, which are also full of dirt, her hair is short, and she is barefoot. Her posture and body language suggest the embarrassment and the hesitancy when it comes to interacting with the other child, as she appears to be bow legged and quite ashamed of the situation. On the other hand, the white girl is holding a bar of Fairy Soap in her left hand, wearing both shiny shoes and socks, while the black girl stands holding her dress in her hand. Their appearance may be considered an indicator of their financial status as well. The black child comes from a poor family while her friend embodies a more powerful status, coming from a wealthy white family.

This advertisement is problematic in two different ways. First, it suggests that African-Americans are dirty because of their darker skin. And second, it implies that the young white child involuntarily has this misconception. The preconceived belief that the skin of an African-American is dirty because it is darker is an important indicator of how fast racist mentalities are transmitted, especially at such young ages. Moreover, the advertisement was definitely not directed to African-American consumers, but towards white people, foregrounding how the lack of Fairy Soap would make no difference between a person of color and a white individual.

There is a more powerful, socializing message at the advertisement's core – the idea of “race” erasure, of eradicating other people in order to make sure everyone looks the same. Advertisements for soaps and other cleaning products were especially likely to use images of African-Americans. More specifically, they created a popular belief according to which the efficiency of the promoted products is given by their ability to wash away or clean darkness from skin, which was the ultimate level of dirt. Accordingly, this idea is also supported by Brown & Stentiford (2008) in *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia: Greenwood Milestones in African American History*.

Moving on, Figure B represents an advertisement for Cream of Wheat, an American brand of farina, which is a type of breakfast porridge made from wheat. The company was founded in 1893. The advertisement promotes a very popular product whose advertising features human characters. The protagonist of this advertisement is also known as Rastus, a standard African-American male, dressed in a cook's white smock. He is portrayed as an obedient, non-problematic figure for whites, while his smiling face with gleaming teeth suggests even more docility. The ad presents Rastus as a proud individual, who seems to be enjoying his subservient role.



Figure B - Advertising campaign for Cream of Wheat, 1918
(Source: <https://raceandethnicity.org/exhibits/show/african-americans-and-advertis/item/657>)

In 2021, one may wonder how there could be any problems with this iconic figure, since chefs are considered celebrities nowadays. Therefore, it may seem a positive thing to see an African-American in this position. However, there is another side of this story. There was a unique storyline of the advertising industry when using African-American characters. They were portrayed in no other manners or environments, but as characters that can bring at least one benefit to white people. In this sense, the lack of diversity is one of the reasons for which Rastus is considered problematic. It is not as if African-Americans could have any other position during that time, as they were extremely limited. Moreover, Rastus was not a chef, as suggested by several advertisements in which he even serves the food himself. Additional advertisements of Rastus have placed him into a bad spotlight, validating the racist practices of those who produced these types of advertisements.

For instance, another advertisement shows the cook bringing his own message that was meant to promote the product. The text is presented as a non-sense piece of information written in a minstrel dialect: "Maybe Cream of Wheat aint got no vitamins. 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 1\$ fo' a great big dish. Rastus". The message makes no sense, since cereals were considered to be healthy and delicious; instead, they are presented as lacking vitamins, suggesting that they have no nutritional value. Therefore, if we are to sell a product, why make the spokesman sound like an uneducated person who does not acknowledge the benefits of the product for potential consumers? This is exactly the point in which the advertisement turns out to be discriminatory, especially during Jim Crow and the Minstrel Show 'era. If Rastus had to speak directly using the appropriate dialect, he would have been shown as an intelligent and educated person, image that would have contradicted the prejudice of white people.

Figure C represents an advertisement for Pennsylvania Railroad from 1940, with a war related theme, as it shows many soldiers greeting their loved ones. At first sight, the advertisement expresses a general feeling of joy, as everyone is smiling in the process of either saying goodbye or reuniting their acquaintances. Wealthy white people are in the

⁶ The Minstrel Show was an American theatrical form of racist entertainment, popular from the early 19th to the early 20th century, that was founded based on racial stereotypes. The shows were staged by white people with their faces painted black, who caricatured the singing and dancing of slaves (Stark, 2001).

center of the advertisement, wearing shiny jewelry and beautiful pieces of clothing. However, an in-depth look at the image allows us to spot two men of African origin. They are neither greeting their loved ones, nor smiling, they are not portrayed as soldiers. Although African-American soldiers represented a reliable source of power in World War I, they are not even portrayed as ordinary travelers. The two characters are playing the role of two porters, being concentrated on carrying luggage for white travelers. They are background characters, revealing how the American society used to work at that time. This is another stereotypical role given to people of color, the low-wage worker. They are not taking part in the plot, they are in the background, hardly noticeable in the white crowd, where the action is happening. Therefore, they are not recognized as equal citizens. African-Americans were among those whose low status in advertisements confirmed their economic disenfranchisement, just as violence and Jim Crow laws confirmed their inferiority and political disenfranchisement.



Figure C - Advertising campaign for Pennsylvania Railroad, 1945
(Source: <https://raceandethnicity.org/exhibits/show/african-americans-and-advertis/item/457>)

The worker category was dominated by white citizens who were entertained or served by black workers, with rarely to almost never the reverse occurring. There is a high probability that white people at that time saw this advertisement as normal, even rewarding for African-Americans since they were presented as having jobs, instead of having slave-related features. In support of this idea, some academics suggest that “one way of incorporating blacks into advertisements without having him become too closely identified with a particular product is to ‘assimilate’ him into a large, predominantly white group” (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972, p. 13). Moreover, the above advertisement is a good example of tokenism⁷, as the representation of the African-Americans gives them some visibility, but the predominantly white environment in which they are depicted, reflects their minority status and reminds the audience that they might be easily identified with a particular product, especially for the white audience. Lastly, the ad also suggests that white people are the main beneficiaries of public welfare, considering that the company definitely aims to offer services to a dominantly white public.

Moreover, there is a consistent amount of empirical evidence that demonstrates how African-Americans were portrayed for decades in ads as filthy, simple-minded, ugly and subservient in contrast to white people, who were portrayed as clean, civilized, powerful and intelligent. This type of advertisements is one of the key elements that represents the racism of the American culture. They conform, for the most part, to the white stereotype and vision of black life which is divided into two major lines - those that entertain and those that serve. In those integrated ads, where both blacks and whites are featured, the settings and interactions are not social or intimate, but formal and professional. Every discriminatory vision of African-Americans is incorporated into a regular, public activity, while images of blacks represented racist and derogatory stereotypes. Moreover, scholars argue that the number of these images only increased in the years after the Great Depression (1929-1939) (Brown & Stentiford, 2008).

⁷ Tokenism refers to the practice of making a symbolic effort to be inclusive to disadvantaged groups in order to prevent criticism and give the impression that people are being treated equally (Wright & Taylor 1998).

3.2 An analysis of ads in the post-civil rights movement period

The first significant changes regarding images of African-Americans in American advertising and their role in the industry began to happen in the 1960s. The presence of movements for social change, inequality and black empowerment raised national awareness that influenced numberless industries, including the advertising industry. Whether African-Americans started to create advertisements themselves or whether white people started to be more inclusive because of the civil rights movement, there were substantial changes in the portrayal of African-Americans in advertising. It is true that organizations also played a significant role in this process. For instance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People began to argue that the portrayal of African-Americans was demeaning and had a negative impact on the country (Brown & Stentiford, 2008).

All these efforts of the civil rights movement to change the media resulted in a gradual, but meaningful transformation, portraying none of the stereotypically black attributes that had been commonly present in Jim Crow advertising. In order to keep up with the African-American culture and the black pride that was popularized at that time, some advertisements began to see beyond traits that privileged light skin, straightened hair, or any other Caucasian features, and focused mainly on showing the society that African-Americans could be powerful, beautiful and important characters, too.

Figure D is an advertisement for the famous brand Pepsi-Cola from the same year in which Jim Crow was officially abolished. The image represents an “antonym” for what has been discussed previously. The ad illustrates two people, an African-American man and a white woman, enjoying their beverage. At first sight, they are presented as two happy individuals, simply laughing. However, this was an enormous improvement for the community of African-Americans, since advertisements started to project a vision of a racially diversified consumer market and of African-Americans as a middle-class population. There are two major aspects that caught my attention when analyzing this image. First, the man of African origin is finally portrayed as a regular citizen, lacking inferiority or demeaning attributes, being in the central plot of the story. Second, the relationship between him and the white woman introduces a novel perspective. A couple of decades before this advertisement was created, one of the most popular excuses for which

African-American men were very often lynched was that they represented a threat for white women, by having a desire to attack and sexually assault them. Therefore, we could say that this particular Pepsi-Cola advertisement managed to cancel (or at least limit) that belief. The white woman in the ad seems happy in the company of the African-American man. Her facial expression suggests safety and joy while they are having a meaningful eye-contact. Moreover, the fact that an African-American was finally portrayed as an individual worthy of entertaining a white woman, represents a substantial difference in the perception of people of color.



Figure D - Advertising campaign for Pepsi-Cola, 1965
(Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/monikalel42/2825300711>)

In addition, at a closer examination, one may assume that the two individuals might form a couple; the man's head is slightly tilted, the position one usually adopts when intending to kiss someone. Therefore, taking this element into account, we may consider it another sign of the

improvement of the status of the African-American community. In this sense, the idea combats a very common belief that was spread in America during the Jim Crow era - "sexual relations between blacks and whites would produce a mongrel race which would destroy the United States; treating blacks as equals would encourage interracial sexual unions" (Pilgrim, 2015, p. 63). Therefore, the advertisement suggests that the African-American is finally treated as an equal and that there is no problem when two people with different skin colors are this close.

The next advertising campaign (Figure E) transmits another powerful image and a powerful message. The whole scenario is populated with African-Americans, who are independent and do not rely on other white people. They can afford services on their own and they seem to be enjoying it to the fullest. They are finally portrayed as people caring about other people, good neighbors, good parents, whatever the case may have been, people who had dreams and aspirations. The advertisement was released around the 1970s for McDonald's, a very powerful company. The characters suggest a general state of happiness. They wear beautiful pieces of clothing and are portrayed as civilized American citizens. However, the only problematic aspect may be that the advertisement mentions the lack of the necessity to tip, which alludes to their reduced income. The most important thing about this advertisement is that the characters presented are not the ones who are either serving or preparing the food. They are able to enjoy a service without being marginalized or without contributing to the process. Moreover, it looks like the four members sitting at the same table are interacting with a man sitting at another table. This suggests a friendly and peaceful attitude towards other people, even if the man is another African-American. Ultimately, they lack any exaggerated traits that were usually incorporated in their visual representation before. They are shown in their natural appearance, having curly or afro-textured hair, beautiful smiles and positive attitudes.



Figure E - Advertising campaign for McDonald's in the 1970s
 (Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/06/casual-racism-and-greater-diversity-in-70s-advertising/394958/>)

Founded in 1886, Avon has a long history in the advertising industry, especially in portraying standards of beauty, or what the society perceived as “beautiful”. However, the history of women as symbols of beauty during the first half of the 20th century was dominated by white figures. Figure F seems to illustrate what the society perceived as beautiful and what was considered to be appealing to the general public the end of the twentieth century. The advertisement presents an African-American woman, highlighting her beautiful traits, accompanied by make-up, jewelry and nail polish. The woman is portrayed as a powerful character, embracing her culture and her ability to promote other products by using her own physical traits.

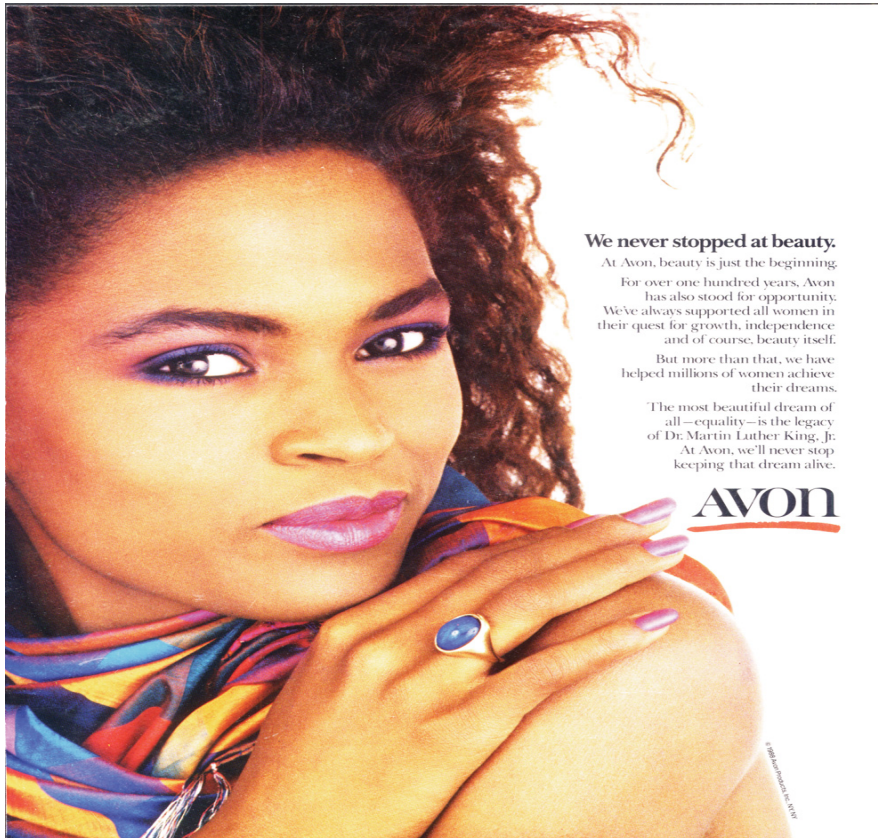


Figure F - Advertising campaign for Avon, 1988

(Source: <https://raceandethnicity.org/exhibits/show/african-americans-and-advertis/item/1221>)

African-American women were usually portrayed in terms of motherhood or cooking practices. Famous faces like Aunt Jemima represent the perfect prototype in support of this idea. In addition, according to Du Bois, “the Black woman was riddled with the double burden of racism and sexism, and neither could be overlooked.” (Dubois, 1920, quoted in Gammage, 2015, p.1). In this sense, the Avon advertisement has definitely challenged the historical status-quo of black women, especially in a world where light skin was the beauty standard. The African-American presence in an advertising campaign that aimed to promote notions of beauty and independence was definitely something revolutionary. Moreover, a closer examination of the advertisement spots the tribute that is brought to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. mentioned in the slogan. Therefore, by emphasizing King’s aspirations and “legacy”, it seems as if advertisers were aware of the

racial inequality and problematic issues involved in the visual representation of African-Americans in the advertising industry, that had previously affected the American society.

4. Concluding remarks

The first notable aspect observed in the present research is the clear relationship between events and advertisements. The industry turned out to have been immediately affected, as significant events occurred throughout history (Jim Crow laws, the civil rights movement, the abolition of Jim Crow, post-civil rights movement era). In this sense, during Jim Crow, the role imposed on black people in advertisements was directly influenced by a fresh post-slavery era, in which a powerful and preferential legislature captured every industry of the United States. The present analysis has also revealed that the representation of African-Americans would never allow the general public to spot any potential inequalities between white people and black people, as African-Americans were predominantly portrayed in a happy manner, fully enjoying whatever activity that they were doing.

Second, when shifting attention to the relationship between whites and minorities in advertisements, the present investigation has revealed similar results in terms of minority roles. Illustrations of African-Americans in servant roles and white people in a master or customer role highlights the big difference between the perceived civilized and uncivilized behavior of individuals. Moreover, by using predominantly white models, the industry managed to take advantage of a hierarchy that was based on the color of someone's skin.

Having analyzed advertisements from the post-civil rights movement period, the discussion can only confirm that the attempts that were made to redress the inequalities of the general racial segregation were surely efficient. When it comes to the visual representation of African-Americans, differences in their portrayal were enormous. Whether influenced by the power of the civil rights movement or not, the synchronization of inclusive advertisements with the civil rights movement allows us to draw the next conclusion – some companies started reflecting and eventually escaped their limited reference system, as they started to have a wider perception of the American society. Therefore, according to this analysis other studies, people of color started to be portrayed as

regular citizens, beauty symbols, independent individuals who are neither relying on white people's mercy or contributing to their welfare. Additionally, slavery-suggesting characteristics were finally absent, subservient roles being replaced with inclusive imagery suggesting at least equality, if not equity.

One may conclude that there are substantial changes in differences of visual representation of the African-American community between the two periods that served as the timeline of this study. It is well-known that the problem of American racism has not come to an end even in the 21st century. In this sense, racist advertisements were never off the table, not even in the second half of the 20th century, and not even in the 21st century, but at least there were differences and some improvement. They continue to affect contemporary society, and are reproduced and reinforced by the consumption of racial images and stereotypes in capitalist societies. However, the improvement represents only one of several steps needed to eliminate racism in advertising. The present article takes into account that problematic portrayals of African-Americans persisted even in the post-civil rights movement era and continues to do so even today. However, the emergence of inclusive and powerful representations of people of color was certainly more important. We could say that it expressed progressivism, as it came in response to compensate for the negative stereotypes that were previously spread through the media. The post-civil rights movement or the end of Jim Crow is an iconic event for the American society, and especially for people of color, in which the enormous efforts that had been made eventually had a significant impact. When it comes to advertising, such efforts were important because negative images of African-Americans or the complete lack of positive images can have serious repercussions for African-Americans and for society as a whole.

The qualitative research applied on these images is central to getting an in-depth perception of the American society. From that perspective, many portrayals have been found to be problematic, because the positive presence of African-Americans was predominantly diminished by images that subtly conveyed an ideology of white supremacy. This investigation has argued that an ideology of white superiority is deeply encoded in the advertising industry, though it may be less obvious to those who are less negatively or not at all affected by its prejudice. Stereotypical depictions of racial minorities in advertising rely on the reader's premised knowledge

and awareness. In addition, this analysis has also argued that visual data can provide clear answers to research questions.

Although contemporary advertisements arguably portray African-Americans in a wider variety of roles than history had done, and although many negative and discriminatory, stereotypical portrayals of African-Americans (e.g., servants, maids, porters, agricultural laborers, cooks) have largely disappeared, some portrayals of African-Americans still remain narrow and stereotypical. However, the continued presence of negative images suggests that advertisers are sometimes unaware of how some of their advertisements can be perceived as insensitive. Nonetheless, the contemporary stereotypical portrayal of African-Americans requires another complex analysis that has to be done in the future.

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