

RACE, GENDER, AND COSMETIC ADVERTISEMENTS

**“DARK SHADES DON’T SELL”: RACE, GENDER, AND COSMETIC ADVERTISEMENTS
IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY UNITED STATES**

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TITLE: “Dark Shades Don’t Sell”: Race, Gender, and Cosmetic Advertisements in the Mid-Twentieth Century United States

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Lay abstract

My project analyzes skin bleaching and hair straightening advertisements appearing in four black-owned periodicals between 1920-1960: *Chicago Defender*, *Afro-American*, *Plaindealer*, and *Ebony*. The main goal has been to document the advertising messages about blackness and beauty communicated to black women through the advertisements of black-owned and white-owned cosmetic companies. I explore the larger racial and social hierarchies these advertising images and messages maintained or destabilized. A major finding of this project has been that advertising messages usually, but not always, diverged along racial lines. White-owned companies were more likely to use denigrating language to describe black hair and skin, and more likely to measure the beauty of black women based on how closely they approximated whiteness. Black-owned companies tended to challenge this ideology. They used messages about racial uplift as part of this challenge.

Abstract

In this study I examine the two major cosmetic categories - products for skin and products for hair - aimed at African American women and advertised within the black press between 1920 and 1960. Specifically, I examine the *Chicago Defender*, *Afro-American*, *Plaindealer*, and *Ebony*. My project analyzes the images and conceptions of blackness and beauty sold to women of colour by white-owned and black-owned cosmetics companies. I explore the larger racial and social hierarchies these advertising images and messages maintained or destabilized. A central theme of this project has been tracing the differences in advertising messages and conceptions of beauty communicated by black-owned and white-owned companies. Many of the images and much of the advertising copy produced by black-owned cosmetic companies challenged hegemonic beauty ideals that venerated white beauty and sold white idealization as a norm. The black cosmetic industry, however, was dominated by white-owned companies. The dominant position of white-owned companies was linked to the advantages associated with whiteness, which allowed these companies to advertise with greater frequency throughout the forty-year period. White-owned and black-owned companies often pursued diverging advertising strategies and messaging about black beauty. An important finding of the project is that white-owned companies were more likely to use degrading language and stereotypes to describe black beauty in their advertisements. However, a company's racial identity did not always determine advertising strategies or messaging about black beauty. An important concept that permeated the 1920s and 1930s was the strategy of racial uplift, which was promoted by several black-owned companies. This strategy tapered out by the 1940s as new technologies like photography regularly depicted black women with dignity and accuracy. The 1940s and 1950s witnessed new advertising strategies including the appeal to glamour. This period also saw the introduction of *Ebony* magazine, which fundamentally altered advertising messages through their appeal to middle class sensibilities.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

I, Shawna Collins, declare this thesis to be my own work. I am the sole author of this document. No part of this work has been published or submitted for publication or for a higher degree at another institution.

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Introduction

On September 7 1968, two powerful protests unsettled Atlantic City, New Jersey. The first was the now well known Miss America pageant protest organized by New York Radical Women (NYRW).¹ The second protest also addressed beauty in American culture, though from a different angle. On the same day, and a few blocks away, the NAACP held the first ever Miss Black America pageant - a “‘positive protest’ against the exclusion of black women from the Miss America title.”² Organizers pointed to the beauty of black women as a way to challenge the normative vision of ideal American womanhood as white. The message was that black women were beautiful *as black women* and not for how closely they approached the white ideal. The NAACP was challenging the longstanding cultural, social, and economic associations of “beauty” with whiteness, an association that was denigrating to black women.

The NAACP pageant called attention to a particular double bind. According to Maxine Leeds Craig, in the 1960s images of black women were either wholly excluded from mainstream media - movies, magazines, advertising - or “included in images that reinforced Eurocentric beauty ideals. Black women had to contest their wholesale definition as non-beauties.”³ The pageant asserted a beautiful black womanness defined by black women. Protestors refused white society’s definitions of beauty. Protestors at Miss Black America would not allow white society to dictate how they should feel about themselves, how they should measure success, or how they should measure womanhood.

¹ New York Radical Women “No More Miss America!” August 22, 1968, <http://www.redstockings.org/index.php/no-more-miss-america>

² Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I A Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

³ Craig, *Ain't I A Beauty Queen*, 4.

The two protests were in many ways contradictory. While the white protestors abhorred the very idea of a beauty pageant for its objectification of women, the NAACP and its black protestors used a beauty pageant as a mechanism of protest. The mostly white Miss America protestors were aware of the NAACP protest, and they included an analysis of race in their ten points of protest. However, they did not seem to identify the affirmative value of recognizing black women as beautiful.⁴ Although the NYRW contended that they were against the main pageant's racism, they never acted upon the claim during the protest. Even though white protestors alleged to understand "the black issues involved," they ultimately declared that they "deplore[d] Miss Black America as much as we deplore Miss America..."⁵ The Miss America protestors did not understand the influence of race on the ways "women" experienced their womanhood or their relationship to beauty. As Craig argues, the NAACP protestors "potentially shared grievances with the white women at the Miss America protest. But Miss America, the symbolic target of the protest, had never stood for black women. Few black women in 1968 were willing to voice protest against the Miss America pageant for what it supposedly said about women generally."⁶

There was and is no general or all encompassing definition or experience of womanhood. Womanhood is deeply intertwined with class, race, religion, ability, sexuality, and other categories. The diverging protests articulated the complicated relationship between racial identity and realities of womanhood. As Anne Anlin Cheng argues,

woman of color's relationship to beauty does not merely replicate the white woman's relationship to beauty even if we were to understand beauty as a discourse of abjection for all women. The effects produced by the intersection of race, gender,

⁴ New York Radical Women "No More Miss America!"; The NYRW claimed that Miss America was racist because it never had a Black finalist nor a Puerto-Rican, Alaskan, Hawaiian, Indigenous, or Mexican-American winner.

⁵ Craig, *Ain't I A Beauty Queen*, 4.

⁶ Ibid, 6.

and aesthetics are not merely additive, but interlocking and, at times, contradictory.⁷

The NAACP protest serves as both prologue and epilogue for this study. The protest surfaces a series of issues in the construction of black womanhood and its relationship beauty. The protest also sets the table for issues I take up in this project. My work examines the racialization of beauty and how it affects messages of beauty and blackness sold to women of colour by both white and black-owned cosmetic companies in the mid twentieth century.

The NAACP protest is important in its own right, and also lays bare a series of issues including how negative depictions of black beauty have come to represent larger negative attitudes towards black people. We can decipher these attitudes via the language used to describe blackness in beauty advertisements. Racial and gender identities are read and constructed through the idea of beauty; what is considered “beautiful” holds privilege in American society. White hegemony, or their close proximity to privilege, allows this group to establish the norms and dictate the criteria for what counts as “beauty.” Such criteria is based on the premise of white as beautiful and anything that deviates is considered secondary.

The value of beauty for non-white women hinges on the perceptions and values associated with race. In Higgenbotham’s canonical 1992 essay “The Metalanguage of Race” she persuasively argues that race forms a language of its own providing other categories of identity such as gender, class, and sexuality with their “power to mean.” For example, even in the nineteenth century those black women who could afford upper-class luxuries such as expensive cosmetics or first class train tickets, found themselves unable to ride in the first class car or refused service at a cosmetic counter. Upper class blacks who would financially be in the upper

⁷ Anne Anlin Cheng “Wounded Beauty: An Exploratory Essay on Race, Feminism, and the Aesthetic Question,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 19, no. 2 (2000), 192.

strata of society could not hold that status socially *because* of their race.⁸ Their race “informed” their class status. African Americans have historically and systematically been de-valued as a group by a majority white population that viewed black people as inferior. De-valuing black women through their exclusion from the realm of beauty, and using derogatory imaging to depict and describe black women, is part of this devaluing. Devaluing black people maintains racial hierarchies and upholds an unequal balance of power that is meant to remain unequal.

* * *

This project explores advertisements for skin bleaching as well as hair straightening and lengthening products directed at black women and published in black-owned periodicals between 1920 and 1960. I am most interested in the advertising images and the advertising copy, rather than the packaging or the products themselves (such as ingredients). Advertising images and copy were the mechanisms through which cosmetic companies communicated and commented on the intersection of blackness and beauty.

The two main product categories advertised between 1920 and 1960 were skin lighteners and hair straighteners, products which were produced and sold by a variety of white-owned and black-owned companies. Nadinola and Black and White were the two most popular and frequently advertised skin bleaching companies of the period. Both companies were white-owned. Most of the mid-sized and smaller companies selling skin-lighteners (like Dixie Peach, Golden Brown, and Snow White), that appeared during the forty-year period of this study were white-owned as well. The majority of skin bleaching companies were white-owned because many black-owned companies (like Poro and the Walker Company) felt it was irresponsible to

⁸ Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (1992): 254-256.

produce skin bleaching products.⁹ There were some exceptions, such as the Dr. Fred Palmer's Skin Whitener. Against the original wishes of Madam C.J. Walker, and after her death in 1919, the Walker Company too began producing a skin-lightener called "Tan Off." This product quickly became a best selling product in some locales, ahead of Walker's most famous product and previous best seller, "Wonderful Hair Grower."¹⁰

The second major product category considered here is hair straightening products. Hair straighteners also included hair lengtheners, and in the 1940s this product category also expanded to include wigs and hair attachments. This product category was heavily populated by black owned brands like Poro, The Walker Company, Overton Hygiene, Hi-Ja, Apex, and Nile Queen. All of these companies produced hair pressing oils, straightening creams, and gels. Some white-owned brands were also present in this category, most notably Pluko. The owner of Pluko, (Plough's), also owned the Black and White brand, and consequently there were similar imagery and rhetoric in ads across these two brands. Other white-owned companies that sold hair products included Lustrasilk, Perma-Strate, Silky-Strait, and Royal Crown.¹¹

This project uncovers the types of products offered to black women and the advertising strategies used to sell these products. The goal is to understand the images and conceptions of blackness and beauty sold to women of colour and the larger racial and social hierarchies these images maintained or destabilized. Documenting how the images shifted across the mid twentieth century is equally important. Many of the images and the advertising copy produced by black-owned cosmetic companies challenged hegemonic beauty ideals that venerated white

⁹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 89-90.

¹⁰ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 113.

¹¹ Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 97.

beauty and sold white idealization as a norm. The industry provided black-owned companies and their customers with the platform to identify and shape what they believed to be an ideal image of blackness and beauty as well as reject age old stereotypes and negative imagery of black women. As Susannah Walker argues, black women had previously been portrayed through demeaning stereotypes and exaggerated features.¹² Black-owned cosmetic companies were more likely to promote positive images of the race, depicting well-groomed black women in their advertisements. Several black-owned cosmetic companies sought to uplift the race via their businesses, a topic discussed at greater length in Chapter three.

Although I have just presented an either or scenario of cosmetic companies maintaining or destabilizing racial hierarchies, there is in fact a much more complicated relationship between hegemonic white beauty ideals and how they played out within the industry and advertisements. Neither black-owned nor white-owned cosmetic companies wholly supported or completely rejected white styling practices. Both black and white companies presented well-groomed black women in their ads, but at the same time both types of companies propounded straight long hair and light skin as the beauty ideal for black women. However, for some black-owned companies and their customers white styling practices were used in order to get ahead in a world that valued whiteness. In other cases, it was about expanding the possibilities of black beautifying practices and not emulating whiteness.

There is tension here, and there needs to be tension in our historical assessment and

¹² Walker, *Style & Status*, 14; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 204-205; Susannah Walker, "'Independent Livings' or 'No Bed Of Roses'?: How Race and Class Shaped Beauty Culture as an Occupation for African American Women from the 1920s to the 1960s," *Journal of Women's History*, 20, no.3 (2008): 62; Juliann Sivulka: *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012), 65; Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America* (New York: Humanity Books, 2001), 256-257; Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 8; Laila Haidarali, "Polishing Brown Diamonds: African American Women, Popular Magazines and the Advent of Modeling in Early Postwar America," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no.1 (2005): 14.

judgment. Black-owned companies that utilized white beauty ideals should not be vilified for their choices. Doing so would imply that these companies were corrupted or “duped,” while the contextualized historical reality is far more complex. Companies such as the Walker Company used the straight hair ideal to promote positive images of black women in order to achieve racial uplift. At the Miss Black America Pageant, the contestants sought and demanded inclusion in the realm of beauty through a pageant- a normative practice traditionally used in assessing white beauty. In the advertisements studied here, some black companies sought to define black women as beautiful portraying them with both dignity and accuracy. Sometimes, this meant working with the tools of the system (i.e. utilizing white beauty ideals to their advantage). Thus, cosmetic companies cannot be divided into companies that promoted white standards of beauty and those that did not.

* * *

1920 marks the start of this project because cosmetic use did not receive widespread social acceptance until that point.¹³ Prior to the 1920s, cosmetics were associated with prostitution and the lower class. During the end of the nineteenth century, the women who typically wore “paints” were either prostitutes or considered to be prostitutes. Prostitutes intentionally wore cosmetics in order to identify their occupation to prospective clients. Much of this association had to do with the belief that painted women were intentionally duplicitous for they were “covering up” or hiding their face. Painted women were labeled as “seductresses” who could lead men down a path to adultery.¹⁴

Marlis Schweitzer identifies an earlier acceptance of cosmetics around 1911-1914, but she references cosmetic items like face powders and not more overt cosmetics such as rouge and

¹³ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 55-56, 85.

¹⁴ Ibid, 26.

lipstick, which did not become accepted to a wider swath of American society until the 1920s.¹⁵

In addition, Schweitzer's discussion pertains only to middle class white woman as she completely excludes the upper and lower classes, as well as non-white women, from her analysis. Upper class women did begin wearing cosmetics in the late 1910s as a result of their advertising in magazines like *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and the *Ladies Home Journal*.¹⁶ *Vogue* was one of the only women's magazines to advertise rouge before 1915, suggesting that Schweitzer's dates do not apply here either.¹⁷ Schweitzer does not distinguish "white women" from "women" because her work does not include an analysis of "other" women who might need to be considered in their own context. Kathy Peiss, on the other hand, locates the 1920s as the general period of acceptance.¹⁸ Peiss includes an examination of the experiences of women of colour, whose timeline does not conform to that of middle class white women.

Before 1910, advertisements for skin-lighteners in the black press were rare. Hair-straightening ads were slightly more common but still not as popular as they would become as the 1920s progressed. Examining the cosmetic industry through the perspective of white women also obscures the history of the cosmetic items used by women of colour that were rarely if ever used by white women. Some of these items include wigs, skin lighteners, and hair lengtheners.

My project ends in the late 1950s for reasons of practicality but also because of the shifting political and social landscape for African Americans, which was already beginning to

¹⁵ Marlis Schweitzer, "'The Mad Search for Beauty': Actresses' Testimonials, the Cosmetics Industry, and the 'Democratization of Beauty,'" *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 4 no. 3 (2005), 282-286; Schweitzer still emphasizes that upper class women were reluctant to accept cosmetics even after 1914-15. She stipulates that magazines began "aggressive marketing campaigns" in 1911 but a taboo surrounding cosmetics remained. Magazines provided information on cosmetics and beauty culture but would not promote them. Many celebrities would also not divulge whether they wore cosmetics, or were extremely hesitant to do so because of their controversial nature.

¹⁶ Schweitzer, "'The Mad Search for Beauty,'" 282

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 55-56, 85, 102-103

fluctuate by the mid 1950s. Within the next five years, the civil rights movement, feminism, black power, and other social movements fundamentally altered many aspects of American society including the beauty industry. Social movements modified trends in beauty. For example, by the early 1960s white-owned cosmetic companies were exploiting the liberatory practice of wearing natural and afro-style hair opposed to straightened hair. Companies were selling products for natural hair and also depicting women with natural hair in their ads for other products.¹⁹ The 1960s also saw tremendous growth in black owned advertising firms as well as opportunities for black people in both black and white-owned companies created within the spirit of the civil rights movement. What was advertised and how it was advertised was also reshaped by civil rights, feminism, and black power.²⁰ The post-1960s beauty landscape is perhaps the most popular and well-covered period in the history of cosmetics for black women because of the way the industry responded to social movements.²¹ My project provides a pre-history or a backdrop to 1968, and to the issues highlighted in the Miss America/Miss Black America protests. By 1968, feminism had intermingled with civil rights and black liberation. Miss Black America was an example of the enmeshing of such movements.

Even though the 1960s and 1970s saw tremendous development within the political and cosmetic realms, beauty was and remains racialized. According to Evelyn Brooks

Higgenbotham,

Race serves as a 'global sign,'...since it speaks about and lends meaning to a host of terms and expressions, to myriad aspects of life that would otherwise fall outside the referential domain of race...race impregnates the simplest meanings we take for granted. It makes hair 'good' or 'bad,' speech patterns 'correct' or 'incorrect.'²²

¹⁹ Susannah Walker, "Black is Profitable: The Commodification of the Afro, 1960-1975," *Enterprise and Society* 1, no. 3 (2000): 536-540.

²⁰ Walker, *Style & Status*, 9; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 257-261; Dorothy Cohen, "Advertising and the Black Community," *Journal of Marketing*, 34, no 4 (1970), 5-6; Harold H. Kassarian, "The Negro and American Advertising, 1946-1965," *Journal of Market Research*, 6, no 1 (1969), 29-30.

²¹ Walker, "Black is Profitable." 536-538, 542-546; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 257-261.

²² Higgenbotham, "Metalanguage of Race," 255.

Higgenbotham demonstrates that values such as beauty and work ethic are created or carried through race. Race penetrates distinctions such as class and gender and also supersedes these classifications. If class status is defined by economic standing or even professional identity, then black people who had the same income or job as middle class white people should enjoy the same status. However, in most cases, class status is deeply informed by racial identity giving black people (even those of equal education or professional status) a lower social status. In the mid twentieth century, these distinctions were legitimized because race was conceived as biological, phenotypic, and natural thereby rendering it as factual to white scientists.²³ However, as Higgenbotham explains, race is socially constructed and not determined by biology or phenotypic features. Racial distinctions, however, serve an additional purpose. “Perceived as ‘natural’ and ‘appropriate,’ such racial categories are strategically necessary for the functioning of power in countless institutional and ideological forms, both explicit and subtle.”²⁴ Preserving racial categories subsequently maintains racial hierarchies, with both social and political implications. Racial hierarchies demand racial inequalities, which are determined by the hegemonic values of those in the highest categories. Racial hierarchies functionally keep those on the bottom at the bottom, in this case African-Americans. In order to maintain “business as usual” those on the bottom are kept out of positions of power or, at the very least, their acquisition of power or privilege is much more difficult.

The values placed on race were, and are, culturally specific and fluctuate through time and geography (see Chapter two for more on this). Because the classifications and meanings of race are constructed, they require a reinforcement of their legitimacy. “Their social construction

²³ Ibid, 253.

²⁴ Ibid, 253-254.

becomes racialized as their concrete implications and normative meanings are continuously shaped by... “ideological state apparatuses’ - the school, family, welfare agency, hospital, television and cinema, the press.”²⁵ Everyday practices and societal structures serve as a mechanism to legitimize racial construction. Their ubiquity makes the classifications seem and feel real. The beauty industry, then, is a mechanism that reinforces socially constructed meanings of race.

By the nineteenth century, racialized beauty standards were already well established largely as a result of America’s history with slavery. By this, I mean the valuing of white skin and hair over darker skin and curly or textured hair.²⁶ The development of the beauty industry was a reflection of those ideals creating another societal mechanism to solidify racial perceptions and hierarchies by specifying what or who can be considered beautiful. Beauty and its perception have always been raced, from the time of contact between European and “other” cultures.

Africans were enslaved on the basis of their inferiority. Jennifer Morgan writes:

As travelers and men of letters thought through the thorny entanglements of skin color, complexion, features, and hair texture, they constructed weighty notions of civility, nationhood, citizenship, and manliness [in its relationship to femininity] on the foundation of the amalgam of nature and culture. Given the ways in which appearance became a trope of civility and morality, it is no surprise to find gender located at the heart of European’s encounter with and musings over the connection between bodies and the Atlantic economics... Early modern English writers did... conventionally set the black female figure against one that was white– and thus beautiful... Writers mobilized femaleness alongside an unwillingness to allow African women to embody ‘proper’ female space, which in turn produced a focus for the notion of racial difference.²⁷

Racialized views of blackness persisted in America and did not disappear during or even after the period of American racial slavery. Black women were excluded from the definition of

²⁵ Ibid, 254.

²⁶ Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in the Making of New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 12-14.

²⁷ Morgan, *Labouring Women*, 13-14.

“woman” and all that definition might include, such as beauty. The bodies of non-white women have historically been exoticized, and almost always highly sexualized as their bodies have been viewed as available to white men. Higgenbotham explains that,

The idea one people has of another, even when the difference between them is embodied in the most striking physical characteristics, is always mediated by the social context within which the two come in contact. Race came to life primarily as the signifier of the master/slave relation and thus emerged superimposed upon class and property relations.²⁸

It is these histories that inform the relationship between whites and blacks in the United States, marking African Americans as lesser, even though the formal master/slave relationship was abolished.

According to Stephanie Camp, “nineteenth-century black activist writers and twentieth century black social scientists, journalists, and anti-racist activists were thus concerned not only with slavery, segregation, and discrimination but also with beauty, which they understood to be the taproot of black life, black consciousness, and black politics.”²⁹ Beauty and its meanings and values are and never were neutral. Shirley Tate reminds us that during the period of slavery “European concepts of beauty were based on notions of purity, delicacy, modesty, asexuality and physical frailty. Whiteness was about the embodiment of beauty while black women were viewed as physically strong, immodest and as exuding an animal sensuality.”³⁰ Thus, beauty was not only situated within physical attributes such as hair or skin, but it was also associated with personality traits, character, and morality. Beauty then becomes a judgment on a person’s entire being. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, prevailing white ideology stipulated that a

²⁸ Higgenbotham, "Metalanguage of Race," 256.

²⁹ Stephanie Camp, "Black is Beautiful: An American History," *The Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 3 (2015): 677.

³⁰ Shirley Tate, "Black Beauty: Shade, Hair and Anti-Racist Aesthetics," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 301.

person's outer beauty and general appearance were a reflection of their internal value and character.³¹ This moral and internal valuing persists today and often results in stereotyping. Black activists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries understood the importance of beauty because it functioned as a proxy for larger racial tensions.

The understanding of "good" hair-straight, light-weight, and soft (read: hair resembling white hair) - is only understood through its juxtaposition to "bad hair." A racial hierarchy is imbedded in these terms. These values serve to reinforce the socially constructed meanings of race. Shirley Tate writes that,

[The] norm 'white girls as beautiful...is acted out in social practice and re-idealized and reinstituted in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life ... it is itself (re)produced through its embodiment, through the acts that strive to approximate it, through the idealizations reproduced in and by those acts' ...[T]he norm confers recognizability through bodily practices which can also alter norms at the everyday level.³²

Without the recognizability of a norm and means of producing that norm, the hierarchies and associated judgments could not take hold or be reproduced. Tate's assessment can apply to a norm like straight hair. Women can embody "white girl as beautiful" through the reproduction of a trait like straight hair. Reproducing straight hair is an embodiment of the norm "white girl as beautiful." If it is reproduced enough times by enough people straight hair can be recognized as belonging to the norm of "white girl as beautiful." If this is true, Tate's assessment means that norms can be changed through approximating a trait and reproducing it enough times in order to establish recognizability. Similarly, Noliwe Rooks writes:

There was group of African American women, one generation removed from slavery, who began a conscious process of positioning African American women's identity within their communities through advertisements for hair-care products. In

³¹ Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 13.

³² Shirley Tate, *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics* (Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2009), 19.

the process, these women and their advertisements critiqued class constructions in African American communities, argued for equality in gender relations, and resisted dominant culture's prevailing ideologies surrounding beauty. All of this took place in relation to hair.³³

Beauty and beauty products, then, are saturated with larger social meaning. Hair is not simply hair. Every choice on stylization is imbued with meaning regardless of how it is styled. For those subordinated in a hierarchy, that meaning is more at the surface, more conscious and more contested.

Kobena Mercer argues that all black hair is political.³⁴ Black hair is almost always styled or groomed, meaning that hairstyles are created with intention and mean something socially and culturally. "Such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of significant statements about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or do not ... hair is constantly processed by cultural practices which ... invest it with meanings and value."³⁵ These values can signal race, class, and gender. Each of these are social constructions and require a performative element to signal their meaning and establish recognizability. How do we recognize a woman on the street? It is through her stylization, a stylization that can be repeated, and is repeated often enough to establish a norm or a way of doing. We can also tell when someone does not fit the pattern of what is understood as "woman," when she does not conform with stylization that we recognize as "woman." Similar values are associated with skin colour, a valuing that is also a legacy of slavery. Juliann Sivulka and Susannah Walker comment on this practice. Sivulka writes,

³³ Noliwe Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 10.

³⁴ Kobena Mercer qtd in Tate, *Black Beauty*, 35.

³⁵ Ibid, 44.

During slavery, light-skinned African Americans received preferential treatment in work assignments, becoming household servants and sometimes getting trained in skilled trades. Because they were the offspring of plantation owners, they were more likely to be given such privileges. With emancipation, these advantages gave them greater job security, independence and influence. By the 1890s, the ‘mulatto elite’ were often suspected of trying to become a separate race or to pass for white.³⁶

According to Walker, mixed-race black people “made up a disproportionate number of free black people before the Civil War.”³⁷ Mixed-race elites attempted to use colour as an exclusionary device as it worked in their favor. While colour alone did not determine social status, it was always a factor.³⁸ Black women with “desirable” traits - usually meaning light skin but also straight hair- have historically received comparatively better treatment and greater access to goods and services otherwise out of reach or more difficult to access for other black people. This can include access to higher paying jobs, greater availability of housing, and education. Many cosmetic companies, both white and black-owned, played on the legacy of colour hierarchy, insecurities, and privilege. Cosmetic companies, regardless of the race of their owners, transmitted messages that were deeply embedded in histories of race, hierarchy, privilege, oppression and potentially resistance.

Methodology

The whiteness of beauty is deeply embedded within American culture. Advertisements for beauty products are one point of access in understanding the place of beauty, advertising culture, gender, race, class, and consumerism in the mid-twentieth century United States. My research examines beauty advertisements placed in black-owned periodicals and directed at black consumers. I selected black-owned periodicals for their mostly black audience. The beauty advertisements published within the pages of the black press were intended for and carefully

³⁶ Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt*, 270.

³⁷ Walker, *Style & Status*, 83.

³⁸ Ibid.

constructed for black readership. I tap into this understanding by examining hair straightening and skin lightening advertisements in four black-owned periodicals: *The Chicago Defender* (est. 1905), *The Baltimore Afro-American* (est. 1892), *The Topeka Plaindealer* (1900-1932) which later became *The Kansas Plaindealer* (1933-1958), and *Ebony Magazine* (est. 1945). In 1922, historian of the black press Frederick Detweiler published his famous work *The Negro Press in the United States*. Detweiler argued that out of 217 known black-owned newspapers, the *Chicago Defender* was the largest with a circulation of around 150,000. The NAACP publication *The Crisis* came in next at 62,417, while the *Baltimore Afro-American*, ranked third with a circulation of 18,916.³⁹ I selected the *Plaindealer* in order to explore advertising that might appear in a smaller local paper versus a larger nationally circulating paper. I selected *Ebony* because it was the first nationally circulating, black-owned magazine and it became the largest circulating magazine aimed at people of colour in the early 1950s.⁴⁰ As will be explored in Chapter four, *Ebony* magazine also ushered in fundamental changes in the beauty industry and the advertising industry more generally.

The Chicago Defender, *Afro-American*, and *Plaindealer* were all weekly periodicals, while *Ebony* was a monthly magazine. These sources were chosen based on their circulation size, publication frequency, scope, and page range. *Ebony* was a substantial publication; most issues surpass the one-hundred-page mark. The *Chicago Defender* and *Afro-American* usually had a page range of twenty-four to thirty-two pages per issue, while the *Plaindealer* averaged four to eight pages per issue. The *Plaindealer* was a local circulating paper while the *Chicago Defender* and *Afro-American* were nationally circulating. The source types demonstrate a juxtaposition of

³⁹ Frederick G. Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1922), 6-7; Prior to the 1920s, circulation numbers did not require a legal guarantee and as such only four black periodicals did so, which is why earlier estimations of circulation size are unavailable or highly speculative.

⁴⁰ Chambers, *Madison Avenue*, 4.

local versus national, weekly versus monthly, and periodicals of varying page lengths. My goal is to provide the widest selection of variables in order to understand the types of advertisements African American consumers might see across the northern United States. My research revealed that the *Plaindealer*, more so than any other periodical, retained a local advertising focus. Nonetheless, national companies like Nadinola also advertised within its pages. Someone living in Kansas and reading the *Plaindealer* would see smaller, fewer, and more locally-based ads. *Ebony* contained the most expensive and luxurious ads as the magazine was much more conscious of their class identity than the three weeklies. There is, however, advertising crossover between all four periodicals.

I surveyed the *Chicago Defender* and *Afro-American* yearly between 1920 and 1959, and the *Plaindealer* until 1958 when it ceased circulating. I also surveyed *Ebony* between 1945-1959, beginning with the first issue released in November 1945. Each periodical was surveyed during the first and last week of June and January in each year. In the case of *Ebony*, the monthly issues for June and January were surveyed each year. In addition, if any of the weekly periodicals published a weekend edition on the first or last week of the month, these issues were also included on top of the regular publications. However, this was not a regular practise. Most of periodicals published consistently, but if for some reason any of the weeklies did not publish an issue for the allotted date, the nearest date was selected for review. I reviewed a minimum of 160 issues for each of the *Chicago Defender*, *Afro-American*, and *Plaindealer* totaling 480 issues alongside thirty monthly issues from *Ebony*.

The *Chicago Defender* and *Afro-American* began as soapboxes to address racial equality because the white press, when it did include stories on blacks, “emphasized black crime and

omitted black achievements.”⁴¹ *The Afro-American*, *Chicago Defender*, and *Plaindealer* all published stories that were believed to be integral to black consciousness and everyday life. Such stories included accounts of lynching, rape, and unlawful imprisonment, but also celebrations of black success, and local race news. The mission of the *Chicago Defender*’s founder was that the paper would be “a force to combat the pervasive racism of the era.”⁴² In the 1920s and into the 1930s, the *Chicago Defender* was not about producing the most up-to-date stories. Stovall argues that the *Chicago Defender*’s “function was less of reporting news...than of affirming black life by reporting significant activities, praising black success, and defining worthwhile goals for the community.”⁴³

Each of the three periodicals had an intentional identity that was reinforced or shaped through the content. In “‘Unashamedly Black’,” Eurie Dahn addresses the *Chicago Defender*’s goal of racial uplift and its use of shame in achieving their goal. Dahn writes that the paper had encouraged blacks from the South to come to the city but then printed material that described these new arrivals from the Great Migration as inferior to respectable black people already in Chicago. He writes:

[T]he letter writers of the *Defender* see shame as an instrument that can provoke pride in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, teaching shame to working-class migrants teaches respectability, which facilitates a sense of pride in the race as a whole; on the other hand, feeling shame instills class pride, which creates divisions within the race. In the pages of the *Defender*, shame is mainly available to African Americans with middle-class sensibilities; the working-class black body, from the point of view of the middle class, is in fact a source of shame in its shamelessness.⁴⁴

Dahn demonstrates that shame was utilized as a tool of racial uplift by “teaching” new migrants

⁴¹ Mary E. Stovall, “The Chicago Defender in the Progressive Era,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 83, no. 3 (1990), 159.

⁴² Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America: From the Age of the Pullman Porters to the Age of Obama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 22.

⁴³ Stovall, “The Chicago Defender in the Progressive Era,” 160.

⁴⁴ Eurie Dahn, “Unashamedly Black”: Jim Crow Aesthetics and the Visual Logic of Shame,” *The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, 39. No. 3 (2014), 10.

how to be “respectable” so as to benefit the whole race. The Walker Company, one of the most important of the early black-owned cosmetics companies, used similar rhetoric in their advertisements. Walker promoted racial uplift through the use of beauty products, encouraging black women to appear presentable and respectable. Racial uplift was also promoted through the appearance of the models in advertising campaigns. As demonstrated by Dahn, the *Chicago Defender* was formed from a middle class viewpoint, but at least partly directed at the working class. What is clear is that class identity was reinforced via advertisements, cost of the periodical, and overall aesthetic.

* * *

Throughout the course of this project I have been asked one question repeatedly: how can I as a white woman write about complex and even intimate issues of race. Particularly about the fraught issues surrounding hair texture and skin colour. This is an important question that requires an answer.

I take my lead from scholars like Evelyn Higgenbotham who have rightly criticised white scholars for paying “lip service” to histories other than their own.⁴⁵ Fully integrating histories of minorities means that somewhere along the way white students and scholars will have to write about these histories. My project does not speak on behalf of anyone, nor does it aim to tell anyone’s story. There are tremendous works that include first person interviews or works that discuss black women’s lived experience of beauty.⁴⁶ As much as possible, I defer to black women telling their own stories in their own words. My historical training has trained me to

⁴⁵ Higgenbotham, “Metalanguage of Race,” 251-252.

⁴⁶ Rooks, *Hair Raising* contains reflections on her childhood and family; Shirley Tate’s *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics* (Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2009) contains several interviews with black women in Britain; Walker, ““Independent Livings,”” 60-83 and Walker, *Style & Status* both contain interviews and first person accounts.

write about the past, a past which I have never experienced. In this project, I attempt to use these skills to critically address racism, but I also hope to treat the material with humility.

My identity as white, cisgender, educated, able bodied, straight, and middle class leaves me among the most privileged. Although I have spent countless hours reading about the white gaze, colourism, passing, the male gaze, the beauty gaze, black beauty culture, black beauty, black entrepreneurship, the black press, consumerism, the Jim Crow era, and beyond, reading and theory can only take me so far. There are many experiences of blackness that I will never be capable of understanding. There are many women with various intersecting identities who feel as though I will never be able to understand their womanhood or that my experiences and writing will never reflect their experiences.

I believe that people of all races should tackle issues like beauty and how it has functioned in the past in order to address racism in our present. Leaving people of colour to address their own histories can be liberating but it also leaves a void and a disconnect in our scholarship such as the gaping one in the history of the black and white cosmetic industries. Black historians have written works on the black beauty industry to fill a need where there was no scholarship. We should not leave people of colour as the only ones to address these histories. To integrate minority histories into the larger historical narrative or “normative” conversations of history requires collaborations between black and white scholars, in which white scholars are allies and not leaders of liberation. My work is not the final word or discussion on black beauty, but a positive contribution. I hope that my work helps to advance a larger project of radical scholarship for social change. I also hope that this work encourages other students to tackle subject matter that is indeed complicated, uncomfortable, and politically charged. “Getting it wrong” has served as greater learning experience than refusing to write about the subject at all.

The chapters that follow will take you through the mid-twentieth century black cosmetic landscape following the development of the cosmetic industry and the shifting advertising strategies. Chapter One reads much like “Beauty Culture 101” as it introduces the basics of this project. I begin with the cosmetic industry generally and the black industry specifically as I outline some of the major players in the black cosmetic industry. I move on to the state of advertising in the 1920s and its place within the black beauty industry, and then tackle how the black industry differed from the white industry. A discussion of the black press and the place of cosmetic advertising within its pages rounds out the chapter. Chapter Two presents the theoretical base needed to understand the intersecting gender, racial, and class issues at work between 1920 and 1960. The chapter grounds the reader with gender and racial theory as well as outlining the political and social climate within which the beauty industry developed. I discuss America’s long history of segregation, slavery, and racism, as well as intertwining features like colourism and passing. Chapters Three and Four get to the heart of the matter. These chapters chronologically examine specific ads and popular advertising strategies drawing comparisons between white and black owned companies. Chapter Three delves into the 1920s and 1930s, while Chapter Four explores the 1940s and 1950s. This chronological focus follows the natural development and maturation of the industry. Chapter Four highlights four key advancements and features that distinguish the period from its predecessor. The chapter discusses the creation and influence of *Ebony*, the proliferation of new companies, the contribution of photography, and the new hair attachment and wig industry. I return to many of these issues in the conclusion where I tie together the mid-twentieth century norms and developments with our modern cosmetic industry.

Chapter 1: The Foundations of the Black Beauty Industry

“It is a woman’s *business* to be beautiful.”¹ The author of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, a popular American women’s magazine targeting middle and upper class white women, penned these words in 1852 describing a prevailing mid-nineteenth century ideology. Only women could be beautiful, and demonstrating this beauty was an obligation. The author describes an intimate relationship between beauty and women claiming that a woman could not consider herself to be a woman if she could not consider herself beautiful.²

The association of beauty with women came from an eighteenth century artistic convention that maintained curved lines were more beautiful than straight ones.³ These curved lines represented the female body; the beauty ideal, naturally extended beyond her figure to other phenotypic features. If beauty could be identified and reified, that also meant it could be manipulated and reproduced. Eventually, cosmetics-became one way of achieving, maintaining, and reproducing beauty. Much like today, the expectation for ordinary women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that women must use cosmetics products, but their use should be undetectable. Thus, early cosmetics were dedicated to skincare rather than the application of what we would now call make-up. Too much emphasis on beauty and using overt cosmetic products was highly suspect due to the societal discomfort with “painted women.” Paints were a signal of prostitution, which was an association that took decades to shed.⁴ As discussed in the introduction, this negative stereotype finally lifted around 1920. The business of

¹ Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1983), 10.

² Banner, *American Beauty*, 10.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 26.

achieving beauty rapidly expanded across the twentieth century to include a wide swath of products that were integral to helping women achieve beauty - undetectably.

This chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the project as it provides the basics of the business of beauty as is developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, separately for black and white women. In combination with the development of the black beauty industry, this chapter also discusses emerging developments in advertising, the population movement of the Great Migration, black economic nationalism, racial uplift, and evolving ideals of beauty for black women. This chapter is organized around two major sections. The first section examines the racially segregated cosmetic industry, with an emphasis on products for black consumers. In the second section, I explore the expanding advertising industry as it developed alongside the cosmetics industry. These topics are intimately intertwined with one another, and with the development of the black press (as laid out in the introduction). The black press was the platform for cosmetic ads, and cosmetic ads were usually the largest ad category in any given black-owned periodical.

The term cosmetics had an entirely different meaning in the 1860s than it would come to have in the 1920s. According to Kathy Peiss, nineteenth century Americans,

[I]nsisted on a fundamental distinction between skin-improving and skin-masking substances. The word cosmetic usually referred to skin-improving creams, lotions, and other substances that acted on the skin to protect and correct it. Paints and enamels, in contrast, were white and tinted liquids that covered the skin.⁵

This distinction between cosmetics and paints was a moral one. Cosmetics were used to enhance natural beauty; paints were used to deceive.⁶ Painting the body was viewed as suspicious; the

⁵ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 10.

⁶ While the overall distinction stands, there is some variation in the understanding of paints and cosmetic across class, geography, and even social groups. While some secondary sources are clear on their distinctions between cosmetic and paints, some are less so. This mixed use of terms is a product of the variation in the primary sources themselves.

user was seen as attempting to cover up or hide parts of their skin/body in order to intentionally deceive others.⁷ For many this distinction was rigid- *anyone* who painted was attempting to be deceptive. If women had nothing to hide, they would not paint. Still, the distinction between the two kinds of products could be arbitrary. Face powders, for example, could be considered both a paint and a cosmetic. Rice based powders were viewed as protecting the skin from damage, while lead-based powder (the most common type of face powder) was seen as a paint. The negative reputation of lead-based powders may in part be a result of their use by stage performers, including burlesque stars who were viewed as somewhat unsavory and immoral characters. Still, it was these celebrities (women like Lillie Langtry and Adelina Patti) who helped bring cosmetics off the stage and into the lives of everyday women.⁸ The prominence of stage women and the cult of celebrity that emerged around them intensified the importance of beauty performance in everyday life. Writing about the late nineteenth century, Kathy Peiss expressed,

Photographic and stage techniques of making up and posing introduced external and standardized models of beauty that challenged the ‘natural’ [beauty] ideal. For some advice writers, social life [by the] instead had become a performance that called for make-up, but only if used, paradoxically, to enact the part of one’s true, natural self.⁹

Upper class white men, and to a lesser degree upper class white women, treated nineteenth century women who painted as though they had been morally duplicitous. Painting flew in the face of perceptions of Victorian womanhood, where women were traditionally judged by their virtue. A woman should be spending her time on her family, not herself. Victorian womanhood stipulated women should be self-less, humble, and pure.¹⁰ The “painted woman”

⁷ Ibid, 8-12.

⁸ Ibid, 10-12, 48.

⁹ Ibid, 49.

¹⁰ Lois Banner, *American Beauty*, 8; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 38.

was viewed as seductress, with moralists invoking the biblical ‘Jezebel’ trope “who represented the power of women to seduce and arouse sexual desire... [she] was the ‘originator and patroness of idolatry,’ whose arrogance and pride brought death and destruction. Her example taught that women had a duty to spurn adornment, submit to authority, and cultivate piety.”¹¹ The Jezebel trope remained well into the twentieth century and was one of the largest hurdles the “paints” industry (our modern cosmetic industry) was forced to overcome. Painting covered up “nature’s handiwork” and was an act of vanity.¹² Beauty had all of these complexities despite being “women’s business.”

Beginning in the second decade of the twentieth century women and men began to scrutinize women in new ways and against new standards. Some form of cosmetic enhancement or product use became an expectation. Women were expected to wear cosmetics (and increasingly even paints) but only if they went unnoticed. Over time, skin-improving cosmetics became a naturalized norm as men and women gradually acclimatized to the way women appeared with enhanced complexions.

Helena Rubenstein and Elizabeth Arden are considered the founders of the *modern* cosmetic industry for white women. They both began their product lines after the turn of the twentieth century. Their first wave of products were cosmetics, or skin enhancing products like face creams. Both companies were extremely slow to include paints in their product lines. In 1915, when Rubenstein visited New York she expressed disgust, concern, and surprise at the amount of women who wore paints.¹³ The distinction between paints and cosmetics collapsed by the third decade of the twentieth century into one product category, even though the taboo

¹¹ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 26; The Jezebel trope has a longer history as an insult directed against Black women.

¹² Ibid, 12.

¹³ Ibid, 64-66, 168.

surrounding the association of paints and prostitution lingered in the background. However, the distinction between paints and cosmetics was ambiguous and there was always overlap.

From the beginning of the industry, the use and sourcing of cosmetics and paints was divided by race. As the cosmetic industry developed it remained segregated. Commercially made cosmetics directed toward women with white skin became available in the 1860s but were rather uncommon as most women who could afford cosmetics made their own products.¹⁴ Women followed recipe books, and assuming they had the necessary funds, obtained some of the more complicated ingredients from druggists.¹⁵ In the United States, homemade cosmetics followed a long tradition that dated back to the seventeenth century and early English colonists. Cosmetic knowledge was generally passed on through family recipes, as recipe books were not commercially printed until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁶ The publishing boom in the 1840s and 1850s expanded the proliferation of cosmetic knowledge, with the increase of etiquette books, cosmetic recipes, and women's manuals. The boom lowered prices for such books thereby making them more accessible.¹⁷

Although it was a less common initially, women could also purchase cosmetics from druggists or patent medicine companies. Products and formulas purchased from druggists were more reputable than those peddled as patent medicine, as products produced by druggists drew from stock recipes and were generally tested and trusted. Nonetheless, some early commercial products like Bloom of Youth, a popular skin-lightener developed for white woman, were a creation of the patent medicine industry. The product was designed to maintain the idealized pale skin of the Victorian period. However, this product contained lead and eventually became

¹⁴ Ibid, 18.

¹⁵ Ibid, 9-10.

¹⁶ Ibid, 14.

¹⁷ Ibid; Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 32.

notorious after it killed a young woman in 1877.¹⁸

The cosmetic industry was haunted by the patent medicine industry. According to Peiss, “‘patent’ simply referred to medicines and beauty preparations sold through specific techniques of national advertising and distribution.”¹⁹ Across the second half of the nineteenth century patent medicines appeared claiming to treat every condition and ailment imaginable. These medicines were usually ineffective because the main ingredient was typically alcohol. Even if patent beauty products worked in some way that approximated the exaggerated claims used to sell products, they could have nasty and unforeseen side effects from ingredients like lead or mercury. The patent medicine industry was largely unregulated and concoctions were peddled by a wide variety of characters including doctors, actresses, sports players, and other elites like Congressmen.²⁰ The patent medicine industry was unconcerned with advertising the truth as companies intentionally deceived their customers.²¹ The industry reached a “quack peak” in the 1890s, but by the early 1900s “scandals involving the use of fake or ‘tainted’ testimonials” led to a crusade against the industry.²²

Into the early twentieth century, cosmetics and patent medicines were closely related in the public view, especially when celebrities like Lillie Langtry were endorsing patent medicines *and* cosmetics.²³ Many consumers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lost faith

¹⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 8-12.

¹⁹ Ibid, 20

²⁰ Kerry Segrave, *Endorsements in Advertising: A Social History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2005), 9; Segrave writes that in the early 1900s a Virginia Congressman, the mayor of Lowell Massachusetts, a senator from North Carolina, and a Kansas Attorney General all “testified” in ads for Pain’s Celery Compound an alleged “nerve strengthener” which was actually comprised mainly of alcohol. Peruna’s cure-all was a popular compound of the 1890s and early 1900s. The company claimed to have fifty testimonials from members of congress and twenty-five American army generals. All twenty-five testimonials were published along with some of those from congressmen.

²¹ Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 140.

²² Segrave, *Endorsements in Advertising*, 4; Marlis Schweitzer, “‘The Mad Search for Beauty’: Actresses’ Testimonials, the Cosmetics Industry, and the ‘Democratization of Beauty,’” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4 no. 3 (2005): 264.

²³ Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012), 41-42; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 217.

in advertising and did not trust the newly burgeoning cosmetic industry because of the trickery and deception that went on with patent medicine advertising. Celebrity endorsements for cosmetics also became less effective once earlier products were exposed as fraudulent. The endorsers lost their credibility and the tactic became an advertising pariah. Endorsements did not begin appearing again until the 1920s.²⁴ The problems of the patent medicine industry and its tarnished reputation likely contributed to the slow take-off of the cosmetic industry. Customers were hesitant to trust companies in the same product category as patent medicines, especially companies that utilized advertising strategies very similar to those used by the patent medicine industry.

Nonetheless, commercially made cosmetic products began taking off in the 1860s, with expansion into the 1880s and 1890s.²⁵ Harriet Hubbard Ayer created a line of skin cream in the late 1880s, which is considered one of the first in the industry.²⁶ Around the turn of the century, some companies produced both skin-improving cosmetics like moisturizers and a limited range of skin-masking paints. Women in this period who wanted to paint were limited to powder, rouge, and lip products such as tints and balms. These items could be used to achieve the signature Victorian aesthetic of pale skin and rosy cheeks. Peiss argues, however, that it took decades for businesses to become established and that there was no “identifiable ‘cosmetic industry’ (understood as we use the term now) in the nineteenth century.”²⁷ From this point forward I will be using the term cosmetics to refer to both cosmetics and paints unless specified otherwise.

The emerging beauty marketplace was of course not accessible to enslaved women. This

²⁴ Segrave, *Endorsements in Advertising*, 4-10.

²⁵ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 18-19.

²⁶ Ibid, 64.

²⁷ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 18-19.

does not mean, however, that enslaved women stood entirely outside of beauty regimes.

Enslaved black women used berries for rouge, slicked back their hair with grease, tied their hair back with head wraps, plaited and straightened their hair.²⁸ A focus on hair remained central to African American beauty regimes both during and after the end of slavery. Enslaved women were assessed and measured by owners in the US and elsewhere against a standard that associated whiteness with beauty.²⁹ According to Shirley Tate, in the Caribbean and United States notions of beauty were based on “purity, delicacy, modesty, asexuality and physical frailty.” Black women were positioned as the opposite as strong, immodest, and sexual.³⁰

Outside of and after slavery, black women were less likely to participate in the emerging cosmetics trade. The free black population was less likely to have the resources to purchase commercial products or the ingredients for home-crafted preparations. Still, a market for skin-lighteners and hair straightening devices began to emerge even before the civil war. Advertisements for skin lighteners and hair straighteners began appearing in the northern black press in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Companies such as Black Skin Remover, Black and White Ointment, and Curl-I-Cure were among the first to advertise regularly around the 1860s.³¹ More regular advertising, and black-owned companies with national attention and distribution, appeared after the turn of the twentieth century.

Two of the most popular and successful black-owned companies were Poro, founded by Annie Turnbo Malone, and The Walker Company, founded by Sarah Breedlove (better known as Madam C.J. Walker.) These two companies emerged around the same time as Rubenstein and

²⁸ Ibid, 13.

²⁹ Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in the Making of New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 159.

³⁰ Shirley Tate, "Black Beauty: Shade, Hair and Anti-Racist Aesthetics," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 301; Shirley Tate, *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics* (Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2009), 61.

³¹ Noliwe Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 27.

Arden began producing products for white women. Around 1900, after about a decade of experimentation, Malone began to produce her first cosmetic item, the “Wonderful Hair Grower.” She formally registered Poro as her trade name in 1906. Walker worked for Malone for a short period, and then struck out on her own. Walker’s company and *her* “Wonderful Hair Grower” emerged around 1905. Peiss speculates that both women likely played around with pre-existing formulas and a similar set of ingredients thereby producing similar products, both of which were effective.³²

Malone and Walker’s business endeavours began with hair products (instead of the skincare products chosen by Rubenstein and Arden) because of the specific needs for African American women whose hair was damaged by unsafe hair-straightening techniques.³³ Earlier, the predominant hair straightening method used round tongs or pullers. The pulling motion of a solid object through coarse and thick hair put tremendous stress on the hair and scalp causing hair damage, balding, thinning, and severe burns.³⁴

Malone and Walker likely improved on the pre-existing heated combs already on the market by widening the teeth of the combs to be more suitable for coarse thick hair. The new Malone/Walker combs were heated up on a stove and then brushed through the hair after applying oil. Walker’s Glossine, Apex’s Glossatina, or other hair pressing oils were created specifically to press or straighten the hair.³⁵ The new hot or straightening comb was so effective that it persisted as the main method for straightening hair into the 1960s.³⁶ Although burns were still possible, the process was considerably safer than its predecessor. Most importantly, the new

³² Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 68-70.

³³ Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 12-15.

³⁴ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 70.

³⁵ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 70, Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 70.

³⁶ Walker, *Style & Status*, 105.

hair straightening methods from Malone and Walker (but especially Walker) were touted as mechanisms that would restore the integrity of the hair increasing overall hair health.

According to Susannah Walker, C.J. Walker vehemently refused to call her products “hair straighteners” and instructed her employees to refer to her method as “treating” the hair instead. Regardless, the Walker Company actually sold hair-straightening products, and taught beauty school graduates the Walker method for hair pressing.³⁷ Former Walker employee Marjorie Joyner described Walker’s hair pressing method as “a method to beautify rather than thinking about making a woman look white.”³⁸ Walker avoided using the term “straighten” because of the implication that emulating white beauty and hair styles was the ultimate goal of the product. Straightening vs. pressing can seem like a semantic game to modern ears, but Walker’s early ads truly emphasized hair health over hair straightening, even if straightening was the end result. Using the word “straighten” undercut the goals of maintaining scalp and hair health that Walker’s method emphasized. I argue that Walker, and to some extent Malone, were defining their own goals and they used their pressing method (as well as their language) to advocate for a black self-defined meaning of beauty.

Skin lightening creams were a product with far more complicated history. As many scholars note, the practise of skin lightening through cosmetics and home preparations was a part of black beauty culture from the nineteenth century.³⁹ Commercially produced skin lighteners targeting black women were available from the 1860s, but the early versions appearing around the 1840s were of questionable safety. A late nineteenth century company called Black Skin Remover suggested the goal was to remove any visible signs of blackness. After the turn of the

³⁷ Ibid, 65-66.

³⁸ Ibid, 66.

³⁹ Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 26-27.

twentieth century, skin-lightening creams were mostly produced by white owned companies, lead by Nadinola and Plough's (with its Black and White and Pluko's product lines). Some of the emerging black-owned brands were hesitant to produce skin lighteners because of the political implications of skin lightening. Some black men and women critiqued skin bleaches, viewing them as a rejection of blackness. Walker refused to sell skin-lightening creams because this kind of product did not fit with her goal of connecting her business with racial uplift. Malone also shared this stance. However, after Walker's death the company went against her wishes and began selling "Tan-off" in 1919.⁴⁰ Other black-owned brands, like Overton Hygiene and Dr. Fred Palmer's, also produced skin bleaches.⁴¹

The main ingredients in their bleaches were hydroquinone, hydrogen peroxide, mercury, ammoniated mercury, and borax, all of which were ingredients which were not regulated for use in cosmetics until the mid 1930s.⁴² These ingredients could lighten skin colour to varying degrees as long the product was used regularly. In the eyes of some black people, skin lighteners were representative of white domination and/or black self-hatred. For others, skin lighteners were about fading dark spots⁴³ or using these products to get ahead in a racially stratified society.⁴⁴

Malone and Walker saw their hair and skin products as providing racial uplift for the user and the entire race, and this approach is reflected in ads that emphasized positive images of the race. Women of colour were presented as well-groomed, stylish, happy, and respectable. Such representations defied many of the racial stereotypes of the early twentieth century. A clean and

⁴⁰ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 113.

⁴¹ Shirley Tate, *Skin Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones: Shade Shifter* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 28.

⁴² Tate, *Skin Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones*, 27, 88.

⁴³ Skin lighteners remain a modern treatment for acne scars and hyperpigmentation.

⁴⁴ Tate, *Skin Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones*, 27-28. The politics of skin-lightening and colourism are discussed in Chapter Two.

well-groomed appearance, according to Walker, made these women appear presentable and respectable. If society viewed black women (or even a specific subset of black women) as respectable, Walker believed this would benefit the entire race.⁴⁵

Walker was in many ways proven right. In 1933, Paul K. Edwards published one of the first market research studies with African American men and women. Edward's work was eventually published in *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, the most comprehensive study involving African American consumers in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ The African American men and women interviewed for Edward's study expressed their abhorrence for the commonplace imaging of black people in stereotypical and derogatory ways. Women in Edward's study were shown two cosmetic advertisements. One was for a Dr. Fred Palmer's Skin Whitener (a product from a white-owned company), and the other was for a Madam C.J. Walker's face powder. The women surveyed lauded the two cosmetic advertisements for providing "positive images of the race."⁴⁷ Many of the study participants expressed that they liked the two cosmetics ads they were shown because they did not rely on stereotypical caricatures that were common in advertisements at the time.⁴⁸ Writing about a slightly later period (mid-twentieth century), scholar Jason Chambers argued that "the ubiquitous nature of advertising gave blacks access to a visual space and a set of practices to challenge the existing images of themselves as a group and to present an alternate vision."⁴⁹ Chambers' assessment reflects the goals of black-owned companies who presented their definition of black beauty and black womanhood that directly challenged the pre-existing assumption of the association of

⁴⁵ Susannah Walker, *Style & Status*, 50-52; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 89-91

⁴⁶ Paul K. Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1932).

⁴⁷ Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro*, 250-253.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 250-251.

⁴⁹ Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 8.

whiteness and beauty.

Cosmetic companies that promoted women of colour positively were likely to gain favour with black consumers. This approach was part of the marketing strategy of many cosmetic companies, both black and white-owned. Positive images of women of colour included nicely groomed straightened or slicked back hair, a clear and clean complexion, minimal makeup, clean and pressed clothes, and a dazzling smile. In these ads, black women saw as alternate depiction of self- a depiction that was both positive and accurate.⁵⁰

For Walker, the products she advertised and sold, the training she gave women in her beauty schools, and the employment she provided women (in schools, salons, and sales positions) were all part of her belief and strategy of racial uplift.⁵¹ Job opportunities were crucially important to her vision because they could lift black women out of poverty. In the early part of the twentieth century, very few desirable job opportunities existed for women of colour. Their options usually consisted of subservient positions like washers, cooks, and maids. These jobs paid very poorly and black women frequently had demeaning encounters with white employers. Walker (and also Malone at Poro) wanted an alternative.

Malone and Walker's beauty schools advertised that graduates would make more money working in this field than in any of traditional jobs available to black women. They would be free of white employers, set their own schedules, and perhaps one day own their own salons. All of this would take place while helping other black women.⁵² Beauty culture training could be accomplished within a few weeks and with a low tuition cost; these factors also made the

⁵⁰ Nadinola is an American white owned companies founded in 1899 and is among the old skin bleaching companies, which still exists today; Tate, *Skin Bleaching in Atlantic Zones*, 93.

⁵¹ The connection between racial uplift the black cosmetics industry is explored at greater length in Chapter Three.

⁵² Susannah Walker, "'Independent Livings' or 'No Bed Of Roses'?: How Race and Class Shaped Beauty Culture as an Occupation for African American Women from the 1920s to the 1960s," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no.3 (2008): 61.

occupation a desirable career option for many black women. Beauty colleges emulated traditional academic colleges to provide the occupation with a sense of prestige and professionalism.⁵³ Although many of the wider claims for job security a higher pay never came to fruition, beauticians regularly “invoked the rhetoric of racial uplift when explaining the importance of their work.”⁵⁴

Kathy Peiss argues that beauty culture for black women, as envisioned by early black-owned cosmetic companies, “was a vindication of black womanhood, a way to achieve personal dignity and collective advancement.” Early black beauty culture entrepreneurs “embedded the beauty trade in the daily life of black communities linked by kin, neighbours, churches and schools.” These business owners crafted their own niche within the cosmetics industry which fundamentally intertwined profit with “larger ethical and political purposes.”⁵⁵ From the beginning, the Poro and Walker companies contributed to philanthropic work by donating to churches and fundraisers. As noted, both companies encouraged female training and entrepreneurship, and both Malone and Walker connected consumption to larger racial and social concerns.⁵⁶ Commenting on this, Shirley Tate writes, “women entrepreneurs like Madame C.J. Walker, used a counter hegemonic discourse to critique ideologies of gender, race, and class in the dominant as well as African-American middle-class culture.”⁵⁷

Although Poro and the Walker Company were central players in the black beauty industry, they were not the only black-owned companies. Other major players included Apex, Hi-Ja, Overton, and Nile Queen/Kashmir. The most economically powerful companies in the

⁵³ Walker, “Independent Living,” 61.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 90.

⁵⁶ Walker, “Independent Living,” 63; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar* 92-93.

⁵⁷ Shirley Tate, *Black Beauty*, 36-37.

industry were, however, white-owned. The African American cosmetic industry was heavily populated by white-owned companies advertising products specifically for black consumers, and this made the cosmetic industry unlike other commercial sectors serving black consumers. Across most industries, white-owned companies generally assumed black consumers could not afford their products, thereby making specialized advertising campaigns directed at African Americans useless.⁵⁸ These were heavily racialized beliefs of black spending habits and largely based on speculation and stereotypes. In everyday life black people might purchase Quaker Oats, but the brand did not advertise in the black press and generally did not include black people in their advertisements. Most white companies ignored the black press in their advertising strategies pointing to what they saw as comparatively low circulation numbers, substandard design and poor journalism. In addition, many white-owned companies were unwilling to advertise in the black press as they feared deterring white customers. Finally, white-owned companies producing products for white society generally had a hostile relationship with the black press. The black press regularly lambasted white companies, including companies that were potential sources of advertising revenue.⁵⁹

White-owned companies producing cosmetics for black consumers began to appear around the end of the nineteenth century, but the numbers increased dramatically in the 1920s and 1930s. Companies such as Excellento, Golden Brown, Nadinola, and Plough's (which produced both Pluko Hairdressing and Black and White Skin Bleaching Creams) were some of the largest players in the industry.⁶⁰ The race (white) and gender (male) of the owners made it easier for them (as compared to black female or even black male entrepreneurs) to access credit,

⁵⁸ Walker, *Style & Status*, 4, 7, 14-15.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 88-89.

⁶⁰ With the exception of Pluko's Hair Dressing all of these companies and brands focused on skin bleaching products.

marketing, and distribution channels.

With few exceptions, these companies had product lines directed specifically at women of colour; the products sold to black women were not sold to white women.⁶¹ The entrance of white-owned companies into the market for cosmetics directed at black women was not a result of white owners attempting to achieve equality or make any type of civil rights statement. Rather, the owners of these companies and brands were opportunists that saw business opportunities, which were somewhat exploitative. These “opportunities” were based on

Company and Brand Name	Cosmetic Focus	Black or White Owned
Excellento	Skin	White
Nadinola	Skin	White
Plough's Pluko Black and White	Hair Skin	White
Snow White	Skin	White
Golden Brown	Skin, eventually hair	White
Dixie Peach	Skin	White
Golden Peacock	Skin	White
Silky Strate	Hair	White
Lustrasilk	Hair	White
Perma-Strate	Hair	White
Poro	Hair, eventually skin	Black
C.J. Walker	Hair, eventually skin	Black
Hi-Ja	Hair, eventually skin	Black
Overton	Skin	Black
Nile Queen/ Kashmir	Skin	Black
Apex	Skin and hair	Black
Fred Palmer's	Skin, eventually hair	Black

Figure 1. Chart of leading cosmetic companies between 1920-1960

undercutting black-owned companies through the advantages provided to white companies as a result of their race, financing and connections. Some companies, such as Golden Brown, attempted to conceal the race of the owners to intentionally pass as black-owned. Golden Brown

⁶¹ One counter-example was Nadinola's skin bleach. The company sold a version of this product to white women but marketed as a product to help with sun and age spots.

fabricated the backstory of Miss Hightower, a black woman whom the company claimed was the owner. Miss Hightower was a real person, but she was the wife of a porter and had no association with the ownership.⁶² The owners of Golden Brown also performed in drag and blackface, and sent racist ads to white druggists calling their black customers “superstitious darkies.”⁶³

Figure 1 lists several of the most important cosmetic companies in the black cosmetic industry between 1920 and 1960, and highlights the race of their owners. It should be noted that several companies expanded their product lines to include skin and hair products but such companies are usually known for one or the other. As an example, Dr. Fred Palmer’s began as a skin lightening company and eventually expanded their product range to include hair products. Even after this expansion the company was best known for their “Skin Whitener.”

This chart highlights the over-representation of white firms in the black beauty industry, but it also functions as a point of reference. In later chapters I will be referring to these companies at length as I discuss their advertising strategies. What the chart cannot capture is the extent in which the white-owned companies completely outpaced the black-owned companies in the extent of their advertising. As we will see in Chapters Three and Four, the advertising tactics and messages deployed by black-owned companies and white-owned companies could be very different. At a very general level, white-owned companies were more inclined to use derogatory phrasing when referring to natural black hair and skin, and to pose white beauty as the ideal.⁶⁴

Although advertising existed before 1800, there was little professionalization and it could

⁶² Susannah Walker, *Style & Status*, 25.

⁶³ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 117-118.

⁶⁴ I will look at this generalization with more nuance in subsequent Chapters.

hardly be considered an industry until the middle of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Juliann Sivulka writes that prior to the 1850s, “There were no copywriters, art directors, account executives, or marketing professionals.”⁶⁶ She argues that the profession arose because coordinating with newspapers about printing ads required tedious full-time labour. Hiring full-time employees to perform this labour, including selling advertising space, birthed the advertising industry.⁶⁷ Although a new industry emerged out of necessity, this did not mean that the first generation of advertisers were efficient. Until the turn of the twentieth century, advertising was little understood and self-conscious advertising strategies were virtually non-existent. “Decisions about whether to advertise, how much to spend, and where and how to advertise tended to be personalized, ad hoc, and in large measure, stabs in the dark.”⁶⁸

Most nineteenth century ads were extremely small and relied heavily on copy.” The role of early advertisements were to inform the consumer that the particular product existed.⁶⁹ One of the first advertising assignments was to create brand recognition among consumers, an approach that became extremely important for the cosmetic and food industries in particular. This first generation of advertisements were also had to convince consumers to buy products from the store (or mail order) as opposed to making goods at home.⁷⁰ Early advertising “played a vital role in the development of a national market for consumer goods, in creating demand for mass-produced items, and in shifting the consumption habits of Americans.”⁷¹ The transition between home-made to store-bought occurred between 1880 and 1920 when “former luxuries

⁶⁵ James D. Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), xvi-xvii.

⁶⁶ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, Cigarettes*, 32.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 111.

⁶⁹ Norris, *Transformation of American Society*, xvi-xvii.

⁷⁰ Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, Cigarettes*, 43-44.

⁷¹ Norris, *Transformation of American Society*, xix; Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, Cigarettes*, 43-44.

like packaged soap and ready to made clothing became widely available and acknowledged as ‘necessities.’”⁷² Purchasing store bought items was now less expensive and less time-consuming than making these goods at home. In a period where America was transitioning from home-made to store-bought, advertising was critical in shaping these habits.

James D. Norris describes a perfect storm for the development of the modern advertising industry at the end of the nineteenth century. Norris stipulates that per capita income increased by more than fifty percent during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. Along with this was the development of more affordable transportation, alongside reduced costs for raw materials and machinery. Goods became cheaper while production output increased. These parallel developments opened markets to a wider swath of consumers.⁷³ Prior to the advent of advertising, food products were sold in bulk with no distinction between manufacturers.⁷⁴ Flour was simply flour and oats were oats, regardless of where a consumer bought their items in the United States. The job of advertisements was to teach the consumer that instead of buying ‘oats’ they were to purchase ‘Quakers Oats.’ Although the same manufacturer had been producing ‘Quaker Oats’ for decades, the consumer was previously unaware who was producing their goods. By creating a name and a brand, the ‘Quaker Oats’ company distinguished itself from oats generally and then maintained this distinction with packaging and labels. Labels and packaging were then featured in newspaper advertisements. Advertisements were supposed to communicate the “real or perceived quality” of their product such as price, health concerns, and product quality to entice consumers.⁷⁵ The switch to individually packaged and labeled goods established brand recognition and eventually brand loyalty.

⁷² Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, Cigarettes*, 43-44.

⁷³ Norris, *Transformation of American Society*, xv and 47; Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 32-33.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 42-43.

⁷⁵ Norris, *Transformation of American Society*, 97.

This same process applied in the cosmetics industry. Part of the appeal of home-made cosmetics was the low cost, however, new developments made store-bought or mail-order options both more economical and more appealing. Furthermore, the choices available after the growth of advertising far surpassed anything most women could make on their own. Advertising created a demand for necessities like food and clothing, but also directed consumers to purchase these items ready-made and individually packaged as opposed to in bulk. Advertising also encouraged consumers to purchase non-necessities like bicycles and cosmetics. “As advertising shifted its function from informing the public to creating demand in cosmetics... it created an artificial need by creating doubt about old ways, about old products, about old values, and even about women’s selves.”⁷⁶ Advertising directed consumer tastes, reinforced class-consciousness, manufactured and maintained product demand, and established lifestyles of convenience Americans sought to maintain.

Caricatures, jingles, slogans, catchphrases, and larger than life business personalities were integral to brand recognition and advertising between 1880 and 1920. Brand recognition was central for the consumer “to ensure real or perceived quality (read: value).”⁷⁷ In the case of the Walker Company, consumers came to know the name of the brand in connection with Madame C.J Walker’s image, which was used in most Walker ads in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Even if a black woman was unfamiliar with a specific product name, she would know the brand and especially the face behind the brand.⁷⁸

The effectiveness of the first generation of cosmetic advertisements is demonstrated by census records which detail the dramatic growth of the industry. In 1880, 26.5 million was spent

⁷⁶ Ibid, 68.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 97, 106.

⁷⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 118.

in soap production, which was an increase of only four million dollars from the previous census. By 1899 the value had nearly doubled to exceeded \$43.6 million. By 1909, the value jumped to nearly \$115 million.⁷⁹ The growth in the soap industry was an example of moving from home production to commercial purchasing. In addition, soap was part of that earlier wider definition of skin-improving products and was among the first cosmetic categories to utilize national advertising campaigns.⁸⁰ At the same time as this shift to commercial production and purchase. There was also see a dramatic rise in spending on advertisements. According to Pope, in 1880 approximately thirty million dollars was spent on advertising across the United States. In 1900, this number it rose to 200 million dollars. In 1925, the figure was 1.2 billion dollars.⁸¹ Pope's evaluation of 1.2 billion in 1925 would be a modern equivalent of more than 16.8 billion dollars. Norris argues that the growth in advertising was crucial to the expansion of the cosmetics industry, pointing to the two industries (illustrated here through the example of soap) expanding at the same time.⁸²

From the beginning of the industry white and black-owned companies in the black beauty trade tended to pursue separate, often dichotomizing, advertising strategies, although this is not an absolute distinction. On the whole, white-owned companies relied more heavily than black-owned companies on racialized and degrading images and language in their descriptions of untreated textured hair and dark skin. These companies frequently utilized terms such as “kinky,” “nappy,” “snarly,” “ugly,” and “curly” to describe textured natural hair.⁸³ Words such as kinky and curly do not appear inherently derogatory or negative, but they were specifically

⁷⁹ Norris, *Transformation of American Society*, 51.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 52.

⁸¹ Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 27, 30.

⁸² Norris, *Transformation of American Society*, 51-54

⁸³ Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 35.

deployed in the ads to imply negative and undesirable traits that were perceived as inherent in black hair. Rooks, writing about the early twentieth century, argues that “African American women’s bodies are...positioned as handicapped or imperfect and incapable of representing a standard of beauty constructed outside of dominant ideologies surrounding race... The language shapes or constructs that community as forever trapped by its circumstances and imprisoned by its features.”⁸⁴ The language used by early companies in the black beauty trade (and many of those that would later) signalled the inferior position of blacks within American society.

Analyzing the derogatory messages found within nineteenth and twentieth century ads, Rooks writes:

Not only was skin color positioned as indicative of intelligence and civilization, but hair texture and facial features were also highlighted and speaking to one’s position in the hierarchy of humanity. These racial theories constructed those of African descent as dark-skinned, wooly headed, small-brained primitives who did not have the reasoning capacity to better their place in the racial hierarchy without some direct help and intervention from Europeans. White-owned companies marketing beauty during that time [mid twentieth century] seemed to suggest that the first step was straightening African American hair.⁸⁵

Extending beyond the specific issue of advertising, Shirley Tate argues that “a racialized hierarchy is clearly embedded in this language of hair and it must be negotiated by Black women.”⁸⁶ Noliwe Rooks also supports Tate’s assessment when she writes that,

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century beauty companies depended on the commonly held belief of a racial hierarchy and maintained it in their advertisements, even those aimed at an African American audience. Advertisements for skin lighteners and hair straighteners marketed by white companies suggest to blacks that only through changing physical features will persons of African descent be afforded class mobility within African American communities and social acceptance by the dominant culture.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ibid, 34-35.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 39.

⁸⁶ Shirley Tate, *Black Beauty*, 42.

⁸⁷ Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 26.

Peiss argues that “too many ads smack of ante-bellumism, disrespect, and a low grade of intelligence.” She quotes an early ad from the white-owned Plough’s company which she says “shamelessly invoked racist imagery and the memory of slavery.”⁸⁸ The ad advised consumers to, “Bleach Your Dark Skin; Race Men and Women Protect Your Future. Be Attractive! Throw off the chains that have held you back from the prosperity and happiness that belong to you.”⁸⁹

White-owned companies used negative portrayals of black women’s beauty to convince black women to buy products that would move them toward respectable and desirable self-presentation. As we have already seen with the early example of Walker, black-owned companies were treading on similar territory, but attempting to emphasize the positive achievements of black women, celebrate natural features, or emphasize care of the body or of the hair.

Walker, Tate, and Rooks, suggest that racialized messages are deeply embedded in beauty products and advertisements no matter who owned the companies or who carried out beauty treatments. The reasons women might use various skin bleaching products could be quite complex but, according to these authors, the very existence of this product category maintained racial hierarchies.⁹⁰ As discussed earlier, Malone and Madame CJ. Walker in particular were very specific about how they defined and talked about their products. Although Walker made clear and persuasive arguments as to why her agents should not use the term “straighten,” straight hair this was the end result of using the product. As Susannah Walker argues,

African American beauty professionals were in an awkward position. They were

⁸⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 213.

⁸⁹ Plough’s ad qtd.in Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 213.

⁹⁰ Walker, *Style & Status*, 40; Tate, *Black Beauty*, 42, 65; Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 26, 39.

financially, intellectually, and emotionally invested in a business that, one could argue, black women did not particularly need, that many could not afford, and that, according to some, did them considerable harm.⁹¹

Black women in the cosmetic industry faced criticism that their businesses promoted racial shame instead of pride, when their intentions were far different. Indeed, black company owners frequently celebrated black hair and skin. Advertising images that depicted black women with straight hair could still convey a message of racial pride and uplift.⁹² There is tension here. Whether a product category was, or could be, considered detrimental to the cause of racial uplift was not always easy to determine. As will be explored in Chapter 3, some companies could approach advertising a product category (like hair-straightening products) through the lens of racial uplift, while other companies working with the same product emphasized the standard of white beauty. And, these differing advertising approaches were not always determined by the race of the owners.

Straight hair and light skin were portrayed as the ideal by both black and white-owned companies. Even though black-owned brands sought to define their own conceptions of beauty, these standards were often in line with the prevailing white standards of beauty. There are two contradictory ideas expressed simultaneously that cannot be entirely teased apart. White-owned and black-owned companies sometimes used derogatory language to describe natural hair and dark skin tones *and* also used positive images of black women that could support racial uplift. This is not an either/or situation. No company wholly supported or wholly challenged racialized ideals of beauty or racial hierarchies. The same group of women were purchasing products from black *and* white owned companies and consumed messages from both sources.

As a result of segregation, black businesses generally competed with one another for

⁹¹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 48.

⁹² Ibid.

market segment and found it extremely difficult to compete with white-owned companies. As such, “African American leaders often pushed purchasing from black-owned businesses, which was understood as a form of racial solidarity.”⁹³ Purchasing from other black-owned companies and point of sale businesses was especially important as a way to support economic development because of the advantages held by white owned businesses.

Access to financial resources was extremely difficult for black female entrepreneurs. According to Kathy Peiss, “Women had less access than men to credit and education in business methods. They were generally barred from professional training in pharmacy, which was necessary to run drugstores and the path men usually took into toiletries and manufacturing.”⁹⁴ Black women were forced to develop options involving low start up costs and small product batches that could be made to order. Women of colour tended to rely on door-to-door canvassing, mail-order ventures, touring churches, community centers, and salons, and pyramid-style business hierarchies. Although most of these techniques were not new at the turn of the twentieth century, black “beauty cultists redefined and even pioneered techniques in distribution, sales, and marketing that would later become commonplace in the business world.”⁹⁵

Space on drugstore shelves, even in stores owned by black business people, was typically reserved for brands owned by men, who could generally afford much better advertising both in quantity and quality. Male-owned (and especially white male-owned) brands could also afford better packaging, “modern” distribution and bulk manufacturing. “Drugstore owners relied on established brands who also gave drug and chain stores special deals, lowered prices, and

⁹³ Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875-1940* (New York: Humanity Books, 2001), 254.

⁹⁴ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 71.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 72.

effectively undercut African American firms.”⁹⁶ White-owned companies had the money to advertise with larger ads, with more frequency, and in a larger number of periodicals. Smaller companies owned by black women could not compete with same level of advertising as larger companies owned by white men. Black entrepreneurs were also forced to develop alternate distribution channels making large scale distribution (which would allow products to be shelved at drugstore) impossible regardless of the gender of the owner.⁹⁷ The most important point here is that regardless of what aspect of business- production, distribution, access to goods, selling to suppliers or retailers- white-owned businesses in the black beauty trade had an easier time at every stage. White-owned companies used their advantages to undercut black businesses in the same trade and sell more product.

The Great Migration also had an enormous influence on black businesses, including those in the beauty industry. The Great Migration meant that blacks were moving both to the north from the south and from rural to urban environments, with the predominant pattern one of rural Southerners moving to Northern cities. In 1916, approximately twenty-seven percent of African Americans lived in cities, a figure which rose to thirty-five percent in 1920, and forty-four percent in 1930.⁹⁸ Between 1915 and 1918 approximately 500,000 African Americans left the south, with an additional 700,000 moving to the North in the 1920s.⁹⁹ The Great Migration was significant because it drastically shifted the demographics of the United States. Many of the newly emerging black cosmetic companies were located in the north. This shift “created a central location of purchasing power” which also aided in the growth of black businesses.¹⁰⁰ The Great

⁹⁶ Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt*, 286; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 71-72.

⁹⁷ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 106-112; Walker, *Style & Status*, 24-26.

⁹⁸ Walker, *Style & Status*, 15.

⁹⁹ James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3.

¹⁰⁰ Sivulka, *Stronger than Dirt*, 271.

Migration brought many black people to the North in search of job opportunities. Such opportunities and other idealist depictions of the North were often promoted by papers like the *Chicago Defender*.¹⁰¹

A growing urban African American population in large cities also meant that distribution costs for new products were cheaper as product was largely staying within a small geographic area. It also meant a larger consumer base and therefore “greater engagement with consumer culture” within smaller urban centers.¹⁰² Migration created new opportunities but also forced cosmetic companies to adapt to this changing environment. For those who could afford the cost of advertising, the nationally circulating black newspapers (and after 1945 the magazine *Ebony*), reached beyond the Northern cities to a wider consumer base. The *Chicago Defender* specifically used shame in order to achieve racial uplift. The paper had encouraged blacks from the South to come to the city but criticized these new arrivals. The *Chicago Defender* portrayed the new Southern migrants as inferior to a pre-existing and respectable black population in the city. The *Chicago Defender* consciously extended a respectable and more middle class image of African Americans. This image was created, in part, by contrasting established citizens with criticism of new new migrants who, in the eyes of the middle class readers, required “help” in becoming respectable citizens.¹⁰³ Respectability could mean a wide-ranging variety of characteristics including dress, appearance, and language. I argue that the ads and the overall editorial tone of the paper could cause new arrivals to reach for respectability through cosmetics and beauty practises.

¹⁰¹ Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 64-65.

¹⁰² Walker, *Style & Status*, 15.

¹⁰³ Eurie Dahn, “‘Unashamedly Black’: Jim Crow Aesthetics and the Visual Logic of Shame,” *MELUS*, 39 no. 2 (2014), 98-101.

Advertising dollars could be used effectively by targeting nationally circulating periodicals with headquarters in the North, in order to attract customers in the cities but also reached beyond the cities. The clustering of black business in northern cities created a bubble that isolated potential black consumers outside of the north. And, startup companies could not usually afford national advertising. Thus, start up, local, and mail-order businesses were more likely to advertise in periodicals with a more limited and local distribution like the *Plaindealer*. These types of companies (local and mail-order) were the most prevalent in the pages of the *Plaindealer* due to the paper's local distribution and lower advertising costs, as compared to national periodicals like the *Chicago Defender*, *Ebony*, or *Afro-American*.

African American publications such as the *Afro-American*, *Chicago Defender*, and later *Ebony* are essential to this study as these were the top circulating black owned periodicals located in the North. Advertising in any one of these periodicals would guarantee hundreds of thousands, and potentially millions, of advertising views over time as papers were re-circulated. Mail order companies were common in all three of the national periodicals. Such companies produced smaller ads that ran infrequently as a result of the cost. Advertising in these periodicals, especially in regular intervals with large eye-catching ads, was a substantial financial investment. White-owned companies dominated the ad space because of their financial advantages, advantages which were not unrelated to the racial identity of the owners.

The rise of the advertising industry can also be attributed to its connection with the newspaper industry. Newspapers increasingly began to rely on advertisements. In 1879, approximately fifty-six percent of periodical revenue came from subscriptions and only forty-four percent came from advertising. In 1919, only thirty-four percent of total revenue came from

subscription sales while sixty-six percent came from advertising.¹⁰⁴ This increased reliance on advertising also meant an increase in the number of cosmetic advertisements. In the 1920s, cosmetics ads represented approximately thirty to forty percent of the total number of advertisements in black owned newspapers. In some papers, this figure reached fifty percent.¹⁰⁵

A study was conducted by Guy B. Johnson in 1925 to ascertain the top advertising categories in the black press. The study examined five periodicals: *Chicago Defender*, *Negro World*, *Journal and Guide*, *Atlanta Independent*, and *Houston Informer*. The study also placed advertisements into three categories: Class A which contained clothing, food, fuel, home and real estate, insurance, and medical/professional services; Class B: books, magazines newspapers, music/musical instruments, theatre and amusements, and colleges; and Class C: beauty preparations, patent medicines, fire arms, cheap jewelry, and charms. Class C dominated the advertising space for the majority of the periodicals. The lowest percent of total ad space was (43.2%) in the *Houston Informer* and the highest percentages in the *Negro World* (79.6%) and *Chicago Defender* (79.8%).¹⁰⁶ I mention this study because these findings corroborate the claims mentioned in the previous paragraph as the papers with the highest percentages of Class C ads hailed from the north.

With advertising as such an important and growing source of revenue, the rise in advertising paralleled the expansion of the black press and the press more generally. Between 1850 and 1900 there was a massive expansion in daily and weekly newspaper publications. In 1850 there were approximately 254 daily papers across the US, which increased to 2226 in 1900.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Ohman, *Selling Culture: Magazine, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 21; Pope, *Making of Modern Advertising*, 137.

¹⁰⁵ Sivulka, *Stronger than Dirt*, 287.

¹⁰⁶ Guy B. Johnson, "Newspaper Advertisements in Negro Culture," *The Journal of Social Forces*, 3, no. 4 (1925), 706.

In 1838 there were approximately 991 weeklies in circulation and in 1904 that number climbed to 13,513.¹⁰⁷ As noted in the introduction, in 1922 Frederick Detweiler identified the *Chicago Defender* and the *Afro-American* among the top three newspapers in circulation among the black press.¹⁰⁸ Within nine years of its first issues *Ebony* became the largest circulating African-American magazine with a circulation of 500,000.¹⁰⁹ The transportation, production and technological changes that fed both the manufacturing and advertising industries also fed the newspaper and magazine industry. These changes resulted in cheaper printing costs, wider newspaper circulations and greater geographical variety within periodical ads. For these reasons, the *Afro-American*, the *Chicago Defender*, and *Ebony* were eventually read across the country.

According to Susannah Walker, until the creation of *Ebony*, black-owned periodicals rarely saw advertising from national companies whose products were not specifically directed at black consumers.¹¹⁰ Jason Chambers also comments on this trend. Many black papers- including all of the weeklies mentioned in this study, but particularly the *Afro-American* and *Chicago Defender* - devoted their editorial content to reporting on “race” news. Chambers also comments that because newspapers relied so heavily on advertisements and there were so few black companies (or white companies directing their products to black consumers) that could afford to advertise many papers “contained advertisements for psychics, charms, or other similarly ludicrous offers” which sullied their reputation to potential readers and national advertisers.¹¹¹ In many cases newspaper owners were forced to tread a fine line between decreasing their “radical” content to allow for national advertising, or keeping with the original message of their work and

¹⁰⁷ Pope, *Making of Modern Advertising*, 113.

¹⁰⁸ Frederick G. Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1922), 6-7.

¹⁰⁹ Jason Chambers, *Selling the Race*, 4.

¹¹⁰ Walker, *Style & Status*, 20.

¹¹¹ Jason Chambers, *Selling the Race*, 33.

accepting sub-standard advertising. The growth of the cosmetic industry provided more cosmetic companies interested in advertising space. The 1940s saw the introduction of hair extensions and wigs as a distinct and prosperous market segment. This development also led to more demand for advertising space.

The cosmetic industry began in the nineteenth century and matured slowly into the first two decades of the twentieth century. The industry was racially segregated from the beginning, and stayed that way across the period of this study. The advertising industry was also in its infancy as the cosmetics industry emerged, and the two industries professionalized together. The cosmetic industry was tied up in many ways with changes in manufacturing, transportation and communication— changes which also fed both the advertising industry and the black press. This chapter has pointed to the contrasting advertising messages and goals of black and white-owned companies as the industry matured. And yet, there was not always a straightforward or reliable relationship between the racial ownership of a company and the advertising message. The idea of “white as beautiful” was an extremely powerful message that played out in complicated ways across advertisements that came from both black-owned and white-owned companies. “White as beautiful” is explored in more detail in the next two chapters- both in theory and in application. Chapter Two builds on this chapter as it explores the theoretical nexus of beauty, race, and hierarchies as it comes to apply in the cosmetic industry. The development of the black cosmetics industry was happening against the idea of white as beautiful, an idea that was both challenged and sustained by companies at different locations to power.

Chapter 2: Race and Gender: A Theoretical Framework for the Black Cosmetics Industry

Beauty is a social construction that carries and contributes to wider social meanings. Beauty has the power to simultaneously reinforce or destabilize societal norms. Its strength lies with its readability and familiarity. According to Margaret Hunter,

Skin color, racial, and gender hierarchies all work at the ideological level to construct beauty as a tool of patriarchy and racism. Because beauty is an ideology, its standards serve the interests of dominant social groups. In this case beauty is a hegemonic ideology and its existence serves the interests of whites in that it maintains white privilege. Beauty as ideology also serves the interests of men because it maintains patriarchy as it divides women through competition and reduces their power.¹

As Hunter argues, beauty is racialized. In a general sense, racialization is the process through which “groups come to be designated as being of a particular ‘race’ and on that basis subjected to differential and/or unequal treatment.” Although white people are also racialized, their racialization is often invisible, because white people are the “norm” against which “others” are compared. For these reasons, “white people may not see themselves as part of a ‘race’ but still as having the authority to name and racialize ‘others.’”² Racialization is built on the false assumption that race is a real and tangible category with biological and phenotypic traits, an assumption that has been attacked vigorously and successfully by scholars.³

Racialization applies to beauty as an ideology and a material practice in several ways.

¹ Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5

² "Racialization," Calgary Anti-Racism Education, 2015, Accessed October 2, 2017.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/cared/racialization>.

³ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 252, 255.

Historically, racialization in beauty has meant holding whiteness, particularly middle and upper class “respectable” whiteness, as the beauty ideal. Tate, for example, argues that,

Racialization means that there is an inscription of beauty on some bodies and not others so that beauty is always embodied *as white*. As a norm ‘white girls as beautiful’ ‘is acted out in social practice and reidealized and reinstituted in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life ... it is itself (re)produced through its embodiment, through the acts that strive to approximate it, through the idealizations reproduced in and by those acts.’⁴

Racialization has led to the devaluing of black hair and skin.⁵ White beauty standards have remained as the norm because they are continually identified and reproduced, in a process of identification and reproduction that rests within larger systems of racial and gender hierarchies. There is significant privilege conferred to whiteness and white beauty, a privilege that serves the interest of those who hold white beauty, and in turn, incentivizes white and non-white people to re-approximate it. The 1968 NAACP Miss Black America Protest described at the beginning of this study is important for its explicit counter example. It was an effort to re-define beauty standards to include black women in the realm of beauty as black women rather than for how closely they approximated white beauty standards.

This chapter discusses the ideological construction of race and beauty in the mid-twentieth century United States. The black cosmetics industry (described in Chapter One) emerged in a racialized state with pre-established hierarchies and value systems based on race and colour. The ultimate goal in this chapter is to explore how ideas about beauty, race, and colour came together and influenced the developing cosmetics industry. This chapter discusses slavery, emancipation, race-based hierarchies, legal definitions of race, colourism, passing, ,

⁴ Shirley Anne Tate, *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 18-19.

⁵ Tate, *Black Beauty*, 19-22, 27-31; Hunter, *Politics of Skin Tone*, 109; Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 9.

racial performativity, and whiteness. Deciding which of these ideas to introduce first in this analysis is arbitrary, as each informs all the others. As we already know, the black cosmetic industry was populated by both black- and white-owned companies. This chapter provides the context required to understand the complex, and sometimes competing, visions of whiteness and blackness communicated by white and black-owned cosmetic companies through the companies' respective advertisements.

As numerous scholars have argued, ideologies of race and the mechanisms of race-based slavery developed in conjunction.⁶ Colour stratification also emerged at the same time and came to be most evident through the privileging of light-skinned slaves. Margaret Hunter writes that "sexual violence, including rape, was part of the beginning of the skin colour stratification process itself."⁷ Sexual violence was (amongst other things) a mechanism of social control. Sexual relationships between white men and enslaved women occurred under conditions where enslaved women were denied effective choice; similar coercion could play out across generations producing yet lighter-skinned offspring.⁸ Light-skinned slaves sometimes received preferential treatment because of their relationship with the white owners, although at times this dynamic could play out in the reverse. Such preferences were usually communicated through work assignments.⁹ Lighter-skinned female slaves were overwhelmingly selected to perform lighter indoor domestic work while dark-skinned slaves routinely performed strenuous outdoor labour. Jennifer Morgan writes that the number of indoor assignments were extremely small compared

⁶ Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (April 1950): 199-202.

⁷ Hunter, *Politics of Skin Tone*, 18.

⁸ Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in the Making of New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 80-84, 110-111.

⁹ Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875-1940* (New York: Humanity Books, 2001), 270.

to the total number of work assignments, and indoor assignments were not routine on every plantation.¹⁰ As noted in Chapter one, the selection of the lightest slaves for domestic work reaffirmed European notions of beauty and womanhood.¹¹ Work assignments also helped to maintain skin colour; outdoor work and exposure to the sun deepened darker complexions while indoor work sustained lighter complexions.

Light-skinned slaves were also the most likely candidates to learn new skills and take over skilled positions when they became available. After emancipation, “these advantages gave them [mixed-race and lighter-skinned black people] greater job security, independence and influence.”¹² Post-emancipation, freed people who previously held skilled positions had greater job opportunities than their counterparts who previously performed manual labour.¹³ In many communities, mixed race persons with lighter skin became “elites” because of their relative success.

Mixed-race people were disproportionately represented in the free black population before emancipation in the 1860s. In 1850, mixed-race blacks represented thirty-seven percent of all free black people but only comprised eleven percent of the total black population (north and south).¹⁴ After emancipation, mixed-race blacks with a longer history of freedom were disproportionately involved in leadership positions or positions of power because they were likely to be more educated, to have more economic resources, and to be well known and well established with their own communities when these positions were needed.¹⁵ By the 1890s, the mixed-race elite were often suspected by both whites and blacks of trying to become a separate

¹⁰ Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 80-82, 111.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹² Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt*, 270.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ United States Census Bureau, *Population of U.S. in 1860; compiled from original returns of 8th Census, under direction of Secretary of Interior*. By J. C. G. Kennedy, Washington, 1864; Hunter, *Politics of Skin Tone*, 19.

¹⁵ Hunter, *Politics of Skin Tone*, 19.

race, in order to ascertain greater privileges, or to pass for white.¹⁶

As mixed-race populations appeared and then expanded, legal definitions of race were critical in maintaining both the institution of slavery (before the Civil War) and racial hierarchies outside of slavery. Mixed-race people were neither completely black nor completely white in a system that required rigid racial lines to ensure slavery and colour hierarchies remained firm. Their racial ambiguity threatened white privilege and the colour hierarchy. Daniel J. Sharfstein argues that one of the ways we know that race is a construct is through exploring the inconsistent legal definitions of race and demonstrating that the boundaries of whiteness and blackness varied wildly.¹⁷

According to Kevin D. Brown, “one of the first legal uses of race...was to prevent miscegenation, and therefore, uphold the operation of a race-based system of slavery.”¹⁸ Anti-miscegenation law in place between 1660 and 1960 worked, to varying degrees, to criminalize relationships, particularly marriages, between whites and non-whites.¹⁹ Throughout this period the overwhelming use of racial classification was to enshrine white privilege through discrimination. By the nineteenth century, Brown argues, there were three legal ways to assess race: appearance, association, and blood fractions. Because a judge could “see” skin colour the use of appearance was the most common tool of assessment. The next best test was association, which was based on the assumption that people married and socialized with members of their own race.²⁰ When appearance or association were unclear, blood fractions were utilized to

¹⁶ Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt*, 270.

¹⁷ Daniel J. Sharfstein, "The Secret History of Race in the United States," *The Yale Law Journal* 112, no. 6 (2003): 1476-1480.

¹⁸ Kevin D. Brown, "The Rise and Fall of the One-Drop Rule" in *Color Matters: Skin Tone Bias and the Myth of a Post-Racial America* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 44-45.

¹⁹ Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of "Race" in Twentieth-Century America." *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (1996): 47; Pascoe highlights that anti-miscegenation laws applied to Mexican-Americans as well as African-Americans.

²⁰ Brown, "One-Drop Rule," 56.

ensure that racial lines were maintained.²¹

This third strategy, the use of blood fractions, relied on a biological conception of race which opened up the legal definition of “black” to mixed-race people. The “one-drop-rule” came into fruition from the 1830s and stipulated that anyone with a “drop” of black or African “blood” was raced black.²² Morgan argues that the “one-drop-rule” was essential both legally and “morally” in order to have a clearly established group to enslave. The one-drop-rule provided a “scientific” method of denoting difference which was eventually used beyond the reaches of slavery to “limit black access to resources, to limit black political power, and to maintain the myth of white racial purity.”²³ The “one-drop-rule” thus expanded the definition of the racial category of “black” thereby absorbing and preventing mixed-race blacks from forming their own racial class with distinct privileges or access to white privileges. This expansion was an attempt to solidify racial boundaries and maintain racial inferiority of blacks through legal channels.²⁴

The “one-drop-rule” was not a federally instituted law, which meant that its implementation was unequal and haphazard. In some jurisdictions this was codified in law and in other places observed (to varying degrees) as practice. For example, while mixed-raced black people in South Carolina shared the same legal standing and legal disadvantages as non-mixed black people, societal perceptions of who “counted” as white socially were much broader than in many northern states. In Louisiana, mixed-race creoles had their own unique social and legal place. Legal distinctions of blood fractions and who “counted” as black were also much less rigid than in some parts of the north. Before emancipation, southern states usually had much higher black populations than northern states, in some cases black people represented the majority race

²¹ Ibid, 45.

²² Ibid, 45.

²³ Hunter, *Politics of Skin Tone*, 19.

²⁴ Sharfstein, "The Secret History of Race," 1476.

of the state. States with white minority and black majority populations relied on support from mixed-raced black people in the event of a slave uprising, a relationship that was far from ideal but necessary in order to maintain white superiority. Northern states usually had much larger white populations, which meant that ideal racial relationships (in the eyes of white men) could be maintained and informal relationships between mixed-race blacks and white peoples were unnecessary.²⁵

Prior to the codification of the “one-drop-rule,” in some states anyone with a black grandparent was considered black. In other states, the definition of “black” applied to anyone who had a black great-grandparent.²⁶ By this definition, a person was “black” if one of sixteen great grandparents (and no one else in the line of descent) was deemed black. The burden of proof was also in the hands of the person trying to prove white racial identity. That person had to provide some sort of legal evidence in order to prove that their great-grandparent was not “black” as the court assumed they were black unless proven otherwise. Sharfstein cites that this inconsistent application of racial determination was specifically used in Louisiana to inform the decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896.²⁷ The “varying definitions” of race gave the court “confidence” in their decision.²⁸ Barbara Fields points out that, by way of comparison, European-American immigrants were not bound to a “biological category” based on the “one-drop-rule” as were African-Americans.²⁹ Thus, both the grandparent standard and the “one-drop rule” demonstrated the extent to which white people manipulated the legal system to ensure that as many people as possible, even those who might “look white,” were legally raced black. The

²⁵ Brown, “One-Drop Rule,” 53-57.

²⁶ Sharfstein, “The Secret History of Race,” 1476-1479.

²⁷ Ibid, 1478

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Barbara J. Fields, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001): 50-51.

methodology of calculating blood-fractions appears on the surface to resemble unbiased scientific inquiry, which is why the method and its conclusions were perceived as legitimate. However, the legal categories defining race were built in a legal system controlled by white men with an interest in fixing a precise boundary. Thus, as Sharfstein notes, “race is not a constant, but instead a fluid, dynamic process of highly contested political and social change occurring over time.”³⁰ Who “counts” as one race or another and how society treats people so counted, is - like other social constructions - historically and culturally specific.

Judith Butler theorizes that gender is performative. Gender requires “doing,” a performance that can be read by another and understood as either male or female. When someone does not conform to a normative gender performance they are not recognizable as male or female. Their hair, their dress, their body language, their attitude, or their complexion disrupt rather than reinforce expected gender roles. Shirley Tate builds on this analysis and applies it to race. Tate draws on Butler’s work – and in particular her idea of performative reiteration - to “look at Black beauty as performative.” Tate argues that like gender, black beauty involves a process of “doing.” “Doing” suggests that there is no innate essence, “inherent attribute,” or single characteristic that determines black beauty. Tate presents “Browning” as a Black beauty category read as a matter of doing.

The ‘ing’ in browning is instructive because it is about becoming, specifically becoming brown in the moment of stylization. The ‘ing’ also implicates a continuous process which is subject to emerging tastes, stylizations, technologies and politics for the browning to come into being. Browning might be ‘this’ at a particular time and in a particular Black Atlantic diasporic space and ‘that’ in a variety of others.³¹

³⁰ Lori Latrice Martin et. al, eds. *Color Struck: How Race and Complexion Matter in the "Color-Blind" Era*, (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2017), I.

³¹ Tate, *Black Beauty*, 99; Tate’s use of ‘Browning’ and her subsequent analysis builds on a term that came out of the Jamaican context in the 1980s. ‘Browning’ was used to refer to a spectrum of skin-lightness among mixed-race Jamaicans. It also referred to the process of “cross-breeding” and the person who was a product of this process. Jamaica was, and remains, extremely stratified based on skin-colour, and levels of whiteness. ‘Browning,’ and where someone landed on the spectrum of brown, was socially and culturally important.

Tate's assessment is powerful for several reasons. First, she highlights that societies register race through its performance. She discusses the expectations in the way one lives out blackness. Because skin colour is usually perceived as real and natural, the idea of performativity is easily dismissed. Tate argues, however, that one can alter skin colour with chemicals and creams to achieve a specific result, or be read as "white" or lighter-skinned. But to be brown, or to shift on the "browning" spectrum is not just about brown skin, it is also about the stylization of one's overall aesthetic. Ultimately, Tate believes that if black beauty is performative it can be disrupted, specifically disrupting "normalized racializing." Black women can challenge the racialized performativity of blackness "through women's embodiment and their daily strivings (not) to approximate to it."³²

Kobena Mercer explores the performance of blackness as it applies to hair. Mercer writes:

Hair is not just hair, but a constant signifier of self because as organic matter produced by physiological processes, human hair seems to be a natural aspect of the body. Yet hair is never a straightforward biological fact, because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally worked upon by human hands. Such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of significant statements about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or do not...hair is constantly processed by cultural practices which... invest it with meanings and value.³³

Hair is crucial in gender and race performativity. It helps others decode us and is representative of social and cultural values. If a woman has naturally textured hair, that hair is going to be read as black and present as an overall signifier that the individual is a black person, even if the

³² Ibid.

³³ Kobena Mercer qtd. in Tate, *Black Beauty*, 100-101.

individual has light skin. Hair can make a statement of class, gender, or race, which can easily be changed. The same person will be read differently with a shaved head, with long braids, with natural texture or waves, or with straight hair. Hair straightening for black women is a part of that value system - a system that prioritizes whiteness as beauty - which values straight hair more than textured or braided hair.³⁴

Alternately, hair can be a way to signal blackness. Tate describes how light-skinned black girls in early 2000s Britain used their aesthetic, and in particular their hair, to make themselves appear more “black.” The girls Tate identified as expressing this aesthetic reported being treated differently, and usually with hostility, by darker-skinned black girls because the light-skinned girls were seen as experiencing privileges because of their skin colour. Their race and gender performance were not read as “black” by darker-skinned black girls, and the lighter-skinned girls were resented for their lightness.³⁵ These girls tried to counteract their lightness via racial performativity. They changed their aesthetic to how they believed a darker-skinned black girl might dress and style herself, hoping to have their performance read as authentically black.³⁶ Tate’s example illustrates how performances will be and can be read and judged by community standards. Communities can have different expectations for racial performativity (i.e. how hair might look) and those performances that do not meet a community’s standards can be seen as inauthentic by its members. Fear of judgment can lead to self-policing because missing the mark of expectations can have real consequences. Performativity hints at the notion that the body is seen as a “physical text,” which can be read and learned from. Writing about the black female

³⁴ Tate, *Black Beauty*, 19; Walker, *Style & Status*, 2-9; Noliwe Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 2-26; Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 42.

³⁵ Shirley Tate, "Black Beauty: Shade, Hair and Anti-Racist Aesthetics," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30, no. 2 (2007): 313-314.

³⁶ Tate "Anti-Racist Aesthetics," 301-305, 313-315.

body, Kaila Story writes that if we interpret the body as a text it is “always in view and on view. As such, it invites a gaze, a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation - the most historically constant being the gendered gaze.”³⁷ Story argues that gendered and racial discourses have historically been seen as separate, but in fact inform each other and “created a complex interplay that has had its hand in the shaping and invention of the black female body.”³⁸

Story’s perspective is close to that of Higgenbotham, who argues that race forms a language of its own providing other categories of identity such as gender, class, and sexuality with their “power to mean.”³⁹ Story’s work also mirrors Crenshaw, who argues that identities are intersectional. Identities for black women are not an either/or scenario but a “both” – the women are both black and female at the same time and in always inter-twining ways.

Crenshaw also points out, however, that “The problem with [single or separate] identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite- that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences”⁴⁰ All black women do not share the same identities nor do they hold the same relationships to race because their race is also shaped by their ability, sexuality, class, and several other factors. “Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, [some] women of colour are marginalized within both.”⁴¹ I take my lead from Crenshaw, Higgenbotham, and Story to think about beauty and how it is connected to gender, race, and class. All three of these factors shape black women’s identities, their relationship to the beauty

³⁷ Kaila Adia Story, "Racing Sex-Sexing Race: The Invention of the Black Feminine Body" In *Imagining the Black Female Body: Reconciling Image in Print and Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 24.

³⁸ Story, "Racing-Sex," 24.

³⁹ Higgenbotham, "Metalanguage of Race," 254-255.

⁴⁰ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1242.

⁴¹ Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1244.

industry, and its messages about beauty - that are, themselves, raced, gendered, and classed.⁴²

The concept of “the gaze” can also help us understand how cosmetics advertisements position black women as the object of male desire, and also how women in turn self-police to maintain this image. Gazing, as defined in Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” describes how people understand and assess the world. A ‘gaze’ is more critical than a passive look; a gaze is interrogative and inquisitive.⁴³ The male gaze stems from this idea and was first applied to film to describe how movies and visual culture were and are constructed with the male viewer in mind. The male gaze at the heart of film-making has historically meant portraying women in roles that were pleasing to (straight and white) male audiences. Specifically, this meant women were portrayed as hyper-sexualized or passive objects of desire. The male gaze also translates to the world outside of film, and can be used to help us understand how men look at women, how women look at themselves, and how women look at other women.⁴⁴ The argument here is that women have internalized the male gaze. Women learn to identify with the male perspective and gaze at themselves and other women through that lens, which usually results in self-policing.⁴⁵ Thus, in cosmetic ads women are instructed to beautify themselves for the male gazer and this message seems perfectly reasonable. Throughout the 1920s-1950s, cosmetic ads routinely and aggressively informed female consumers that without a specific product they would be undesirable (read: lonely, unmarried, and unloved) to men and the only way to receive positive attention and romance was through consuming and applying the advertised product.

⁴² Class analysis is not foregrounded to the same extent as race or gender in this project, which would be a site for further research.

⁴³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screens*, 16, no. 3 (1975), 6–18.

⁴⁴ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure,” 6-8.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

George Yancey argues that white people have historically benefitted from their power and privileged place in society which protects their role as gazers. Yancey explains that “Within the context of white racist America, whites inherited the privileged status of being the ‘lookers,’ and gazers, with all the power that this entailed...’ For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen.”⁴⁶ By this Yancey means that white privilege has rendered whiteness as the “standard” or the norm - against which everything different is othered. White maleness and femaleness set the standard for what qualifies as “maleness” and “femaleness” generally. Black maleness and femaleness is racialized because it is different than the standard already established.

A third gaze is also in play here, the beauty gaze. Shirley Tate writes that “beauty is about *outsideness*, in a context in which beauty as visible, as inscribed on the body’s surface, *matters*. What this means is that considerable labour is involved in producing this surface, in performing a visible beauty which is recognized by the beauty gaze.”⁴⁷ The gender roles widely accepted in the twentieth century included an expectation of women to beautify. Those who did not were shunned either explicitly (through public mockery) or implicitly (being passed over for jobs or by men) because of their appearance. For black women, the beauty gaze was fundamentally intertwined with the white gaze. Writing further on the beauty gaze, Tate expresses “We constantly monitor ourselves because racialized beauty norms work in such a way that the beauty gaze is an ‘inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end up by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ George Yancey, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), xviii.

⁴⁷ Tate, *Black Beauty*, 17

⁴⁸ Ibid, 22.



Figure 2. Black and White Ointment ad, *Afro-American*, June 2, 1922, 8.

The male gaze, the beauty gaze and white gaze are connected when the standard of beauty for black women is moored in whiteness. As Margaret Hunter argues, physical features connected to whiteness (i.e. hair texture, skin colour and other facial features) “take on the meanings that they represent: civility, rationality, and beauty.” Hunter maintains that opposite associations are attached to black features such as “savagery, irrationality, and ugliness. The values associated with physical features set the stage for skin colour stratification.”⁴⁹

Colourism as defined by Margaret Hunter is “the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of colour over their dark-skinned counterparts. Colourism is concerned with actual skin tone, as opposed to racial or ethnic identity.”⁵⁰ Here, we return again to the implications of race-mixing, and the physical appearance of the mixed-race population (still

⁴⁹ Hunter *Politics of Skin Tone*, 3.

⁵⁰ Margaret Hunter, "The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality," *Sociology Compass* 1 no.1 (2007): 237.

carefully defined in law as black). W.E.B Du Bois believed that colourism stemmed from eugenics and the process of ranking race, a process which itself originated in beliefs of white supremacy.⁵¹ The hierarchies of colourism are perpetuated by white people but also by black people who are advantaged by their lighter skin. Hunter argues that light-skinned black people tend to enjoy “substantial privileges” that are “unattainable” to darker-skinned people.⁵² She also connects colourism directly to a racialized patriarchy.

Colourism permeated the mid twentieth century black beauty industry. Lighter-skinned black women were considered more beautiful by white society, and also by many blacks because they closely approximated white beauty ideals. Tate writes that contemporaries viewed mixed-race women as more attractive and “sexually desirable” because of how closely they “approximat[ed]” white European standards of beauty.⁵³

All cosmetic ads attached meaning and made judgments about black female physical features via the company’s copy, models, or photographs. However, not all cosmetic companies idealized white beauty features (like white or lighter skin) to the same degree. Walker, Malone, and Overton Hygiene (all black-owned companies) challenged negative conceptions of blackness and promoted an ideal of black beauty that embraced a larger variety of skin tones and hair textures. The advertisements that most overtly embraced white beauty ideals tended to come

⁵¹ Giovana Xavier, and Conceição Nascimento, "The Dangers of White Blacks: Mulatto Culture, Class, and Eugenic Beauty in the Post-Emancipation (USA, 1900-1920)," *Brazilian Journal of History* 35, no. 69 (2015), 2,5; Eurie Dahn, "'Unashamedly Black': Jim Crow Aesthetics and the Visual Logic of Shame," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 39, no. 2 (2014): 93-95.

⁵² Hunter, *Politics of Skin Tone*, 1.

⁵³ Tate, *Black Beauty*, 61.



Figure 3. Dr. Fred Palmer's Skin Whitener ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 7, 1930, 16.

from white-owned businesses. One such example is Figure 2., a 1922 ad from white-owned Plough's for Black and White Ointment, a skin bleaching cream. The ad copy reads "Men admire a bright, smooth skin... The greatest charm a woman can possess is bright, smooth velvety skin... Black and White Ointment... will remove pimples, blackheads, freckles, spots, and other ugly blemishes."⁵⁴ The dress of the two figures in the ad suggests that they are upper or middle class. The woman in the image visually appears white (or as if she could pass for white) and the viewer is invited to connect her visage and prosperity to her use of the bleaching cream. The couple gaze into each other's eyes and the man appears to be looking at her with admiration.

This ad illustrates that a woman's skin colour (the model is very light-skinned) and its quality ("bright," without "ugly blemishes") as the most important part of her, more important than her kindness, intelligence, smile, or any other skills or traits she may possess. The tagline "men admire a bright smooth skin" reinforces colour based hierarchies. The tagline exemplifies the commonly held belief and experience that women will receive benefits and privileges if they lighten their skin. The benefit in this case is male

attention. The ad for Black and White Ointment underscores female desire for male attention, love, and marriage. In this instance, the ad implies that the model gained attention from the man

⁵⁴ Black and White Ointment Advertisement, *Afro-American*, June 2, 1922, 8.

via her lighter “improved” skin. It also positions skin colour as inherently problematic; the wrong (dark) skin colour holds a woman back from her “true” potential and achieving happiness. The ad also positions the skin quality of black women as intrinsically troublesome through language that assumes the black women have blemishes which are “ugly” and *must* be eradicated. Black skin is of course not inherently blemished, but the ad positions blemished skin as a disease or as something terrible that requires immediate action and constant vigilance. Ads such as this one also reinforce patriarchal attitudes. The ad stipulates that women should not lighten their skin for themselves, but in order to be more desirable to men. Thus, the ad is one example of how a company relied on the male gaze. The ad suggests that a woman’s value as a human being rests on her attractiveness to a man, her ability to attract and hold the male gaze. Women could not attract men if they had dark or blemished skin. This ad connects darker skin with loneliness or spinsterism, because dark skin is unattractive and undesirable. The ad suggests happiness, love, and male attention are light-skin privileges.

While ad copy that denigrated dark skin more commonly came from white-owned companies, this approach was sometimes used by black-owned companies, like Dr. Fred Palmer’s. A 1930 advertisement (Figure 3) for Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener, printed in *The Chicago Defender*, is also an example of how skin bleaching advertisements promoted and reinforced colourism. This ad is, in fact, much more overt than the Plough’s ad. The product is explicitly named a skin “whitener” and the central image of the ad is a close-up photograph of a light-skinned black woman with straight, slicked back hair. The image of this woman implies someone trendy, glamorous, and upscale. A reader might fantasize about this woman’s life, desire her beauty, or view her as worth emulating. Her appearance signals a middle class audience, which was in keeping with the *Chicago Defender*’s middle class image. The audience

could view her light skin as contributing to her middle class identity, especially with the context of the copy in mind. The ad states “A light, soft skin makes you ATTRACTIVE. If you want to be popular- keep your complexion soft and light.”⁵⁵ Like the Plough’s ad, the Palmer’s copy for this product also claims to “clear up pimples, blotches, and tan marks, and it entirely does away with that ‘oily, shiny’ look.” The ad explicitly asserts that attractiveness comes from light skin and that light skin was *the* pivotal feature for determining beauty. The ad also suggests that men believed white or light skin was best and the most beautiful. As with the Black and White ad, the Dr. Fred Palmer ad suggests that happiness comes from light skin.

The ad for Dr. Fred Palmer Skin Whitener did not invent a new ideal. The company, the product, and the ad reinforced pre-established norms and everyday realities, and then accentuated them to promote insecurities and sell products. However, this ad takes the claim farther by asserting that women would be more popular with “whiter” skin. This statement suggests that the larger society already prefers whiter skin over darker skin and that white skin alone is beautiful. In this situation, those who did not lighten their skin (even lightening to an extent in which the skin looks white) would be socially disadvantaged. The claim here is general enough that each reader could imagine what new-found popularity would look like in her life. The ad implies women with lighter skin would be more popular among men, thus connecting the ad to wider social and economic concerns. The ad’s reference to popularity could also mean at work or among female friends. Readers could also draw on personal experiences such as seeing a friend who lightened her skin and received more attention. They might blame a lack of attention in their own lives on their darker skin.

Ads like these two from Plough’s and Dr. Fred Palmer appeared consistently in the *Afro-*

⁵⁵ Dr. Fred Palmer’s Skin Whitener advertisement, *Chicago Defender*, June 7, 1930, 16.

American and *Chicago Defender* through to the late 1950s. These ads reinforced the real experiences of colourism. Explicitly and implicitly these beauty companies used colourism to sell products by normalizing colourism, which helped to generate competition among women for lighter skin, for male attention, and for other advantages. For women struggling in life - with romance, finances, or employment- skin bleaching ads pinpointed the problem, exacerbated the fear, and offered a quick solution.

Perhaps one of the most crucial factors in the success and widespread nature of skin lightening advertisements was that light skin tones and beauty more generally functioned as a form of social capital. Margaret Hunter explains that beauty for black women today, but also in the past, “came from having light skin, and meeting the widely accepted beauty standard and then subsequently enjoying certain privileges. These privileges that flow from beauty are transformable into other types of capital.” Here, “other capital” mainly referred to social and economic capital.⁵⁶ Light skin was also a form of cultural capital that could aid in social mobility, especially in a society steeped in colourism and racial hierarchies. Petra Alaine Robinson also describes beauty (including light skin) as capital, or as an investment on which one could receive a return. By this she means that if a woman spends money and time purchasing and routinely applying skin lighteners and hair straighteners, all of this effort and money will be worth the price *because* there would be a measurable return on this investment.⁵⁷ A return could look like being more attractive to men and therefore having a larger partner pool, earning raises at work, having more employment options, or having easier access to housing and potentially living in better neighbourhoods.

⁵⁶ Hunter, *Politics of Skin Tone*, 5.

⁵⁷ Petra Alaine Robinson, *Skin Bleaching in Jamaica: A Colonial Legacy*, PhD diss (Texas A&M University, 2011), iv; Robinson was referring most directly to Jamaica in 2009 but also talked about skin bleaching historically.

Any discussion of colourism must link to passing, for these two concepts are deeply intertwined. In its simplest definition, passing usually takes one of two forms. The first is when black people are read as white by white people, which may lead to advantages not usually conferred on people of colour. This can happen unintentionally – as when people who might otherwise be defined as black (especially under the ‘one-drop-rule’) are read as white and they either accept or reject their identification. Second, passing can also happen with more intentionality where “passers” deliberately use behaviours and/or social connections to pass as white. Passing was most prominent in the Jim Crow era, especially between 1880 and 1925.⁵⁸ People who pass intentionally (or accept unintentional passing) usually do so to obtain advantages and potential prosperity. Nikki Khanna and Cathryn Johnson have argued that passing is a remnant of racism and of the lingering influence of the “one-drop-rule.” “Passers” would otherwise be “raced” black because a fraction of their “blood” is black when their skin appears white. This was exactly the goal of the one-drop-rule - to cast the net of the legal definition of those raced “black” widely so that all people of black heritage, regardless of their skin colour, would be excluded from white privileges.⁵⁹

In the mid twentieth century (and still today) passing was steeped in controversy. For whites, passing has represented a refusal of “natural” divisions of race and class and privileges associated with these identities, which can also be seen as deceitful. Among black people, passing can be seen as a betrayal of “your people” and even as an action that reinforces negative stigmas of blackness and the idea that blackness is shameful and must/should be overcome.⁶⁰ Passing becomes even more controversial when we look at the deliberate use of skin lighteners.

⁵⁸ Nikki Khanna and Cathryn Johnson, "Passing as Black: Racial Identity Work among Biracial Americans," *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 73, no. 4 (2010): 380- 382.

⁵⁹ Khanna and Johnson, “Passing as Black,” 380-381.

⁶⁰ James E. Conyers and T. H. Kennedy, "Negro Passing: To Pass or Not to Pass," *Phylon* 24, no. 3 (1963): 215.

The use of skin lighteners can (but not always or even most of the time) be a tool deployed toward the end of passing. The common thread, exploited in the ads we have already seen, is that of approaching lighter skin with skin lighteners as a pathway to grab advantages associated with whiteness. For most people, however, using a skin lightener could not on its own produce a visible appearance that would allow the user to pass. Using skin lighteners is not equivalent to deliberately trying to pass, but using skin lightening is a practice linked to similar rhetoric and goals.

Critics argued that passing is an individualistic way to deal with racism, which neither changes societal perceptions of black people nor makes strides to end or reduce racism. Passing can also deepen overall denigration by condoning or using a system that relies on a colour hierarchy.⁶¹ Similar criticism is also applied to women who use skin lighteners. Achieving greater social mobility or social capital because of lighter skin reinforces colourism and evades a challenge to racism or colourism, even though the practice does expose the hypocrisy of arbitrary rankings. These criticisms are perhaps unfair for they present a danger in closing down a space for black women to talk about why they use skin lighteners.

Beauty was and is an integral way to challenge racism and white privilege. These challenges came in overt forms such as the Walker and Malone companies refusing to sell skin bleaching creams, or in the form of consumers opting to purchase products that advertised with images that put forth “a positive image of the race.” Some women of colour believe that those who skin bleach have been corrupted by white media, are ashamed of their blackness, or are betraying the race.⁶² Others have expressed that bleaching is a way of achieving greater social

⁶¹ Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 9; Conyers and Kennedy, “Negro Passing,” 216.

⁶² Tate, *Black Beauty*, 36-37.

mobility.⁶³ Black women can be demonized for bleaching their hair blonde or styling their hair in “white styles.” However, black women are caught in a double bind. If they bleach they are demonized, and if they promote natural styles they can be criticized for believing they are superior to those who do not. If they happen to eventually choose a non-natural hairstyle they can also be criticized for forgoing their natural tresses. In *Black Beauty*, Shirley Tate’s comment on this problematic is significant. As she argues, *Every* hairstyle chosen by black women (and we might add every choice about skin lightening) both in the past and in the present is political.⁶⁴

The next chapter examines the choices advertisers made as they tried to attract black consumers during the 1920s and 1930s. Importantly, the next chapter outlines some of the vital differences between black and white-owned companies and how they conceived of blackness and beauty. The racial makeup of a company’s ownership and direction, often, but not always, determined the types of advertising a company produced and the language it used to depict black hair and skin.

⁶³ Robinson, *Skin Bleaching in Jamaica*, iv-6; Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 4-8.

⁶⁴ Tate, *Black Beauty*, 25.

Chapter 3: Light, Bright, and Smooth Complexions



Figure 4. Madam C.J Walker advertisement, *Chicago Defender*, June 27, 1925, 5.

A 1925 ad from the Madam C.J. Walker Company asks readers to “Glorify the womanhood of our Race.”¹ This ad addresses many of the themes in advertisements for cosmetics aimed at black women in the 1920s and 1930s. The ad embodies Walker’s goal of “uplifting the race” through employment, self-confidence, clean and neat appearance, and positive depictions of black women.

Simultaneously, the ad reinforces the ideal of straight and long hair. The ad ties “glorification,”

“hope,” and “cheer” to “long, luxurious hair.”²

Racial uplift was a concept integral to many black-owned cosmetic companies and repeated throughout their advertisements; the owners saw cosmetics as a way to influence the perception of an entire race and achieve success for blacks generally. Racial uplift and “positive” images of the race were central advertising features for black-owned companies in the 1920s and

¹ “Glorifying Our Woman,” Walker Company advertisement, *Chicago Defender*, June 27, 1925, 5.

² “Glorifying Our Woman,” Walker Company advertisement, *Chicago Defender*, June 27, 1925, 5.

1930s. The Walker Company was the most financially prosperous black-owned company of the period. As a consequence, trends in advertising produced by the Walker Company were mimicked by other black-owned and white-owned companies. The central tension explored in this chapter is the way in which black-owned and white-owned companies defined beauty and expressed their definitions through advertisements. To varying degrees, black and white-owned companies used prevailing racial rhetoric and beauty trends to serve a specific company purpose. The Walker Company, for example, frequently promoted long and straight hair as an ideal in their advertisements but used this ideal to promote black respectability. Black-owned companies worked within the rhetorical and material constraints they encountered to serve their own agenda and help black women succeed in their everyday lives via their appearance.

The goal of this chapter is to understand some of the key advertising techniques, the messages of beauty and blackness propounded by cosmetic advertisements, and how and why these advertising techniques varied by product category and company ownership. Although this chapter frequently juxtaposes white and black-owned companies, there was tremendous cross over between advertising techniques and even product lines. For example, the most striking instance of overlapping advertising techniques used by white and black-owned companies was the appeal to love and romance. My approach in this chapter is not meant to place black and white companies in opposition to one another, or to create inflexible categories of racial ownership. Such an analysis is unreflective of the historical circumstances or the black beauty industry generally. Indeed, both black and white-owned companies sometimes promoted white beauty ideals, including the use of skin bleaching products, and both kinds of companies sometimes published ads that were in line with aspects of racial uplift. The racial ownership of

cosmetic companies did not always dictate their position on black beauty or use of advertising techniques.

My specific focus in this chapter is on the skin lightening and hair straightening advertisements in the *Chicago Defender*, *Afro-American*, and the *Plaindealer* between 1920 and 1939. The next chapter in this study looks at advertisements in the 1940s and 1950s. There was a distinct break in advertising strategies and messages beginning in the 1940s and especially with the appearance of *Ebony* magazine in 1945. In addition, the 1940s witnessed the entry of the new product category of wigs and hair extensions, and this development shifted some of the rhetoric around hair. I have chosen not to divide skin and hair products into separate chapters because the politics, messages about beauty, and advertising strategies behind these skin and hair preparations were quite similar. For example, disparaging language was applied to black women's skin and hair, while advertising techniques such as the appeal to romance appeared in ads related to both skin and hair. There are places, however, where I provide separate discussions of hair and skin products as a way to highlight specific arguments and strategies in the ads.

There was overlap between the product lines of black and white-owned companies. Even though companies like white-owned Golden Brown were best known for their skin bleach, the company also produced Hair Dressing, Beauty Soap, Beauty Ointment, Face Powder, Cold Cream, Vanishing Cream, Perfume, Talk Powder, Rouge, and lipstick. The same can be said for Black and White, a product line from white-owned Plough's, which also had an expansive product line. The Black and White line included a skin bleach, ointment, facial soap, face powder, cleansing cream, cold cream and hair grower. White-owned companies dominated the skin lightening product category, but a few black-owned companies (Overton Hygiene, Hi-Ja, and Dr. Fred Palmer's) also produced and advertised skin lightening products. Hi-Ja, for

example, produced a Skin Whitening Ointment, as well as a coconut shampoo, medicated Beauty soap, vanishing powder, talcum powder, complexion powder, perfume, cold cream, and glossine. Dr. Fred Palmer's produced an ointment, face powder, soap, hair gloss, and dainty hair dressing. But, in the 1920s, Dr. Fred Palmer's was best known for its skin bleaching product.³

It is important to understand the size and quantity of cosmetic ads as compared to other advertisements in order to put the industry and the ads mentioned in the next two chapters into perspective. In addition to my wider survey of cosmetic ads across the 1920s and 1930s, I completed a more focused analysis of *all* ads appearing in specific issues of the *Afro-American*, *Chicago Defender*, and *Plaindealer* once in the 1920s and again in the 1930s to determine the ratio of cosmetic ads to the total number of ads.⁴ Ad size is significant because larger ads (an eighth of a page or larger) were the most expensive and the most eye-catching to readers. The frequency of such ads were indicative of a company's financial status and influence. Only the most financially prosperous companies could afford to regularly purchase large advertising space. Determining these companies is important because their messages about beauty and blackness were seen the most frequently by potential consumers.

In the four page-long, Jan. 29 1924 issue of the *Plaindealer* there were a total of ten ads. Two (twenty percent) of these ads were for cosmetics. On June 10, 1938, the eight-page paper contained twenty-seven ads, three of which (eleven percent) were for cosmetics. All of the ads in both issues were a sixteenth of a page or smaller. I surveyed the *Afro-American* on January 4, 1924 (twenty-four pages) and June 27, 1936 (thirty-four pages). In 1924, fifteen of the seventy-

³ The focus of this project is on comparatively larger companies with a bigger advertising profile. There were many other small companies – for example Lou Ray, Gro-Press, The Thomas Company and Bendict Laboratories – that also made and advertised beauty products. I rarely discuss these smaller companies because of a dearth of information about their ownership, products and advertising.

⁴ This smaller survey is a specific cross-section of cosmetic advertisements to determine their relative scope and role.

six ads, were for cosmetics (twenty percent) and in 1936 eighteen of the forty-eight ads were for cosmetics (thirty-eight percent). The 1924 issue contained one larger ad, an eighth page ad for Poro's beauty school (black-owned). The 1936 issue contained one eighth-page ad each for the Walker Company's Wonderful Hair Grower (black-owned) and Nadinola Skin Lightener (white-owned), a quarter-page ad for Golden Peacock Skin Bleach (white-owned), Black and White Bleaching Cream (white-owned), and Black and White Hairdresser Styling Cream (white-owned). A half-page ad for Mr. Johnson's Hair Grower (unknown) was also included. The *Chicago Defender's* twenty-four page January 28, 1922 issue contained 106 ads, twenty-one of which were for cosmetics (twenty percent). Their thirty-two page June 1, 1935 issue contained twenty-one ads, and eleven of which were dedicated to cosmetics (fifty-three percent). The January 28, 1922 issue contained a single eighth page ad for Fulto Hair Grower (unknown) and a quarter page ad for white-owned Plough's. The June 1, 1935 issue contained an eighth page ad for Black and White (a product line from white-owned Plough's) and a quarter page ad for both Fantan (white-owned) and Nadinola (white-owned).

This survey revealed several important trends. The first is that white-owned companies were the most likely to purchase the largest advertisements. This finding is representative of the black beauty industry generally. This is not surprising since white-owned companies were the most numerous and the most financially prosperous. The largest black-owned companies also placed larger ads, but still did not have the presence as the major white-owned companies. Cosmetic advertisements represented approximately twenty percent of total periodical advertisements. Although there was some variation by periodical, year, and issue, cosmetics represented the largest advertising segment in the black press. In addition, no other product category accounted for as many of the larger ads (quarter or half page) as the cosmetic industry.

In the 1920s, a close rival for placing larger ads (over the eighth page mark) was the film industry, which placed ads for theatres and specific films in each of the three periodicals. Beginning in the 1940s, tobacco ads exploded and rivaled cosmetic ads for both quantity and size.

Advertisers used full, half, and quarter page ads to attract attention. However, full-page ads were quite rare and half-page ads appeared infrequently. Quarter and eighth page ads were much more common, and they could still be visually arresting when placed on a page with heavy copy. (Figure 4) A series of full page ads from the Walker Company that ran in the *Chicago Defender* in 1920 stands out as rare. Several of these full-page Walker ads were text-only. If such text-only ads were half or quarter page in size, they would certainly be less effective at catching reader attention. The size of the full-page ad and the sizeable extent of white space drew readers' attention.

Apart from the Walker Company, when full or half page advertisements ran in any of the newspapers they were usually ads from white-owned companies. The Plough's company used this strategy the most frequently.⁵ This was especially true for the *Chicago Defender* where Plough's (and their brands Pluko and Black and White) was over represented not only in total number of advertisements but in the number of half and full-page advertisements. After 1924, and particularly between 1924-1927, Black and White launched an ad campaign that brought half page advertisements in almost every weekly paper examined. There were far more ads for these two brands than for any other, with the possible exception of Nadinola (white-owned).

Ads from an eighth page upward used large images and bold borders to draw distinctions between the advertisement and the newspaper copy. Figures 1 and 2 are examples of such tactics.

⁵ An example includes a 1930 ad for Black and White bleaching ointment and soap; The *Plaindealer* rarely ran half-page or full-page ads because of their page limitations, although some are visible there are some examples

The Walker Company ad referenced at the beginning of the chapter features the company's classic floral boarder and a large bolded headline. (Figure 3). The Herloin Pomade Ad from Herloin Medicine Co. in 1920 (Figure 4) also features a border, but this ad uses a more traditional bolded line. These examples are relevant because they demonstrate the distinct patterns utilized to seize readership. Advertisement size was the crucial factor for determining specific design and presentation strategies.

The use of scientific claims to sell products was a common strategy in ads for hair and skin products from both black and white-owned companies. A 1934 Black and White Hair Growing ad conveys a sense of authority through the use of scientific rhetoric. The Black and White ad features an illustration of a strand of hair, including the root, under the microscope. The copy reads,

No longer need you fret and worry over short, stringy hair... for now your hair can be your crowning glory... Only Black and White Hair Grower can give you such quick results, because only Black and White has special, scientific ingredients that nourish and stimulates each little hair gland.⁶

The appeal to science suggested that Black and White products were superior to other products on the market, implying that the company scientifically tested the formula and ingredients. A Reliance Double Quinine Hair Grower ad from 1936 also utilized this tactic. The ad stated that their product was "scientific" because of its double dose of Quinine.⁷ Similarly, in 1922 Suaveline claimed that their new lotion was the "newest scientific discovery" as a result of "research by an eminent French chemist."⁸ The company's claims that the product was both "harmless" and effective were "supported" by the scientific claims. But the Suaveline and Black and White ads were extremely vague. No actual scientific knowledge was provided. The ads did

⁶ Black and White Hair Grower ad, *Afro-American*, January 27, 1934, 20.

⁷ Reliance Double Quinine Hair Grower ad, *Afro-American*, January 25, 1936, 5.

⁸ Suaveline Hair Straightening ad, *Afro-American*, June 30, 1922, 8.

not stipulate how their products grew hair, how they nourished the skin or hair, why the product was effective, why their ingredients were special, or who these un-named scientists were.

Ads for skin lighteners also deployed scientific claims to sell products. Ads that appealed to science typically made one of two claims. The ads boasted the product could lighten the skin to an extreme degree, or that the product could lighten the skin extremely quickly. Ultimately, many of these ads advocated a quick fix. Products that promoted a quick result were usually accompanied by a mail-in coupon or money back guarantee - both of which are infamous hard sell techniques from the patent medicine era.⁹ The problem with these ads was that they rarely, if ever, included information on how or why the product was effective. One 1936 Golden Peacock ad reads, “A unique new discovery that gives women what they have always wanted- an almost overnight bleach; results guaranteed.” The copy of the ad states

Some 30 eminent doctors, scientists and skin specialists worked in its development. 10 years were spent perfecting it. Over 1,000 formulas were tried and discarded before the right one was found. Thus it marks a new era in modern beauty culture. And supplants entirely old-time methods. Its bleaching agent is one of the most potent healing agents known. One that virtually every doctor uses.¹⁰

The ad conveys a sense of safety because thirty professionals helped to develop the product, implying that they participated in the 1,000 trials. The ad also insinuates that the medical professionals rigorously scrutinized and vetted the product to create a perfect formula. The formula is so great that doctors use and recommend the product further demonstrating its safety and efficacy. 1922 BLEACHO ad proclaims “YOUR SKIN MADE WHITE NEW AMAZING DISCOVERY SAFELY. LIGHTENS SKIN MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.”¹¹ A 1928 Fan

⁹ Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 185; Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012), 51-52; Figure 6 uses the mail in coupon for a special offer with a money back guarantee listed in the fine print.

¹⁰ Golden Peacock Bleaching Cream ad, *Afro-American*, June 27, 1936, 6.

¹¹ Bleacho ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 30, 1922, 5.

Tan ad writes “Amazing New Way 3-Minute Way to Whiten Skin!” The ad goes on to say “After years of study and research famous dermatologists have found an astounding new safe way to lighten dark complexions.”¹² Another 1925 ad by Golden Brown states “Startling New Discovery by My Chemist! Your Skin can be Bright and Clear as if by MAGIC!”¹³ These ads made tremendous claims and used terminology to sound scientific. Many of the ads asserted that dermatologists or scientists worked on a project or with a company, but their roles or the alleged secret ingredients were never shared.

The late 1920s and early 1930s saw tremendous anxiety over the safety of cosmetic preparations. During this time, cosmetics and their ingredients were unregulated. A 1930 report from the American Medical Association uncovered rat poison in a hair removal cream and aniline dye in a mascara.¹⁴ Ultimately, these concerns became widely known through the protests of cosmetics advocates in the “consumer movement” and the publication of two influential books: M.C Phillips’ *Skin Deep* (1934), and Ruth deForest Lamb’s *American Chamber of Horrors: The Truth About Food and Drugs* (1936).¹⁵ Both works exposed the dangers of the cosmetic industry and provided photographs of disfigurement caused by cosmetics and explicit cases of toxic and harmful products like Lash Lure from 1933. Similarly, by 1938 women’s groups across the United States joined forces with Eleanor Roosevelt to force the Food and Drug Administration to regulate the cosmetic industry.¹⁶

Both white-owned and black-owned companies made an appeal to science, but other strategies were more associated with black vs. white ownership. According to Susannah Walker,

¹² Fan Tan ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 2, 1928, 3.

¹³ Golden Brown Skin Bleaching ad, *Afro-American*, January 31, 1925, A13.

¹⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 197.

¹⁵ M.C Phillips, *Skin Deep: The Truth About Beauty Aids* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1934); Ruth deForest Lamb, *American Chamber of Horrors: The Truth About Food and Drugs* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936).

¹⁶ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 198.



Figure 5. Herolin Pomade, *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1920, 15.

racial uplift was a distinguishing feature of the black beauty industry. Racial uplift functioned in two ways. Black-owned companies created products designed to make black women more beautiful and more respectable in the eyes of black and white communities, using cosmetics and physical appearance “to help raise the collective and individual fortunes of black people.”¹⁷ The second mechanism of racial uplift was via employment opportunities for black women (as discussed in

Chapter One). Because racial uplift was central to the business policy and practices of some black-owned companies, racial uplift also translated into advertising copy, imaging, and product selection.¹⁸

In advertising, racial uplift could mean utilizing positive and accurate images and language, emphasizing black female respectability, and refusing to rely on pre-established white images of beauty. For example, many black companies lauded black hair and avoided any denigrating language, even if they also argued that hair should be straightened. Positive images usually meant including depictions of beautiful black women who were well groomed, wore light make-up, and flashed dazzling smiles. This model of black womanhood was someone who appeared warm and approachable. According to Peiss, many black consumers believed that “improved appearances expressed self-respect, registered collective progress, and would

¹⁷ Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 3.

¹⁸ Walker, *Style & Status*, 9.

expedite social acceptance.”¹⁹ Although positive appearance served as a specific site of racial uplift for some black-owned companies, this technique was eventually implemented by white-owned companies as well because of favorable consumer feedback.

Respectability was also tied to racial uplift. Respectability could be achieved through dress, through cosmetics, and by maintaining a neat and clear appearance. Black-owned cosmetic companies like Poro, Walker, and Apex reinforced the respectability ideal by including philanthropists and minister’s wives in their advertisements.²⁰ These women held prestigious roles in their communities that came with explicit moral associations. Susannah Walker argues that by the 1920s the rhetoric of respectability fell out of favor, but my research demonstrates that black respectability was still an advertising feature into the 1930s.²¹ Kathy Peiss argues that using respectable women in cosmetic advertisements could also be seen as an attempt to stamp out dissent from church officials “who railed against the use of hair oils, straightening irons, and face powders.”²² Thus, promoting respectable women was a useful and effective advertising tool that demonstrated that black-owned businesses were cognizant of the debates surrounding cosmetics.

Walker and Poro, in particular, insisted that their products focused on hair health. Their rhetoric emphasized treating damage, balding, and thinning hair instead of emulating white beauty standards.²³ We can see a similar approach – one that emphasizes the potential in black women’s beauty and stresses caring for hair - in a 1920 Herolin advertisement (racial ownership

¹⁹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 206.

²⁰ Walker, *Style & Status*, 9-31.

²¹ Further examples include A 1931 Walker advertisement for the “Wonderful Hair Grower” featured a “Prominent Minister’s Wife.” A Plough’s ad from the same year also featured “Mrs. Clara Robinson, a beauty parlor owner and ‘special nurse for crippled children in the public school system;’” Walker, *Style & Status*, 31-32.

²² Walker, *Style & Status*, 32.

²³ *Ibid*, 9.

unknown) reproduced here (Figure 5). The ad describes a product that “Grows Your Hair Long, Soft, Straight. Lots of Hair-Fluffy-Soft- Brilliant-Straight-Pliant- full of life and beauty is yours if you supply your hair a little HEROLIN.”²⁴ Another example of this more positive, caring for

**Quick, sure way
to whiten your
complexion!**

“Isn’t she glorious!”
Do men whisper this to one another
when you pass by?

YOU can make yourself admired by your men friends
and the envy of all the girls—*quickly, surely,
easily!* Nadinola Bleaching Cream—quick-acting, extra
powerful—will give you just the smooth, creamy-white
skin you want in double-quick time.

Be Beautiful—Be Admired
This amazing, direct-acting bleach puts precious beauty
within your reach. No uncertain waiting for results—no
heart-breaking disappointments—no complicated treat-
ments. Just before you go to bed tonight smooth this soft,
fragrant, wonder-working Nadinola Bleaching Cream on
your skin. Continue the delightful treatment for just a
few days.

See the quick improvement in your complexion. Watch
your skin grow lighter, smoother, lovelier day by day. See
pimples, oiliness, roughness, all skin blemishes disappear.
Soon you will reach the goal of glorious beauty—a clear,
light skin, smooth as satin, with just the trace of a rose-
petal blush.

Nadinola Never Disappoints
The disappointments you’ve suffered from other so-called
bleaches will be forgotten in your new-found loveliness.
For Nadinola is super-quick and positive in its bleaching action.
Nadinola never fails. It always works—and works quickly.

Results Guaranteed—Or Money Back
In every jar of Nadinola, you will find clear, simple
directions for use—and a positive, written money-back
guarantee. Many of your friends whose complexions you
envy are likely among the thousands of women who owe
their new-found beauty to this famous beauty bleach.
You can learn their secret—it’s Nadinola. You can know
the full joy of lovely, light skin—and the popularity and
happiness it brings!

Get a jar today and begin tonight. See how quickly
Nadinola bleaches your skin to beautiful creamy lightness.
At all drug stores—50c. Extra large
money-saving size \$1.00. If you
cannot buy Nadinola where you
live, send 50c or \$1.00 and we will
mail it post-paid, along with our
booklet of treasured beauty hints.
Address Department D, National
Toilet Co., Paris, Tennessee.

**At Last—
the Perfect Powder**
in a wonderful new shade
for light-toned pretty skin!

The famous Nadine Face Powder is now made in a wonderful new
shade called Coral-Rose—a shade which brings a rich new beauty
to light-toned skins. Here at last, is a fascinating new shade, per-
fectly blended to give you the final touch of true beauty. Puff it on
your face, throat and arms. Let its mysterious fragrance add charm
to your own. See how smoothly it clings and what a gorgeous rich
tone it gives. If your dealer can’t supply you with Nadine Face
Powder Coral-Rose, write us enclosing 50c and we will gladly send it
to you post-paid. Address Dept. D, National Toilet Co., Paris,
Tennessee.

**Nadine
Face Powder**

**Nadine
Finishing Cream**

**Nadine
Rouge**

**Nadine
Soap**

**Nadinola
Bleaching Cream**

Figure 6. Nadinola Bleaching Cream and Face Powder ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 29 1929, 12.

hair rhetoric in action was a 1936 Apex ad for their hair product Glossatina. This ad reads, “Regardless of the condition of your hair, you can make it amazingly straight, soft and silky...It imports to the hair the smooth, shimmery finish that no other preparation can duplicate.”²⁵ A 1927 Walker Company reads,

No other single factor means so much to the woman of today as does her beauty. It is the easy road to happy realization of her fondest dream...Trim, clean, healthy, glossy hair is the basis of facial beauty...Madam C.J Walker’s Hair Preparations are proved aids to pretty hair, bobbed or long...Our vegetable shampoo will thoroughly cleanse the scalp and hair. Wonderful Hair Grower will positively enrich and nourish the scalp and grow hair. Glossine will oil and soften dry, brittle hair and impart a silky healthy luster²⁶

The last example is a 1930 Hi-Ja ad for their entire product line of hair and skin products.

This ad features African-American Vaudeville actress and recording artist Esther Bigeou. The ad quotes Bigeou as saying, “On the Smartest dressing tables these preparations are always

²⁴ Herolin Pomade ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1920, 15.

²⁵ Apex Glossatina ad, *Afro-American*, June 6, 1936, 8.

²⁶ Walker ad, *Afro-American*, January 29, 1927, 4.

found.” The ad copy reads, “That’s why I use and recommend Hi-Ja...they give to everyone the lustrous, luxuriant, silken hair, and clear, creamy complexion that always marks the woman of perfect beauty, enhancing her natural charm and bringing out the full bloom of loveliness.”²⁷

These ads demonstrate that the emphasis on hair health contributed to the end goal of racial uplift. Their definitions of beauty included hair health. The Walker and Hi-Ja ads emphasized what the products could do for a black woman’s hair or skin instead of describing black hair or skin as inherently problematic or requiring a cosmetic fix. The Hi-Ja ad, for example, framed cosmetics as elevating a woman’s *pre-existing beauty*. The Walker ad stipulated that the products were for women with all hair types or lengths, and that the company’s main concern was hair health. The Apex ad was specifically for a hair pressing oil, a product type linked to the straight hair ideal. The ad implied that straight hair could be for everyone, but also that the product would help with hair quality. The ad did not demand that all women have long hair; whatever her hair length, a woman could have beautiful hair. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, a goal of racial uplift was promoting the success of the race through an appearance that was perceived as positive and pretty. In the 1920s and 1930s this sometimes, but not always, meant straight hair. But, ads that promoted straight hair could also be seen as conforming to the goals of racial uplift. The racial uplift strategies are not difficult to locate; they were usually quite overt in the ad images and ad copy. Still, there were important differences between promoting the health and nourishment of black hair and promoting long, straight hair at a time when hair-straightening could be very damaging for black hair. Sometimes, this could also mean promoting straight hair through a preparation that was deemed to be safer or gentler on the hair, as for example Apex’s Glossatina.

²⁷ “Esther Bijou ad,” Hi-Ja Chemical Company, *Chicago Defender*, January 25, 1930, 12.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, contemporary commentators and modern scholars accused black-owned companies selling hair straightening and growing products of promoting white beauty standards. This is true for some companies at some points, but certainly not for all companies at all times. Accusing these companies of being mechanisms for white



You Can Have Beautiful Hair

Why have hair that you are ashamed of—nappy, kinky, stubborn hair—when it is easy to have hair that you are proud of? Have beautiful hair that falls in straight silky, soft, gleaming strands below your shoulders. Have hair that is long enough and soft enough to dress in any way you wish.

That's the kind of hair you want and that's the kind of hair you can have if you will use Hi-Ja Quinine Hair Dressing, the wonderful new hair treatment. Hi-Ja Quinine Hair Dressing costs no more than the ordinary dressings, but results will soon show you how greatly superior it is to them.

Not only does Hi-Ja beautify, soften and lengthen the hair, but it removes dandruff, stops itching of the scalp, tetter and relieves all scalp disorders.

Buy Hi-Ja from your druggist, from our agents or from us direct. Price 25c, postpaid.

AGENTS WANTED. Write for our Money Making Plan and Circulars Today.

HI-JA CHEMICAL CO. ATLANTA GEORGIA

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER. So that every lady and gentleman may see just what Hi-Ja Quinine Hair Dressing will do to straighten and beautify hair, we are making the following remarkable offer: On receipt of \$1.00 we will forward 4 boxes of Hi-Ja Quinine Hair Dressing and 1 bottle of Hi-Ja Coconut Shampoo (value of this assortment, \$1.25), all for the price of One Dollar.

Send \$1.00 Today

Figure 7. Hi-Ja Chemical Company Ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 28, 1924, 14.

emulation is somewhat misleading because many companies consciously attempted to use their platform for racial justice. There is a tension here; the ads demonstrate that black-owned companies recognized that hair products could be damaging or potentially

damage to black hair given contemporary hair practices. They had to balance supporting women in their quest for straight hair with an emphasis on hair health, all the while linking beauty and respectability to racial uplift. Kathy Peiss writes “While many [African-American women] fashioned their appearances by following in some measure the aesthetic of European beauty, they frequently understood their beauty rituals in ways that modified, undercut, and even challenged the charges of white emulation...[Cosmetics] became the battleground in a contest of cultural visions, political concerns, and individual desires.”²⁸

²⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 204.

The use of positive images of the race and respectability was not an all-or nothing approach; it could be and was used in combination with other strategies. Black-owned businesses



Figure 8. “Be Proud of Your Hair” ad, Pluko Hair Dressing, *Chicago Defender*, June 7, 1924, 4.

may have pioneered this tactic out of a commitment to racial uplift but this approach was also appropriated by white-owned companies like Nadinola because the approach resonated with consumers. Some companies, black or white-owned, paired an image embodying a positive image with copy that did not reflect the same principle. Figure 6, a 1929 Nadinola ad, is an example of how a white-owned company used an image that aligned with the goals of racial uplift while also relying on a contradictory component. The ad combined the positive depiction of a black women (young, short hair, smiling, beautiful) with a product category- skin bleach- that might be considered counter to racial uplift, especially because the ad promised the user would achieve a “creamy-white” complexion.²⁹ Paul Edwards, in his *Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, addresses this very dynamic. He polled black women on their response to a Dr. Fred Palmer’s skin whitening advertisement. Women overwhelmingly liked the ad for the skin whitener because it featured a black woman, even though the ad was selling skin “whitener.”³⁰

²⁹ Nadinola Bleaching Cream and Face Powder ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 29 1929, 12.

³⁰ Paul K Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1932), 253.

Advertisements from black-owned companies could also differ quite drastically from one another, and some black-owned companies utilized rhetoric more commonly found in white-owned company ads. In other words, because a cosmetic company was black-owned did not automatically mean they were committed to a platform of racial uplift. Figure 7., a Hi-Ja hair straightening ad from a black-owned company, and Figure 8., a Pluko hair dressing ad from a white-owned company, provide two examples of how black and white ads could use similar disparaging language. Earlier, we noted a Hi-Ja ad (not reproduced here) featuring Esther Bigou that used a positive image/racial uplift strategy. In Figure 7, however, the Hi-Ja ad states “Why have hair that you are ashamed of- nappy, kinky, stubborn hair- when it is easy to have hair that you are proud of?... Have hair that is long enough and soft enough to dress in any way you wish.”³¹ In this ad, Hi-Ja (although a black-owned company that used racial uplift elsewhere) portrayed natural black hair as limiting and shameful. The ad implies that women’s natural appearance, the hair they were born with, is inadequate, embarrassing and worthy of shame. In Figure 8, this Pluko ad uses bold cursive letters to proclaim “Be Proud of Your Hair.” The body of the text, however, states that,

“There is no longer any reason why YOU should be humiliated and embarrassed by a scanty growth of harsh, wiry hair, when thousands of our men and women are finding that beautiful long, straight, glossy hair, which is east to dress in any desired manner, is merely a matter of using PLUKO HAIR DRESSING.”³²

The large print and most eye-catching portion of the ad seems positive at first glance, proclaiming “Be Proud of Your Hair.” However, the ad copy goes on to position hair that is not “long, straight, or glossy” (like the natural hair of most black women) as problematic. The ad also describes the “problem” as simple – so simple that there’s no excuse and as such, black

³¹ Hi-Ja Chemical Company ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 28, 1924, 14.

³² Pluko Hair Dressing ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 7, 1924, 4.

women are depriving themselves unnecessarily. Thus, the ad stipulated that natural hair was something to be embarrassed or ashamed of.

Both the Pluko (Figure 8) and Hi-Ja (Figure 7) ads also played up the problem of thinning, balding, and patchy hair that was common among women of colour who used hair straightening devices. This specific problem was the inspiration for Walker's Hair Grower, and Walker positioned the marketing for her product with hair health in mind. Neither of these ads

The advertisement for Lou Ray's hair treatment is a vertical rectangular layout. At the top, a bold headline reads "GROWS HAIR 3 Times as Fast! Amazing New 3 Way Treatment Acts in Only 3 Short Days". Below this, a small illustration shows a woman's head with long, straight hair. To the right of the illustration, text states: "SHORT, KINKY, STIFF HARSH UGLY HAIR GROWS LONGER, SOFTER, STRAIGHTER AND MORE BEAUTIFUL AT NO COST". Below the illustration, a section titled "Make This Test!" contains a testimonial from Mrs. Little Russell of Boykin, Va., praising the product's effectiveness. Further down, another section titled "ACT NOW!" includes a "Mail This Trial Coupon Today" box. At the bottom, there is a form for the reader to fill out their name, address, city, and state, and to send the coupon to Lou Ray Company at 212 So. Franklin St., Dept. 702-A, Chicago, Ill. The ad also includes a small note about a refund policy: "Gentlemen: I want to test Lou Ray Special Hair Treatment at 50c per box, so send me one package at once. I will pay postage only \$1.00 plus postage upon its arrival, with the understanding that I can return the unused portion within seven days. If I am not delighted, and you will then pay my money back without question."

Figure 9. Lou Ray ad, *Afro-American*, June 6, 1936, 5.

(Figures 7 and 8) emphasized hair health or even noted the damage that hair straightening could produce. While both of these ads positioned their product as a remedy, they also positioned textured hair as inherently problematic and ailing. Natural hair required treatment *because* it was inadequate due to its natural state. The Hi-Ja and Pluko ads sold the belief that straight long hair was the pivotal element that would determine a woman's beauty. She would be inadequate as a woman without straight or long hair. The rhetoric used in both ads to discuss hair was not new. These ads did not "teach" women for the first time to think of their hair as nappy, wiry, undesirable, or hard to style. These ads played on negative feelings of inadequate beauty. It would be easy for many women of colour to recall situations where they felt uneasy about their natural hair texture and/or recall the experience of the first time they

straightened their hair.³³ Still, by drawing on emotions and providing a solution, these ads could

³³ Noliwe Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 4.

be empowering to women who decided to use either of these products to alter their hair in the hope of new attention, love, or improved job prospects.

Products for Hair

In the 1920s, black-owned companies dominated the hair care market because there were specific needs for black hair that were yet to be addressed. Thus, this was the most common entry point for black business owners. The white-owned companies that sold hair products usually entered the market as a mail order companies with hair growers as their main product, although the much larger Pluko line that sold in stores was a notable exception here. A common tactic for illustrated hair growing ads, regardless of racial ownership or company size, was depicting women with unrealistically long hair. Figures 5, 7, and 9 are examples of this popular tactic.

Hair growing products usually emphasized that beauty came not only from the length of one's hair but also from the hair texture. Although hair growing products were not formulated to "relax" or straighten hair, ads for these products regularly advertised straight or wavy (vs. tightly curled) hair. These depictions, such as the illustration in Figure 9, represented idealized visions of hair beauty which were neither realistic for natural black hair nor a result that was achievable using the product, regardless of the claims. The hair portrayed in Figures 5, 7, and 9 resembles white hair texture. The Herolin ad (Figure 5) explicitly claims "you can have hair like this" and misleads the reader to believe that the product will "grow your hair long, soft, straight."³⁴ The Lou Ray (Figure 9, white-owned) ad similarly advertised that the product "Grows Hair Longer, Straighter, Softer, and Glossier."³⁵ This ad also uses highly derogatory imagery describing hair that was "short, kinky, stiff, harsh, ugly" but which could become "longer, softer, straighter, and

³⁴ Herolin Pomade ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1920, 15.

³⁵ Lou Ray ad, *Afro-American*, January 25, 1936.

Figure 10. “Do You Worry About Your Hair” ad, Poro, *Chicago Defender*, January 3, 1931, 7.

more beautiful at no cost.”³⁶ Hair growing from the scalp cannot grow “straighter” as new untreated hair grows back at its natural texture. Although the ad expresses that straight and long hair is beautiful, the ad is also somewhat vague. What exactly was “ugly hair” or “beautiful hair”? The unclear claims allow the reader to input their own definition of what was ugly about themselves and imagine that the ad could cure their specific needs. These ads also stipulated that the model’s beauty came from her long straight hair. Figures 5 and 9 represent a specific subset of hair growing ads which can be identified

via the drawn illustrations of women with impossibly long hair. These mail-order, typically white-owned hair growing companies retained their specific illustration style into the 1940s, even after most companies switched to photography. In most cases, ads for these mail-order hair-growing products did not write negatively about natural black hair nor use disparaging images or language. However, the Lou Ray ad in Figure 9 demonstrates that this was not always the case.

Other hair growing products such as Poro’s Hair Grower used photography to demonstrate the effectiveness of the product. Poro’s 1931 ad specifically evoked female anxiety about appearance by stating “Do You Worry About Your Hair?” in bold. The ad also claimed “YOUR hair can be made soft, glossy and beautiful through Poro treatments.”³⁷ The model’s hair did not resemble the illustrations produced by the mail order company because the product

³⁶ Lou Ray ad, *Afro-American*, June 6, 1936, 5.

³⁷ “Do You Worry About Your Hair ad,” Poro, *Chicago Defender*, January 3 1931, 7.

was used on textured hair. This ad portrayed accurate results, as compared to the ultra-smooth lux hair that the Lou Ray or Herloin ads implied. The true effects of the product made Poro's product seem less effective, but their advertising was much more honest. The model also conveys a sense of trust, intelligence, and middle-class identity as she gazes straight at the reader carrying school books.

Advertisements for hair straightening products utilized much of the same rhetoric as that used for hair growers, but these products (regardless of the race of the company's owners) perpetuated the straight-hair rule as both a norm and symbol of beauty. Many hair straightening ads (like their hair growing counterparts) also used illustrations of models with long flowing hair that reached unrealistic lengths. Because advertisements for both products used similar imagery, it suggested that these two ideals- straight and long hair- were inextricably intertwined. One ad from Herolin (racial ownership unknown) drew the consumer to the ad with a photograph of a smiling young woman and bolded lettering "**You Too Can Be B E A U T I F U L.**"³⁸ The ad instructed the consumer "If you have wiry, course, stubborn ugly hair start today using Herloin Pomade Hair Dressing.... [it is] a highly perfumed preparation that makes short, ugly hair grow long soft and pretty."³⁹ This advertisement overtly denigrated natural hair texture and short hair, suggesting its inferiority to straight long hair. The route to beauty was to strip away natural hair texture. The "Be Proud of Your Hair" Pluko ad featured as Figure 8 also perpetuated the straight hair ideal.⁴⁰ The model's hair is swept up in an up do, and noticeably straight. Figure 8 suggests that straight hair (hair that has been artificially created or molded by human hands) was the only hair African-American women *should* be proud of. In other words, a woman should feel

³⁸ "You Too Can Be Beautiful" ad, Herolin, *Afro-American*, January 29, 1927, 6.

³⁹ "You Too Can Be Beautiful" ad, Herolin, *Afro-American*, January 29, 1927, 6.

⁴⁰ "Be Proud of Your Hair" ad, Pluko Hairdressing, *Chicago Defender*, 7 1924, 4.

embarrassed or ashamed of her natural hair; her natural hair did not reflect all that she could be. Ads that promoted straight and long hair as the beauty ideal usually relied on denigrating language. When these ads argued that the product would make a user beautiful, they simultaneously positioned natural hair as ugly and undesirable. Sometimes this positioning was more deliberate to accentuate the quality or results and communicate the product's necessity. However, this positioning was not always derogatory. Early Walker ads promoted straight hair through the lens of racial uplift. Importantly, such positioning was the exception and not the norm.

Hair straightening ads also tended to emphasize the style-ability of straightened hair. This was a widely used tactic employed by companies such as Hi-Ja, Pluko, Black and White, Excellento, Slick, Newbro, Nelson's and several other brands.⁴¹ This idea of style-ability could be a main advertising point, or an additional point to bolster a products' desirability. An example of this from a Black and White ad reads, "In this dainty, effective and so-nice-to-use dressing you can comb your hair in all the striking new styles. You can keep it shining like new silk and forever be free of those horrid twists and curls."⁴² A 1928 Excellento ad boasts that this product "beautifies the hair and enables you to dress it in any style you wish."⁴³ Each of these ads communicate that hair straighteners provided greater freedom through straight hair's style-ability. The freedom rhetoric implies that black hair is restrictive, cumbersome, and undesirable because it does not function or move like white hair. Freedom from textured hair could only be achieved through an extensive straightening process that required hours of work. "Any style you

⁴¹ Excelento Quinine Pomade ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 28, 1928, 2.6; Slick ad by Benedict Laboratories, *Chicago Defender*, January 3, 1925, 4; Pluko ad featuring Josephine Baker, *Chicago Defender*, June 5 1926, 5; Pluko Hair Dressing ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1929, 3; Black and White Hair Dressing ad, *Plaindealer*, January 31, 1931, 4; Newbro ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 26, 1926, 2; Nelson's Hair Dressing ad, *Afro-American*, January 7, 1927, 7.

⁴² Black and White Hair Dressing ad, *Plaindealer*, January 31, 1931, 4.

⁴³ Excelento Quinine Pomade ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 28, 1928, 2.6.

wish” might implies that a woman would have more hair options, but all of the options available for textured hair (afros, locks, braids, and other curly hair styles) were excluded from this list of possibilities. Their exclusion indicates they were undesirable or delegitimised options. The Black and White ad was extremely explicit through its labeling of natural black hair as having “horrid twists and curls.”⁴⁴

Many black women were raised under the “straight hair rule.” Shirley Tate describes this as “the presumption that long straight hair is a necessary component of black women’s beauty.”⁴⁵ Generations of African American girls have been raised under this ideology, believing that long straight hair was the only way black hair could be beautiful. The straight hair rule was an example of racialization and its application to beauty discussed in Chapter Two. Paul C. Taylor argues that “the most prominent type of racialized ranking represents blackness as a condition to be despised, and most tokens of this type extend this attitude to cover the physical features that are central to the ascription of black identity.”⁴⁶ Taylor’s analysis applies to hair products because textured hair is usually a distinguishing feature of blackness, potentially illuminating racial identity. White-owned and black-owned companies promoted a standard of beauty that asked or demanded the removal of distinguishing racial features - hair texture and skin colour (discussed later in the chapter). While certainly not always the case, Taylor argues that people of colour have been socialized into assuming their own inferiority. Ads that point to the inferiority of black beauty traits, and ask black women to reduce or remove these features were a reflection of white opinions on blackness - opinions that were to some extent absorbed in the products and

⁴⁴ Black and White Hair Dressing ad, *Plaindealer*, January 31, 1931, 4.

⁴⁵ Shirley Tate, “Black Beauty, Shade, Hair, and Anti-Racist Aesthetics,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 303.

⁴⁶ Paul C. Taylor, “Malcolm’s Conk and Danto’s Colors; Or, Four Logical Petitions Concerning Race, Beauty, and Aesthetics,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (1999): 16.

advertising even of black-owned companies.⁴⁷ While denigrating black hair and skin and racializing black beauty as inferior assumes that black women believe in this inferiority and passively consume demeaning messages of black beauty, such a rhetoric reduces black women to victims. The lived reality was more complex. The simultaneous racial uplift messages in advertisements - from black-owned and even white-owned companies - explicitly provided women with a vehicle to challenge these ideas and re-inscribe new meaning to beautifying practices. Thus, they could use the mechanism of hair straightening to their benefit. Why couldn't hair straightening be a legitimate option for black womanhood and black beauty? Tate explores this possibility when she writes,

The anti-racist aesthetics position would be that we loosen the hold that hair straightening has on the collective black consciousness and that we cultivate the idea that we can be beautiful just as we are naturally...So, the only authentic black hairstyles would be dreadlocks, afro, cane-row and plaits. By extension, the only authentic blackness would be a dark-skinned one. These are the valorized signifiers of the ideal of 'natural black beauty'.⁴⁸

Tate presents an interesting predicament; black women who wore "white" (straightened) styles were accused of emulating whiteness and eschewing their own cultural heritage. Those who wore their hair in braids or locks were viewed as making a political statement. This type of thinking also plays into racialized valuing of hair, stipulating that black women cannot adopt traditionally white styles of hair because they are black. Black women who do are somehow less authentically black for wearing these styles.

Because race is a social construction, the meanings and value a given society gives to race and the elements used to construct race fluctuate across history. The meaning and values assigned to straight hair, for example, are constructed through "patterns of social meaning."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Taylor, "Malcolm's Conk," 16.

⁴⁸ Tate, "Anti-Racist Aesthetic," 303.

⁴⁹ Taylor, "Malcolm's Conk," 18.

Taylor writes that people can partake in the practice of hair straightening in order to shift the meaning of this practice or create an entirely new meaning. Taylor writes that “hair straightening itself has taken on such racialized significance that participation in the practice can be a way of expressing black pride rather than a way of precluding it.”⁵⁰ Taylor’s work reinforces Tate’s idea of racial performativity (see Chapter Two). White America and black America have come to expect black women to look and act a specific way, opinions that frequently diverged. Because race is both performative and constructed, women who straightened their hair were seen as performing an act of whiteness, when in fact, that behavior can be re-inscribed to represent a different performance of blackness.

Skin Lighteners

Skin lighteners represent the other major product area and advertising category in the black cosmetic industry in 1920s and 1930s. As stated earlier, skin bleaching was dominated by white-owned brands. Even though companies like Black and White, Nadinola, Excellento, Gold Brown, and Dixie Peach all produced other products, their skin bleaches were their most heavily advertised products. Many of the advertising strategies used to sell skin bleaching creams were also used to sell other products. For example, the use of celebrities and the appeal to science were tactics used to sell both hair and skin products. However, because white owned companies dominated the skin bleaching industry, many of these ads denigrated black skin and hair and overtly sold white emulation as a standard of beauty. Skin bleaching products were also a more intimate product category. From a young age, women were taught that hair could be molded, groomed, or styled. Hair could be slicked-back, styled in braids or ponytails, curled, pressed, or arranged in a fanciful fashion for weddings, funerals, or special events. Hair also experienced

⁵⁰ Ibid.

come-and-go trends like short bobs. Hair could be easily changed – styled and re-styled. Women could apply make-up on top of their skin, but actually changing the core features of the skin (especially the colour) was a more radical and more intimate act. Skin was imparted with intense political and social meaning. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, lighter-skinned black people received preferential treatment and greater privileges. These privileges extended into the twentieth century and advertisers used implied privilege or preference for light skin as a major impetus in advertising.

In the 1920s and 1930s, illustrations were the most common type of advertising technique to showcase the people who used skin-bleaching products in the ads. This choice was partly a result of cost. In addition, when illustrations were used race could be quite ambiguous because there was no uniform way to signal race. Some companies used shaded lines to signal that a piece of clothing was dark, and a similar version of that shading technique was also used on skin. Other times, skin-bleaching companies denoted the race of the figure in the ad via before and after images of black to white skin. Occasionally, when the skin was depicted as white or very nearly white in an illustration, the facial features of the figure could be raced black via stereotypes of large noses, thick or wide lips, or curly hair. In many instances, and especially in the 1920s, the illustrated woman in skin-bleaching ads appeared to be white. This effect was achieved by illustrating skin as white (no shading) and not racializing facial features. The women in such ads were not depicted as light-skinned black women but really as white. The implicit message was that the product could lighten black skin enough for the user to appear white, even if such a claim was never explicitly made. Some ads completely removed the racial identity of the illustrated figure signaling passing for white as the ultimate goal.



Figure 11. Black and White Ointment and Skin Soap ad, *Afro-American*, January 28, 1928, 5.

The use of photography in advertising steadily increased across the 1920s and 1930s, although companies that used photography and models remained a minority in the cosmetic industry until the beginning of the 1940s.

Photographs of models were typically used only by the most prosperous companies because of the associated costs. However, by the late 1920s cosmetic companies selling their products to black women were beginning to hire black models for the first time. Figure 6, the Nadinola Skin Bleaching ad and Figure 9,

the Poro Beauty School ad are two examples of advertising campaigns that used black models in the 1920s and 1930s. The use of the “brownskin” model quickly became the norm. The “brownskin” model was a model who visually looked black but had light skin. The “brownskin” ideal was used by both black and white companies selling cosmetics to black women. These models reinforced a specific form of the light skin ideal, especially as it became an industry norm.⁵¹

A major advertising claim made by skin-lightening companies was that the product would fix a medley of skin issues including acne, uneven skin texture, enlarged pores, and uneven skin tones. White-owned Black and White used this tactic frequently. One such example is Figure 11, a 1928 ad for Black and White Ointment and Skin Soap. The headline of this ad

⁵¹ Laila Haidarali, “Polishing Brown Diamonds: African American Women, Popular Magazines and the Advent of Modeling in Early Postwar America,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 17, no.1 (2005):12-14,16-18.

read “Don’t tolerate an ugly skin! Get rid of Pimples and Blotches This Safe, Easy Way.” The body of the text reads “There’s no excuse for allowing your face to be covered with pimples, rashes, and blotches. Why tolerate the annoyance and embarrassment of such ugly skin blemishes?”⁵² Another one of their ads from 1931 reads “IT’S AMAZING! BUMPS, PIMPLES, ECZEMIC IRRITATIONS GO LIKE MAGIC AND DARK SKIN QUICKLY BECOMES LIGHT AND BRIGHT.”⁵³ Another Black and White ad similarly reads “are you ashamed of those ugly bumps?”⁵⁴ This headline is written beside a dark-skinned model with a before and after picture. The model appeared more masculine, grumpy, and slightly darker in the before. She is happy, feminine and lighter in the after. The ad uses the “ugly bumps” to represent the entire model. With the bumps the model was portrayed in a manner the advertiser saw as ugly. Once the bumps were removed the model was transformed.

Black and White was not the only company to produce such ads. A 1929 ad from white-owned Fan Tan reads, “Lighten Your Skin to Any Shade You Desire or No Cost! With Amazing New Powder in Crème Form. Stays On 12 Hours- Banishes All Gloss and Shine- Conceals All Blemishes.”⁵⁵ A 1930 ad from United Laboratories (a mail order company with ownership unclear) claimed “Makes Skin 9 Times Whiter in Only 9 days Banishes Pimples, Skin Eruptions See Results In 9 Days or Money Back! **Guaranteed.**”⁵⁶ A Nadinola ad (white-owned) featured in the *Plaindealer* expressed, “Why not try this safe, easy way to improve coarse, dark, oily skin?”⁵⁷

⁵² Black and White Ointment and Skin Soap ad, *Afro-American*, January 28, 1928, 5.

⁵³ Black and White Ointment and Skin Soap ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 27, 1931, 12.

⁵⁴ Black and White ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 3, 1933, 4.

⁵⁵ Fan Tan ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 12.

⁵⁶ United Skin Laboratories ad, *Afro-American*, June 28, 1930, 7.

⁵⁷ Nadinola ad, *Plaindealer*, June 10, 1938, 5.

These claims - with the exception of evening out skin tone - were largely false. Skin lightening products were *not* acne treatments or skin re-texturizers. Skin bleaches could only achieve some of these claims as a residual effect of lightening the skin. That is, skin lighteners could reduce the appearance of acne by getting rid of the red spots produced by acne, but they could not eradicate acne scars or treat the underlying problem. Similarly, when it came to uneven skin tone, skin lighteners evened out the colour by lightening all of the skin, as opposed to fundamentally altering the “problem” area. Even so, these results were temporary and only lasted as long as the user continued applying the product. In addition, ads that claimed to cure skin ailments relied on derogatory language and positioned black skin as inherently problematic. This language could be extremely harsh, as in the Black and White ad that blatantly labeled skin with acne as “ugly”.

The problem with these ads is that there was no separation between the skin “problems” and the skin generally. To white advertisers addressing black consumers, skin problems signaled the problematic nature of black skin generally. White advertisers spoke of black skin as undesirable, unwanted, and full of issues because it was black. If one had acne, the skin had no redeeming qualities so the entire (black) face had to be bleached. Black and White shamed women for their skin, stipulating they should be embarrassed. Skin issues were the fault of the women and were preventable with the use of the correct products. The ads implied that it was a woman’s job to do something about her skin, because lighter skin and an even tone was the path to happiness. The belief that uneven skin tone, texture, and acne in black women were “ugly” was a social construction by the beauty industry. Beauty ads medicalized skin concerns when they made claims that the skin required ‘treatment,’ utilizing similar terminology one might hear in discussions of serious health concerns. These ads also encouraged self-policing: a woman’s

skin required vigilance because it was her fault if she had problems and her responsibility to seek ‘treatment.’ Simultaneously, many of the ads argued that the end result of the skin bleaching and eradicating those pesky skin issues was a beautiful complexion – beautiful because lighter. A 1938 Nadinola ad wrote, “Soon you have what every woman wants... a lighter, satin-smooth, lovely complexion.”⁵⁸

By far, the most popular skin-bleaching advertising strategy in the 1920s and 1930s was the appeal to love and romance. This was a common strategy used by both skin-lightening and hair-straightening companies and many ads used a version of this approach. However, the appeal to love was most prominent in skin-lightening advertisements because lightening one’s skin was a more drastic and invasive departure than hair straightening. The premise behind these ads was that if a black woman bleached her skin it would make her pretty, more desirable, and more noticeable to men. This strategy could be used explicitly in advertising copy claiming that a product would bring a woman more attention, allow her to fall in love, and make her more attractive. This tactic could also be used more indirectly with photos or illustrations. For example, some ad copy focused on effectiveness of a product and made no mention of love or male attention. At the same time, the ads might utilize a close-up photograph of a woman with a man in an amorous embrace. The image signaled to the reader that the product brought the female model this new affection. Ads that utilized images of relationships between men and women almost always used photographs rather than illustrations. Photographs were a wise choice as they provided legitimacy to the copy and made the relationship and new attention more relatable. Using models allowed women to picture themselves in the place of the woman in the photograph.

⁵⁸ Nadinola ad, *Plaindealer*, June 10, 1938, 5.

These types of ads could appeal to dark skinned women, or women who perhaps never received male attention. Advertisers never put a threshold on how dark someone's skin should be to use the product. Thus, any woman who felt undesirable could pin her "problems" on her skin and purchase the skin whitener to solve her romantic problems. The appeal to love played on a "universal" (heteronormative) expectation that women should find a man and marry. These kinds of ads fanned the flames of anxiety encouraging a woman to worry about whether her skin was holding her back from her "true potential." The appeal to love could make women without men in their lives feel lonely, inadequate, or undesirable. These ads also encouraged women to define themselves through the men in their lives. If she was not married or engaged, she was somehow less of a woman. Something was wrong with her, and that "problem" was her skin. The appeal to love and romance exploited societal norms and linked a woman's marriage status to her appearance and skin colour.

The best example of the appeal to love and romance technique was produced by Black and White. In the early 1930s, Black and White ran a series of ads detailing "true stor[ies] from life" of how various women found love as a result of lightening their skin with Black and White products. Ads in this series were usually larger (half-page format), contained at least one photograph of the new couple, and utilized several bolded phrases throughout to highlight the effectiveness of the product. This ad series was also written in first person, providing the impression to the reader that the ad was written by the woman in the photograph, an impression the company attempted to play up with their statement that the story was a "true story from life." Images from this ad series appeared in all three of the periodicals. One of the ads from 1931 claims "I AM MARREID NOW TO THE MAN I LOVE." Further down in the ad in bolded text

were the words “MY SMOOTH, CLEAR, LIGHT SKIN DID IT.” The main part of the text is from the perspective of the young woman. It says:

For years, I missed a lot of fun that other girls had. I was over eighteen before I had my first date with a boy. My skin was so bumpy and pimply, so dark and course, that men never asked to call on me... and I couldn't blame them a bit for not wanting to. Finally, I made up my mind that I wasn't going to be ugly and unpopular all my life so I asked several of my closet friends how I could clear up my skin. Every one of them recommended Genuine Black and White Ointment and Skin Soap... Then my good times began. My pretty skin brought me plenty of dates. Now I am married to a big, tall, handsome man... and oh! How happy I am.⁵⁹

This young woman (at least as narrated in the ad) believed her natural skin colour and texture were unattractive. The narration made the connection for the reader that her skin was the reason why she could not get dates and reinforced the idea that dark, textured skin was unattractive. The ad portrayed the discovery of this unattractiveness as a positive moment of enlightenment. She realized her skin was the problem and in this ad she informed other young women if they had dark skin they too were inherently unattractive *but* they could do something about it. At the same time, this ad could also be viewed as empowering in that it advocated that women become more assertive and “take matters into their own hands.” Women could find the experience empowering if they controlled a crucial aspect of their life. A woman's beauty, and controlling the way she looks, might directly influence other areas of her life such as her income, happiness, or self-worth. Women who lightened their skin might see themselves as taking control of their lives, they might feel more in control of their lives where previously they may have felt powerless. However, the kind of empowerment the company advocated was superficial - empowering women to use a skin bleach instead of asking for a raise.

⁵⁹ Black and White ad, *Plaindealer*, January 31, 1931, 2.

Black and White sold a similar story in a 1931 ad regarding hair, claiming that straight hair was the single element that determined female attractiveness. If women used a hair product from Black and White they would become more attractive, popular, and experience an enhanced quality of life. In both ads, Black and White placed a man's validation of a woman's appearance ahead of her own. The narrators believed they were unattractive because men did not find them attractive; the "blame" lay with an arbitrary physical feature and the solution lay with fixing that feature. Only after men found these women attractive did women subsequently believe they were attractive. These ads are disturbing because Black and White asked women to change an essential element of themselves to suit the beliefs of a white (and sexist) society.

A second Black and White ad in this skin-bleaching advertising series had the headline "HE HELD ME IN HIS ARMS AND TOLD ME THAT HE LOVED ME."⁶⁰ The story in this ad followed a similar plot to the previous ad. The narrator believed her skin was dark and ugly thus no man paid attention to her. After using the product, she finally received male attention, fell in love, and her "dreams came true." It is easy to see how the testimonial-style nature of the ad, combined with the photograph, would resonate with readers. Although the ad copy emphasized "true stories" expressing the authentic experience of a woman, these stories were certainly written by the company to evoke a very specific tone and message. The stories plucked the heartstrings of readers and encouraged women who felt unloved, ugly, and lonely to see their solution in the product. Black and White validated negative feelings in order to sell product.

Black and White was not the only company that used the appeal to love to sell product. An ad from black-owned Hi-Ja in 1928 closely resembled the Black and White series mentioned

⁶⁰ Black and White ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1931, 4.

above. The photograph featured in this ad was of a young woman atop of a headline that read “The Greatest Love Charm – A Beautiful Skin!” The ad told tale of loneliness:

Her life was torture. Behind her back men jeered at her. She knew the reason- a muddy, blotchy, pimply, skin was hers. She thought nothing would correct the trouble. Then a friend told her about Hi-Ja...The pimples and the blotches were soon removed. A creamy, beautiful softness took their place. The very complexion that men laughed at now drew them to her side. Popularity was hers- She felt that wondrous power over men and women that beauty brings.⁶¹

The ad shows that black-owned companies also sometimes used negative portrayals as well as the appeal to love. Similarly, a 1930 ad from white-owned Nadinola advised women, “Don’t wait any longer to have the lovely, light-toned skin that every man admires and every woman envies.”⁶²

Black and White, Nadiola and Hi-Ja firmly placed the “problem” with women themselves. The companies labeled dark skin as a problem that required correcting. The companies did this cleverly via narrator who labeled *herself* as ugly. In this way, none of the companies told their readers directly that their dark skin was damaged or ugly. These ads could inspire hope because the companies stipulated these “hopeless” women could be “fixed” by the miracle product. The most significant issue was that companies were successfully selling the message that dark skin was unattractive via relatable stories. The message was subsequently reinforced by the hundreds of ads women could view in weekly periodicals. Life experience also told dark-skinned black women that lighter skin was more beautiful, that lighter skin allowed women to get ahead, and that lighter skin was favored by men and indeed all of society.

These ads promoted colourism. Colourism privileged lighter skinned women, and this in itself was a reason to desire light skin. Shirley Tate also argues that skin lighteners, specifically

⁶¹ Hi-Ja Skin Bleaching ad, *Afro-American*, January 7, 1928, 17.

⁶² Nadinola Skin Bleaching Cream ad, *Afro-American*, June 28, 1930, 7.

Nadinola, sold “the idea that by consuming scientifically produced cosmetics one can assume a cosmopolitan upper-class lifestyle that ma[de] one desirable and modern.”⁶³ She also contends that bleaching companies advocated a sense of choice and freedom - that bleaching would liberate the user from racism (or at least lessen it) and that it was the user who fully and consciously decided to bleach. Each of these factors work together to reinforce colourism. Tate also writes that “orders for action – that is, buy the cream and apply it – exist within already existing beauty ideals, so they need not speak ethnically or racially about the need for the cream, which is already built into the racialized gender aesthetic system.”⁶⁴ As Tate argued, skin bleaching companies never articulated why their cream was ethically necessary and black-owned companies with an expressed interest in racial progress (like Poro or the Walker Company while it was run by Madame CJ Walker) did not produce skin bleaching products. However, skin bleaching was an accepted beautifying product that did not require justification by the producer. A double standard was in play for consumers who could be shunned for bleaching even though bleaching could be advantageous to those seeking to grab social privileges. There is tension here that paralleled larger tensions in the black beauty industry. Some companies and women sought liberation through contesting hegemonic beauty norms and practices - such as the refutation of skin bleaches. Simultaneously, there were also those who sought liberation through the use of the tools of the system, including using bleach as a way to succeed. There were also those who sought “business as usual.” The black beauty industry had a place for all three kinds of women.

Throughout all of the skin lightening, hair straightening, and hair lengthening advertisements “beauty” and “beautiful” were incredibly common buzzwords. “A BEAUTIFUL

⁶³ Tate, *Bleaching in Black Atlantic Zones*, 89.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 95.

QUEEN steps out of Every Box;”⁶⁵ How to be Beautiful: Just how to be beautiful has been the desire of almost all women for hundreds of years. Many hours each day were spend in the effort to increase their charms- to make the skin bright, soft and youthful;”⁶⁶ “only clean skin can be beautiful;”⁶⁷ “Beautiful Hair ATTRACTS ATTENTION EVERYWHERE,”⁶⁸ Walker, Poro, Black and White, Nadinola, Golden Peacock, and other brands mentioned expressed definitions of beauty that often competed, but sometimes converged. Many of the ads promoting beauty – even sometimes those linked to racial uplift - ended up denigrating natural hair or dark skin directly or indirectly. It is clear that many of these ads attempt to exude positivity by using the word beauty and suggesting that the user would feel more beautiful after using the product. However, when a company claimed that lighter skin and straight hair was beautiful and promoted these standards as the sole criteria for beauty, then natural skin and hair were placed in opposition.

This chapter did not solve the question of what counts as beauty nor was it meant to. Outlining major advertising strategies allowed me to demonstrate the various definitions of beauty and strategies used to widen the definition. At times, these ads dismantled and at other times supported racial hierarchies and colourism. A key element to this chapter has been the advertising approaches, messaging, and often competing goals of white and black-owned cosmetic companies. Although white-owned companies were the most likely to use denigrating language and promote white beauty as an ideal - and black-owned companies were the most likely to promote racial uplift - this chapter highlighted that such tendencies were not always racially determined. Black ownership was not synonymous with a commitment to racial uplift,

⁶⁵ Black and White Face Powder ad, *Afro-American*, January 25, 1936, 10.

⁶⁶ Excelento Beauty Preparations ad, *Afro-American*, January 7, 1921, 2.

⁶⁷ Poro ad, *Plaindealer*, January 3, 1930, 3.

⁶⁸ Pluko Hair Dressing ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1929, 3.

just as white ownership was not synonymous with degradation of black hair and skin. Still, the broad associations and themes are quite clear. Advertising messages in the black beauty industry of the 1920s and 1930s were themed with tensions and nuances.

Chapter Four builds on the groundwork established in this chapter to document industry development as the players, advertising messages, and product categories changed through the 1940s and 1950s. Technology like photography and new players like *Ebony* Magazine also fundamentally altered the advertising industry and its contents, changes that were only possible because they built on the industry's success in the 1920s and 1930s. *Ebony* accomplished this through their own new contributions like the appeal middle class luxury and glamour.

Chapter 4: “Diamonds in Your Hair?": The Rise of Glamour, Luxury, and a Reawakened Hair Industry



This 1948 ad for Snow White Bleaching Cream could have been in the pages of a 1930s magazine with its messaging, copy, advertising strategies, packaging, claims, and overall advertising aesthetic. (Figure 11). Ads from the 1940s and 1950s retained much from the style and approach from the 1920s and 1930s, but they were layered with some new methods and content.

Celebrity endorsements,

appeals to love and romance, and

Figure 12. Snow White Cosmetics ad, *Ebony*, June 1948, 2.

scientific claims were regularly used by both black and white-owned cosmetic companies throughout the forty-year period. Consistency and familiarity with ad approaches as well as available brands eased transitions to larger industry changes that occurred in the late thirties and early forties. Although there were continuities over the forty-year period, this chapter traces some of the marked changes in cosmetic advertisements in the 1940s and 1950s.

Four major changes occurred in the 1940s and 1950s that affected the ways in which cosmetics were advertised. These include the introduction of *Ebony* magazine in 1945, the unprecedented entry of new cosmetic companies (alongside the old brands), the widespread use of photography, and the introduction of a new product category - wigs and hair attachments. After looking at each of these changes in turn, I will explore how the changes showed up in the ads campaigns of various companies, including Black and White, The Walker Company and Apex.

Throughout the previous two chapters, highlighting the race of company ownership has been a central component of my analysis. In this chapter, I use a different strategy in part because of the proliferation of new companies and new advertising approaches which makes deciphering the race of the company's owners extremely difficult. In the 1920s and 1930s, the cosmetics industry was establishing itself. Some black-owned companies used their race as a marketing feature to highlight their goal of racial uplift. This approach was crucial to most of the early black-owned beauty brands. Black-owned cosmetic brands also relied on their communities for monetary support and for accepting new product categories.¹ By the 1940s, racial uplift no longer functioned in quite the same way and was no longer as central to advertising strategies. This change was linked to the increasing use of photography in the ads. Degrading stereotypes and images dramatically decreased in ads as both white and black-owned companies as they transitioned to photography. Black women were consequently depicted with greater dignity and accuracy, signaling the achievement of one of the goals for racial uplift.²

¹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 90-93; Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 21, 26, 31-32.

² There is a greater discussion on photography and black models later on in the chapter

As previously mentioned, the 1945 introduction of *Ebony* magazine revolutionized cosmetic advertising aimed at African Americans. Within ten years, *Ebony* became the largest circulating black-owned magazine in the country.³ It is unfair to compare *Ebony* to the black newspapers directly because the magazine was in a different publishing class in terms of size, goals, editorial content, and publishing frequency. *Ebony's* status as a monthly magazine meant it was not in competition with the weekly or daily newspapers. Readers purchased *Ebony* in addition to the weekly paper. Similarly, readers purchased *Ebony* to receive different content than their weekly paper. *Ebony* was also unlike the majority of black-owned newspapers because it deviated from the traditional use of a periodical as soapbox to tackle race issues. *Ebony* provided readers with something more like an escape from racial tension and injustice, discrimination, lynchings, violence against black people and other hardships in a reader's life.⁴ *Ebony* became big and did it impressively, quickly, and most importantly in a new kind of way.

Ebony was one of the first black owned periodicals to provide more space for advertising than for journalistic content, a common feature in contemporary magazines. *Ebony's* advertising space was enormous compared to other black owned periodicals, which was due to the magazine's page count of 100-130 pages per issue. *Ebony* provided more space for full page ads and unprecedented two-page advertising spreads to potential clients. During the period of this study, cosmetic advertisements represented the largest segment of *Ebony's* advertising space. Because of *Ebony's* middle class image, the magazine helped to present new brands to the market and helped reinvigorate the image of other brands by positioning them with middle class

³ Laila Haidarali, "Polishing Brown Diamonds: African American Women, Popular Magazines and the Advent of Modeling in Early Postwar America," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no.1 (2005): 17.

⁴ Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 129-132.

status. *Ebony* became the periodical that set the standard for advertising content, space, and middle class glamour.

The owner of *Ebony*, John H. Johnson, modeled the magazine after the white-owned middle class *Life* magazine. The goal of *Ebony* was to project a middle-class lifestyle, which Johnson achieved through the magazine's copy, feature stories, advertisements, and celebrity features. Johnson also saw *Ebony* as a way to help blacks "get away from 'the problem.'"⁵ I consider *Ebony* to be "conservative" when compared to the black press. The black press was known for its racial activism, calls to action, and sometimes radical opinions. Johnson made a calculated decision to not emulate this approach and instead emphasize and pushed glamour, luxury, and middle-class identity. Still, *Ebony* highlighted change and advancement for African Americans on its own terms. Until the creation of *Ebony* there had not been a stable or national platform that showcased African Americans as successful middleclass citizens. Still, despite Johnson's attempt to separate from "the problem," many blacks viewed these messages as positive claim for improved status. In *Ebony*, blacks were included, for the first time, in mainstream advertising campaigns with dignity and accuracy.

Evaluating popular post-war women's magazines targeting both black and white audiences, Joanne Meyerowitz argues that *Ebony* represents a challenge from the postwar push back of women into the homes- a pushback that had few dissenting voices or alternative depictions of women. This analysis came from Betty Friedan and was largely accepted by historians.

In many ways I agree with Meyerowitz. *Ebony* was not the cheerleader for traditional domestic roles for women- promoting stay-at-home roles, emphasizing child-rearing over paid

⁵ Chambers, *Selling the Race*, 140.

work, or shunning divorcees or women who married later in life. The magazine was revolutionary because its avenue to “racial advancement” (arguably the central goal of the black press) was through the promotion of black success, which was also the tactic used by black-owned beauty brands in the 1920s and 1930s. *Ebony* was also revolutionary because black models were featured regularly in its pages. Major white-owned brands promoting a wide range of products, who previously ignored advertising directly to black audiences, began advertising in *Ebony*.

These two developments (the increasing use of black models across advertising and increased attention generally to black consumers) were major contributors for the rise in duplicate ads as an advertising strategy. Duplicate ads were advertisements that used black models to replicate ads that originally used white models. Usually, duplicate advertisements were shot in the same venues and on the same set, sometimes using the same outfits. This meant that companies attempted to maintain the same essence as the original ad, thereby portraying blacks as successful middle class citizens. Duplicate ads were more common outside of the beauty industry because the beauty industry already had direct access to black consumers. However, the beauty industry held major responsibility in the professionalization of modeling, which led to the popularization of duplicate advertising.⁶ *Ebony* was crucial in this development because of its self-conscious middle-class status, as maintained in editorial content and advertising.

Meyerowitz also argues that *Ebony* emphasized achievement, especially the achievement of women. Meyerowitz states that stories of achievement represented more than sixty percent of the 489 sample articles she surveyed in the magazine, making *Ebony* one of the top sources for

⁶ Haidarali, “Polishing Brown Diamonds,” 18.

such stories.⁷ She writes that in *Ebony* “the rise to public achievement was the first, and sometimes the only, narrative concern. When addressing both the domestic and the nondomestic, these articles placed public success at center stage: they tended to glorify frenetic activity, with domesticity at best a sideshow.”⁸ Stories of achievement were in some ways similar in black and white women’s magazine, however black-owned magazines usually included stories as lessons of how individuals overcame racism.⁹ Meyerowitz also argues that

[E]ditorial decision to construct glamour and beauty as political issues in the fight against racism. Articles admired black women’s sex appeal in a self-conscious defiance of racist white standards of beauty. In this context what some feminists today might read as sexual ‘objectification’ presented itself as racial advancement, according black womanhood equal treatment with white.¹⁰

Ebony ads of the late 1940s and early 1950s reinforced this ideology when they included beauty ads that had noticeable sexualized imaging or sexual undertones that were uncommon in the previous decades.

Even though *Ebony* had revolutionary aspects, critical racial commentary or challenging racism were never the goals of the magazine. It is true that modelling *Ebony* after a white magazine is a civil rights claim by asserting that the black middle class could be equal to its white counterparts. However, *Ebony* was modeled after a traditionally minded *Life* magazine. *Ebony* rarely deviated from many of the messages common in white magazines, such as the promotion of traditional gender roles- including the ideal of the male breadwinner, stay at home housewife, and the nuclear families-, consumption, and heteronormativity. These messages that were supported by the copy and the advertising. Similarly, *Ebony* often avoided controversial

⁷ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminist Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958.” *The Journal of American History* 79. No. 4 (1993): 1458.

⁸ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminist Mystique,” 1461.

⁹ Ibid, 1459.

¹⁰ Ibid, 1472.

topics when they could. When the magazine did take on controversy, it usually landed on the traditional side of the debate. One such example was marriage vs. career for women. While the magazine celebrated women who could do both when given the choice, *Ebony* emphasized marriage.¹¹ When *Ebony* did discuss how black men and women overcame racism they were usually referring to a celebrity's rise to fame. Their analysis was individualistic and could not be reproduced by readers, especially because they detailed job categories that were unreflective of the everyday person. *Ebony's* stories of "overcoming" racism were somewhat superficial. Similarly, when *Ebony* wrote stories on women which Meyerowitz groups into four categories "women's paid work, political activism, marriage and domesticity, and glamour and sexuality. Most of these articles did not pose profound challenges to the varied oppression of women. But they do differ significantly from most postwar domestic ideology."¹²

Joanne Meyerowitz argues that popular culture of the mid 1940s to late 1950s can be seen as repressive. This is true for *Ebony* as the magazine can be seen as "encouraging" inaction or detracting from the goals and messages of the black press. In a way, this might be true as *Ebony's* messaging was pseudo-racial uplift. However, she also argues that mass culture "is rife with contradictions, ambivalence, and competing voices" and that there was/is no "single, fixed meaning for all readers, and we sometimes find within the mass media subversive, as well as repressive, potential" which accurately depicts *Ebony's* content and messaging.¹³ *Ebony* inspired and uplifted its audience and cannot be condemned because the magazine did not follow a traditional path or style of messaging. *Ebony* made substantial contributions to black industry and racial advancements while simultaneously putting profit over racial advancement. *Ebony*

¹¹ Ibid, 1467.

¹² Ibid, 1465.

¹³ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminist Mystique," 1457.

abounds with contradictions.

Changes in the technology and costs associated with advertising made it easier for new companies to get started. For example, decreased printing costs made producing ads and periodicals more affordable, thereby lowering the bar for companies to advertise and hence to enter the market in a substantial way. Similarly, the widespread use of hydroquinone (a more effective and affordable bleaching agent) made pre-existing skin bleaching formulas more effective and potent.

The 1940s and 1950s witnessed a tremendous influx of new cosmetic companies. Some of the more prominent companies include Lustrasilk (hair), Perma-strait (hair), Dixie Peach (skin bleach), Silky Strait (hair), Golden Peacock (skin bleach), and Sulpher-8 (hair). Other brands that burst onto the scene in the 1940s were Beauty Star (skin bleach), Kotalko (hair), Mercolized Skin Bleach, Murray's (hair), Long-Aid (hair), Royal Crown Hair Dressing, Kongolene (hair), Tuxedo (hair), and Snow White Bleaching Cream.

Snow White, for example, began major advertising in the early 1940s with a ramped up presence by the end of the decade into the 1950s. The growth in their advertisements came with their product extension. Snow White produced a skin bleaching cream and a "Hair Beautifier." Their "Hair Beautifier" was published with dazzling advertisements, some featuring celebrities like Hilda Simms, Ella Fitzgerald, and Jean Parks.¹⁴ The Bleaching Cream was advertised with less pageantry. An ad from 1945 claimed "Don't fret any longer if your skin looks dull or overly dark, if you suffer from rough, coarse skin or externally caused pimples. Snow White Bleaching Cream is an answer to the problems"¹⁵ Similarly to Black and White, Snow White extended their

¹⁴ "Parade of Stars" Snow White Hair Beautifier ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 27, 1945, 3.

¹⁵ Snow White Bleaching Cream ad, *Afro-American*, June 30, 1945, 3.

brand to a new but modest line of cosmetics.¹⁶ Snow White's most notable advertisements appeared in *Ebony*. A 1948 advertisement promoted their make-up cream, face powder, and hair beautifier.¹⁷ This ad featured a large image of a black model as well as two small illustrations (not photographs) of white women showcasing the before and after images of product use. This ad reads:

In Just 3 minutes you can have the complexion tone you want! Amazing Snow White Make-Up Cream Works 'Miracles' on Dark Skin. Yes, RIGHT NOW you can look AS YOU WANT TO LOOK luscious, lovely with the bright, flattering skin coloring you've always dreamed of - you can have the lighter, smoother looking skin that invites caresses.¹⁸

Snow White's line extension of cosmetics provided an additional way for the skin to appear lighter without using bleach. Their products - the make-up cream and skin powder - did not contain lightening properties which made them safer for the consumer. The company's expansion appealed to two different customer types, drawing in larger potential market for the product. The new line appealed to consumers who were not ready or willing to bleach. Natural facial complexions without make-up are typically uneven in skin colour or tone regardless one lightens their complexion.

On its own, the name of the Snow White company suggests that beauty lies with not just whiteness but paleness. The company modeled its name after the success of Walt Disney's Snow White, who was known for her pale skin and short full-bodied hair. The company name is suggestive of the brand's vision of beauty (but also implied that the product could literally turn women's skin white). Golden Brown, a similar white-owned skin-bleaching company, is another brand that played on the image of skin tone within the company's name. The name is significant

¹⁶ Snow White Hair Beautifier *Chicago Defender*, January 6, 1945, 5.

¹⁷ Snow White Cosmetics, *Ebony*, June 1948, 2.

¹⁸ Snow White Cosmetics, *Ebony*, June 1948, 2.

because it also inferred the product quality and vision of beauty. Golden Brown is a symbol of browning and a desired shade.

Beauty Star was another brand that began advertising regularly in *Ebony* as soon as the magazine appeared. Beauty Star was reminiscent of Black and White for its recognizable ad style and consumer appeal. Throughout the the 1920s to 1950s, Black and White maintained the same font and logo through the majority of their advertisements providing instant brand connection. The Walker Company was also fairly good at this, however, the images in Walker ads began to vary near the end of the 1920s. Black and White's early ads consistently marketed their products with the appeal to love. Beauty Star's characteristic font and model helped the consumer make the instant connection with the product. The company created clever branding, which became crucial after the company changed its name from Beauty Star to Star Glow. With a consistent ad style, the brand remained recognizable to the consumer despite their name change. One of their first ads after their name change reiterated on of their previous ads as Beauty Star. It stated "Don't envy your friends! Now, with Star Glow Skin Lightener you too, may have the beauty-bright, creamy smooth skin appearance that invites romance. Wouldn't you be thrilled and delighted to have a skin appearance that is so lovely and irresistible and oh so kissable?"¹⁹ This ad was a standard version the company had been running in *Ebony* for almost eight years, always referring to the envy of friends and the admiration of men. This Star Glow ad is also reminiscent of Black and White's "give romance a chance" advertising series in the 1930s. Star Glow relied on the old adage of "do you want to be noticed and fall in love?" Beauty Star/Star Glow is relevant to this study because they were a new emerging company but more importantly they are

¹⁹ Star Glow ad, *Ebony*, January 1954, 36; Beauty Star ad, *Ebony*, January 1948, 16 and June 1949, 33.

representative of the types and styles of new companies in the 1940s and 1950s as they emphasized glamour and consumerism,



Figure 13. Perma-strate ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 3, 1950, 12.

Cosmetic advertisements in the 1920s and 1930s were populated by hand-drawn illustrations more often than photographs. A small minority of companies began using photography in the 1920s, with this group increasing across the 1930s. I argue that it was in the 1940s, however, that photography became firmly established as the industry standard. Leila Haidarali also argues that a black modeling industry, closely tied to the increasing use of photographs in ads, did not take off until the mid 1940s.²⁰ It took some time for photography to be used more frequently in

advertising. The economic conditions of the Great Depression strained both black- and white-owned companies, even though the quantity of advertising remained relatively stable.²¹ In the difficult economic climate, companies were unwilling or unable to commit to the increased costs associated with photography in ads. But, by the 1940s (and in better economic times) The cost of printing, photography, and advertising in general, were all also on the decline. This made photography a more realistic option, especially for the dozens of new cosmetic companies entering the marketplace by the mid 1940s and into the 1950s.

Photography fundamentally altered cosmetic advertising. It established modeling as a legitimate profession for black women and a wider variety of women were used in cosmetic ads

²⁰ Haidarali, "Polishing Brown Diamonds," 11.

²¹ Walker, *Style & Status*, 23.

*be a glamorous
golden skin girl...*



Figure 14. Mercolized Cream (skin bleach) ad, *Ebony*, June 1952, 78.



Figure 15. Dr. Palmer's Complexion and Deodorant Soap, *Ebony* June 1956, 116.

than ever before. In the 1920s and 1930s, hand drawn illustrations stayed close to a handful of standard images, with additional images of a small number of celebrities. Companies might utilize one model (either a real model on whom an illustration was based, or just a continuing illustration of the same woman) for several ad campaigns. For example, the Black and White ad campaign between 1924-1927 used the same (illustrated) woman. The dramatic growth of new cosmetic brands in the 1940s and 1950s also meant that there were new companies on the scene producing a wider variety of ads. This necessarily expanded the pool of models visible in one magazine or newspaper. Women in cosmetic illustrations aimed at black women were usually drawn with white skin and slim features, sometimes the models were racially ambiguous, and occasionally black. Illustrations put the power into the company's hands because they could design their ideal woman depicting women with wholly unrealistic bodily proportions or using the illustration to depict degrading stereotypes in "before" images in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the product.

The ideal of racial uplift and putting forth "positive images" of the race was a necessity to combat issues of racial denigration and promote the success of black women (Chapter Three). The

emergence of photography changed the way companies signaled both black beauty and racial uplift. The realism of photographs of black women made the racial uplift point – here was the

racialized woman as beautiful and living a realistic life. Photography also opened up a new avenue of employment for black women, which also conformed to one of the tenants of racial uplift. By the 1940s, black owned companies were no longer stressing racial uplift, respectability, or positive images of the race in the same way because of the normative place of photography within the cosmetic industry.



Figure 16. Nadinola Skin Bleaching Cream ad, *Plaindealer*, June 1940, 4.

cover. The modeling industry also brought some diversity of age, body shapes, hair style and texture, and skin colour. There was, of course, limits to this diversity. Most ads still featured beautiful, young, lighter-skinned women.

The ads in Figures 13-16, demonstrate a few of the women used as models in skin-lightening and hair straightening ads between 1940 and 1959. While each woman has flawless

Ads across the entire cosmetic spectrum were now regularly using black models and depicting these models with dignity and accuracy. The models appeared much more like black women would in real life, even if the models were (almost by definition) attractive women. Ads were now more relatable than ever before, especially because products were depicted on black women, which showed real-world application. More black women were depicted as beautiful and middle class. *Ebony* in particular highlighted middle class blackness. Women in *Ebony* were being depicted as successful and glamorous, both in ads and on its

skin, alongside narrow and well-defined eyebrows, there is a small variety of face shapes, ages, and skin colours represented here. When ads featured celebrities, there was room for more variety. In some instances, it was their fame and not their looks that drew customers to the ad. Overall, the women (celebrities or not) who were used in ads for *Ebony* (Figures 14 and 15) were depicted with more emphasis on glamour.

Black-owned Howard, a wig and hair attachment company, invested the most in ads that

*Your hair can look
as long... as luxurious
as this with
howard real hair tresses*

So you'd love a chignon? A glamorous page-boy?
Or a luxurious braid? Don't worry if your hair is frizzy or short. Do what the glamour girls pictured here did. Pin or fasten on Howard's hand-made, real hair chignons, braids, page-boys or curls.

IT'S REAL HAIR AND GOOD! Howard's real hair tresses are perfectly blended in color and texture so that these hair pieces have the body, resilience, and fine silky look of your own.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SHADES. We match blue-black tresses in "Midnight"; true-black in "Ebony"; rich dark-brown locks in a shade we call "Sable." Or send a generous lock of your hair and we will match it. (There is a slight extra charge to match light shades.)

HOWARD REAL HAIR TRESSES ARE SALON-STYLED. Our expert stylists have created hair pieces in every fashionable hair-do. You have a choice of dozens of different smart hair-dos, all described in Howard's FREE catalogue. In ordering, be sure to fill out coupon on opposite page.

oward, THE ESTABLISHED LEADER IN GUARANTEED REAL HAIR ATTACHMENTS FOR ALMOST 40 YEARS

Pin or fasten a Howard Page-Boy beneath your own short hair. Gently pull ends over as this girl did. This piece is 12 inches wide, with an adjustable elastic band... gives a smooth long hair from ear to ear. . . . \$3.25

Crown your upturned hair with a luxurious Howard Braid as this girl did. Use it many other ways. All this smart beauty costs you only \$5.00

Conceal your short hair beneath this Glamour Bob which covers your entire head from the attractive pompadour bangs to the full shoulder-length page-boy roll. Lined crown . . . \$12.00

Attach a luxurious puffy Howard Chignon over your short ends as shown at top or side of your head in whatever style becomes you best. Extra large size pictured \$5.00. Regular size \$3.25.

howard

Tresses: Salon-styled, real hair attachments.
Guaranteed: Satisfaction or your money back.

Howard's, Dept. E, 141 W. 125th St., New York 27, N. Y.

In ordering, please put "X" following your choice of hair color and method of payment you select. You need buy nothing to get free catalogue.

Send me the following Howard attachments: in blue-black, brownish black, dark brown, I enclose sample of my hair.

(Please print: State attachment wanted.)

Send C. O. D. Plus Postage. ☐
I enclose check, or money order. ☐
Send me the Free Howard Catalogue. ☐

NAME _____
STREET _____
CITY _____
STATE _____

We Pay All Postage Charges on Prepaid Orders.

Figure 17. Howard double page ad, *Ebony*, June 1947, 26-27.

depicted glamour and luxury. This was particularly true in the ads the company place in *Ebony*. Howard published ads in all four periodicals, and they were one of the few companies to purchase the rare double page spread in *Ebony* (Figure 17). Howard published several ad styles including smaller (eighth or sixteenth page) ads with one image, and also larger (half or full page) catalogue style ads. The smaller ads usually ran in newspapers, while their large and



Figure 18. Jessie Kare Hair Attachments, *Plaindealer*, June 6,

glamorous ads were reserved for *Ebony*. These luxury-focused ads almost always depicted a young, thin woman with flawless skin, straight hair, and a light or brown skin tone.

Howard was the leading hair extension and attachment brand across the 1940s and 1950s. The brand published in all four periodicals tailoring their ads to fit the publication. Howard ads usually came in one of four forms: a small catalogue style ad featuring one or two designs, a four to six catalogue style feature, a larger catalogue style with more than ten designs, and their luxurious one to

two page spreads. The first two ad styles featuring less than six designs were the most common in the *Plaindealer*, *Afro-American*, and *Chicago Defender* and were usually less than an eighth of a page. The larger catalogue style ad was an *Ebony* specific tactic. These ads are discussed more at length later on in this chapter. Howard's stand-out advertisements were both luxurious and minimalist in terms of copy, design, and imagery. Howard was not alone in the first three styles mentioned above as several companies also tailored their ads in a similar fashion. The success of Howard's luxury ads in *Ebony* is the company's standout feature.

Although *Ebony* regularly included advertisements across two pages, the advertisements were rarely devoted to one company. Howard's double page advertisement was a rarity, with this

HAIR STYLES BY MEDALO



MEDALO ALL-OVER PAGE BOY WITH CLUSTER CURLS
Hair Style #610B \$1650

A grand style, using long hair matched to your own with cluster curls in front and long wavy waves in back, natural looking. The hair workmanship and matching make this a glorious natural looking hair style you will enjoy because of its rich long waves.



MEDALO "JOAN OF ARC" FULL CAP WIG WITH CENTER PART
Hair Style #611A \$3250

The Joan of Arc hair style was showing the beautiful long curls and short curled sides. ADJUSTS TO FIT ALL HEAD SIZES.



MEDALO STEMLESS BRAID
Hair Style #624 (15 Inches Long) \$298

"The new shorty" style will suit many beautiful hair women, requiring no hair extension or hair pins. Hair Style #624 on your coupon. Buy two, one through for \$298 to get on curls or with baby pins.



MEDALO FIGURE 8 CHIGNON
Regular Size #614 \$3.98 Extra Large #614A \$ 5.98

Wear similar fashion as Page Boy style back of your Hair Style. Rich, luxurious natural looking. Featured in Latest Medalo Chart.



MEDALO DOUBLE BANG CURLS
Hair Style #612 \$240

A lovely natural looking bang curl style which can be worn in other ways. Medalo hair style #612.



MEDALO FEATHER CURL ALL-AROUND HALO
Hair Style #609 \$750

Notice how easy and naturally you can wear this hair style. Wear all around your own hair. Beautiful feather curls with hair matched, your own.



MEDALO "RAVE" FULL CAP WIG with center part
Hair Style #621 \$4250

The hair style you see for you better than any wig. Every woman who has seen it says it is the most beautiful hair style they have ever seen. The Medalo Model wearing the "Medalo Rave" - The top will suit you.



MEDALO ALL-OVER PAGE BOY with BANGS
Hair Style #610C \$1650

Creates entire top and back of your head. Long beautiful bangs. Buy two, one through for \$1650 to get on curls or with baby pins.

FREE WITH YOUR ORDER
You will receive with your order FREE the latest Style Hair Flower on a Comb and Hair Style Chart with full directions and Wines Goggles!

MARK HERE
MATCHING COLOR
☐ Jet Black
☐ Or Black
☐ Dark Brown
☐ Brown
☐ \$2 Extra for Mixed Grey

SEND NO MONEY—Just Mark Off The Hair Style You Wish and Mail Coupon . . .

Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over
Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour
#610A \$18.50	#610B \$16.50	#610C \$16.50	#610D \$16.50
Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over
Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour
#611A \$32.50	#611B \$32.50	#611C \$32.50	#611D \$32.50
Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over
Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour
#612A \$24.00	#612B \$24.00	#612C \$24.00	#612D \$24.00
Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over
Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour
#613A \$7.50	#613B \$7.50	#613C \$7.50	#613D \$7.50
Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over
Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour
#614A \$3.98	#614B \$3.98	#614C \$3.98	#614D \$3.98
Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over	Medalo All-Over
Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour	Page Boy Glamour
#615A \$5.98	#615B \$5.98	#615C \$5.98	#615D \$5.98

NAME _____ STREET _____ CITY _____ STATE _____

OR SEND A FEW STRANDS OF HAIR FOR OUR COMPARISON MATCHING. USE MAIL COUPON OR WRITE TO: _____

If you wish you can send a small sample of your hair for a free match

GOLD MEDAL HAIR PRODUCTS, Inc., E-20A Brooklyn 23, New York

Figure 19. An example of a catalogue style ad. Medalo, *Ebony*, January 1950, 66.

approached used on only a few occasions between 1945 and 1959.²² The ad is extremely minimalist in design with small copy on the left page and a full page image of a woman in side-profile wearing two strings of pearls around her neck and a chignon. Their copy reads. "Your hair can look as long...as luxurious as this with Howard real hair tresses." The copy continues, "So you'd love a chignon? A glamorous page-boy? Or a luxuriant braid? Don't worry if your hair is frizzy or short. Do what the glamorous girls pictured here did."²³ Howard continued to

advertise in *Ebony* into the 1950s but often

(such as their ads from 1953, 1954, and 1956) their ads were in the form of catalogue-style advertisements which were more like the industry norm for hair attachments.

Medalo, Nu-Charm, New York Beauty Supply, Best Yet Hair Products Co, Jessie Kare Beauty Products, and Humania Hair Company joined Howard as the top advertisers of hair extension, attachment and wig advertisers in the period. Jessie Kare Beauty Products and Howard were the top hair attachment, extension, and wig advertisers in the *Plaindealer* between 1943 and 1949.²⁴ Both companies also advertised in *Ebony* and occasionally in the *Afro-*

²² Howard ad, *Ebony*, June 1948, 34-35.

²³ Howard ad, *Ebony*, June 1947, 26-27.

²⁴ Howard ad, *Plaindealer*, Jan 7, 1949, 3; Jessie Kare ad, *Plaindealer*, January 1, 1943, 3.

American and the *Chicago Defender*.²⁵ Figure 18 is an example of a smaller catalogue-style advertisement in the *Plaindealer*. Figure 19, a Medalo ad from 1950, is a sample of a much larger product line as advertised in *Ebony*. Catalogue-style ads frequently utilized an array of models to demonstrate the product rather than utilizing one model to style all of the products. This tactic allowed the consumer to see the styles across a diversity of faces

In the 1940s and 1950s advertisements for hair growing products were much less prevalent and visible than in the previous two decades. One of the reasons for this shift was the entry of a new product category in the cosmetic market: wigs, hair extensions, and attachments. Although the market for hair growing products did not entirely disappear with this new development, ads for wigs and hair extensions soon outnumbered those for hair-growing ads. The new products provided an immediate, and non-damaging solution for hair growth that was not possible for hair growing companies to achieve. Wigs and attachments were also relatively cheap. Women could purchase these products to participate in major hair trends (like the page-boy) without having to spend hours straightening and styling their hair. Hair attachment and wigs were also quite practical. Some attachments and wigs covered up the hair completely and did not require the user's natural hair to be straightened and styled. Thus, wigs and attachments could relieve a woman's hair of constant relaxing and trips to the salon, giving her hair a valued break from potential damage. At the same time, however, hair attachments and wigs were almost never used in isolation. The consumer was also likely to continue (even if less frequently) with trips to the salon or with straightening their hair at home. Thus the wig and attachment industry competed with the hair growing market, but it simultaneously became an additional product a woman might own in their hair-care regime. A woman might purchase products to help her hair

²⁵ Howard ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 5, 1948, 7; Jessie Kare ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1946, 4; Howard ad, *Afro-American*, June 7, 1947, 13; Jessie Kare ad, *Afro-American*, June 3, 1945, 13.

recover, while also wearing attachments and wigs. It was unlikely that a woman would only own wigs or attachments and never straighten her hair.²⁶

Hair attachments and wigs functioned like a hair accessory. A woman could own more than one and use them interchangeably to have the option of multiple styles. Consumers targeted by hair attachment ads might own multiple wigs or attachments for different occasions. Hair accessories allowed women to participate in new trends. They were sold at varying price points from \$2 to \$50 (equivalent to approximately \$20-\$500 USD in 2017) or more depending on the item. Pieces with more hair, complicated designs, higher quality material, or higher brand status were sold at increased price points. Hair attachments and wigs advertised trendy styles or fads. Wigs and hair attachments allowed women to appear “with the times” and stylish by wearing a modern (modern here usually meant the most recent styles) aesthetic. Across the fashion industry, wearing items that were out of date could become a point of critique or judgment. As the twentieth century progressed, trends and styles began changing with the seasons. These changes promoted consumption by providing consumers with something new. Concurrently, keeping up with the latest styles became a benchmark for trends and style, in return making certain styles feel ‘old’ or unfashionable, which could result in guilt, shame, or self-policing.²⁷ The hair attachment industry was no different and paralleled these trends. At the same time, the natural hair texture of many black women made achieving the Page Boy or a Victory Roll - two styles that were especially popular amongst white women - extremely difficult and time-consuming style for black women. Wigs, attachments, and extensions provided women

²⁶ Walker, *Style & Status*, 107.

²⁷ The idea of linking consumption with class or self-worth was a well-crafted strategy by 1920 and translated extremely well to the realms of fashion and beauty because such items like lipstick, hairstyles, or clothing were visible everyday. James D. Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), xiv-xvii; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 100, 268.

of colour with an easy way to participate in trends that may have previously been out of reach, undesirable, damaging, or too time consuming to maintain.

Ads for hair attachments and wigs sometimes included illustrations, but it was more common for the ads to feature photographs. Ads for hair attachments and wigs were usually put forth in a catalogue- style arrangement displaying several of the company's offerings. Ads for companies like Humania and Howard displayed up to twenty different styles of attachments and wigs in one advertisement. When catalogue-style ads appeared in *Ebony* they usually occupied a half or full-page. Catalogue-style ads also appeared in all three of the weekly periodicals, but the sizing for these ads (and the number of models depicted) varied widely. In the *Plaindealer*, a catalogue-style ad was usually small containing one to three models. The ads in the *Afro-American* and *Chicago Defender* were usually a little larger with four to six models.

Authors such as Noliwe Rooks and Shirley Tate have expressed the pride and significance black women feel with their hair. They argue that there are ritualistic and bonding aspects to salon trips or family evenings over a sink. Both Walker and Apex marketed to young children and utilized children as models.²⁸ These ads were a testament to the bonding and ritualistic experience of hair, as well as an attempt on the part of companies to draw on a wide consumer base. Hair attachments were an additional stream of revenue for companies and were an addition item for customers to purchase. Wigs and attachments provided women of colour with flexibility. They were neither chained to their new style or the salon; both were possibilities that allowed women of colour to feel pride in their appearance as well as feeling trendy and fashionable.

²⁸ Apex "Dandruff" ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 6, 1942, 4; Apex "Dandruff" ad, *Afro-American*, January 30, 1943, 12; Apex "Dandruff" ad, *Afro-American*, June 5, 1943, 16.

Fostering pride in appearance provided a positive image of the race, but could simultaneously be another forum for white emulation. Although wigs and attachment could provide the user with substantial benefits, and could be seen as de-racing hairstyles previously associated with white women. Wigs and extensions also maintained the straight and long hair

JUST THINK OF IT!

**Madam C.J. Walker's
WONDERFUL HAIR GROWER**

For nearly 20 years Madam C. J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower has stood the grueling test of womanhood and proved its rare excellence beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt. Women all over this land and in 29 foreign countries have used it to enliven nerve cells, enrich the scalp, thicken thin hair, soften and silken rough, wiry hair and thousands of both men and women have found this preparation matchless in nourishing and stimulating weakened hair growth on scalps left all but bald by protracted illness. Madam C. J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower is not an experiment, it has stood the test of time and is today a proven safe, certain way to have better hair.

Increased Business Demands Larger Factory

So ready and eager were women to accept this product nearly 20 years ago to improve their hair, and so steady has been their demand for more and more of it, we have found it difficult to supply their needs. First a bare hundred boxes and now, more than a million boxes a year are required to

keep milady's hair alive, clean and healthy as the times demand. In spite of numerous renovations and frequent removals, our present factory is proving inadequate. Again we need more room to meet the ever-increasing demand for Madam C. J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower.

Independent Livings Made

More than a million boxes of Madam C. J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower will annually circulate in the United States. Large part are made by Madam C. J. Walker Agents everywhere. And further, it is but one of 16 high quality preparations for the hair and skin sold by these well-known companies. It is not a wonder that Madam C. J. Walker agents make independent

livings! They are supporting families, educating an almost countless number of young women, and even liberating them from their bondage as slaves to their hair and skin. Madam C. J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower and her other preparations. When their hair done and are doing you good. Capture success and mail it today, we'll show you the way.

Madam C. J. Walker's complete line of Preparations sold by Agents, Drug Stores and by mail.

The MADAM C. J. WALKER MFG. CO., Inc.
6140 N. West St., Indianapolis, Ind.
MAKERS OF 16 PREPARATIONS

Free of Charge to You
SEND NO MONEY NOW

Absolutely without cost or obligation to you we will send our Directions which fully explain how you may earn an independent living. Opportunity for well earned money awaits you. The trade of successful Walker agents, how easily you can learn "the trade of an independent living" is yours for the asking. Fill out and mail this coupon to us now.

Dear Madam Walker,
Please send me your free literature telling how I can better my present condition, how I can earn an independent living.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

**50 Cents
Per Large Tin
at Agents, Drug
Stores or by Mail**

Figure 20. Walker Company ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 2, 1926, 5.

rule. In the 1940s and 1950s wigs and attachments did not really provide an alternative vision of hair beauty or style. Consumers had a variety of reasons to 'buy-in' including confidence, providing hair relief, saving money (or the perception of), having variety and choice, participating in fashionable trends, or supporting black businesses.

The Walker Company was one of the notable players in the black cosmetic industry across the entire forty-year period. The company's advertising shifted drastically in the

1940s and 1950s. In the 1920s and 1930s the Walker Company usually included a photograph

of Madam C.J. Walker, a floral border, and a distinct serif font. The ads emphasized hair health and frequently (but not always) included inspiring messages in the ad copy. Figure 20 is a 1926 Walker Company advertisement from the *Chicago Defender*. This ad was published after the death of Madame C.J. Walker in 1919, but still maintained the aesthetic and message of the



Figure 21. Walker Company ad, *Ebony*, January 1950, 63.

company's earlier advertisements and expressed the company goals Walker established. The ad utilized the company's favourite headline: "Just Think of It!" The copy of the ad reads,

For nearly 20 years Madam C.J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower has stood the grueling test of womanhood and proven its rare excellence beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt. Woman all over this land and in 29 foreign countries have used it to enliven nerve cells, enrich the scalp, thicken the hair, soften and silken rough, wiry hair and thousands...have found this preparation matchless in nourishing and stimulating weakened hair growth on scalps left all but bald by protracted illness.²⁹

The ad also emphasized the company's increased factory facilities and how the company helped African American women live independently. Although the ad copy includes the phrases "soften and silken wiry hair" it largely stands apart from popular advertising messages of the 1920s that attempted to normalize and naturalize straight hair. The ad avoids labeling women's natural hair texture or skin colour as ugly, embarrassing, or undesirable. The ad's main promotion was that the product was reliable and well-loved for two decades. This approach was used instead of dramatic claims about ingredients or unrealistic transformative qualities. There were no misleading images of torso-

²⁹ Walker Company ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 2, 1926, 5.

length hair common in ads from some other companies. The ad focuses on the product and on the long-term relationship between the Walker Company and black women.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s some Walker ads began to deviate from Walker's initial vision, but by the 1940s the company's ad stylization was drastically overhauled. Ads no longer contained images of Walker. Their classic floral border was long gone, and the direct emphasis on racial uplift was absent. The company maintained the focus on the product and its performance, made reasonable claims, and used realistic imagery of women, although these strategies appeared less consistently and overtly than in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the 1920s and 1930s Walker ads rarely mentioned straight hair as a form of beauty because their ads focused on hair health. In the 1940s and 1950s, Walker's beauty claims led their messaging; messages about hair health, while not absent, were secondary. Figure 21, A 1950 Walker ad proclaims "Hair' Comes Santa Claus... Better Be Good-Looking!" The ad copy reads "You'd better...you want to...you will... have the loveliest hair you've ever known...all through the holidays, and all through the year...if you'll just say a last goodbye to disappointing substitutes and turn to the genuine, proven Mme. C.J. Walker preparations.³⁰ This ad mentions several of the company's products, such as the Wonderful Double-Strength Scalp Ointment, Wonderful Hair & Scalp Preparation, Wonderful Temple Salve, and Glossine.³¹

The 1950s also witnessed the first Walker ads targeting children. An ad from 1952 reads "mother... or daughter? Which girl has the WALKER? They both do... of course! The BIGGER girls want their LITTLE girls to have HEALTHY SCALPS and LOVELY CURLS! So more, and more, with each new day, they're turning to the WALKER WAY!"³² A young girl under the

³⁰ Santa Claus ad, Walker Company, *Ebony*, January 1950, 63.

³¹ Santa Claus ad, Walker Company, *Ebony*, January 1950, 63.

³² Mother and Daughter ad, Walker Company, *Ebony*, January, 1953, 14.

age of eight with soft curls was the feature of the ad and a young woman (perhaps in her early thirties) was also depicted in the corner, with her image about half the size of the young girl. Another ad from 1949 featured an illustrated image of soft waves and copy that spoke to the product's ability to produce curls, waves, or any other hair style.³³

Walker ads of the 1940s and 1950s in *Ebony* were usually half or full-page ads and the models in these ads usually wore straight hair styles. In the 1920s and 1930s, Walker ads had appeared to be for the 'everyday' woman and the products had very reasonable process. Because these early ads consistently used an every-day and relatable version of Walker's image and her "rags to riches" story, these ads spoke to women where they were. In contrast, images of Walker outside of the ads often showed her wearing fur coats, riding in luxurious automobiles, and building an expensive mansion.³⁴ There was a Walker for ordinary women, and a Walker for the wealthy. In addition, early Walker ads usually contained mail-in coupons for samples.

Walker's prices were also slightly higher than in earlier decades. In the 1940s, Murray's sold its Hair Cream for fifty cents, and its hair pomade for twenty-five cents.³⁵ Dixie Peach Hair Pomade cost twenty-five cents,³⁶ The "family size" container of Royal Crown Hair Dressing sold for twenty-five cents,³⁷ and Apex Glossatina, Pomade, and Scalp Cream all went for fifty cents.³⁸ In contrast, Walker's Glossine and Temple Salve sold for forty-five cents opposed to twenty-five cents and their Scalp Ointment and Hair Preparation (similar to a pomade) sold for sixty cents for the same or similar amount of product.³⁹

³³ Satin Tress ad, *Ebony*, January 1949, 18.

³⁴ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 76, 80-81; A'Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2000), 15-16, 132, 92-96, 248-249.

³⁵ Murray's ad, *Ebony* June 1953, 76.

³⁶ Dixie Peach Hair Pomade ad, *Ebony*, January 1953, 57.

³⁷ Royal Crown Hair Dressing ad, *Ebony*, June 1951, 76.

³⁸ Apex Products ad, *Ebony*, June 1951, 50.

³⁹ Mother daughter ad, Walker, *Ebony*, June 1952, 56.

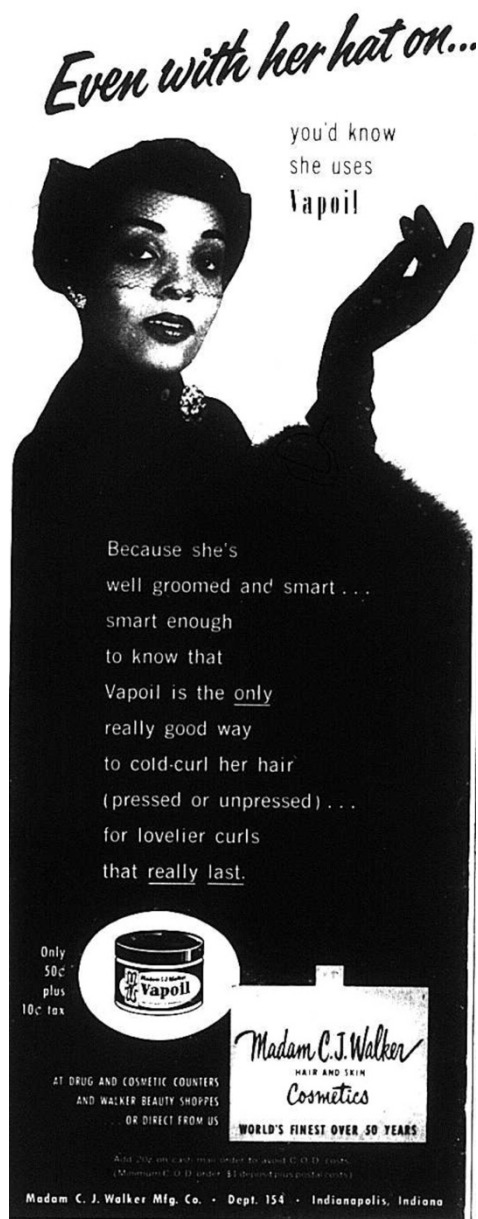


Figure 22. Walker Cosmetics ad, *Ebony*, January 1954, 5.

The Walker Company changed its branding in the 1940s and 50s, producing a more glamorous and middle-class image that settled nicely within *Ebony*. Walker ads in *Ebony* were heavily stylized – using hair, make-up, and fashion - to represent middle class women. Figure 22, a Walker ad from 1954, is perhaps the best demonstration of their new image. The ad provides a profile shot of the model with an avant-garde look that includes the pointed outline of her hat, a black cloak or jacket that covers her entire body, and delicate hand positions. The message of this ad was that she looked like someone who used the product. Walker's association with luxury and the middle or upper class is clear.

Apex followed a similar model to both Poro and the Walker Company when it emerged in 1919. Apex opened up a beauty school and began selling hair products, eventually expanding its product line.⁴⁰ By the late 1920s and early 1930s, Apex advertised in all four periodicals. With a later start in the industry, Apex only

achieved a level of success and brand recognition similar to Poro and the Walker Company in the 1930s. In the late 1930s and through the 1940s (as the company grew in size) the company

⁴⁰ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 92.

drastically increased its advertising presence. A 1946 ad featuring a smiling black woman proclaimed:

WOMEN EVERYWHERE ARE CHANGING TO THIS WONDERFUL NEW POWDER

YOU SELECT FROM 10 New SHADES OF BLACK AND WHITE FACE POWDER

There's a shade made just right for you! And the new Black and White Face Powder contains "Myricol," a secret ingredient that prevents caking. You'll also like the new perfume that's been added... a lovely flower-fresh fragrance that's exclusive with this new face powder.

New! Lipstick

FIVE exciting shades! It's the new Black and White Lipstick! Each shade is made especially to blend with certain shades of the new Black and White Face Powder. All five lipstick shades are thrilling, flattering. You'll love the way Black and White Lipstick stays—and stays—and stays—making your lips look so kissable, soft and inviting! Comes in a beautiful, all metal lavender case.

10c / 25c EVERYWHERE

USE THIS CHART WHEN CHOOSING BLACK AND WHITE FACE POWDER AND LIPSTICK

Use Black and White Beauty Creams for Daily Skin Care

BLACK AND WHITE VANISHING CREAM—A fragrant, non-greasy cream that acts as a wonderful powder base. Holds make-up on for hours.

BLACK AND WHITE CLEANSING CREAM—One night, it quickly and gently removes make-up and old make-up for easy removal with tissue.

BLACK AND WHITE COLD CREAM—Contains LINDOLIN to help soften skin and help prevent dry flake. Leave on overnight for a perfect, more youthful look.

BLACK AND WHITE FACE POWDER **A SHADE MADE JUST FOR YOUR SKIN!**

Figure 23. Black and White Face Powder ad, *Afro-American*, June 1947, 10.

THOSE WHO CARE FOR GLAMOROUS HAIR USE APEX SCALP CREAM. There is absolutely no reason why you should not be in the front ranks of attractive women. Keep ahead with Apex. Lovely alluring hair plays such an important part in your appearance that no woman young or other can afford to allow her hair to become dull and unattractive. Improve your appearance NOW by the beautifying of your hair as millions of other women have done and are doing by the daily use of Apex products.⁴¹

Like the Walker company, Apex maintained some of the goals that select racially conscious black-owned business owners

established for themselves in the 1920s and 1930s. Apex's best-selling product was their

scalp cream. The cream was neither a hair straightener nor a hair grower, but a product to maintain the hair's quality and "loveliness." The company claimed that product "relieves dry itching scalp, removes dandruff scales and gives life to the hair making it look alive and glossy."⁴² Apex was still advertising their Scalp Cream - which they labeled as "medicated" - in a 1952 *Ebony* ad.⁴³ The goal of the product was to maintain the hair and thereby helped the user to

⁴¹ Apex ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1946, 17.

⁴² Apex Scalp Cream ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1946, 17.

⁴³ Apex Medicated Scalp Cream ad, *Ebony* June 1953, 107. The same ad was also used in 1954 (*Ebony*, Jan 1954, 62).

feel more put together, attractive, and beautiful. Still, the ad relied on the consumer's insecurities to buy in. Dandruff, flaky scalps, or extremely dry hair affected the hair's appearance and subsequently a woman's confidence. The company confirmed that scalp issues were something to feel self-conscious about, and then offered relief. Similarly, the company advertised their hair pomade (formerly referred to as their hair grower) specifically for the purpose of controlling dandruff, which is a hair health issue. The ad features the image of a child who appears to be under the age of ten. The body of the ad claims that dandruff starts at a young age and can affect women their whole lives. Here, it seems that Apex was advertising a product that was known and well used by adult women in a new way to capture an additional consumer.⁴⁴

Although this 1952 ad aligned with some of the original goals espoused by Apex, other ads showed a considerable evolution. Another ad, published in the *Afro-American* in 1947, read "World's finest beauty preparations will improve your appearance beautify your hair clear your complexion."⁴⁵ A similar ad from *Ebony* in 1952 proclaimed "YES! YOU, TOO CAN HAVE Lovelier Hair by using APEX GLOSSATINA (for use with the Hot Comb)." The body of the ad further commends the product for producing "smooth, satiny, shimmering" hair and suggests women could bring this product with them to their salon.⁴⁶ Informing women that they could bring the product to their salon was also potentially helpful to Apex. If women consistently brought Apex products to their salon owners might consider switching or carrying Apex products. More importantly, this ad demonstrates that Apex was breaking away from racially conscious hair health messages that were extremely popular in the 1930s. Apex's new messaging

⁴⁴ Apex Hair Pomade ad, *Afro-American*, January 30, 1943, 12.

⁴⁵ Apex Beauty Products, *Afro-American*, January 4, 1947, 11.

⁴⁶ Apex Glossatina ad, *Ebony*, June 1952, 70.

Can You Feel A Burning QUESTION In The Eyes of Friends

... better do this right about face

Help yourself right out of that skin-torture victim act and let men and women see you in a new light. Restless scratching fingers can't help, can't comfort. It is one more tell-tale misery added to itching, burning, torturing pimples of acne of external cause.

Comforting aid through antiseptics, plus healing aid is what you get with Black and White Ointment. It also affords you blessed relief, for this ointment soothes out itch and burn. And you must be satisfied or your dealer will cheerfully refund your money. So you see, in purchasing Black and White Ointment you take absolutely no chances. Use only as directed.

Vitality important in cleansing is good soap. For this reason the famous mild Black and White Skin Soap (which is special skin soap) is highly recommended for your regular use while using Black and White Ointment. Ask for the economical large sizes, 25c.

BLACK AND WHITE OINTMENT and SKIN SOAP

Figure 24. Black and White Skin Misery ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1940.

focused on beauty, glamour, and consumption, which paralleled the new direction of the black beauty industry.

In one late 1950s ad series, Pluko used the tag line “Diamonds in Your Hair” suggesting their “hairedressing” would make the users hair shine like diamonds.⁴⁷ This was a direct analogy that alluded to luxury and glamour, the ultimate 1950s cosmetics trope. Pluko also had another campaign featuring two ads with the same illustration. One was titled “Bewitching Hair Beauty” and the other “Starlight in your hair means Lovelight in his eyes.”⁴⁸ The body of the ad reads “Let Pluko play cupid - put a sparkle in your hair and capture his heart... for keeps! Pluko helps make your hair look longer, softer, silkier-easy to arrange ... Try it on your dry, dull, brittle hair.” These ads demonstrate the ongoing “appeal to romance” which was a consistent advertising tactic throughout the forty-year period. Pluko, and dozens of other brands, repackaged the theme that beauty products would help a woman secure a man. These ads demonstrate that white-owned companies like Black and White were using more positive language

⁴⁷ Diamonds in Your Hair ad, Pluko, *Afro-American*, June 7, 1952, 5; In the early 1920s Pluko advertised under the name Pluko by Ploughs, eventually the company advertised independently as Pluko, but by 1950 the company began selling their product as Black and White Pluko in order to retain the consistency of the Pluko name from the 1920s.

⁴⁸ Bewitching Hair Beauty ad, Pluko, *Afro-American*, January 7, 1956, 2; Pluko Starlight ad, *Afro-American*, June 7, 1958, 6.

to describe black hair, but the denigration never completely disappeared. The use of negative language to describe natural hair and positive language to describe hair after applying the product was used in order to make the product results stand out.

The 1940s and 1950s also witnessed several different advertising campaigns from Black and White. Black and White was best known for its bleaching creams, the product that the company advertised most frequently. In the mid 1940s Black and White began advertising a small line of cosmetics which included non-bleaching face creams, facial powder, and lipstick. Figure 22 represents one example and is the most eye-catching because it appeared as a full page spread in the *Afro-American*. The Black and White Face powder advertisement reads “WOMEN EVERYWHERE ARE CHANGING TO THIS WONDERFUL NEW POWDER. YOU SELECT FROM 10 NEW SHADES... There’s a shade made just right for you!”⁴⁹ This advertisement was unique – because it was published in full-page format, included three products, and showed Black and White entering a new part of the cosmetics market – but the overall strategy was largely in line with ads coming out of other companies.

Elsewhere, Black and White ads could be much more challenging and extreme. This more bold approach that appeared in the first installment (Figure 24) of the multi-Part “skin misery” campaign that stretched across the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁰ The image of the woman in this ad is jolting because she appears to be possessed or demonic. The ad copy reads “Help yourself right out of that skin-torture victims act and let men and women see you in a new light.” The ad also warns that itchy skin is a “misery” and scratching surely does not help. “It is one more tell-tale misery adding to itching, burning, torturing pimples of acne ...” The ad appears to be making a bold statement that women are in a trance-like state regarding their skin. They are

⁴⁹ Black and White Face Powder ad, *Afro-American*, June 1947, 10.

⁵⁰ Black and White Burning Question ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1940, 2.

completely controlled by their acne. They are victims tortured by their skin. By 1946, the demonic-looking ad disappeared. A simpler text-only version appeared in the late 1940s and continued into the early 1950s. Different versions of the ad began with “Relieve Itching, burning of [X],”⁵¹ with X standing for bumps, tetter (an itchy skin ailment like eczema), or acne pimples.⁵²

Another version of this theme appeared between 1956 and 1959 in an ad which asked “what’s your skin misery?” and promised “Blessed Relief from Skin Misery.” This ad featured the same illustration of a tub of the ointment as well as a list of ailments such as “ugly bumps, acne pimples, simple ringworms, tetter, eczema, burning, irritated feed and hands” that the cream appeared to cure. The following year Black and White produced an add-on to this same series featuring photographs of men and women who had been cured of their skin misery.⁵³ The skin misery series resembled earlier ads on hair health, but the company took this theme of health much further. Instead of emphasizing the skin health elements, the ad series emphasized skin problems labelling skin as miserable, torturous, and ugly. The ads also emphasized anxiety over skin issues - blaming and shaming women for the condition of their skin demanding women to take action to end their own torture. In the 1920s and 1930s, Black and White had used the same tactic in their appeal to romance when they implied that women were single because of their problematic skin-it was up to them to fix it. While this ad new series did not appeal to romance, it used similar rhetoric of shame and blame to coax women into purchasing their product because its use would transform their skin and their lives.

⁵¹ Black and White Ointment ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 3, 1950, 9.

⁵² Black and White “tetter” Ointment ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 8, 1950, 9; Black and White “acne pimples” Ointment ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 5, 1948, 2; Black and White “acne pimples” Ointment ad, *Afro-American*, June 24, 1950, 12; Black and White “Bumps” Ointment ad, *Afro-American*, January 7, 1950, 3.

⁵³ Black and White Skin Misery ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 26, 1957, 15; Black and White Skin Misery ad, January 25, 1958, 3; Black and White Skin Misery ad, *Chicago Defender*, June 27, 1959, 15; Relief from Skin Misery ad, Black and White, *Afro-American*, June 28, 1958, 3.



Figure 25. Black and White “Put a New Face” campaign, *Chicago Defender*, June 6, 1942, 17.

Another controversial campaign from Black and White was the “PUT A NEW FACE on things about face powder” ad from the early 1940s. (Figure 25) This campaign featured two women. The woman in the back of the ad was well groomed, smiling, and was wearing light make-up and hair styled back. The second woman, the closest to the reader, has her entire face cut out and in its place is a white background and black text. The body of the text read “Black and White Magic Mist

Face Powder actually offer you six (6)

different ways to change the very look of your face, your complexion.”⁵⁴ The ad copy goes on to detail how the powder blurs fine lines and wrinkles, and well as evening out the skin tone. The ad copy was in no way controversial, but its imaging physically removed a woman’s face. The image was extremely unnecessary because the ad copy did not write that the product would transform the skin or make the user feel like a new person. The ad is reminiscent of the patent medicine era where advertisers advertised absurdities to gain attention or sell product. The ad is disturbing because it suggests women should or could be completely transformed by cosmetics. The ad fed into messages already circulating within the industry (messages created and perpetuated by advertisements) that women should change themselves for social acceptance, love, or popularity.

⁵⁴ Black and White “Put a New Face” campaign, *Chicago Defender*, June 6, 1942, 17.

The appeal to glamour was a striking and effective technique that parallels the appeal to love that emerged in the 1920s. Although the appeal to love had not disappeared, companies that emphasized glamour allowed women to position themselves as the glamour girl through the fantasy lifestyles promoted in many ads, but particularly in *Ebony* ads. The 1940s brought the expanded use of Technicolor in films, feature length extended films, and a wider use of black actors. Although many black characters featured in Hollywood films were casted in stereotypical roles such as the jazz or night club singer, or the mamie, many women liked the appearance of black actresses in film for reasons that paralleled the appearance of black women in skin bleaching advertisements. The popularity of black performers in the music industry also increased. As a result, actresses and singers (along with professional models) became role models for other black women. These same celebrities were used with increasing frequency in the 1940s and 1950s to advertise cosmetics and on the front page of *Ebony*.

The Walker Company made an appeal to the glamorous with their 1947 celebrity-endorsed ad in the *Afro-American*. The ad's headline reads "Gleaming Hair Glorious Hair" in a swanky cursive font that suggests glamour and luxury. The body of the text reads "The rich looking glorious hair of lovely Dorothy Carinaldi comes easily through care and attention... Famous stars of the stage-screen-radio; business and professionals, social leaders and debutants depend on Glossine for they know that 'Glossine-grooming' assures them always of hair easily styled-naturally radiant."⁵⁵ Black and White used a similar campaign between 1952 and 1954 using the appeal to glamour for their complexion products. Each of the ads featured a different celebrity with a unique message, but the headline, fonts, and overall aesthetic were maintained so as to signal a campaign or a series to the customer. An example of one of the ads in the series

⁵⁵ Walker Company Gleaming Hair, ad, *Afro-American*, June 28, 1947, 10.

reads “Glamorous Model says: You too can have that Camera Close-up Look!” The body of the text was written as a first-person account by the model in question who says, “A camera tells more than a mirror about make-up. I owe that perfect Camera Close-up Look to Black and White Vanishing Cream. I use this wonderful cream as my make-up base, always!”⁵⁶

Dixie Peach was another brand that used the appeal to glamour in several of their ad campaigns. One of their ads featured “America’s most famous Negro model”⁵⁷ and another featured Joyce Bowman the “director of the Famous Colored Models of New York’s leading model agency.”⁵⁸ Dixie Peach positioned their products in ways that continued themes from the 1920s and 1930s. They positioned the model as beautiful, and therefore a credible expert on beauty.

The appeal to glamour was produced through explicit phrasing in advertisements, the use of a celebrity who exuded luxury, and styling a model to appear glamorous. This usually meant arranging her hair, clothes, and make-up to appear minimalist, expensive, chic, and high-class, as in Figure 17. Even using the word “glamour” already invoked specific expensive, stylish, or beautiful fashion or beauty items. A 1952 Humania ad used “glamour” to denote a movie star hairstyle that was widely used in film.⁵⁹ Another 1954 Howard ad showcased fourteen different “glamorous” hairstyles including styles for short hair.⁶⁰

Howard’s 1949 ad campaign “Say ‘Yes’ to Romance” closely resembled Black and White’s 1930s “Give Romance a Chance” campaign.⁶¹ The appeal to romance was among the most popular advertising strategies between 1920 and 1959. The message usually stipulated that

⁵⁶ Black and White Camera Close-Up ad, *Afro-American*, June 1952, 10.

⁵⁷ Dixie Peach Famous Negro Model ad, *Chicago Defender*, January 26, 1957, 15.

⁵⁸ Dixie Peach, Joyce Bowman ad, *Afro-American*, June 7, 1958, 12.

⁵⁹ Humania ad, *Ebony*, June 1952, 76.

⁶⁰ Howard Glamorous ad, *Ebony* June 1954, 122.

⁶¹ Howard “Say ‘Yes’ to Romance” ad, *Ebony*, June 1949, 29.

the respective product would lead to increased attention from men, and eventually to romance and marriage. Howard played off of this theme, but added a new layer. The stylization of the models appealed to glamour while also implying that a woman's new long hair would draw in a man. However, the ad was not promoting 'any' woman, but a middle-class, well put together woman. The woman receiving attention wore make-up, jewelry and gloves (the ones in the ad were long and appeared as though they might accompany an evening gown). She had well-groomed hair and skin. The ads messaging suggested that a specific type of woman (luxurious and middle class) was the one most likely to experience Romance.

The appeal to glamour was successful and popular in part because because it played on societal critiques in the 1920s and 1930s. Critics in the 1920s and 1930 had argued that consumption and purchasing power was a civil rights issue. The purchasing power of African Americans could be – needed to be – harnessed to improving civil rights.⁶² At the same time, many advertisers (apart from those whose products were specifically aimed at black consumers) simply ignored black consumers who were understood as universally poor. The appeal to glamour portrayed black women as middle or upper-class through their stylization or appearance in advertisements for expensive and luxury items. Representing blacks as successful, beautiful, and frankly rich, emerged for the first time with consistency in the 1940s with *Ebony*. While these ads were not necessarily intended to have political undertones or created for the purpose of further civil rights they signaled a change in attitude regarding race as well as the recognition of black purchasing power.

The allure around the glamorous world of actresses, models, and singers was furthered by *Ebony* whom the magazine regularly featured these beauties on their cover and in multi-page

⁶² Walker, *Style & Status*, 6-7; Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 4.

stories about their careers (A phenomenon was built around this group of women creating a cult-like veneration). Not only were these women admired for their beauty but also for their money and achievement. Many young black women wanted to capture their piece of success or fame and fortune and one way of doing so was through emanating the glamour girl look.

The cosmetic industry of the 1940s and 1950s was a place of both continuity and innovation. This chapter highlighted four key developments that separate this period from its predecessor: the introduction of *Ebony* magazine in 1945, the unprecedented entry of new cosmetic companies, the widespread use of photography, and the introduction of wigs and hair attachments as a distinct product category. Several of the key developments of this period were only possible because of the innovations that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. The hair straightening industry paved the way for and created the need for attachments and wigs, and the explosion of new companies was only possible because of the solidification of the industry by the 1930s. *Ebony* magazine revolutionized the periodical landscape as well as the cosmetic industry. The modeling industry, developed in part because *Ebony* created a stable platform for duplicate ads, ads from black-owned companies, and solidified the need for luxurious and high-quality ads for all advertisers. *Ebony* was a sought-after space for new companies to advertise. *Ebony's* vision was to create a positive space for readers to shed the harsh realities of daily life. While *Ebony* was never intended to be a political soap box for black racial issues, the magazine forced the reality of black purchasing power and used glamorous advertisements to regularly depict black women as successful middle class citizens for the first time.

Conclusion

Between 1920 and 1960, the cosmetic industry directed at black consumers developed and matured as a segregated market sector which had antecedents in the late nineteenth century. The first black-owned beauty brands - The Walker Company and Poro - developed products designed to serve the hair and skin needs of black women. Although Madame C.J Walker (The Walker Company) and Annie Turnbo Malone (Poro) establish their companies in the first decade of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1920s that cosmetics were socially accepted as a product category. From its inception, the beauty industry was racially segregated. Black entrepreneurs like Walker and Malone created products to answer black needs, but these entrepreneurs were followed into the market by white-owned companies that also began producing products aimed at black women. Black-owned companies were more likely to begin their work with hair care products and stay away (at least initially) from the skin care products (typically skin bleaching creams) marketed by white-owned companies. (Although the black cosmetics industry sometimes paralleled the cosmetics industry aimed at white consumers (in terms of trends like the page boy hairstyle), a comparison to the white industry is unfair. The black cosmetics industry faced tremendous tension between the goals and ideals of beauty propounded by black and white-owned companies. The black cosmetics industry was fundamentally different from the white industry because it was ungirded by racial messages. No company could present an image of beauty without also making a statement about race, intentional or not. However, messages about race and beauty were not racially specific. Both black and white-owned companies used denigrating language but also racial uplift. Advertising between black and white-owned companies usually, but not always, diverged in their goals and assessment of black hair and skin.

The black cosmetics industry solidified into its modern form between 1940 and 1960 while building on developments in the earlier period. Some of the advertising and marketing strategies developed in the 1920s and 1930s survived into later decades. Nonetheless, the industry underwent significant change and really took on its modern form in the 1940s, and especially after *Ebony* began publishing in 1945. The period 1940-1960 saw four major changes that distinguished this period from its predecessor. These include the introduction of *Ebony* magazine in 1945, the unprecedented entry of new cosmetic companies, the widespread use of photography, and the introduction of a new product category- wigs and hair attachments. Photography developed as an emerging advertising tool in the 1920s and 1930s, but became widespread after 1940. As the US economy boomed in the postwar period, the black cosmetic industry became both larger and more stable.

My project has emphasized the intersection of race and gender operating in American society using the window of the cosmetics advertising and racialized beauty standards. Beauty expectation, “norms,” and messages from the mid twentieth century form the foundation of the messages and trends we see today. The goal for this project has been to investigate the connection between race and beauty in order to understand where our modern beauty ideals come from and how history informs the present. I analyzed racialized beauty ads of the mid-twentieth century in order to explore the place of race in this period. Particularly, I analyzed the messages about black beauty that were sold to black women in ads that came from black and white-owned companies. Advertising images selected by advertisers conveyed what that company thought was desirable and beautiful and what could be sold to black consumers. Chapter 2 explored how race informs beauty standards and the messaging around blackness and beauty.

From the first days of the industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, black and white companies aimed at black consumers competed for physical space on drugstore shelves and advertising space within the black press. White-owned companies, with more money to spend and wider distribution networks to move products, regularly won out over their black-owned competitors.¹

The appeal to love was the most popular advertising strategy of the forty-year period. The tactic of love and romance was used in ads for hair straighteners, wig and attachments, and skin lightening products. These ads usually combined images of a man and woman in an amorous embrace with copy that proclaimed that using the product led directly to the relationship. These ads pointed to curly or short hair or to dark skin as the “problem.” The product was the solution which could completely transform the user’s life. The appeal to celebrity was also a common theme. In the 1920s celebrities were used to draw a potential consumer to a brand, helping to achieve brand and product awareness. By the 1940s this tactic shifted slightly where familiar products and companies used celebrities in a way that read like “celebrities are people too!” What remained constant was that the celebrity was seen as an authority on beauty. Celebrity status never failed to excite consumers, especially after the creation of *Ebony*, who made celebrities an integral part of their platform.

In the 1920s and into the 1930s advertisements from white-owned companies like Nadinola, and Black and White denigrated black hair and skin describing it as inherently problematic and ugly. Black skin and hair was an obstruction that prevented black women from achieving their “true” beauty potential. In the same period, black-owned companies like Poro,

¹ Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875-1940* (New York: Humanity Books, 2001), 286; Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 71-72, 106-112; Susannah Walker, *Style & Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 24-26.

Walker, and Apex usually took a different approach. They avoided denigrating language and they largely stayed away from products like skin-lighteners. Instead, these black-owned companies (though not all) used their ads to connect their products to racial uplift. Racial uplift self-consciously promoted black respectability through an accurate, dignified, and positive portrayal of black women. More generally, the tactic sought to uplift the entire race through the positive reception of black women in everyday life. Some white-owned companies also picked up strands of this approach depicting black women positively (in language and copy). The 1940s and 1950s witnessed a visible waning of explicit attempts to promote racial uplift in this way. This decline, in part, was a result of the widespread use of photography which on its own depicted women of colour with dignity and accuracy. As a result, modelling also developed as a career for a small number of women of colour.

After *Ebony* began publishing in 1945, the appeal to glamour quickly became a leading advertising strategy. “Glamour” as both a catchphrase and an appeal was indicative of deeper meaning. Glamour was evoked in the stylization of a model - hair, clothes, accessories, and makeup - to signal luxury or wealth, and middle or upper class status. This was the first time that black women were regularly portrayed as middle class citizens. This portrayal was an acknowledgement of their buying power and a recognition that people of colour were invested in and contributing to the economy.²

The research for this project focused almost exclusively on the northern black press. Expanding this project to include a wider geographic sampling, especially including newspapers in the South, would give a wider view of advertising aimed at black consumers. Still, two of the three weekly periodicals I included –The *Afro-American* and *Chicago Defender*- were among the

² Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 4; Walker, *Style & Status*, 6-7.

top three circulating papers across the nation within the black press. *Ebony* was the largest circulating magazine. Choosing major organs of the black press in the north that circulated in the south, was a way to minimize geographic issues.

The Plaindealer (which had the most limited and local circulation of the other periodicals in this study) included many local advertisements that never made it into nationally circulating periodicals. The national circulating periodicals were more likely to include ads from the largest and wealthiest national brands. Those national brands and national advertising strategies drew the most attention in this study. A study on local papers or papers that had a state-wide circulation would be another avenue of exploration, as this would highlight mail order companies and small businesses that may have advertised extensively within a particular geographic region. In turn, juxtaposing the advertising strategies of local, state or community-based companies against national brands might yield contrasting advertising strategies. An expansion into the south - to analyze periodicals that exclusively circulated only within the south or had wider distribution channels in the south- is another avenue that I did not approach but which certainly requires further research.

Blain Roberts' *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth Century South* delves into some of the issues discussed in this study, including the acceptance and use of cosmetics in the South. Roberts however, does not analyze advertisements in the black press to the same extent as this study. Her questions and her scope are different.³ Roberts' does argue, however, that "female beauty in the American South was, more so than in the rest of the country, deeply racialized" and that "southern beauty practices resulted from the fraught

³ Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

relationship between a conservative, largely rural region and the rest of the nation.”⁴ Such a conclusion underscores the deep political nature of the beauty industry in the south and the importance of taking on this specific topic in further study.

Expanding this project into the 1960s would also bring new questions. Susannah Walker’s 2007 book, *Style & Status* covers the period between 1920 and 1975. Noliwe Rooks’ *Hair Raising* also extends into the 1960s and Rooks’ has less to say about this later period than does Walker and her writing on this period is much more personal.⁵ Walker’s article from 2000, “Black is Profitable: The Commodification of the Afro, 1960-1975,” speaks about new political context surrounding beauty in this later period.⁶ Walker discusses how the afro, a hairstyle that symbolized revolution, was picked up and exploited by the beauty industry.⁷ Prior to 1965-66, the straight hair ideal dominated and was promoted by both black and white-owned companies selling hair products to black women. Some companies chose not to highlight straight hair in their advertisements and instead depicted women with curly or short hair. However, such depictions were uncommon. Walker tells us that after 1960 there was a visible and important shift as natural and afro-style hair were promoted as the ideal, although images of straight hair were never removed entirely. Most importantly, the afro was a rarity before 1960 and natural/afro styles did not contain the same political meaning before 1960 as they held after this date and in the context of the expanding civil rights movement.

⁴ Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, 7.

⁵ Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 129-136.

⁶ Susannah Walker, "Black is Profitable: The Commodification of the Afro, 1960-1975." *Enterprise and Society* 1, no. 3 (2000): 536-64.

⁷ Walker, "Black is Profitable," 544-547.

Expanding my project into the 1960s and beyond would raise new questions: do natural hairstyles lose their political meaning once they are widely adopted by the masses and the black beauty industry? How does performativity come into play when natural hairstyles, especially the afro, symbolize rebellion or militancy? How do we interpret white-owned companies promoting natural hairstyles with a political undertone? Did the afro and all it symbolized influence the appeal or advertising messages of skin-bleaching products? Did the afro fundamentally change the beauty industry? How do we explain the eventual return of straight hair styles in the late 1970s and early 1980s?

Divisions and distinctions continue in marketing for cosmetics. A white beauty ideal is still dominate, and this has the effect of downgrading black beauty. There is an as unwillingness from most white-owned cosmetic companies to cater to black women on their terms. Instead of popular transnational companies expanding the shade range of cosmetic lines to service a wider customer base, new black-owned cosmetic companies have cropped up to fill the void. Even when darker products are available from established companies they are frequently available as an “extended shade range” or “online only.”⁸ Separate “ethnic” haircare sections are still a feature in local grocery and drugstores. These sections are filled with hair-straightening creams and oils both maintaining straight hair as the norm. Many of these products marketed to girls under ten. But to simply say that black women should “know better” or utilizing these products somehow inherently means users are ashamed of their hair or heritage strips consumers of their own agency and shames users for their aesthetic choices. Further, it establishes only one way of

⁸ Lines like the *Cover Girl Queen Collection*- a product line dedicated to women of colour- are only available in the U.S. and in select drugstores. To shop the full collection consumer must go to their online retail website. Maybelline Fit Me foundation, which has dedicated lines under the *Fit Me* name for matte, natural, and illuminating finishes, each with sixteen shades. Drugstores usually carry 8-10 of each with variety depending on the individual drugstore and location. This inconsistency is not restricted to Maybelline but is a common industry practice to free-up shelf space.

being black that delegitimizes all other options. Should African-American women ignore these isles even though these items are part of their regular beauty routine, represent family bonding, make these women feel beauty, or allow them to level life's playing field? Should African-American women be shamed for using products they have been told by both white and black industry that they should use? Doing so places women of colour as nothing more than victims and unable to interpret advertisements and the implications of the products they use. Second wave feminists determined that personal experience is a form knowledge and expertise that should be valued. Who knows more about the politics of hair than women of colour who live the reality everyday.

The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s altered beauty standards and expanded the range of "socially acceptable" hairstyles for black women. However, there are countless cases in the last five years where women of colour were fired for not complying with a company policy prohibiting hairstyles that unfairly targeted women of colour. Others were asked to take out a hairstyle because they were deemed "unprofessional" and one woman was fired for defending her short hairstyle. A few of these cases include Jessica Sims, Farryn Johnson, Rhonda Lee, Ashley Davis, Melphine Evans, Tiffany Bryan, and Cree Ballah.⁹

Yet, at the same time cosmetic companies and the public are demanding change. In the last four months alone, Fenty Beauty by Rihanna released a complexion line with forty shades (all available in store and online) and Kylie Cosmetics released a line of concealers with thirty

⁹ Philip Lee-Shanok, "Zara employee humiliated after managers try to 'fix' her hair," *CBC News*, April 09, 2016. Accessed December 10, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ballah-zara-discrimination-hairstyle-1.3527977>; "Because Our Hair Is Always Political: 6 Black Women Fired For Their Hairstyles." *Clutch Magazine*. Accessed December 10, 2017. <http://clutchmagonline.com/2015/09/women-fired-for-their-hairstyles/7/>.

shades. Fenty's launch was particularly memorable because the dark shades were the first to sell out.¹⁰

While Kylie's launch was initially lauded for its inclusiveness, once women of colour received the product complaints were abound. The dark shades were all "red toned" (as listed in the product description and noticed by the users), which did not reflect the true diversity of dark skin tones.¹¹ These product launches buck the industry trend of launching a small ten-to-twenty shade range, and then expanding to include darker colours *two to four years later*. Consumers, both black and white, are actively supporting these new brands and publicly opting out of products and brands that do not cater to a wide variety of skin tones.¹²

Most recently, Tarte cosmetics launched their new Shape Tape foundation in fourteen shades. The obvious problem lay in the distribution of the shades, as there were few if any options for dark-skinned people. Fans were deeply disappointed and outraged because of the standard the company established when they launched their Shape Tape concealer with fifteen shades in 2016. In response to the situation, a brand rep from Tarte stated "Additional shades are usually added seasonally, which makes sense because your complexion tends to be paler in the

¹⁰ Summer Arlexis, "Rihanna's Fenty Beauty Dark Shades Are Basically Sold Out & As A Black Woman, I Couldn't Be Happier," *Bustle*, September 13, 2017, Accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.bustle.com/p/rihannas-fenty-beauty-dark-shades-are-basically-sold-out-as-a-black-woman-i-couldnt-be-happier-2344288>.

¹¹ Jenna Rosenstein, "Kylie Cosmetics is Dropping 30 Concealer Shades," *Harper's Bazaar*, December 6, 2017, Accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/a13977867/kylie-cosmetics-concealer/>; Marquaysa Battle "Kylie Jenner's 'inclusive' concealer ignores one important fact about dark skin. This is a DEAL BREAKER," *Revelist*, January 9, 2018, Accessed April 1, 2018 <http://www.revelist.com/makeup/kylie-jenner-concealer-dark/11133>; Danielle Cadena "People Are Not Thrilled About Kyle Jenner's New Concealers," *Buzzfeed*, December 8, 2017, Accessed December 10, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/danielacadena/people-are-accusing-kylie-jenner-of-copying-rihannas-makeup?utm_term=.tjeJm2pX9#.cuYmN529X;

¹² "Fenty Realness: We Had 40 People Try All 40 Foundation Shades," *Flare*, September 20, 2017, Accessed December 10, 2017, <http://www.flare.com/beauty/fenty-beauty-foundation/>; Chaedria Labouvier, "How Rihanna's Fenty Beauty is Changing The Conversation About Beauty," *Allure*, October 13, 2017, Accessed December 10, 2017, <https://www.allure.com/story/how-rihanna-fenty-beauty-has-changed-the-beauty-industry>; Tynan Sinks, "You Can Hate Kyle Jenner for Many Things, But at Least Her Concealer Range Is Fine," *Allure*, December 14, 2017, Accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.allure.com/story/kylie-cosmetics-fenty-beauty-shade-range-inclusivity>.

Winter and darker in the Summer months.”¹³ Beauty influencers refused to review the product with many boycotting the brand indefinitely. Less than two weeks after the product launch, the negative consumer feedback forced the company to immediately expand the shade range.¹⁴ While this situation should never have happened, the outcry and then the action from Tarte inspires hope instead of disappointment. Fenty’s launch, a few months previously, was so powerful that make-up wearers refused to accept a product line from Tarte that almost exclusively catered to white women. Fenty’s success and Tarte’s disaster sent a clear image to consumers and brands as to what consumers expect, what is now the industry norm. Most importantly, the message was that refusing to cater to dark-skinned people is unacceptable.

These cases also demonstrate that there is not simply an industry refusal to do better. There is certainly much more work to do in creating inclusive cosmetic brands, accepting a wider variety of hairstyles adorned by black women, and de-segregating products in-store. Ultimately, these examples illustrate that dismantling white beauty as *the* standard for beauty is still a fundamental concern. Understanding where these ideologies come from- ideologies like the veneration of white skin and hair- help in the dismantling process. Fenty beauty in particular debunked the industry myth that “dark shades don’t sell.”

¹³ Amanda Demeku, “Tarte’s Response to The Shape Tape Foundation Backlash Was...Not Great,” *Flare*, January 18, 2018, Accessed April 1, 2018, <http://www.flare.com/beauty/tarte-shape-tape-foundation-backlash/>

¹⁴ Kelsey Stiegman, “Twitter is Really Pissed Over Tarte’s New Foundation Collection,” *Seventeen*, January 16, 2018, Accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.seventeen.com/beauty/makeup-skincare/a15172076/tarte-cosmetics-shape-tape-foundation-collection/>.

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