

THE HUMBLE HANDMAID OF COMMERCE:
CHROMOLITHOGRAPHIC ADVERTISING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
CONSUMER CULTURE, 1876-1900

by

Dawn M. Schmitz

BA, University of Wisconsin, 1989

MA, University of Pittsburgh, 1997

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This dissertation was presented

by

Dawn M. Schmitz

It was defended on

April 16, 2004

and approved by

Kirk Savage

Jonathan Sterne

Ronald Zboray

Carol Stabile
Dissertation Director

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Between 1876 and 1900, large numbers of manufacturers began to advertise more widely in an effort to create national markets for their products. They commissioned lithographic firms to produce chromolithographed cards, booklets, calendars, and posters, which were then distributed to stores, stuffed into packages, or tacked up on bill-posting boards. The enormous increase in visual advertising in the late nineteenth century, then, must be understood in the context of the production, distribution, and consumption of chromolithography.

While chromolithographic advertising may not have had the cultivating and democratizing influence on American society that reformers believed it could, it did blend in with other cultural forms, thus integrating the discourse of visual advertising into everyday life across class boundaries. Produced under a complex, irrational, and inefficient system by men and women from many walks of life, it was a crucial component in the development of consumer culture.

Not only were individual brands developed largely through chromolithography, but also the very idea of the brand was made intelligible during the chromo era. Chromolithographic advertisements drew upon existing cultural forms and visual vernaculars to communicate an ideology of consumption by visually articulating consumption to whiteness and citizenship—and elevating it to a position as the most significant realm of activity.

With a large number of firms vying for advertising work, lithographers desperate to compete turned to independent artists with “original ideas” in order to distinguish themselves and thus help them land contracts. As a result, watercolor and pastel artists from a range of social positions, both women and men, were brought into the process of visual-advertising design. The lithographic craftsmen who printed, and also sometimes designed, the advertisements identified as both consumers and workers, while expressing dismay that their trade had become little more than the “humble handmaid” of advertisers.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES

AAA	Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C.
CHS	Cincinnati Historical Society Library Cincinnati Museum Center Cincinnati, OH
HSWP	Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania Heinz History Center Pittsburgh, PA
WCBA	Warshaw Collection of Business Americana Archives Center National Museum of American History Smithsonian Institution Washington, D.C.

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INTRODUCTION

Histories of visual print advertising have focused almost exclusively on advertising agencies and the mass media with which they have done business. This approach is clearly worthwhile, and the reasons for it are understandable: it makes sense to start with the industries and media with which we are familiar, and trace their development. Yet there are important chapters in the history of advertising and its production that are overlooked using this approach. *The Humble Handmaid of Commerce* is predicated on the assumption that in order to get a fuller picture of how visual advertising developed, it is necessary to examine its early incarnations, the foremost of which was chromolithographic advertising. While chromo advertising has sometimes been the focus of scholarly attention, its significance as a precursor to the visual advertising of the twentieth century has not been thoroughly considered.

Yet advertisers had their first experience with visual advertising by contracting with lithographers, and in fact the first color visual ads in magazines were chromolithographed inserts. Moreover, the urban landscape in the late nineteenth century was awash in posters, large and small cards, calendars, and other forms of chromolithographic advertising. In trying to make sense of the development of visual advertising, then, it makes sense to investigate what I refer to as its “chromo era.” Although it was not produced under the banners of scientific rationality and efficiency embraced by advertising agencies around the turn of the twentieth century, chromo

advertisements nevertheless had a profound effect on the long-term development of the language of branding and the shaping of consumer habits and identities. In the chapters that follow, I will argue that chromo advertising, while produced under a complex, irrational, and inefficient system by men and women from many walks of life, was nevertheless a crucial component in the development of consumer culture.

Other writers have studied chromolithographic advertising, but to different ends than I do. Some of the most in-depth textual analysis of this cultural form comes from those who have analyzed its racial imagery. Carla Willard and Marilyn Maness Mehaffy look at representations of African Americans in chromo advertising, important examinations which I draw upon to place these representations in the context of a broad range of chromo advertisements that worked to construct a consumerist ideology and consumer identity.¹ Ellen Gruber Garvey considers the significance of chromo advertising cards for the construction of a consumer subjectivity, specifically focusing on the scrapbooks of white middle class girls and women.² While this work thoughtfully examines chromolithographic advertising cards and correctly positions them as precursors to magazine advertising, none of these writers consider the conditions of chromo advertising production or distribution, a body of inquiry that is central to my approach.

¹ Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, "Advertising Race/Raceing Advertising: The Feminine Consumer(-Nation), 1876-1900," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23 (1997): 131-174; Carla Willard, "Nation's Maid: Realizing Jemima, Segregation Policy, and the Dark Side of Consumer Progress, 1880-96," *Rethinking Marxism* 10.4 (1998):1-32.

² Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford, 1996) 16-50; See also Garvey's "Dreaming in Commerce: Advertising Trade Card Scrapbooks," *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2003): 66-88.

Others have examined distribution and production in more detail. Susan Strasser considers the role of chromolithographed advertising and package premiums in the initiation of branding, a crucial component of the changing distribution practices that helped transform the consumer economy in the late nineteenth century.³ However, she does not address *how* these new marketing practices and forms accomplished the work of making brands into meaningful and important cultural categories, a question that I address at length. Pamela Laird not only provides valuable information about the various types of lithographic advertising and how they were distributed, but also addresses the issue of their production.⁴ While she assumes that the owner-entrepreneurs of advertising companies were primarily responsible for chromo advertising designs, however, I argue that the design process was more complex than this, involving negotiations and multiple points of creative participation.

In *Fables of Abundance*, Jackson Lears contrasts the premodern worldview of abundance and the carnivalesque represented in chromolithographic ads with the discourse of managerial efficiency that eventually came to dominate advertising agencies.⁵ Thus, he rightly pays close attention to lithographic advertisements as a special cultural form, produced under different conditions than the magazine ads that emerged from the new advertising agencies in the 1890s. While I agree with Lears that these contrasting worldviews are evidenced in a large number of

³ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

⁴ Pamela Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998) 1-151.

⁵ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic, 1994) 1-195.

chromo ads, I explore in more detail the complex system under which chromo ads were produced, and I also suggest some alternative frameworks for interpreting them—frameworks that supplement rather than replace Lears’s important observations.

Like Lears, Richard Ohmann is concerned with the role of agencies in the development of advertising.⁶ However, focusing on magazine advertising, he mentions chromolithographic forms only to point out their dissimilarity to agency ads, thereby strengthening his argument that the first visual advertisements of any significance were produced in agencies and appeared in the general-interest monthlies of the 1890s. Despite my differences with his argument, which I will discuss later, in many ways my project is methodologically similar to Ohmann’s. Like Ohmann’s study of magazines, my analysis of lithographic advertising attempts to place cultural products in their historical context, produced under specific social, labor and industrial conditions. Raymond Williams argues that scholars must consider cultural forms alongside the social systems of which they are a part and insist on “what is always a whole and connected social material process.”⁷

Understanding this interconnected social material process involves an appreciation of the medium of chromolithography, the first method of mass-producing color pictures. Developed after the Civil War, it enjoyed widespread popularity in the form of *chromos*: reproductions, often of paintings, that could be framed and hung on the wall of the middle-class home. Miles Orvell writes in *The Real Thing* that the late nineteenth century was awash in an aesthetic of

⁶ Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford UP, 1977) 140.

replication and cites the chromo as the supreme example of this “culture of imitation.”⁸

Chromos, because they were widely considered to be faithful facsimiles of original art—as well as cheap, mass-produced, machine-made commodities—were exalted by many writers and reformers as a democratic means of bringing culture and refinement to many. By the end of the century, however, several factors converged to cause the demise of the chromo as an esteemed cultural form, including the flooding of the market with poorly-executed prints and the widespread use of chromolithography in advertising.

Within two decades of its rise to popularity in the United States, chromolithography came to be widely exploited in the service of consumer-product promotion. Of course, it was far from being the only medium for nonperiodical advertising. Letterpress posters and circulars, painted signs and sandwich boards, and (toward the end of the century) electric lights were among the many different media pressed into the service of advertising, not to mention the painting of brand names and slogans on every available surface: walls, barns, fences, rocks. The chief advantage of chromolithography was its capacity for the mass production of *full-color* pictures that were valued highly enough to be sought out, saved, and displayed. Indeed, the emphasis on color cannot be overestimated. By the 1880s, virtually all advertising lithography was produced using several colors, one layered on top of the other to provide rich hues; it is this process and resulting product that is known as chromolithography.⁹

⁸ Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture: 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: UP of North Carolina, 1989) 35-36.

⁹ Since all advertising lithography was in color, lithographers used either the term *lithography* or *chromo*, when referring to their color advertising work, rarely bothering to write the long word *chromolithography* in its entirety. I sometimes do the same.

Advertisers commissioned lithographic firms to produce chromolithographed cards, booklets, calendars, and posters, which were then distributed to stores, stuffed into packages, or tacked up on bill-posting boards. Small cards were given to customers for free in stores and as package premiums, and many of these were collected and displayed in the home. Chromo advertising cards were often used to promote local businesses; indeed, among their precursors were the trade cards that circulated in America since the eighteenth century to promote craftsmen and merchants.¹⁰

In fact, the small chromolithographed advertising cards that I examine, and that are currently sold as collectors' items at flea markets and online auctions, are now invariably referred to as *trade cards*, and this same term has also been used in most histories of chromo advertising cards. However, I avoid using the term for two related reasons. First, the term *trade card* was not used in the lithography or advertising trade press; rather, terms such as *advertising card*, *chromo card*, or *advertising chromo* were employed to describe the small collectible cards used for advertising. (For example, the terms *advertising card* and *advertising chromo* were listed as index terms in an 1888 lithographers' trade directory, while the term *trade card* was not listed.)¹¹ And second, using the anachronistic term *trade card* partially elides the use to which chromo cards were often put: the promotion of national, brand-name consumer products—a practice known then and now as *advertising*.

¹⁰ Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: UP of Missouri, 1987) 4-12.

¹¹ "Our 1888 Directory," *The American Lithographer and Printer* 10.3 (1888): 452.

Branded consumer products were themselves an emerging cultural phenomenon, produced and distributed through the use of the latest and most efficient industrial technologies and new national transportation and communication systems. The mass production and distribution of a vast array of new consumer commodities was among the many economic and social changes that occurred in or around the 1880s, creating the conditions for an acceleration of consumer capitalism to take place. And chromolithography was there to help it along, to serve, in the words of one lithographic artist, as its handmaid.

I deliberately use the term *acceleration* of consumer culture, rather than *origin*, *birth* or *revolution*. Other scholars have identified a range of time periods as marking the beginnings of consumer society in the West, some going back as far as the early modern period. Carol Shammas notes the increasing demand for groceries and “consumer durables” (housewares, furniture and apparel) in fifteenth century England and the colonies, while Chandra Mukerji identifies the origins of “modern materialism” in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as evidenced by the heavy international trade in prints and calicoes.¹² Joan Thirsk argues that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries new industrial and agricultural projects and changing moral attitudes toward consumer spending in Britain created the conditions for members of the middling classes—as well as peasants, workers, and servants—to begin to purchase basic manufactured goods for their households.¹³

¹² Carol Shammas, “Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption From 1550-1800,” *Consumption and the World of Goods*, eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993): 177-205; Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

¹³ Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

The “birth” of a consumer society has been traced to eighteenth-century England by Neil McKendrick, who identifies a “revolution,” equal in significance to the industrial revolution, brought about by the lifting of social and economic barriers to a consumer society. Not only were wages, social mobility and social emulation on the rise, he argues, but enterprising entrepreneurs like potter Josiah Wedgwood managed to create an unprecedented demand for their wares.¹⁴ Shifting the emphasis away from production and material culture, Colin Campbell contends that the crucial change in the eighteenth century was not in economic conditions, but in ethical systems: he argues there was a shift away from traditional hedonism toward a modern, self-illusory hedonism, which relies upon the imagination and daydreaming to bring about a state of enjoyable longing.¹⁵

Focusing specifically on the American context, T.H. Breen identifies a “consumer revolution” as occurring alongside the American Revolution in the late eighteenth century. Breen argues that Americans were “swept up” in a consumer economy based on a wide variety of imported British goods, and that their consumptive habits provided them with a shared conceptual framework, a way to communicate across boundaries, and a way to imagine a national community.¹⁶ James Axtell dates the first “consumer revolution” back to the

¹⁴ Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: UP of Indiana, 1982) 1-194.

¹⁵ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell) 77-95.

¹⁶ T.H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 119 (1988): 73-104; See also T.H. Breen, “Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution,”

seventeenth century, arguing that American Indians' desire for, and consumption of, traded goods in that period was equivalent to what took place a century later in Europe.¹⁷ While all of these writers may disagree about what social and economic changes mark the beginning of consumer society, taken as a whole their work strongly suggests that consumption had already profoundly shaped the American experience by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Intellectual historians have examined the relation between economic changes and shifting beliefs and value systems as they relate to the development of consumer culture in the late nineteenth century. Jackson Lears and Richard Wightman Fox tie the emergence of a consumer culture to the formation of the professional-managerial class beginning around 1880.¹⁸ The “experts” that populated this new class managed both the economic arena as well as the ideological realm, preaching a new consumer ideal that eventually became hegemonic. Daniel Horowitz identifies a shift from a conservative moralism about consumption to a greater acceptance of its comforts and pleasures during the same time period. Noting the shorter workweek, more widespread advertising practices, the proliferation of department stores, and new forms of mass commercialized leisure such as amusement parks, Horowitz writes, “In many

Consumer Society in American History: A Reader, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999) 100-129.

¹⁷ James Axtell, “The First Consumer Revolution,” in Glickman 85-99.

¹⁸ Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption, Critical Essays in American History: 1880-1930* (New York: Patton, 1983) vii-xvii.

ways, the shift from a producer to a consumer economy and culture accelerated during the last two decades of the old century and the first two of the new.”¹⁹

Although I embrace the notion that consumer culture accelerated, I avoid phrases like “shift from a producer to a consumer economy and culture,” because such language tends to efface the continuing importance of the relations of production in a consumer economy.

Obviously, although a shift from a producer ethic to a consumer ethic may take place, the producer economy never goes away in a consumer culture: all goods and services that are to be consumed must be produced (somewhere, by someone). While some workers in a consumer economy live meagerly and consume little, and members of the small leisure class consume a great deal and produce little, in a very real sense the consumers *are* the producers in a consumer economy.²⁰ Thus, I attempt throughout the following chapters to avoid the illusory split between production and consumption, between producers and consumers.

How, then, to conceptualize the development of a consumer culture if not as a shift away from a producer economy? The concept of *consumer culture* is rarely defined explicitly.

However, Fox and Lears may offer the most useful observations, even though they can only seem to describe consumer culture in the negative:

¹⁹ Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 30.

²⁰ While this fact is sometimes underemphasized in scholarly work, it forms the basis for a significant amount of grassroots and labor organizing, such as the demand of organized labor for a “living wage” to support their families in the late nineteenth century and the “don’t buy where you can’t work” boycotts organized by African Americans in the 1930s. See Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003) 44-51.

Exactly what is consumer culture? It is not enough to point to the abundance of televisions and automobiles, to call it a culture of leisure instead of work, since, people obviously still work—assuming they can find a job. It will not do to view it as an elite conspiracy in which advertisers defraud the ‘people’ by drowning them in a sea of glittering goods. The people are not that passive; they have been active consumers, preferring some commodities to others. They have also been more than consumers; they have pursued other goals in their leisure besides consumption.²¹

Thus, Fox and Lears are among those who point to a gradual shift in values, more than changes in material conditions or an increase in leisure time, as the defining feature in the development of consumer culture in the late nineteenth century. In “From Salvation to Self-Realization,” Lears identifies a widespread secularization of dominant values that began to take place starting in about the 1880s: the replacement of the Protestant belief in salvation in the afterlife with the “therapeutic ethos of self-realization” in this life, a shift that was brought on by a pervasive sense of “unreal selfhood” that accompanied economic and social changes among educated professionals.²² Lears suggests that magazine advertising both responded to and reinforced this shift in values.

But visual advertisements contributed to the shift toward consumerism not simply through the promotion of one value system over another, but because they are visually structured

²¹ Fox and Lears x.

²² Lears, “From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of Consumer Culture, 1880-1930,” in Fox and Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption*, 1-38.

to semiotically extract relations and experiences from their social contexts and attach them to commodities. As Robert Goldman writes:

The commodity-as-sign operates when images are allied to particular products and the product images are then deployed as signifiers of particular relations or experiences. Suppose we begin with an image of ‘successful mothering.’ A particular mental image of being a successful mother is detached from the total context of being a mother and attached to a particular product so that the image appears realizable through the purchase and consumption of the good: it might be attached to toothpaste, mouthwash, detergent or frozen food.²³

I argue that in chromolithographic advertising, this yoking of idealized relations or experiences to commodities is evident—although, of course, the values employed were those that were dominant at the historical moment in which the ad was produced. To draw from Goldman’s example, while the efficiency-related ideal of “successful mothering” may not have reached its full dominance until the twentieth century, sentimental relations such as the mother-child bond were fully developed among the middle class of managers and professionals in the 1880s. Thus, it was existing dominant values and idealized social relations such as this sentimental bond that were attached to the consumption of branded products in the chromo era. Similarly, considering that religious salvation was only beginning to be displaced by the secular therapeutic value of self-realization, religious iconography such as angels and cherubs regularly appeared in chromo advertising.

²³ Robert Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 18.

Thus, a very general consumerist ideal began to be articulated in chromo advertising, one in which the branded consumer product was a central, mediating component of human experience. Just as in later magazine advertising, consumption was depicted as the answer to a range of problems, individual or social. Indeed, in some chromo advertising, social problems, such as the increasing burden women faced from domestic labor, were recast as individual, consumer problems. Thus, the folding of the socio-political realm of the citizen into the individualized, brand-dominated realm of the consumer—a complicated and contested ideological move that characterizes advanced consumer society—was already being expressed in chromolithographic advertising.²⁴

The world of the consumer is indeed dominated by brands. The introduction of branding was a necessary factor in the development of consumer culture because it was integral to the shift toward increasingly distant and abstract relations between buyer and seller. Williams suggests that there is an important distinction between the concept of the *customer* who purchases

²⁴ I do not mean to suggest that the two roles of citizen and consumer were ever completely separate. I believe, nevertheless, that it is necessary to understand the conceptual frameworks that have defined the close relationship between these two social identities historically, lest their conflation be entirely naturalized. To be sure, the wider social implications of this conflation as it continued into the twentieth century are complex. While it can be problematic and regressive, often shifting responsibility for serious issues like lack of health care onto the individual to address in the marketplace, it is sometimes nevertheless useful: because the relations of consumption are so central to the functioning of the economy and to the ability of citizens to meet their needs, it is sometimes through collective consumerist activism that significant social change does occur. Therefore, I believe that while the significance of consumer choice is continually distorted in advertising, consumer rights and choices have very real implications. Lizabeth Cohen examines how consumer and citizen became inextricably intertwined during the course of the twentieth century, arguing that the postwar dream of a “Consumers’ Republic” bringing social equality and economic prosperity failed to materialize. See Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*.

household goods from someone she knows personally, and the *consumer*, who has no direct relation with the producer or seller of goods and services, but rather is defined by advertising-mediated market relations.²⁵ Brand advertising is central to this system because it provides a way for a manufacturer to communicate with consumers about its products—in a manner that seems direct and personal but is in fact highly mediated (and generally not reciprocal). Consumers enter the store expecting and demanding to see the familiar, advertised brands; their relationship with the storekeeper has become secondary.

To illustrate how chromolithography was used by businesses as a way to bring the language of branding into the common vernacular, I discuss at length the advertising practices of companies that relied heavily on this medium—and concentrate on companies that built national brands and made the types of consumer products that are extant. Thus, while patent-medicine makers and agricultural-implement manufacturers made good use of lithography, as did local businesses, these uses are not central to my inquiry. There are two rationales for this narrowing of focus. First, some narrowing must occur: due to its enormous range, it would be impossible to analyze the texts, uses, and significance of every type of chromo advertising for every kind of product or business in less than a multi-volume work. Second, since it is my intention to argue that chromo advertising was an important component in the formation of American consumer culture as it developed into the twentieth- and twenty-first century, my focus on still-recognizable consumer brands and product categories buttresses this thesis more than if I concentrated on extinct products like Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. Besides, the role

²⁵ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed., (New York: Oxford, 1983) 78-79.

of chromos in the publicity schemes of patent medicine makers is more well-documented, while their significant role in building the brands that are still recognizable today has not been acknowledged.

Indeed, my argument about the significance of chromos for national brand advertising is contentious. Richard Ohmann argues that the pictorial magazine advertising of that decade marks the “first epoch” and the “outset” of brand advertising, minimizing the significance of chromo advertising for the development of visual structures in advertising.²⁶ What is at stake here is Ohmann’s argument that agencies and magazines were the original sites for “modern” brand advertising, and his identification of the men of the professional-managerial class as the agents of its historical development. Countering this, I argue that lithographic advertising was significant for the development of brand advertising, and that the way it was produced makes it impossible to give the members of any particular class, gender, or ethnic background this agency. Chromolithographic brand advertising was designed by various (not mutually-exclusive) groups: European immigrant artisans; native-born men and women illustrators, artists and art students; newly-proletarianized and unionized craftsmen; and businessmen. Certainly, we can add to this list members of the professional-managerial class, including manufacturers’ advertising managers and lithographers’ artist-room managers. Taken together, these were the developers of visual brand advertising in its early stages, and I devote a large portion of *Handmaid* to providing an account of their work and their significance.

²⁶ Ohmann 199-201, 204, 218.

While no aspect of the lithographic-advertising design process has before been investigated in any great detail, it is the role of independent designers, many of whom were women, that has been completely unacknowledged in previous studies of chromolithographic advertising. These “free-lance” watercolorists and pastel artists, who came largely from the ranks of amateurs, students, or novices, contributed significantly to the design process. Lithographers hungry for contracts turned to them for fresh visual ideas that would stand out in an increasingly cutthroat lithographic-advertising market. While these artists did their design work anonymously, thus making it almost impossible to identify individual artists let alone tie them to particular designs, their contribution must nevertheless be acknowledged. They were among those who began to work out the codes of visual advertising.

Often, though, advertising was designed by the lithographic artist-artisans who worked directly for lithographers. With their status in the production process having been downgraded from artisan to wage laborer as lithographic firms expanded to take advantage of more advertising work, these trained artists experienced a growing alienation. Not coincidentally, for some of them at least, this feeling was exacerbated by the realization that their craft had become nothing more than a lowly servant of advertisers. They resented being enlisted in the development of advertising—with a bitterness that grew mainly out of a deep disrespect for advertisers who insisted on loud, ugly advertising signs with which they then plastered the urban landscape. Although the artists, like other industrial workers at the same historical moment, were beginning to identify as consumers as well as producers, they often found little to like about advertising. They felt art had been displaced in their work, and in their world, by commerce. But their disgruntlement was not, it should be noted, a snobby indictment of graphic art in favor of

the purity of fine art. After all, they became lithographic artists fully expecting their work would be mass-produced and distributed. But, steeped in the widespread nineteenth-century belief that art—whether original or mass-produced—could uplift and educate, they wanted to see their lithographs as beautiful schoolroom decorations or as accurate science-book inserts, not as loud streetcar signs. Lithographic advertising artists were thus neither dupes nor conspirators in the development of visual advertising, but craftworkers trying to do meaningful work under difficult circumstances.

My attention to the perspectives of these lithographic artists is part of a larger interest in understanding the relationship between workers and advertising in the late nineteenth century, and it is this same interest that provokes an investigation of how working-class people encountered chromo ads at home and in public. I hope, through explorations of working-class advertising audiences, to supplement the attention that has been paid elsewhere to the relationship of visual advertising to the professional-managerial class during the same time period. While I do not suggest that the development of working-class consumption occurred alongside that of the middle class, I do offer ways in which chromo advertising may have been relevant to working-class life: by advertising the kinds of products working people purchased, and by sometimes visually representing laborers as consumers. Moreover, working-class people not only encountered ads in public, they also used them to decorate their dwellings. My intention is not to argue with those scholars who have pointed to the 1920s as the crucial decade for the emergence of working-class consumer identity and practice.²⁷ Quite to the contrary. I wish to

²⁷ Lizabeth Cohen describes how consumer practices and values slowly developed among ethnic Chicago workers during the 1920s, far behind the pace of the middle class. See Cohen, *Making*

historicize this formation by showing that workers were among the audiences of visual brand advertising by the end of the nineteenth century, an insight which I find valuable because it keeps the significance of advertising in perspective, illustrating the truism that advertising by itself does not drive consumption. Advertising is only one of many sites where the meaning of consumption is constructed—and, of course, it does nothing to alter the material conditions that make consumption possible. Visual advertising is a necessary, but not a sufficient, component of consumer culture.

The following five chapters provide an account of the early development of mass-produced visual advertising. Chapter One explores the meaning chromolithography carried within late nineteenth-century culture, and how advertising developed out of, and in relation to, its various forms. I suggest that chromolithography did not make good on its promise of “democratization” by making art reproductions widely available to the “masses.” Nevertheless, by spreading advertising messages across class boundaries and integrating them into everyday life, chromolithography was successfully employed as one mechanism in the eventual development of a nation of consumers.

In Chapter Two I discuss the audience for chromolithographic advertising, focusing specifically on the heretofore neglected working class, arguing that working people not only bought the kinds of products advertised using chromolithographic forms, but also collected them and used them to adorn their homes. I also analyze several advertisements to discover how they drew upon existing cultural forms and visual vernaculars to communicate an ideology of

a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939 (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990) 99-158.

consumption, and how they defined the consumer as “white” through the visual exclusion of African Americans from consumptive roles and activities. In and through various representations of white women and children, as well as African Americans of all genders and ages, the identity of citizen and that of consumer were often conflated. As a corollary to this ideological move, social problems were sometimes represented as individual ones, to be solved by making the right brand choices.

Chapter Three addresses how manufacturers depended heavily upon chromolithography to build their brands, and analyzes their orientation to the medium and their distributive practices. While many companies are mentioned, the H.J. Heinz Co. takes center stage due to its heavy reliance on nonperiodical advertising, including chromolithography. I argue not only that individual brands like Heinz were developed largely through chromolithography, but also that the very idea of the brand was made intelligible during the chromo era. I analyze several chromo advertisements that promoted successful consumer-product brands to discover how they contributed to branding and the “brand idea.”

The last two chapters explore the production of advertising lithography. Chapter Four focuses on the role of independent artists and the relation between their work and the larger context of frenzied competition within the lithographic industry. I argue that, with a large number of firms vying for advertising work, lithographers desperate to compete turned to independent artists with “original ideas” in order to distinguish themselves and thus help them land contracts. As a result, artists from a range of social positions were brought into the process of visual-advertising design.

In Chapter Five, I turn my attention to the artists who worked within lithographic firms, investigating the relation between their identities as consumers and their positions as workers who produced advertising. They resisted wage stagnation, speed-up, specialization, and lack of autonomy—all of which were associated with the industrialization of lithography that was spurred on by its widespread use for advertising. They deplored the fact that their trade had become little more than the lowly servant of advertisers. Yet, as they fought for their rights as workers, they argued for these rights in consumerist terms.

In some respects, this project offers more questions than answers, and, I hope, fodder for future research. Among its many limitations is its sole focus on the American context. Because chromolithography was invented in Europe and European chromos were widely imported for the purposes of advertising, a comparative study of European and American lithographic production and distribution would be worthwhile. A deeper investigation into poster and billboard advertising, as it developed from the chromo era into the twentieth century, would be useful as well. A very concentrated effort to find out more about the individual watercolor and pastel artists and art students who may have contributed to chromo advertising design is another area that could be fruitful. Finally, the vast and diverse body of advertising chromolithography available for scholarly research could support several more in-depth textual analyses of the advertisements themselves.

What I hope to offer is a new way of understanding the development of visual advertising in the late nineteenth century, one that is the result of a detailed investigation into some of the cultural forms, cultural producers, and industries that contributed to it. Although the professed “modern” values that came to dominate advertising in the twentieth century—scientism,

professionalism, and efficiency—are not evidenced in the production of chromolithographic advertising, this does not negate its significance as an important precursor to later visual forms. To the contrary, the fact that it was marked instead by craftsmanship, amateurism, and guesswork, may have contributed to its textual richness and widespread distribution. In the following chapters, I hope to convey a sense not only of the richness of this popular cultural form, but of the contradictions, conflicts, and often disconcerting changes that were fundamental parts of its production.

1 “LITTLE MESSENGERS OF UTILITY AND BEAUTY”

Pictorial advertising was commonplace in the late nineteenth-century; indeed, by the 1890s, urban and rural Americans alike were deluged with it. Store windows and interiors were decorated with brightly-colored show cards, either hanging on the walls or supported easel-style on counters. Outdoors, streets were lined with enormous bill boards covered with full-color posters promoting everything from baking soda to bicycles. A common pastime was collecting the small advertising cards that were offered as premiums in product packaging and distributed in stores and on the streets. While working-class recipients decorated the walls of their tenement apartments with these colorful cards, their wealthier counterparts pasted them in handsome leather-bound albums.¹ In homes and businesses alike, lush advertising calendars crammed with sentimental imagery adorned the walls.

There is one common thread linking these types of color pictorial advertising: they were produced in commercial lithography shops, whose output increased sharply in the 1870s and 1880s, just as large numbers of manufacturers began to advertise more widely in an effort to

¹ Some collectors displayed their albums in the parlor and showed them to visitors while others considered their scrapbooks to be repositories for their most private sentiments. See Ellen Gruber Garvey, “Scissorizing and Scrapbooks: Nineteenth-Century Reading, Remaking, and Recirculating,” *New Media, 1740-1915*, eds. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree (Cambridge: MIT, 2003) 219.

create national markets for their products.² The enormous increase in visual advertising in the late nineteenth century, then, must be understood in the context of the production, distribution, and consumption of lithography. In this chapter I will argue that while chromolithographic advertising may not have had the cultivating and democratizing influence on American society that reformers believed it could, it did blend in with other cultural forms, thus integrating the discourse of visual advertising into everyday life across class boundaries.

1.1 The Introduction of Chromolithography

The growth of urbanization and industrialization in the pre-Civil War United States brought with it the increasing mass production of cultural products. Along with the penny press and the dime novel came the widespread availability of color pictures, something that had never before been within the reach of ordinary people. Nathaniel Currier and James Merritt Ives, self-declared publishers of “Colored Engravings for the People” and “Publishers of Cheap and Popular Prints,” were two early lithographers who capitalized on, and generated, public demand for inexpensive pictures for the home. Much of Currier & Ives’s work served the purposes that photojournalism later came to serve, pictorially chronicling important events such as fires, disasters, and Civil War battles. But they and other firms also produced lithographs depicting a wide range of other

² Census figures from 1870 indicate there were 91 lithographic firms in the United States; by 1880 this number had swelled to 167 and by 1890 it was 219. Moreover, the total productivity of these firms increased by almost 275 percent in the first decade and another 260 percent in the next: In 1870, the total value of lithographic products was \$2,515,684 million; by 1880, the total value was \$6,912,338, and by 1890 it had reached \$17,988,157. *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1872) 425; *Report on the Manufacturers of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1883) 64; *Report on Manufacturing Industries in the United States, Part I: Totals for States and Industries* (Washington, GPO, 1895) 236-237.

subjects, including railroads, clipper ships, trotting horses, portraits of presidents and pugilists, historical scenes, the American West, Indians, panoramic views of cities, scenes of farm life, and many sentimental subjects; political cartoons and banners were also published, as were sheet-music covers. The pictures, commonly priced at a quarter or less, were sold widely throughout the country. These were not, strictly speaking, mechanically mass-produced color pictures, however: most of the color work was first lithographed in monochrome and then hand-colored individually by young women.³ They were the products of lithography, but not chromolithography. A brief primer on the unique aspects of the process of lithographic production may serve to clarify what follows in the rest of this chapter.

Lithography was invented in about 1798 by Bavarian writer Alois Senefelder in his quest to develop an inexpensive way to duplicate his work. Unlike relief or intaglio processes—such as woodcuts, engraving, or letterpress—lithography is planographic; there are no raised surfaces.⁴ Rather, it works by means of a chemical process based on the principle that water and oil repel each other. Traditionally—the way much lithography was done throughout the nineteenth century—the image and/or letters were drawn, with either a pen dipped in oily ink or with a special greasy crayon, on a thick block of a particular grade of porous limestone that had been either ground smooth or left with a granular surface. The stone was then washed with a

³ Harry T. Peters, *Currier & Ives: Printmakers to the American People* (New York: Doubleday, 1942). On the popularity and affordability of Currier & Ives prints, see 1-11; on subject matter see 32-41; on coloring process, see 14-16.

⁴ Although this is generally the case, for some types of commercial lithography, lines were sometimes etched into the stone to produce the desired effect in a process known as lithographic engraving.

solution of gum arabic and nitric acid, which caused the fat in the crayon to sink into the stone and also formed a hard skin over the empty parts of the stone; from this point, the parts that had been touched by the crayon shed water, and the parts that had the gum arabic shell took water evenly. The stone was then cleansed with turpentine and water, placed on the press and dampened. When the oily ink was then rolled onto the stone, it was repelled by the water on the empty parts but received by the greasy crayon marks, and paper then pressed to the stone would pick up the ink that had stuck to the drawing.⁵ A design could also be drawn with special ink on a particular kind of paper and then transferred to the stone, a method which eliminated the need to draw the original design in reverse and made it much faster to put several of the same image on a stone, as for label work. Senefelder himself developed the transfer method, although, like some of his other innovations, it was not widely adopted until after his death.⁶

Like other forms of printing, lithography was a highly-skilled undertaking. The artisan lithographer had to grind the stone, mix the ink, feed the presses and perform countless other tasks that required a keen understanding of the unique chemical processes involved in the craft. (As the century progressed, lithographic production became increasingly industrial and less artisanal. Steam presses were used and labor was divided among artists, transferrers, grinders,

⁵ “A Talk on Lithography: Mr. Louis Prang Addresses the Students of the Pratt Institute.” *National Lithographer* 4.1 (1897): 2.

⁶ Wilhelm Weber, *A History of Lithography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966) 15-17. Offset printing also eliminated this need, but it was not in common use until after 1900. Innovations that did change lithography in the nineteenth century included replacing stones with zinc and aluminum plates (a technique that was actually patented by Senefelder himself but not adopted until after his death) and the introduction of mechanical presses, which sped up the process enormously.

feeders, and pressmen, as I will discuss in Chapters Four and Five.) Drawing on stone was difficult, requiring, for example, that the artist never let the oils from his or her hands touch the surface of the stone. Moreover, marks could be removed from the stone, but new ones could not be put down in their place. But in spite of these difficulties, lithography offered artists a new and exciting way to create reproductions. Because the artist drew directly onto the stone, the process eliminated some of the intermediate steps of etching or engraving that were necessary with other forms of printmaking:

All of the nuances of individual style and technique could be preserved in the lithograph, pulled from a drawing made by the artist's own hand. The artist worked directly on the stone, using pen, pencil, crayon, brush, and scraper to achieve the desired effect. Drawings could be done in line or be fully tonal. Never before had printmaking offered the possibility for such spontaneity and directness of execution.⁷

Not only was it a boon to artists, lithography was particularly well suited to commercial uses for several reasons, among them its relative low cost and its capacity to produce an enormous number of prints, and very large ones, from a single stone or set of stones.⁸ But, as I will discuss in more detail later, its capacity for rich color reproduction was its biggest advantage when it came to commercial uses.

⁷Sally Pierce and Catharina Slautterback. *Boston Lithography: 1825-1880* (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1991) 2.

⁸ Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: Missouri UP, 1987) 1.

Senefelder himself first conceived of lithography in colors, but the method for chromolithography was not perfected until the mid-nineteenth century. The color process involved drawing a different stone for each hue in a picture, as few as three for the crudest advertisement or dozens for the most faithful facsimile of an oil painting. Hence, a chromolithograph of a child's portrait might have had one stone drawn just for the base flesh tone, another for pink highlights on the cheeks and mouth, another for the warm glow of light glinting off the forehead, another for the blue in the eyes and dress, and so on. Still other stones would be needed for every additional shade in the dress and each color that appeared in the background. Additionally, overprints were used, with the same color applied with successive stones in order to add depth and tone. Each of these stones had to be drawn, wetted, and inked, in succession, and each printed color then had to be matched up cleanly on the paper. Thus, chromolithography could be time-consuming and laborious, and the more so the more colors were used. Nevertheless, it was still the most efficient method for the mass production of color pictures.

The first chromolithographer working in the United States is believed to be English-born artist William Sharp, who came to Boston in 1839. After Sharp's arrival, Boston lithographers began to experiment with color, using a second stone called a *tint stone* for background color. Sharp and others employed the technique making sheet-music covers, which were sometimes hand-painted with watercolors as well. Later in the decade Sharp began to use multiple stones, a different one for each color; these were chromolithographs. By the 1850s, several lithographers

were producing three-color chromo pictures, several of which were advertisements for local and regional businesses.⁹

A new era in American color lithography was ushered in after the war, propelled by postwar affluence in the North, and promoted by the preeminent commercial lithographer of the century, Louis Prang. Prang, a German immigrant, had worked in Boston since the mid-1850s, publishing monochrome prints of monuments, buildings and towns in Massachusetts, and, later, enormously popular Civil War maps, portraits of Union officers, and scenes of army life. He also did work using simple chromolithography (four stones or less), producing album cards of birds, butterflies, flowers and autumn leaves, as well as multi-use cards with floral designs that could be exchanged in friendship, pasted into albums, or distributed to business associates. However, it was not until 1865 that he began publishing pictures in colors naturalistic enough to replicate oil paintings. In that year he returned from a trip to Europe, having succeeded not only in learning of the latest technologies, but also in enticing a skilled chromolithographic artist to accompany him back to Boston. Although the abbreviation *chromo* had been used by others as early as 1847, it came to be associated with the name Prang, who adopted it as a term for his new “facsimiles” of oil and watercolor paintings.¹⁰

The first American chromos attempted by William Haring, the British artist imported by Prang, were reproductions of a pair of landscapes by Boston painter Alfred Thompson Bricher. These prints, priced at an exorbitant six dollars each, did not fare well on the market, however.

⁹ Pierce and Slautterback 10-11.

¹⁰ Larry Freeman, *Louis Prang: Giant of a Man* (Watkins Glen, NY: Century House, 1971) 14-22; Peter C. Marzio, *The Democratic Art: Pictures for a 19th-Century America* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979) 11; 97-101.

“The picture dealers pronounced them too costly for the American picture buyer...” Prang recalled later. “I was importuned by my salesmen to stop the experiment of producing high cost prints, nothing over 50 cents would sell.”¹¹ Nevertheless, Harring’s next endeavor, a chromo after “Group of Chickens” by Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, a renowned painter of outdoor life, found success at a price of five dollars. Over the next two years, thirty thousand copies of the print were sold, its success probably owing to the fact that Tait had already been popularized by Currier and Ives. And the popularity of the “Chickens” chromo brought new attention to the earlier landscapes, which then became best-sellers as well.¹² By the end of 1866, the “chromo craze” was already under way, and Prang’s chromos were being sold nationally.

He soon began publishing a full line of reproductions, which he titled *Prang’s American Chromos*, featuring more landscapes and animals, as well as portraits and genre scenes. Over the next several years, Prang devoted much of his energy to producing these chromos; while some of them were reproductions of museum paintings, many others were based on commissioned work depicting subjects ranging from household pets to the mountains of the West. Sentimental subjects, such as portraits of children, were common. But he also published the many less costly types of work with which he had found success before and during the war, including sheet-music

¹¹ Marzio 100.

¹² Marzio 102. On Tait, see also Peters 24-26.

covers, floral cards, and album cards with subjects such as wild flowers, birds, butterflies, autumn leaves, and the flags of nations.¹³

While Prang's line of *American Chromos*, commonly priced at about six dollars each, were not nearly as affordable as hand-colored prints, they were priced within the range of possible expenditures for middle-class home decoration; his line of *Half-Chromos* used fewer stones and were thus less expensive, some priced as low as a dollar and a half.¹⁴ And for the many who could not afford that price, chromos were often given as promotional premiums by newspaper and magazine publishers: "Women's and family magazines led the way, with farm journals, religious sheets, and regional periodicals following closely behind. Landscapes, portraits, genre scenes, bouquets of flowers, baskets of fruit, chubby children, and fluffy kittens were all distributed by the premium system."¹⁵ But obtaining these premiums still required an expenditure on a magazine or newspaper subscription. As the century progressed toward the 1890s, however, a great deal of advertising chromolithography could be obtained at little or no cost.

When they were first introduced, chromos were celebrated by many social commentators, who declared that even the most expensive chromos (a large portrait was as much as twenty dollars in 1871) were worth saving up for due to their handsomeness and keen resemblance to

¹³ Freeman 20-21, 47-48. See also Katharine Morrison McClinton, *The Chromolithographs of Louis Prang* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1973) 4-5.

¹⁴ Freeman 62. One contemporary suggested the cost of a chromo was comparable to "the price of a pair of slippers." See James Parton, *Triumphs of Enterprise, Ingenuity, and Public Spirit* (Hartford: A.S. Hale, 1871) 399.

¹⁵ Marzio 127.

their originals. Prang, along with others, even employed post-printing techniques that served to replicate the look of oil paintings: embossing the prints to give them a brush-stroke texture, then mounting them on fine linen cloth and coating them with varnish.¹⁶ In his Roxbury factory, Prang hung the chromos next to their originals to demonstrate that, set side by side, it was impossible for the average viewer to determine which was the painting and which was the print. He also advertised widely, announcing in his monthly broadside *Prang's Chromo* that he provided for the public "fac-simile reproductions of masterly oil and water-color paintings, so skilfully and artistically done that it requires the experience of an expert to detect the difference between them and their originals."¹⁷ Many observers agreed that Prang's chromos faithfully replicated original works—more or less. "The finest of Chromos, made in Berlin and by Prang in Boston," wrote Mary E. Nealy in the monthly *Ladies Repository*, "are such exact imitations of the paintings that one is often obliged to turn the picture so as to throw a glare of light across it to discover its true character."¹⁸ While the editors of *Putnam's Magazine* respectfully begged to differ with Prang's boldest claims, contending that "we have not yet seen any chromo that fully

¹⁶ Freeman 20; Marzio 101. A detailed description of the process is offered in "Method of Roughing Chromos," *National Lithographer* 7.5 (1900): 5.

¹⁷ "Prang's American Chromos," *Prang's Chromo* Jan. 1868: 1. Reprinted in Freeman, Appendix A.

¹⁸ Mary E. Nealy, "Popular Art," *Ladies Repository: A Monthly Periodical Devoted to Literature, Arts and Religion* 4 (1876): 550.

cheated us into the belief that we were looking at an oil-painting,” they still felt obliged to admit that “Mr. Prang’s *Chickens* almost does that.”¹⁹

In Walter Benjamin’s terms, these fine-art “facsimiles” contributed to the decay of the “aura” of the work of art—defined as “a unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be”—and their appeal to the middle classes reflected a desire, in the age of industrial capitalism, to “bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly.” Although Benjamin was ambivalent about the loss of the aura, he did feel its demise was potentially politically advantageous, believing that art objects expressing “exhibition value” rather than relying on “cult value” or “ritual value” could stir or challenge the viewer in a unique way.²⁰ Soon after chromos arrived on the scene, many nineteenth-century reformers and writers lauded their democratizing potential, although in terms different than those of Benjamin.

1.2 Debates Over Chromolithography and Culture

Perhaps because it was the first technology that was widely and popularly pressed into the service of mechanically and accurately reproducing fine art, chromolithography and its products were both celebrated and controversial in the late nineteenth century. As a technology for the cheap mass production of art, the chromo was uniquely positioned to stand in for the merging of new technologies with aesthetic beauty. The chromo exemplified what Miles Orvell identifies as the “culture of imitation” characterizing the period, brought about by the search for order and

¹⁹ “Mr. Prang’s Chromos,” *Putnam’s Magazine* Dec. 1868: 764.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, (New York: Schocken, 1968) 223-226, 243. This essay was originally published in German in 1936.

control amid the uncertainties of industrialization. He writes that one of the tendencies of popular culture in the late nineteenth century was:

to enclose reality in manageable forms, to contain it within a theatrical space, an enclosed exposition or recreational space, or within the space of the picture frame. If the world outside the frame was beyond control, the world inside of it could at least offer the illusion of mastery and comprehension. And on a more elementary aesthetic level, the replica, with its pleasure of matching real thing and facsimile, simply fascinated the age.²¹

Orvell argues that the chromolithograph became the ultimate symbol of the new culture of imitation, in which questions abounded about whether industrialization debased culture by bringing a flood of inauthentic goods, or whether the reproduction of aesthetic objects was democratizing. Traditional class identities and boundaries were thought to be imperiled: Precisely because some low-priced chromos were believed to be of fairly high quality, they threatened elites' claim to be the sole possessors of culture. "The whole problem of the cheap art reproduction," Orvell writes, "sums up a good deal of the class conflict surrounding the advent of a culture of imitation..."²² Indeed, the frequent and prominent debates over chromolithography's social role constitute a significant chapter in the larger conflicts over culture in the post-Civil War years, when, as Alan Trachtenberg writes, the very idea of culture as a "privileged domain of refinement, aesthetic sensibility, and higher learning" became

²¹ Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture: 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: UP of North Carolina, 1989): 35-36.

²² Orvell 36.

normative, and the uplifting, civilizing and “Americanizing” capacities of cultural products were widely discussed.²³

Culture, perhaps more than any other term or concept, crystallizes the enormous economic and social changes that took place with industrialization. Raymond Williams notes that before the late eighteenth century, the word was found primarily in reference to agriculture: the tending of something, such as crops or animals. When it was used in relation to human beings it was as an analogy to this original meaning: the process of growth or training. However, in the nineteenth century, Williams argues, culture became a thing in itself: culture as such, rather than a culture *of* something. The stages Williams traces in the development of the word from this point are instructive:

It came to mean, first, ‘a general state or habit of the mind’, having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean ‘the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole’. Third, it came to mean ‘the general body of the arts’. Fourth, later in the century, it came to mean ‘a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual’.²⁴

The debates that raged over the significance of chromolithography contain elements of each of these meanings. Writers influenced by British critic Matthew Arnold’s notion of culture as individual improvement argued over whether chromos would enhance or stunt individual

²³ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.) 143.

²⁴ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) xvi. See also Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 87-93.

development—intellectual, moral and spiritual—and the consequent effects this would have on society.²⁵ The question was posed, and answered in various ways, as to whether chromolithographic fine-art reproductions, being mechanically reproduced, were made by artists or “mere” mechanics or artisans. The fact that chromos were present in the home, and thus were integrated into everyday life, was central.

Indeed, the chromo embodied, perhaps as much as any other artifact, the complex changes in the meaning of *culture* in the nineteenth century. This is highlighted by the fact that the notion of culture was related to several other key terms, intrinsic to the debates over chromolithography, whose meanings changed in the late eighteenth century and serve to define the nineteenth. Williams argues that *industry* had previously described an individual attribute, but morphed into a word that referred collectively to manufacturing institutions; *democracy* began to gain a primarily positive connotation only in the mid-nineteenth century; *class* began to refer to distinct social strata beginning in the late eighteenth century; and, finally, *art* shifted from describing a skill in general to meaning more specifically the works resulting from the creative or imaginative skills.²⁶ Each of these changing concepts helped to form the terms of the debate over chromolithographs: they were commodities, produced in factories with steam power, that were believed to either democratize art by making it available to all classes, or to represent the antithesis of art due to the role of mechanization in their production. The fact that the public controversies over chromos relied upon all of these key concepts is significant because it

²⁵ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1867).

²⁶ Williams, *Culture and Society* xiii-xx. See also entries for each of these terms in Williams, *Keywords*.

suggests the important societal role that many elite and middle-class social commentators believed chromolithographs, as a cultural form, played.

William Ellery Channing's notion of "self-culture," articulated in an 1838 lecture given to an audience of laborers and mechanics in Boston, helped to define the significance of culture in the specifically American context. Channing, a Harvard graduate, Unitarian minister, and son of the Attorney General of Rhode Island, was a social reformer and an outspoken critic of slavery (although he disliked controversy and had differences with the abolitionist movement).²⁷ Channing's idea of self-culture encompassed many aspects, including reason, temperance, reading (of books and the right newspapers), grammar, and the pursuit of perfection in work. But perhaps the most relevant aspect of Channing's notion of self-culture with regard to the relation between art and culture is the importance placed on beauty. In his speech, Channing stated:

Now no man receives the true culture of a man, in whom the sensibility to the beautiful is not cherished; and I know of no condition in life from which it should be excluded. Of all luxuries this is the cheapest and most at hand; and it seems to me to be most important to those conditions, where coarse labor tends to give a grossness to the mind.²⁸

As is suggested here, key to Channing's idea of self culture is that it was as important for the working class as it was to anyone else, perhaps more so, and he called on his audience to seek

²⁷ Arthur W. Brown, *William Ellery Channing* (New York: Twayne, 1961).

²⁸ William Ellery Channing, *Self-Culture* (1838; New York: Arno, 1969) 26.

improvement in their lives not at the ballot box, but in bettering themselves. Anticipating arguments with critics who would say that labor and self-are incompatible, he declared, “It is a sign of a narrow mind, to imagine, as many seem to do, that there is a repugnance between the plain, coarse exterior of a laborer and mental culture, especially the more refining culture.”²⁹ He dismissed the contention that laborers didn’t have the time for self-culture, arguing that the earnest worker would find the time, even if it was just one hour per day. Going further, he argued that self-culture would only increase the workers’ pleasure, declaring that “cultivation is no foe to enjoyment.”³⁰ Many times throughout the speech he used *cultivation* and *self-culture* interchangeably.

Channing was one of many nineteenth-century American writers and reformers who contributed to this sense of culture as human achievement; another was anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan.³¹ Morgan characterized civilization as the peak of human progress, and *savagery* and *barbarism* (in that order) as stages toward it. This was a progressive notion—*civilization* stood for the height of human achievement—and emphasized the potential of all people to attain it. Reflecting on Morgan’s views as expressed in *Ancient Society* (1877), Michael A. Elliott notes, “Although it relied upon older ideas of inherited racial difference, this

²⁹ Channing 70-71.

³⁰ Channing 75.

³¹ Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (New York: Holt, 1877). *Ancient Society* received an immediate and warm response in a number of American publications, including *Harper’s Monthly*, *The American Antiquarian*, and *North American Review*. See David L. Seim, *Lewis Henry Morgan and the Charting of Social Evolution: Essays on the Origin and Development of Institutional Economics* (Ames, IA: Sigler, 1999) 1.

developmental model of progress opened the door to a kind of cultural constructivism, an idea that groups are malleable in their social identities.”³² This is a key element in the notion of culture that developed in the United States, which depended upon the notion of self-improvement and the betterment of social groups (like immigrants) through the harnessing of cultural pursuits.

With regard to chromolithographs, a key point of discussion was what specific effects these works of art/mass production would have on society as a whole: did chromos truly foster cultivation—defined as the moral and intellectual development of individuals—or were they detrimental to the cause? Williams notes that the very complexity of the notion of culture, its many meanings or senses, derives in part from the perceived relation between art and society: “The complex of senses indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence.”³³ Indeed, in a definition of culture that placed a premium on beauty, the role of art stood front and center.

³² Michael A. Elliott, *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2002) 95. Elliott notes that in contrast to this French meaning, the German meaning of *Kultur* was more static, having to do with the national identity as embodied in its peasant *Volk*. Anthropologist Franz Boas, who emigrated from Germany to the US in the 1880s, contributed to the development of an American definition of culture that owed much to the German meaning, understanding culture not as a universal achievement, but as mores, beliefs, and ways of life particular to a group of people. This came to be known as “cultural particularism,” and greatly influenced the American meaning of culture toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. See Elliott, xi-xiii; 1-34. Despite the eventual strength of this Boasian sense of culture in the US, the debates about chromos clearly reflect the influence of the hierarchical, Euro-centric notion of culture as a progressive human movement toward “civilization” and away from “barbarism.”

³³ Williams, *Keywords* 91.

Protestant clergy were particularly keen on promoting the role of art and beauty as cultivating influences. One of the many writers who remarked upon the value of chromolithographic fine-art reproductions as a moralizing force was Henry Ward Beecher. Like other liberal clergy, Beecher advocated chromos and other mass-produced art as part of a project to shape the American character. As David Morgan writes in *Protestants and Pictures*, Beecher believed that “images exerted an influence that was measured in terms of ‘inspiration,’ ‘feeling,’ and the power of beauty to elevate public morals and to refine the American soul. All these aims belonged to the aesthetic education of humanity and constituted a visual piety among religious progressives.”³⁴ In 1876 Beecher pointed to the chromo in particular as an integral feature of a civilized home: “The laborer ought to be ashamed of himself who in 20 years does not own the ground on which his house stands...who has not in that house provided carpets for the rooms, who has not his China plates, who has not his chromos, who has not some books nestling on the shelf.”³⁵ Here, chromos stood in for the cultural uplift that was supposedly coextensive with an elevation into the property-owning classes.

Henry’s sister, Catharine Beecher, also counseled the readers of her widely-read 1869 treatise on domesticity, *The American Woman’s Home*, to take advantage of the opportunities for household beautification and cultural uplift brought by chromos. For her, and her co-author Harriet Beecher Stowe, these cheap works of art, “when well selected and of the best class, give

³⁴ David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford, 1999) 268.

³⁵ Quoted in Trachtenberg 151.

the charm of color which belongs to expensive paintings.”³⁶ Reflecting and shaping the merging of domestic and educational duties that fell to the economically privileged Victorian woman, Beecher and Stowe argued that chromos—chief among types of “economical art,” along with engravings and small statuettes—had an “educating influence” which “can hardly be over-estimated.”³⁷ They advised:

Surrounded by such suggestions of the beautiful, and such reminders of history and art, children are constantly trained to correctness of taste and refinement of thought, and stimulated—sometimes to efforts at artistic imitation, always to the eager and intelligent inquiry about the scenes, the places, the incidents represented.³⁸

While supplying the reader with suggestions for appropriate chromos to purchase, including “The Little Scrap-Book Maker,” “Barefoot Boy,” and “Sunset in the Yo Semite Valley,” Beecher and Stowe then instructed the reader how to stay within her budget by creating her own picture frames out of branches, acorns and pine cones. They counseled the reader: “These chromos, being all varnished can wait for frames until you can afford them. Or, what is better, because it is at once cheaper and a means of educating the ingenuity and the taste, you can

³⁶ Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (1869; New York: Arno, 1971) 93.

³⁷ Beecher and Stowe 94.

³⁸ Beecher and Stowe 94.

make for yourselves pretty rustic frames in various modes.”³⁹ Richard Bushman suggests that, in general, Beecher and Stowe’s advice reflects tensions between capitalism and gentility, that they employed refinement in the service of warding off capitalist expansion and the production of wealth at the expense of all else: “Their vision of an efficient, Christian, and refined home was placed squarely in the path of capitalist expansion as a center of countervailing values.”⁴⁰ The mass-produced chromo surrounded by a rustic, homemade frame perhaps perfectly symbolizes these tensions between capitalist expansion and consumption on the one hand, and refinement, education, and restraint on the other.

Other women writers lauded the educational and refining impact of chromolithographs, arguing for their democratic potential. Mary E. Nealy, in the same *Ladies Repository* essay in which she praised the fidelity of Prang’s work, asserted that the educational value of chromos lay in their capacity to unleash the intellectual abilities of working-class children. She wrote that lithographic reproductions had:

done more to create and cultivate a refined taste for true art than could ever have been done by the original works alone; for they go to the homes of the masses, and genius as often springs up from the common classes as from any other. All that is needed is the inspiration, the motive power; and this, in art, is given by these reproductions to all.⁴¹

³⁹ Beecher and Stowe 91.

⁴⁰ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992). 444.

⁴¹ Nealy 550.

Furthermore, Nealy argued, by inspiring children to read more about the paintings that were reproduced, “every picture becomes a teacher.” She underlined the transformative potential of chromos with a story of her nephew’s ability to point out similarities between the subjects in chromos and the people he met in everyday life. “I like all this,” Nealy enthused. “It is education from association, and the only kind which refines the pupil – which enters in his daily life and becomes a portion of him.”⁴² Thus, Nealy suggested it was a fine thing to produce a copy that was faithful to the original, and she celebrated the technology for its ability to bring art closer to everyday people.

Echoing sentiments similar to those of Nealy was another fan of Prang’s work, the widely-published essayist and biographer James Parton, whose testimonial letter appeared in the inaugural issue of *Prang’s Chromo*. “It has been a favorite dream with me for years,” he wrote, “that the time would arrive when copies of paintings would be multiplied so cheaply, and reduced so correctly, as to enable the working-man to decorate his rooms with works equal in effect to the finest efforts of the brush.”⁴³ In his book, *Triumphs of Enterprise, Ingenuity, and Public Spirit*, he exalted chromolithographs in a chapter titled “Oil Paintings by Machinery.”⁴⁴ But Parton took pains to explain that the best of those made in America were produced not by

⁴² Nealy 551.

⁴³ James Parton, letter, *Prang’s Chromo* Jan. 1868.

⁴⁴ Parton, *Triumphs of Enterprise*, 383. This essay had been published earlier under a different title: James Parton, “Popularizing Art,” *Atlantic Monthly* March 1869: 348-357.

mechanics or artisans who merely imitated designs, but by men who were excellent artists in their own right.

With this move, Parton seems to have been reacting to the shifting emphasis toward conceiving of artists not as craftsmen but as individuals who possessed the genius of “imaginative truth,” a developing formulation in which originality became the critical basis for evaluating art (and which was itself a reaction to the changing relations between artists and society brought about by industrialization and the mass production of cultural products).⁴⁵ Working against this, with his insistence that chromolithographers were true artists, Parton strove to raise the rank of chromos to that of high art while still acknowledging that they were in a different class than original paintings. He suggested that a chromo would add value to the corresponding original painting while serving as a highly respectable art form itself. With a thinly veiled insult aimed at the snobby guardians of taste, he wrote:

We may rely upon it, that the persons who now buy expensive works will continue so to do, and that these chromos will enhance, rather than diminish, the value of the originals; because the possession of an original will confer more distinction when every one has copies; and it is *distinction* which the foolish part of our race desires.⁴⁶

Here, Parton’s essay seems to foreshadow Pierre Bourdieu’s argument over a century later in *Distinction* that aesthetic judgments serve to maintain class divisions: The elite would not have

⁴⁵ Williams, *Culture and Society* 30-36; Williams, *Keywords* 40-43.

⁴⁶ Parton, *Triumphs of Enterprise* 399. Emphasis in original.

to worry, Parton seemed to suggest: by owning the original they were exhibiting such distinguished taste that their class position would not be threatened.⁴⁷ By arguing that chromos were at once fine art—even superior to the kinds of slap-dash paintings one could pick up for five dollars a pair at auctions or at New York ferry landings—but without the distinction of being great original works, Parton walked a fine line, carving out a unique position for chromos in the hierarchy of cultural products: a position low enough that they would not threaten elites' class position, but high enough that they could not be dismissed as mere products of the factory.⁴⁸

But elites did seem to be threatened, as evidenced by the round denunciations leveled at chromos by the self-proclaimed guardians of high art. E.L. Godkin, editor of the *Nation*, informed his audience that artists and the cultivated were sickened by chromos because they could see through the deception of the reproductions, while “those of doubtful taste” could not. Thus, he declared that at the core of the disgust he and his kind experienced looking at chromos, “we shall find the sensation of sham, of a swindle which disappoints even while it deceives.”⁴⁹ In a later essay, titled “Chromocivilization,” Godkin suggested that the products of mass culture were dangerous because they gave the growing middle classes the social and political confidence that comes with believing one is actually cultivated.⁵⁰ Clarence Cook, art critic for the *New York Daily Tribune*, put similar sentiments more blandly and succinctly in 1866: “A clever imitation is

⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984).

⁴⁸ Parton, *Triumphs of Enterprise* 400.

⁴⁹ E.L. Godkin, “Autotypes and Oleographs,” *The Nation* 10 Nov. 1870: 318.

⁵⁰ E.L. Godkin, “Chromocivilization,” *The Nation* 24 Sept. 1874: 202.

nothing but an imitation after all. It can teach nobody anything, nor benefit anybody.”⁵¹ For elites, the very notion that chromos could be educational was preposterous.

As I have suggested, many middle-class reformers held just the opposite position. Like Beecher and Nealy, Parton insisted that chromos were ideal for educating “the masses.” He argued that the particular socio-historical conditions of the United States at the moment necessitated the *dissemination* of knowledge—through mass production—rather than its creation:

This art of chromo-lithography harmonizes well with the special work of America at the present moment, which is not to create, but to diffuse; not to produce literature, but to distribute the spelling-book; not to add to the world’s treasure of art, but to educate the mass of mankind to an intelligent enjoyment of those which we already possess.⁵²

But it was not the fault of “the mass of mankind” that they were as yet so ignorant of culture that they were not yet ready to produce it, but only to passively receive it. Parton argued that the flood of immigrants which “pours upon our shores, chokes up our cities, and overspreads the Western plains” suffered from ignorance due to meanness and neglect by “barbaric” European elites. Referring to the immigrants, he wrote, “These people, as well as the emancipated slaves of the South, it devolves upon us of this generation and the next to convert into thinking, knowing, skilful, and tasteful American citizens.”

⁵¹ Quoted in Freeman 85.

⁵² Parton, *Triumphs of Enterprise* 396.

For middle-class American reformers such as Parton, drawing together notions of self-culture, refinement, and societal improvement articulated by the likes of Channing and Morgan, all that stood between the current societal chaos and the establishment of a great nation was for those on the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy—newly-free slaves, European immigrants—to be properly edified through exposure to great works of art and literature. Nothing less was at stake than the ability to build a great nation, and the spread of chromolithographs was a place to start: “Mr. Prang has finished his new manufactory just in time. By his assistance we may hope to diffuse among all classes of the people that feeling for art which must precede the production of excellent national works.”⁵³

Comments such as these illustrate the central role chromolithography was thought to play in the developing concept of culture and the nationalist project of creating a refined American character during a tumultuous period in the nation’s history. David Morgan writes that for Americans struggling with racial and ethnic tensions at home, along with a rivalry with Europe over cultural prestige, “the mission of art was to proliferate in American life and elevate public taste by virtue of moral edification.”⁵⁴ For many American artists, critics, and clergy, the arts were essential for not only fostering a national identity, but also supplementing religion in fostering public manners and morals. “For many clergy, art became a humanizing, reforming social force in the national task of shaping character.”

⁵³ Parton, *Triumphs of Enterprise* 396.

⁵⁴ Morgan 291.

Hence, white middle-class reformers viewed the dissemination of culture through chromos as essential to the formation of a national character as well as individual moral development. Through access in the home to the types of pictures that would otherwise only be available to elites or in the hallowed halls of the fine art museums, black former slaves and proletarian whites would be brought up to a respectable level of cultural refinement, and would be brought into the national fold of American citizenship. In the chromo, individuals across many class boundaries would find, hanging on their the walls, a common definition of human perfection.

But not all reformers who lauded chromos did so along the lines I have outlined. Former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass greatly admired a chromolithograph of the first black United States senator, Hiram Rhodes Revels of Mississippi, produced by Prang's lithographers after an oil painting from life by artist Theodore Kaufman, but he expressed his approval in unique terms. In a letter published in the September, 1870, issue of *Prang's Chromo*, Douglass lauded the portrait, which struck him as "a faithful representation of the man."⁵⁵ Unlike many of his white counterparts, however, Douglass did not claim that the presence of chromolithographs in the home served as a marker or agent of cultivated taste. Rather, he suggested that chromos were among the material, aesthetic, and symbolic objects to which newly-free black Americans would for the first time have access. His sentiments were understated: "Heretofore, colored

⁵⁵ Douglass's letter is reproduced in McClinton 37.

Americans have thought little of adorning their parlors with pictures. They have had to do with the stern, and I may say, the ugly realities of life.”⁵⁶

Unlike white reformers, Douglass did not suggest that access to such cultural forms as chromolithographs would help transform the African American into a different kind of person, more tasteful, civilized, and part of the national imaginary. Rather, he suggested that it was the rights of citizenship that would instill in freed slaves a state of equality with their white counterparts; chromos would serve as *evidence* of their new freedoms, not the source of moral uplift. Recognizing that the ability to purchase commodities to beautify the home was one of the privileges that free citizens could enjoy, he wrote: “Pictures come not with slavery and oppression and destitution, but with liberty, fair play, leisure, and refinement. These conditions are now possible to colored American citizens, and I think the walls of their houses will soon begin to bear evidences of their altered relations to the people about them.”⁵⁷ Here, Douglass acknowledged the close relation between the two identities of citizen and consumer in an industrial capitalist society, without collapsing them.

Douglass remarked upon the possibility that the portrait of Senator Revels would challenge the racial assumptions of whites, arguing that such pictures would serve to help counteract the effects of widespread degrading and stereotypical representations of black men and women in cartoons, advertisements, chromos, and throughout the mass media. He offered this prediction: “Whatever may be the prejudices of those who may look upon it, they will be compelled to admit that the Mississippi Senator is a man, and one who will easily pass for a man

⁵⁶ McClinton 37

⁵⁷ McClinton 37.

among men.” So, like white reformers, Douglass, too, found an educational element in chromos, but one that was linked to truth and reason rather than to beauty. And significantly, it was the characters of white racists, not those of newly-free black citizens, which would be altered by chromos, according to Douglass. Concluding his letter, he emphasized that, for freemen, the portrait would serve as a symbol and reminder of how far they had come: “Every colored householder in the land should have one of these portraits in his parlor, and should explain it to his children, as the dividing line between the darkness and despair that overhung our past, and the light and hope that now beam upon our future as a people.”⁵⁸ Here, he was not celebrating the chromo as an edifying medium, but rather focusing on the subject of the picture, which he saw as a symbol that black Americans had achieved full citizenship.

I have discussed Douglass’s letter at some length because it is the antithesis of the perspectives of his white counterparts, thus helping to illustrate the implications of the latter’s rhetoric of uplift. Douglass offered a critique of the chromo that treated it as a significant cultural product, yet did not adopt the cultivation/moral degradation rhetoric of many of his white contemporaries. Unlike the majority of writers and reformers, he did not suggest that the consumption of chromos would serve as a mechanism for constructing refined Americans out of the ethnic (or class) “other.” Douglass’s letter should not be read as lauding chromos in general, but as hailing this one singular portrait of Revels, which stood in stark contrast to the vast majority of chromos that represented African Americans as inferior. Indeed, Douglass’s support for this portrait reproduction served as a platform for him to point out the dehumanizing effects

⁵⁸ McClinton 37.

of the flood of stereotyped imagery. In the following chapter, I will explore the implications of the widespread use of racialized imagery in chromo advertising, but first I consider the role chromo advertising was thought to play in the refinement of “the masses.”

1.3 “No One is So Refined or So Vulgar”

Significantly, advertisements produced by chromolithography were often credited with some of the same capacities for cultural uplift as were chromos for framing. Because chromo advertisements could be obtained at little or no cost, they were seen as particularly valuable for improving taste among “the masses.” As the *New York Times* put it in 1882, “The popular taste for the beautiful is cultivated” through exposure to the “high art on card-board” manifested in chromo advertising.⁵⁹

Seven years later, economist Simon Nelson Patten made this point in the course of tracing the social and environmental conditions necessary for the development of “esthetic feeling.” In his essay “The Consumption of Wealth,” he argued that mechanical reproduction of pictures had provided the means for this development. “Art and taste” he wrote, “have now peculiar advantages which they have seldom or never before enjoyed. The processes of invention have cheapened the process of reproducing pictures and brought the beautiful within

⁵⁹ “High Art on Card-Board: Picturesque Advertising—the Wonderful Growth of the Trade,” *New York Times* 3 Dec. 1882: 4.

the reach of all.”⁶⁰ Patten then took particular care to hail the advertising chromo as an economical means for the cultivation of taste:

So cheap are many kinds of pictures that they are largely distributed as means of advertisements. Everywhere the homes of the poorest people are full of beautiful objects, many of which have no cost; and when their taste is improved by contact with these objects, others more suited to their new condition can be obtained at a slight increase of cost.⁶¹

Here, Patten assumes that once the taste of the poor was elevated, they would automatically be transformed to a “new condition” that would somehow automatically materialize into more money to buy new, more refined items “at a slight increase of cost.” Here, as with Channing, the connection between refinement and economic betterment is assumed. Not only would the chromo advertisement cultivate the masses, but in doing so, it would transform their material conditions as well.

For some, cultural uplift, not commerce, was the main benefit chromo advertising brought to society. To the question of what good the proliferation of chromo advertising had provided “to the general community,” a correspondent to *The Paper World* answered plainly, “It has been the principal means of cultivating a taste for and appreciation of the fine arts among the masses.”⁶² *The Paper World*’s editors echoed this sentiment. “By the use of these cards for

⁶⁰ Simon Nelson Patten, *The Consumption of Wealth* (Philadelphia: UP of Pennsylvania, 1889) 34.

⁶¹ Patten 34.

⁶² “Advertising Art Novelties,” letter, *The Paper World* Oct. 1882: 15.

general advertising purposes,” they wrote, “beauty and art get an introduction and foothold in many and many a place where they have, from the nature of the case, been almost wholly excluded.”⁶³

Not that the middle classes did not collect advertising chromos. The collecting of all kinds of cards, advertisements included, and pasting them into albums or scrapbooks was a common pastime, particularly among middle-class girls. *The Paper World*, booster of all things paper-related, held forth on the positive effects of the “mania” for chromo-card collecting, which they referred to as the “card craze.” The journal suggested that advertising cards brought beauty into the homes of everyone, and had a civilizing effect:

Handsomely colored pictures are rarely thrown aside, and as pictures reach the heart so do the pictured representations of business announcements, even, have careful preservation and frequent reference. This feature of the era of illustrated advertising cards, besides being a useful one, is a hopeful and promising one for the future. The more that art and beauty are intermingled with our prosy habits of business life the nearer do we approach the days when the civilizing and improving elements of culture and refinement will have prominent place in the make-up of the miscellaneous ways and walks of human life, and well may we welcome these little messengers of utility and beauty wherever we find them.⁶⁴

⁶³ “The Power of Art on Paper,” *The Paper World* Oct. 1882: 14.

⁶⁴ “The Power of Art on Paper” 14-15.

Here, without taking direct aim at advertising (their bread and butter) the editors of *The Paper World* suggested that the utilitarianism of advertising—its base “prosiness” as they had referred to it earlier in the essay—was reined in only by the uplifting, poetic qualities of chromolithography.

Hence, advertising chromos could at once uplift the masses while saving the middle classes from the debasing effects of businesses, thereby providing to the “miscellaneous ways and walks of human life” a common definition of culture and refinement. The advertising chromo, then, was hailed as a force for democracy, a cultural product that could, by virtue of being both mass-produced and artistic, all but collapse class differences and help to forge an American character. Still, the language used was sometimes tempered a bit. Chromo advertising was not *all that* refined, but rather occupied a middle ground between true refinement and utter baseness: “No one is either so refined or so vulgar,” wrote the editors of the trade journal *The Paper World*, “that he will not admire a pretty advertising card and save it.”⁶⁵

And there was a very significant yet not specifically acknowledged difference between the uses of advertising chromos by different classes. In the middle-class parlor, framed chromos hung on the wall and handsome scrapbook albums rested on the table, while in the working-class tenement, advertisements themselves were used not as an amusing pastime, but for unframed wall decoration, sometimes to cover up peeling wallpaper or moldy walls. These important differences in the uses of chromolithography between those who had a parlor and children with enough leisure time to create albums, and those who had neither, actually served to accentuate

⁶⁵ “The Advertising Card Business,” *The Paper World* May 1885: 5.

class difference rather than smoothing over them. As Bushman argues, the middle-class performance of refinement did not serve to flatten out class or economic differences, but instead often magnified them. He writes that, as symbols of refinement such as the parlor became more commonplace, those whose dwellings lacked them—or whose occupational footwear was incompatible with its soft, carpeted floors—were even more distinctly partitioned off from the middle classes. He explains, “In the nineteenth century, as refinement spread downward and the middling orders assimilated a diluted refinement of their own, the great divide between polite and coarse isolated the lower orders on the margins of American culture.”⁶⁶ Hence, while chromos and chromo advertisements were often hailed as democratic—able to collapse class differences—they may have actually accentuated differences when a distinction was drawn between those able to afford chromos (even if they had to make their own “pretty, rustic frames”), along with leather albums in which to paste advertising cards, and those who used advertising to brighten up their drab and dilapidated rooms. In the next section, I will trace the development of the use of chromolithography for advertising.

1.4 An Ideal Vehicle for Advertising

If one year can be cited to mark the widespread introduction of the advertising of businesses and products using chromolithographed cards, it would be 1876. Art historian Robert Jay writes, “By the time of the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876, all the elements were in place for a dramatic expansion in the use of the trade card, to the point where it became a

⁶⁶ Bushman 279. On floor coverings, see 265.

pervasive, even ubiquitous advertising medium in the United States.”⁶⁷ *The Paper World* credited Chicago merchants Field, Leiter & Company with initiating the practice, reporting that they got the idea to print their business name on cards upon noticing how enthusiastically visitors to the exhibition took to packets of folded cards with chromolithographed building views. Since no U.S. lithographic firm was producing the kind of work they felt was appropriate for advertising, they cabled to France for packages of chromo Christmas cards, twenty-five different designs per package, and sold these packets for fifty cents each. Not only did they sell out so quickly that the cards immediately became collectors’ items—their value inflating tenfold—they also brought business, doubling the store’s sales. According to *The Paper World*, “Rival firms made haste to get chromo cards, the idea was caught up in other cities, and like wildfire the craze spread over the country.”⁶⁸

Prang begged to differ with *The Paper World’s* account, however. He dated the introduction of the advertising card three years earlier, citing his own practice of distributing cards to promote his fine art prints at the Vienna International Exhibition in 1873. “The idea struck some of our business friends,” he wrote, adding that his firm soon established a special branch to produce attractive cards upon which could be printed or stamped the name of a business. He claimed that by 1876 this agency was “in full bloom” and his firm had already

⁶⁷ Jay 1. As I explained in the Introduction, the term *trade cards* is often used to refer to small *advertising cards*.

⁶⁸ “The Advertising Card Business” 4. As suggested in this passage, the earliest chromo advertising cards were sold in stores alongside other kinds of chromolithographed cards. Later, manufacturers began to distribute them directly to stores and give them to consumers for free. I will discuss distribution further in Chapter Three.

made millions of the cards.⁶⁹ While Prang's claim to advertising-card innovation typically overstated his individual contribution—since other firms were producing trade cards around the same time—the story of his firm's new advertising-card branch nevertheless reveals that the mid-1870s was indeed an important moment in the development of chromolithographic advertising. The advertising card, it would seem, was an idea whose time had come, given the need companies had to build and expand markets for the quickly-growing numbers of consumer products being manufactured in the post-war economy. According to *The Paper World*, almost immediately after the centennial, every lithographer in the country had begun producing advertising cards, and more firms sprouted up to meet the enormous demand. Soon a business was no longer forced to send to Europe for cards upon which to stamp or print its name.⁷⁰

But it should be noted that lithography had been used for commercial and promotional purposes much earlier than 1876. As I suggested earlier, chromolithography had been used for creating advertisements for local businesses as early as the 1840s (and even earlier for monochrome lithographs). Often, a promotional message was included in a print suitable for hanging in the parlor, or added to it in subsequent printings, as was the case with several of Currier and Ives's railroad views.⁷¹ These early advertising prints served both decorative and promotional purposes, typically representing storefronts, factories, hotels, and, most often,

⁶⁹ Louis Prang, "Origin of Holiday and Advertising Cards," letter, *The Paper World* June 1885: 20.

⁷⁰ "The Advertising Card Business" 4.

⁷¹ Marzio 193.

railroad locomotives. “Locomotive prints were invariably large, accurate, and colorful. No expense was spared by machine shops presenting their products to railway engineers and contractors.”⁷² These prints for locomotive manufacturing companies that not only provided details about the machines but were also considered appropriate to adorn the walls of any type of office related to the railroad industry. Many early uses of lithography, such as sheet-music and dime-novel covers, were primarily promotional, intending to provoke interest in the music or stories within.

But even before lithography had been invented, there were precursors to chromolithographic advertising: engraved tradesmen’s cards, receipts and shopkeepers’ bills that had circulated in England as early as the seventeenth century. These earlier “cards” were often large, printed on heavy paper and sometimes used as receipts, thus publicizing a business’s location as well as serving as business stationery. They were produced either by copper plate engraving, or letter press along with a woodcut illustration. A century later in the American colonies, silversmiths and other craftsmen such as the prolific Paul Revere produced many such engraved business/craftsmen’s cards. This is where the term “trade card,” which came to be synonymous with advertising card, originates.⁷³ In nineteenth-century United States, such trade materials began to be lithographed, a new craft that offered possibilities in the production of designs that emphasized the pictorial.

⁷² Pierce and Slautterback 7.

⁷³ See Jay, 4-12, on the early development of trade cards in Britain and the Colonies.

Chromolithography merged pictures, color, and mass production into a powerful advertising medium. Although it faced a distinct disadvantage in relation to relief processes like woodcuts—which, unlike lithography were compatible with letterpress production—it had the key advantage: full color. Chromolithography offered the capacity for the kind of vivid, naturalistic hues that were unavailable to any other medium of mass production. Largely because they were colorful, show cards and posters adorning shop windows drew the attention of passersby, including working men who strolled the streets in cities like Pittsburgh after work on Saturday night. Parton comments on the importance of color and brightness to workers:

These men, after a week of intense monotony,—gazing at dull objects, and doing the same dull act ten hours a day,—how hungry they seemed for some brightness to flash into their lives! ... Mere brilliancy of color and light is transport, we should suppose, to a man who has been making nails or digging coal from Monday morning until Saturday noon.⁷⁴

Commercial lithographers recognized their success with advertisers was due to the appeal of color, and they used as many stones as possible to create color naturalistic enough to approximate reality. Realizing that a practical lithographer was only as good as his most elaborate color show card, chromolithographers continued to outdo themselves with improvements to the color printing process. As one lithographer put it in 1894:

People these days seem to have gone picture-crazy. There never has been such a demand as there is now. They do not care so much for black and white as they

⁷⁴ Parton, *Triumphs of Enterprise* 221.

used to—they want color; as realism seems to prevail, they want in their pictures the colors of nature, and the crude work of the chromo-lithographer of several years ago no longer satisfies them. True, our pictures are many of them for the soap manufacturers, the insurance companies, and the patent-medicine men; but we try in our way to be educators of the people, and to give them good drawing and harmonious coloring.⁷⁵

Color was a double-edged sword, however. While the color in chromolithographic ads was novel and undoubtedly attractive to many, it was the aspect most often faulted when advertising was criticized. Particularly those who considered themselves to have high tastes in art were critical of the color used in advertising. One critic writing in *Art Review* suggested that the type of color used in advertising cards was “brilliant and strong, often gaudy and crude, but calculated to attract the eye from a distance ad appeal to the popular taste for color, which exists most strongly among women and children.”⁷⁶ And the frequent criticisms of public advertising invariably specified its gaudy colors as its most offensive aspect.⁷⁷ And, as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, it was the chromolithographic artists charged with producing chromo ads whose sensibilities may have been most offended by the indiscriminate use of color to attract attention to ads in public places.

⁷⁵ Ives, A.E., “Designing for Lithographers,” *Art Amateur* 32.1 (1894): 15.

⁷⁶ Charlotte Adams, “Color in New-York Streets,” *Art Review* 2.1 (1887): 17.

⁷⁷ For example, see John DeWitt Warner, “Advertising Run Mad,” *Municipal Affairs* 4 (1900): 267-293; and Milo Roy Maltbie, “Advertising Signs and Art,” *Municipal Affairs* 5 (1901): 738-753.

1.5 Chromo Ads and Other Ephemera

Nevertheless, color lithography in a variety of forms appealed to many across class boundaries, and advertising was only one of the many types of chromolithographed ephemera that filled scrapbooks in the late nineteenth century. For example, the period from 1880 to 1900 is considered the “golden era” of collecting chromolithographed printed scraps.⁷⁸ These were embossed color prints, stamped to give them texture and die-cut into shapes, featuring a range of subjects, from children playing to hands holding flowers—imagery identical to the type used in advertisements. Indeed, there were many similarities between chromo advertising and most other printed ephemera, in terms of the type of imagery used as well as the mode of address and the uses to which they were put. I will discuss some of these similarities in the following pages, in order to show how advertising chromolithography was integrated into the daily lives and practices of late nineteenth-century Americans.

Analyzing Victorian advertising-card collecting, Ellen Gruber Garvey notes that, since cards were often organized in albums according to types of imagery rather than the ostensible utilitarian uses of the card, an advertising card may have been placed in a pattern that also included calling cards and decorative chromo cards. She writes:

Such arrangements seem to highlight the appearance of the cards and to ignore the product, but their reliance on the overlap between calling cards, blanks, and trade cards gives the trade card a quasi-familiar and even quasi-familial status. The

⁷⁸ Alistair Allen and Joan Hoverstadt, *The History of Printed Scraps* (London: New Cavendish, 1983). The book is from the British perspective, but states that these years marked the peak of collecting in the United States as well.

advertiser becomes like a social caller, the friend or acquaintance who leaves a card on the silver tray.⁷⁹

As far as card collectors were concerned, then, there was no conceptual line between personal calling cards and advertising cards, resulting in the transference of the meaning of the former to that of the latter. Advertisers became like friends, welcomed into the home.

There was often no clear distinction between advertising cards and greeting cards either. In fact, some early greeting cards *were* advertisements. As I have already shown, one of the earliest uses of advertising cards was when a company stamped its name on French Christmas cards and distributed them for a low price. Moreover, Prang claimed that he created Christmas greeting cards out of advertising cards in 1874, following the British tradition of sending personal holiday greetings. Whether or not it is true that Prang's were the very first Christmas cards produced in the United States, it is instructive to look at how his firm made cards that were at once greeting cards and advertisements. "[T]he American Christmas card is an outgrowth of [the] chromo advertising card," he explained in a letter to *The Paper World*:

... and for which the good wife of our London agent is to be credited. She suggested to fill up the blank space of our advertising cards, which had already become known in England, with 'A Merry Christmas' and 'A Happy New Year,'

⁷⁹ Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford, 1996) 30.

for the benefit of our English friends, who, by old custom, sent such pleasant greetings to each other at those festive occasions.⁸⁰

Thus, some early greeting cards grew out of advertising cards. Indeed, Christmas and other holiday cards were commonly distributed by businesses as advertisements, and were indistinguishable from other advertising cards save the greeting. By extending holiday greetings to consumers, advertisers became like friends or acquaintances, thus personalizing the relationship between advertiser and consumer.

Postcards developed out of advertising cards as well. As Dorothy Ryan explains, “The early history of the ‘post’ card in the United States, that is, a piece of cardboard which was manufactured to be sent through the mail bearing a message or advertisement, is basically the history of an advertising medium.”⁸¹ While there were antecedents as early as 1861, Ryan identifies the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago as marking the formal introduction of the postcard, and chromo postcards became much more common after the turn of the century. Some of these postcards were used for direct-mail advertising, but, notably, many of them were distributed to customers as premiums or free of charge, like other advertising cards, rather than being mailed to customers through the mail. Others were commissioned or produced by large manufacturing companies, then sent in bulk to retailers to be mailed locally. Many of the same types of imagery was used on advertising postcards as on other chromo advertising

⁸⁰ Prang, “Origin of Holiday and Advertising Cards,” 20.

⁸¹ Dorothy B. Ryan, *Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1982) 1.

cards: racial stereotypes, factory views, factory interiors, images of housework made easier through consumption.⁸²

Rewards of Merit, which teachers gave to students as tokens of esteem and rewards for good behavior and diligent work, were often chromolithographed during the chromo era and closely resembled advertising cards in terms of size, subject matter and technique. They, too, were either pasted in scrapbooks or hung on walls along with advertising. And like greeting cards, such rewards were highly personal messages from teachers:

Rewards of Merit, with their images and their message, were not simply a part of a flurry of similar paper artifacts in the homes of early America—nor in the working-class homes served by the charity schools of the second half of the nineteenth century. They had personal messages making them all the more important when used in the home as a display of accomplishment.⁸³

Rewards of merit may well have been one of the most personal forms of printed ephemera, and their child-centered imagery closely resembled many chromolithographic ads.

Educational materials also merged with advertising. There were many kinds of instructional/promotional booklets directed toward adults as well as children. Recipe books were commissioned by baking soda and flour companies, while manufacturers who produced canned meats and soup distributed small publications introducing their brands and products to

⁸² Ryan 71-89.

⁸³ Patricia Fenn and Alfred P. Malpa, *Rewards of Merit: Tokens of a Child's Progress and a Teacher's Esteem* (Ephemera Society of America, 1994) 16-18.



Figure 1: Star soap, advertising booklet, undated.

Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

consumers. Companies distributed advertising calendars that ranged in quality and style from tiny cards to wall hangings featuring large, well-crafted chromos. Almanacs, commonly distributed by corporations for advertising purposes, were also very common and considered important and educational. Books and cards were published that incorporated brand names and promotional messages into nursery rhymes and other children's stories. To take one example, Schultz & Co., makers of Star brand soap, circulated small lithographed booklets, each page containing an illustrated line from a nursery rhyme as well as a slogan for the product. Somewhere in each scene depicted, the Star soap trademark can be found, perhaps painted on a fence or on a crate used as a planter (Figure 1). Many advertising cards depicted scenes from nursery rhymes, with the addition of packaged products and trademark symbols.

The lack of clear distinctions between chromo advertising and other products of chromolithography—whether in terms of format, imagery, or address—made the art form a unique vehicle for advertising, since it resulted in the integration of promotional texts into cultural artifacts that offered instruction, personal goodwill, and fun. This blending of consumptive, instructive, and intimate discourses undoubtedly served to smooth the transition to a culture in which new kinds of consumption-oriented messages made sense. Yet eventually the widespread, seemingly indiscriminate, use of chromolithography to sell products was one of the factors in the eventual cultural degradation of the craft of chromolithography.

1.6 The Debasement of Chromolithography

While middle-class reformers initially hailed the chromo as a refining and democratizing influence, by 1882 *Harper's Monthly* was advising its readers against “hanging too many ‘cheap chromos’ on the walls.”⁸⁴ In 1897, Prang, disgusted with the flood of inexpensive chromos on the market, stopped making chromos and cards and devoted himself to the production of art-educational materials.⁸⁵ The utter vulgarization of chromolithography in all its forms was due, in part, to a general reaction against the defacement of public space with advertising. A related factor was the loss in quality: Due to speed-up and cutting corners, shoddy workmanship—manifested in bad modeling, crude coloring, and poor registration—became commonplace. All in all, the widespread production and circulation of chromolithographic advertising may very well have been one factor in bringing about a familiarity that bred contempt for the chromo.

Some lithographic artists in the United States and Europe attempted to rescue their craft from drowning in commercialism. Notably, color had become so wholly associated with advertising that it was by dispensing with color that artists re-elevated lithography to a fine art form. Commenting on the revival of artistic lithography, the magazine *Arts for America* remarked on the legacy of commercialism that had debased the craft: “The application of steam printing to lithography about forty or fifty years ago, and its consequent employment almost exclusively for commercial purposes, causing it to be associated with variety and cheapness, led,

⁸⁴ “Editor’s Drawer,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* Sept. 1882: 643.

⁸⁵ Freeman 15.

no doubt, to its falling into disrepute and desuetude among artists.”⁸⁶ Hailing lithography as “the supreme and only autographic method of reproduction,” the magazine stated that American art connoisseurs “... are recognizing that there is in the lithograph something more than the showy chromo, the lid of the cheap candy box, or the gaudy poster.”⁸⁷ For this critic, the denigrating effects of commercialism resulted in art that was utterly debasing.

Chromo ads were often criticized on moral grounds as well. Chromolithographic cards, labels, and posters using beautiful women to advertise theatrical productions, tobacco products, beer and liquor were most likely to be targeted by reformers. Denouncing the use of women’s faces and figures in poster advertising and cigar-box labels as “a menace to good morals,” one critic asserted that “the advertisement is, oftentimes, more depraving and demoralizing than the doubtful good which it represents. For instance, if the deadly cigarette is dangerous in the hands of youth, is it not ten times more dangerous when accompanied by gaudy cigarette pictures?”⁸⁸ The article reported on the effort of a Chicago federation of women’s clubs to bring about legislation barring the use of women’s likenesses in advertising (but not in high art), one of many such initiatives at the end of the century.

⁸⁶ Charles Welsh, “The Society of Painters on Stone and Other Sketches,” *Arts for America* 8.2 (1898): 87.

⁸⁷ Welsh 86-87.

⁸⁸ T. Vernet Morse, “Abuse of the Human Form in Advertising,” *Arts for America* 8.6 (1899): 351-352.

The many attempts to limit nudity in advertising chromos probably marks one of the most distinct signs of chromo advertising falling into disfavor.⁸⁹ By the end of the century, when color pictorial advertising of a much more domestic and refined caliber had entered the middle class parlor, tucked primly between the pages of monthly magazines such as *McClure's* and *Munsey's*, chromo advertising—often loud, bawdy, and public—stood out as particularly vulgar in contrast. Moreover, it was perhaps because the chromo was so often specifically identified as a commodity with a unique capacity for the formation of the beliefs and values of “the masses” that these efforts at censorship abounded. Clearly, the representations of women found on beer posters and cigarette cards were doing little to uplift and refine their beholders the way chromos, and even chromo advertisements, were supposed to in the minds of reformers.

1.7 Conclusion

As I have tried to show, when they were initially introduced, the products of chromolithography were believed to have the capacity to civilize and cultivate the individual regardless of class, lifting them to the standards of cultivation of the imaginary “American.” For the working classes who couldn’t afford even the cheapest of the cheap chromos, free advertising chromos were supposed to play that role. Thus, in chromo advertising—mass-produced beauty—it was believed that Americans across class boundaries could come to have a common experience of culture. But, as I argued earlier, it did not make good on its promise of democratization: chromos did nothing to alter the material conditions of class, and, as Bushman might suggest, rather than

⁸⁹ For examples of initiatives against nudity in chromo ads—and lithographers’ reactions to them—see “Prudishness or Plunder?” *The National Lithographer* 2.5 (1895): 9; “Anthony Comstock’s Latest,” *The National Lithographer* 3.3 (1896): 6.

collapsing class differences they actually underscored them. While chromos could serve as a way for the middling classes to emulate their betters, this pretentiousness was out of the reach of workers because they were left with the baser form of advertising chromos.

However, while it was not democratizing, perhaps advertising chromolithography did have something of a nationalizing influence by providing a common definition of art, culture and beauty that circulated across class boundaries. And, by blending in with the types of ephemera that people from many classes interacted with as part of everyday life, it may have served to normalize the discourse of consumption that it carried by helping advertising messages to blend in. For those who could consume little, as well for as the more privileged, they could be drawn into the ethos of consumer culture (tastefulness, refinement, assimilation, nationalism) not only through the messages on the advertisements themselves, but also through the very act of collecting and looking at the ads. In the next chapter, I will discuss in more detail how the advertisements themselves attempted to define the consumer across class boundaries (but not racial ones) while they communicated an ideology of consumption.

2 “WILL THE DRUDGERY OF WASH DAY EVER CEASE?”

Many chromolithographic ads seem more than a bit crude. What to make of packages of soap, jars of pickles, or spools of thread that seem clumsily inserted into apparently generic scenes of beautiful children? Yet, when chromo advertising is considered in its historical context, as the first attempt to use visual imagery in the service of selling branded products, its eclecticism can be better appreciated and it can be understood as emerging cultural form. The system of production under which chromo ads were designed had yet to be professionalized, so there were as yet no standards regarding what would be an effective selling message, no agreement as to what constituted an appropriate ad design. Artists and designers mined ideas from any source they could find, from fine art to comics. The result was a body of imagery that would take volumes to examine in its entirety, because it was derived from such a vast reservoir of visual culture.¹

Nevertheless, despite its heterogeneity and its historical position as a nascent form of visual culture, chromo advertising deserves to be examined from as many angles as possible, including its significance for the development of visual advertising. While chromo advertising lacked the sophisticated psychological/therapeutic appeals and elaborate signifying structures

¹ Fortunately there have already been fruitful investigations into the iconography and selling messages of chromolithographic ads. My intention is to add to, rather than argue with, previous interpretations. See Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic, 1994); and Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998).

that visual advertising came to employ by the beginning of the twentieth century, it did communicate something new—consumption of branded, packaged, consumer products—in visual languages that were familiar precisely because they were drawn from other widely circulated cultural forms. While chromo ads neither reflected nor imposed actual consumer practices or identities, their widespread distribution helped to form a bridge between a world largely free of manufactured consumer products and visual advertising, to one in which these were a part of everyday life. Men, women and children of all classes encountered chromo advertising. Even though much of it seems designed to capture the imagination of a middle-class audience, it was widely available to members of the working-class, including those with limited means to buy consumer products. Since by far the vast majority of scholarship on the nineteenth-century consumption and the construction of consumer identity has concentrated on the relatively small middle class, I will turn my attention largely to the consumptive practices of the working class, in order to make clear how chromo advertising's influence reached across class boundaries.

In this chapter I argue that chromo advertising contributed to the shaping of emerging ideologies of consumer culture by visually articulating consumption to whiteness and citizenship—and elevating it to a position as the most significant realm of activity. Most of the ads pictured middle-class adults and children in sentimental scenes that reflected bourgeois conceptions of idealized domesticity, femininity, and childhood. While it was less common to find representations of men and women of the laboring classes, those that existed often placed this group, too, among the ranks of legible consumers. In contrast, depictions of African-Americans located them distinctly outside the world of acceptable consumption, implicitly or

explicitly defining whiteness, citizenship and consumption as coextensive. This collapse of citizen and consumer identities can also be evidenced in the utilization of sentimentalism to ideologically recast social ills as private problems that could be solved through thoughtful brand choices.

2.1 Visuality

The late nineteenth century marked a crucial era in the development of advertising and consumer culture in the United States. It was then that several factors coalesced: the manufacturing, branding, and national distribution of consumer goods quickly accelerated; cultural values related to consumption began to shift; the practice of advertising expanded; and the middle class of professionals and managers came into its own.² Some historians have also documented changes in working-class consumption and consumer identity around the turn of the century.³

² Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996); Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (New York: Doubleday, 1929) 346-434; Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," *The Culture of Consumption*, eds. Richard W. Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Patton, 1983) 1-38.

³ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge UP, 1983); Frances Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984): 120-126; Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997); Andrew Heinze, "From Scarcity to Abundance: The Immigrant as Consumer," *Consumer Society in American History*, eds. Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca: Cornell, 1999) 190-206. Andrew Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1990).

What has been little recognized is that the proliferation of visual advertising in the form of chromolithography between 1880 and 1900 played an important role in these changes. Because chromolithography was the first medium for the mass production of full-color images, its use in advertising brought a new dimension to the process of endowing mass-produced commodities with meaning. Advertisers could draw attention to their consumerist messages by embedding them in mass-produced full-color pictures that were appealing in both their novelty and their familiarity.

Chromo advertising filled streets, shops, homes and businesses with full-color images of packaged products, usually interjected into scenes from “everyday life.” Such scenes were not necessarily realistic, in the sense of reflecting the actual material conditions of the lives of most viewers, but they were familiar in that they were drawn from the conventions of literature, art, and illustration that were common in the late nineteenth century. But the pictures also contained the unfamiliar. Even those lithographic advertisements that seemed to offer little more than raw information—for example, a picture of the packaged product along with an admonishment to recognize the trademark and “accept no substitutes”—performed an important pedagogical purpose at a time when brands and their visual counterparts, trademarks, were relatively new concepts.

But most chromo ads did more than define what brands were and how to recognize them through trademarks. With pictures that designers sought to make pretty or interesting, they did what visuality in advertising still tries to do: draw attention to the ad, and elicit emotional

responses that can be used in the service of promoting brands.⁴ Designers of chromo advertising overtly stated only the first goal, but an examination of the ads they produced suggests that they created ads that were structured to achieve the second one as well. Whether there was conscious intention on their part is not known; because the codes of advertising were still being worked out, and there was as yet no training in the profession of advertising illustration, designers in the chromo era left very little trace of their deliberate techniques or goals. Nevertheless, the visual repertoire then considered appropriate for advertising was heavily tilted toward the sentimental. As discussed in Chapter One, chromo ads should be understood as part of the milieu of other chromolithographed ephemera, such as holiday cards and souvenir cards—all of which were infused with Victorian sentimentalism. In an 1882 article that gushed over the “craze” for card collecting, *The Paper World* described the content of all kinds of chromolithographed collectible cards in emotional terms: “pleasant recollections,” “tender affection,” and the “loves of humanity.”⁵ Thus, the advertisements that drew upon the same visual repertoire as other ephemera were structured to elicit emotional responses.

Indeed, the advent of visuality in advertising clearly accelerated the yoking of affect to consumption. Visual images (iconic signs) work in a different emotional register than do words (symbolic signs), precisely because they are uniquely structured to remind viewers of the real or imagined worlds of events and situations that elicit feelings, enabling them to “draw upon the rich variety of visual stimuli and associated emotions to which we are already attuned through

⁴ Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997) 3-52.

⁵ “The Power of Art on Paper,” *The Paper World* Oct., 1882: 12.

our interactions with our social and natural environments: facial expressions, gestures, postures, personal appearance, physical surroundings, and so on.”⁶ Depending on the viewers’ perspective, experiences, and social position, an image of a woman slumped over her washing, burdened with never-ending domestic labor, could evoke sympathy; pictures of imagined “better days gone by” could evoke longing; mother-and-child images could evoke tenderness. As we will see, in such cases the emotions elicited could then be harnessed in the service of attributing soothing or heroic characteristics to the brand.

Roland Barthes argues that the polysemic nature of iconic signification makes it nearly impossible to expect the viewing subject to make the desired connections between signifier and signified without a textual anchor; a line of text, or at least a brand name or logo, is always required to “counter the terror of uncertain signs.”⁷ Chromo ads, while lacking the elaborate visual/textual signifying structures that later became normative in visual advertising, did regularly contain textual anchors in the form of a caption, a line of dialogue, a brand name or logo. Certainly, the major elements of twentieth-century advertising’s graphic framing repertoire were already present in many chromo ads: signifying image, brand symbol, and a simple slogan or other line of explanatory text.⁸ To be sure, the introduction of textual elements was often accomplished in a way that may now seem crude or inelegant. The captions in advertising cards

⁶ Messaris 34.

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 39.

⁸ Robert Goldman elaborates on the structural “positioning strategies” that establish “associative links between product meanings and selling ideas” in visual print advertising for consumer products. Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 39.



Figure 2: Mellin's food, advertising card, 1893.

**Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.**



Figure 3: Pearline soap, advertising card with angels, undated.
Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

for Mellin's food left little room for uncertainty as to the product's benefits (Figure 2), as did the dialogue in a laundry soap ad in which cherubs bring forth the branded product, proclaiming an end to domestic toil (Figure 3). In many cases, advertising in other media was introduced into a scene to provide a textual anchor, as in a Hires advertising or premium card in which the "new and improved" aspect of the brand is declared in the newspaper, anchoring the meaning of the young girl as signifying "the new" (Figure 4).

Considering chromo advertisements historically, then, it seems evident that the types of graphic devices that were later implemented by advertising agencies were in the process of being worked out during the chromo era. Yet, the significance of chromo ads in the development of



Figure 4: Hires root beer, advertising card, circa 1890.

**Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.**

visual advertising is sometimes missed by historians, who describe them as “crude” or point out that they widely employed nonspecific stock images.⁹ There was indeed widespread use of stock images, pictures that lithographers kept on hand that could be adapted to work for different advertisers. But such collections of images can serve in the creation of sophisticated advertising; indeed, their video analogs, “image banks,” are in widespread use by advertising agencies today. The significance of these images is not lessened because they serve as “floating signifiers” – the same image of birds in flight can be used to connote either “freedom” or “nature” depending upon the textual anchor provided.¹⁰ It is true that every image can signify in many different ways; but it is equally true that a great number of chromo ads reveal positioning strategies—textual/visual anchors and frames—that structurally favor particular readings. But perhaps more to the point, in chromo advertising, most images for national brands were in fact custom-designed, even if some elements (such as a child’s head) were used many times.¹¹ The reasons for this are suggested in Chapter Four: by the mid 1880s, chromo advertising was a buyers’ market, with lithographers scrambling to find artists to create original designs that would land advertising contracts with manufacturers of consumer products. The result of this frenetic

⁹ Michelle H. Bogart describes chromo advertising as “crude lithographs by anonymous individuals...” See Bogart, *Advertising, Artists, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago UP, 1995) 47. See Ohmann 199-201 on the use of stock images in lithographed ad cards.

¹⁰ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996): 14-15.

¹¹ In examining thousands of chromo advertisements I found very few cases in which identical pictures were used to promote more than one brand of consumer products, with the possible exception of tobacco products. I believe the re-use of entire scenes, while it may have sometimes occurred in ads for national brand products, was far more common in advertising for local stores and businesses.

situation was the creation of a rich body of visual advertising, some of which was structured in ways that are more sophisticated than previously acknowledged.

2.2 Audience(s)

Chromo advertising was not only textually rich, it was also tightly woven into the lives of late nineteenth-century Americans, in part through the practice of collecting. In *The Adman in the Parlor*, Ellen Gruber Garvey analyzes Victorian advertising-card collecting, focusing on the widespread practice, chiefly among girls, of pasting the cards into scrapbooks along with other chromolithographed ephemera. As Garvey points out, the use of these cards was central in educating middle-class girls and women about the new practices and knowledges necessary for their familial roles as shoppers, such as recognizing distinctions between brands.¹² She argues that through the creative pastime of putting together elaborate albums, these young compilers actively took part in their own consumer training by creating elaborate, personal worlds that incorporated public advertising messages into their private lives. Evidence of this is taken from the scrapbooks themselves, into which compilers pasted advertising cards in elaborate patterns alongside other kinds of cards, such as those collected in Sunday school, received as rewards at school, and left by visitors. Garvey points out that advertising cards, by educating young women into the logic of consumption through the creative activity of collecting and compiling, served as important precursors to the magazine advertising of the 1890s: “As mass-circulation advertising-

¹² Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford, 1996) 16-50. See also Garvey’s “Dreaming in Commerce: Advertising Trade Card Scrapbooks,” *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2003): 66-88.

supported magazines spread in the 1890s, they became the major medium of national advertising,” she writes. “But the readers of these magazines had already learned to interact with national advertising through another widely distributed medium: the colorful advertising trade card of the 1880s.”¹³

But the audience for chromo advertising went well beyond middle-class girls and women. While working-class people may not have pasted pictures into fancy albums that have survived for historians to examine, there is ample evidence that they took advantage of the free availability of colorful and appealing posters, cards and calendars in decorating their dwellings.¹⁴ In fact, the practice of decorating walls with chromo advertisements bore similarities to the practice of scrapbook collecting. Like scrapbooks, walls were decorated with whatever available ephemera (commercial, religious, humorous or political) was beautiful or meaningful to the collector. One journalist noted that some tenement residents used anything they could find in a sometimes “pathetic” effort to ornament and decorate their surroundings and to cover over peeling wallpaper and moldy walls: “Pictures of every kind are prized, cheap lithographs, bill-

¹³ Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor* 16.

¹⁴ Evidence of this comes primarily from middle-class writers and reformers, who either approved or disapproved of the practice depending upon the time frame and their theories of aesthetics. See Simon Nelson Patten, *The Consumption of Wealth*. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1889) 34; Lizabeth A. Cohen, “Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915,” *Journal of American Culture* 3 (1980): 767; Margaret F. Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (1910; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1974): 56.

posters, portraits of circus performers and cigarette girls, which are companioned by bleeding hearts, saints, angels, and heads of Christ.”¹⁵

The practice of collecting cigarette cards, which sometimes featured pictures of beautiful women (“cigarette girls”), was so common that it was described as a craze unto itself. These cards, most of which were chromolithographs, were included as premiums in packages of cigarettes and, to a lesser extent, other types of tobacco. Cigarettes were less common than pipes, cigars and chewing tobacco until the twentieth century—in many places they were considered an elite and effete method of tobacco consumption—and the distribution of cigarette cards in the 1880s was part of an enormous drive by some manufacturers to increase their popularity. By the end of the decade, when the major cigarette manufacturers formed a trust in order to end the expense of competing with each other through premiums, the consumption of cigarettes had increased sixfold over the previous nine years.¹⁶ Although cigarette cards were still issued in the 1890s, and well into the twentieth century, the “fad” of collecting them had waned by 1900.

Even though pre-rolled cigarettes were generally not the working man’s favored vehicle for tobacco in the 1880s, cigarette card-collecting was not limited to the middle class; collectors had ways of getting the cards without buying the product, and other forms of tobacco sometimes

¹⁵ Clare de Graffenried, “Need of Better Homes for Wage-Earners,” *The Forum* May 1896: 302. Also cited in Peiss 24.

¹⁶ In 1880, 409 million cigarettes were sold, and by 1889 the figure had grown to almost 2.5 billion. Dawn Schmitz, “Only Flossy High-Society Dudes Would Smoke ‘Em: Gender and Cigarette Advertising in the Nineteenth Century,” *Turning the Century: Essays in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Carol Stabile (Boulder: Westview, 2001): 100-121.

included card premiums as well. As one lithographic salesman recollected wistfully in 1898, after the cigarette card craze had passed:

Small boys clamored for them, and traded and matched and begged cigarette cards; and grown people saved them and received souvenirs and premiums on presentation of a thousand or more. Everybody wanted cigarette cards. Cigarette smokers were importuned on every block by urchins with, “please, mister, give me the cigarette card.” At cigar stores one was politely asked to leave the card if he did not want it. Little girls, as well as boys, made complete collections, and the cigarette card was in evidence everywhere.¹⁷

Because they were distributed with the intent that they would be collected, the cards were issued in sets of about twenty-five cards each—with an incredible variety of subjects, including political figures, vehicles of transportation, actresses, flags, international costumes, birds, bridges, and athletes.

Along with cigarette cards, people of all classes encountered chromo posters and show cards out on the streets of the city as well, and frequently in public establishments such as tobacconists and saloons. All kinds of stores used show cards in their window displays, which, as I mentioned in Chapter One, drew crowds of workers who stopped to look at their brightly-colored pictures. Thus, because it was encountered by workers in their rooms as well as in the street, chromo advertising was neither entire “public” or completely “private.” Indeed, as a bourgeois construct, the public/private distinction is inherently problematic for understanding

¹⁷ P.W.C., “A Necessity of Lithography,” *National Lithographer* 6.9 (1899): 1.

nineteenth-century advertising, since working-class living spaces were not really “private spaces,” frequently housing more than one family and serving as women’s income-earning workspaces. There was a continuous presence of neighbors, acquaintances, and various kinds of foot traffic—boarders, laundry customers—as well as the extension of the “home” outward to the neighborhood. Christine Stansell writes of urban laboring women:

Household work involved them constantly with the milieu outside their own four walls; lodgers, neighbors, peddlers and shopkeepers figured as prominently in their domestic routines and dramas as did husbands and children. It was in the urban neighborhoods, not the home, that the identity of working-class wives and mothers were rooted.¹⁸

There was often not an important distinction (much to the dismay of reformers) between the working-class “home” (itself a bourgeois term) and the street. Thus, even when displayed in tenements and other workers’ dwellings, chromo ads should be considered in the context of public advertising.

All forms of chromolithographic advertising thus constituted what David Henkin calls “public texts.”¹⁹ Posters pasted up on dead walls and bill-posting boards, small cards handed out in stores, calendars distributed in businesses and displayed in households—all addressed viewers at once as individuals and collectively as members of a reading/viewing *public*. Henkin writes of

¹⁸ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1960* (New York: Knopf, 1986); 41. For reformers’ perceptions of working women’s failed domesticity, see 202-203.

¹⁹ David Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1998).

the antebellum trade cards that advertised local businesses and tradesmen: “Like currency (and newspapers), these ‘circulars’ traveled from person to person in the form of numerous identical copies each implicitly referring to its wider public distribution.”²⁰ Although Henkin’s object of analysis is mainly antebellum verbal texts, his observation that the development of mass culture required countless individual yet public acts of reading and interpretation is as relevant to the late nineteenth century urban visual landscape as it is to antebellum New York’s posters, penny papers, trade cards, and nonuniform currency. In order to contribute to the formation of consumer culture, chromolithographic advertising had to address readers as both individuals and as part of the larger social body of potential consumers. It did so, by addressing a heterogeneous public that had already become accustomed to negotiating public texts through reading, and by instructing this public in the codes of the new “language” of visual advertising. These advertisements addressed each reader as an individual potential consumer, and also as one of a larger, heterogeneous “mass” of consumers-in-the-making.

Of course, just because working people read and viewed chromo advertising does not mean they could necessarily afford to buy many branded consumer products, nor that they even wanted to. But the question of working-class interest in chromo advertising—beyond the appeal of its colorful pictures—is an important one, because my overall point is that the consumerist ideologies that circulated in chromo advertising reached beyond a middle-class audience. I would suggest that if middle-class people were interested in chromo ads for what they advertised, so were working-class people. There is some difficulty parsing this out, however,

²⁰ Henkin 72.

because the “working class” (like the “middle class”) was not a monolithic group, but consisted of many class fractions with a range of incomes and dispositions toward spending. While a thorough review of the spending patterns of factory operatives compared to skilled craftsmen (for example) is not possible here, it is possible to gain a general sense of what types of branded, chromo-advertised products were actually bought by workers from a range of social positions. That is, in order to better understand the range of working-class interaction with chromo advertising, it is useful to explore how the everyday lives of workers, including the domestic labor of women, may have intersected with the types of products that were branded and heavily advertised.

Many branded products were those that even the poorest urban families needed to buy: basic necessities like thread, coffee, tea, beer, and soap. Because thread is no longer a heavily-advertised product, it is worth emphasizing the large number of cards that were issued featuring carnivalesque and sentimental images designed to promote thread both for the machine and the hand. Women of many classes had to mend and sew; while ready-made clothing for men was available by the 1880s, most women’s clothing was not mass-produced until around 1900.²¹ And women sewed at home not just for their families, but also to produce income, work that was done for the “putting-out” system. By 1880, entire garments generally weren’t sewn at home, but finishing work was done for the putting-out system—and the large number of women outworkers

²¹ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic, 1983) 64-65; 73-75.

in the needle trades had to supply thread for themselves.²² Sewing machines, too (heavily advertised on chromos), were sometimes bought by women to produce income.

Soap may have been the most heavily promoted product on chromo cards, and was one of the first branded products bought by working-class consumers. Making soap was not an option for most urban workers because its home production in large quantities required the fat leftover from slaughtering animals. Even on farms, home soap-making became rare shortly after the Civil War, when farmers commonly began to buy it from soap makers.²³ This type of craft production was gradually displaced after 1880, when branded bath soap, laundry soap, and other cleansers became widely available—and widely advertised. More than those for any other type of product, chromo soap advertisements sometimes represented working-class men and women using the product, such as one series of bath soap cards that featured men in various occupations such as painters and farmers. Each of these cards featured a slice of life, with men of various occupations discussing the merits of, or using, Dusky Diamond soap (Figure 5). The text on the back reinforced the visual/verbal message: “Made especially for the use of mechanics, engineers, firemen, machinists, foundrymen, coal miners, coal handlers, car drivers, cab drivers, farmers, printers, painters and all men who work.”

²² Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford, 1982) 78.

²³ Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1982): 6, 89, 112.



**Figure 5: Dusky Diamond soap, advertising card, undated.
Author's collection.**

Various kinds of food products were also advertised using chromolithography, but it is difficult to determine to what extent packaged food was consumed by workers. Canned food became available in the 1880s, but was relatively expensive. Families of skilled craftworkers were able to afford canned fish, fruit, vegetables, and milk when they became available, but the extent to which the majority of workers could afford canned foods before 1900 is unclear.²⁴ Even the ingredients for making bread (flour, baking powder) were not on the shopping list of the poorest urbanites, who, lacking ovens, bought bread from bakers.²⁵ Still, by 1900, even the poorest tenement dwellers had iron stoves, (which were themselves heavily advertised on chromo cards) at which point flour, baking powder and other bread-making ingredients were included on their shopping lists. As for beverages, beer—heavily advertised on barroom posters—was considered a necessity for many workers, as was coffee.²⁶

The most well-positioned workers bought the kinds of big-ticket consumer items that were also commonly advertised with chromolithography. In an 1875 survey, families of

²⁴ Harvey A. Levenstein discusses the diets of the “labor elite.” Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford, 1988): 26. Strasser writes that while cookbooks recommended can openers by the 1880s, few Americans could afford canned foods until after 1900. Strasser, *Never Done*, 23. However, Cowan finds that by the turn of the century, canned goods were a standard feature of, and were included in the weekly expenditures of, even the poorest families. Cowan 73.

²⁵ Strasser, *Never Done* 24; Levenstein 25.

²⁶ Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985): 17-19. Levenstein, 24, writes, “Coffee was the non-alcoholic beverage of choice for most workers’ families, regardless of income, and those in the lower income brackets managed to guzzle almost as much of it as those in the top brackets” in the 1880s.

English-speaking, native-born workers reported buying such heavily-advertised items as sewing machines, pianos, stoves, and insurance—even though they led lives that, as Daniel Horowitz puts it, “were hardly self-indulgent.”²⁷ These families, even those with the highest incomes—those headed by skilled laborers and with children who worked—rarely owned their own homes; they did not employ servants; they were rarely able to put aside anything for education, illness, unemployment, or old age; and they did not spend money on excursions or vacations or commercial amusements, opting instead for memberships in local, voluntary organizations.²⁸

As for immigrant workers, histories indicate that there was a great deal of variability in the consumption patterns among different national and ethnic groups. For example, Andrew Heinze suggests that while many Italians came to the United States with the explicit goal of *saving* money and returning to Europe (and did so), Eastern European Jews generally came to stay, and saw becoming consumers as the way to fit into American society.²⁹ And while some reformers at the end of the century may have criticized working-class homes as cluttered,

²⁷ Horowitz 20.

²⁸ It should be noted that membership in voluntary organizations went beyond the realm of leisure and recreation. Peiss, 18, notes that lodges, mutual benefit associations, and fraternal societies “combined recreation and camaraderie with economic services, including protection against sickness, disability, and financial emergencies.”

²⁹ Heinze, “From Scarcity to Abundance” 190-206.

tasteless, and even un-American, immigrant workers felt that their copious display of mass-produced objects was a marker of their acculturation.³⁰

So, while chromo ads may have been directed primarily at the small middle-class of potential consumers, many working-class people had reason to care about them and their advertising messages. Workers sought out, collected, and made time to stop and look at chromo ads. And while most of the ads depicted scenes of middle-class or leisured life, belief in social mobility may have allowed working people to identify with the scenes of consumption depicted. Moreover, the representations of working-class life that appeared on chromolithographed cards placed its members squarely within the realm of consumption. Thus, white, native-born working-class women and men were included in representations of the consuming “class.”

But inclusion must be defined, in part, by exclusion, a point that is best illustrated by comparison to representations of African Americans. Black stereotypes in chromolithographic advertising, drawn from a range of sources including sentimental literature and blackface minstrelsy, made no room for African Americans in the burgeoning consumer culture. These representations constituted part of a larger post-Reconstruction project of constructing racial difference, and equating whiteness with American national identity and citizenship.³¹

³⁰ The Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival movement, aesthetic movements that rejected the cluttered and the ornate, were associated with traditional American values. Cohen 770.

³¹ One estimate puts the percentage of advertising cards with some kind of “ethnic” imagery at between thirty and forty percent, of which the majority depicted African Americans or Native Americans. See Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, “Advertising Race/Raceing Advertising: The Feminine Consumer(-Nation), 1876-1900,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23 (1997): 141. Many different ethnic stereotypes and caricatures were evident in chromo advertising, as well as other popular culture, and all of them factored into the development of

2.3 “Whiteness”

The decades following the Civil War and Reconstruction, one of the most violent and unstable times in U.S. history for African Americans, were crucial for the formation of racial ideologies. Before the war, race and citizenship had been largely subsumed under the slave/not-slave dichotomy; however, with the freeing of the slaves and the end of the war, a new definition of citizenship became necessary. While powerful whites in the North and the South fought over control of the labor and the votes of ex-slaves, newly freed men and women sought to forge local alliances and work toward the expansion of their rights, with the hope of full citizenship. However, the legacy of North-South conflicts, combined with widespread economic upheavals, worked against their efforts.³²

With the Compromise of 1877 and the end of Reconstruction, Northern troops agreed to withdraw from the South in an effort at national reconciliation. Historian C. Van Woodward argues that with the Compromise whites closed ranks around race and began to turn African

racial categorizations as they relate to consumer culture. However, a complete analysis of all of the Chinese, American Indian, Irish, French, Jewish, Scandinavian, Middle-Eastern and German types would require an entire volume in itself (and would be a worthy subject of one), because each individual type deserves its own careful analysis. My decision to concentrate on African-American types is based upon both their omnipresence (I believe they were somewhat more common even than Native American types), and the fact that they survived, in some form, into twentieth century advertising and brand symbols—again, even more commonly than did Native American types. However, representations of Chinese and Chinese-American men as utterly failed consumers, and the implications of this for the construction of whiteness, would be a particularly fruitful topic of further research.

³² Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998) 5-6.

Americans into symbols of sectional strife. The end of Reconstruction thus marks a major turning point in the growth of racism in the United States:

The acquiescence of Northern liberalism in the Compromise of 1877 defined the beginning, but not the ultimate extent, of the liberal retreat on the race issue. The Compromise merely left the freedman to the custody of the conservative Redeemers upon their pledge that they would protect him in his constitutional rights. But as these pledges were forgotten or violated and the South veered toward proscription and extremism, Northern opinion shifted to the right, keeping pace with the South, conceding point after point, so that at no time were the sections very far apart on race policy.³³

African Americans became convenient scapegoats for the nation's problems, and over the next two decades members of the Northern white liberal establishment—not to be outdone by Southern racists—commonly declared “the Negro” inferior, shiftless, and unfit to participate in “white man's civilization.” While relatively informal practices of racism and segregation reigned in the North, Jim Crow segregation gradually became codified throughout the South, and the 1880s and 1890s saw the greatest period of lynching and other violence against African Americans in U.S. history. A series of U.S. Supreme Court rulings in these years also legitimized segregationist social practices and policies.³⁴

³³ C. Van Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford, 1974) 70.

³⁴ Woodward 43, 69-72. One of the most important of these rulings was the Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which found Louisiana's law segregating streetcars to be constitutional.

These changes in race relations were reflected and reinforced across a wide range of popular cultural forms, many of which represented African Americans as inferior and unworthy of citizenship.³⁵ Over six hundred “coon” songs with such titles as “All Coons Look Alike to Me” were written in the 1890s, with sheet-music covers that pictured the genre’s sentiments: black men were comic, lazy, simple, happy, and pre-industrial. In addition to songs and songsheets, racialized representations were also familiar from the minstrel stage, greeting cards, adult literature, children’s books, cartoons, and tin and ceramic collectibles. In the wake of Reconstruction, the dehumanization of African Americans, as attested to by the escalation of lynching and other violence, found its illustrative counterpart in the “coarse, grotesque caricatures” which came to dominate popular culture.³⁶ Comic black types became the most common “ethnic” characters, the Negro even edging out the Irishman as the most frequently targeted object of ridicule by the 1890s.

Literature was another source of African American characterizations. After the federal government’s repudiation of Reconstruction and the repeal of the Civil Rights Acts came a spate of literature recounting a mythic plantation past, the most well-known of which may be Joel Chandler Harris’s *Uncle Remus* stories, in which a black slave/ex-slave recounts the tales of life

³⁵ For general overviews of African American types in late-nineteenth-century mass media and culture, I have relied on: J. Stanley Lemons, “Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920,” *American Quarterly* 29 (1977): 102-9; Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994): xiv-50; James H. Dormon, “Ethnic Stereotyping in American Popular Culture: The Depiction of American Ethnics in the Cartoon Periodicals of the Gilded Age,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 30 (1985): 489-507; and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992): 152-156.

³⁶ Lemons 104.

on the plantation. In these tales, the “Old South” was an idealized world in which all white people had contented, self-sacrificing black servants or slaves. This myth of the “Old South” enabled the creation of the complementary “New South” myth, which would combine these social relations with an industrializing economy.³⁷

These myths, prevalent in both the North and the South, helped to form the basis for a set of visual representations in chromo advertising in which African Americans were flattened out into one-dimensional servants, not consumers in their own right, but eager to serve white consumers. In advertising drawn from popular culture such as comics and plantation literature, such types as the lazy Sambo, the nurturing Mammy, the subservient Uncle Tom, the dandified Zip Coon, and the stupid pickaninny worked not just to identify blacks as the racial Other, but specifically to define that Other as outside of both appropriate consumption and American citizenship. Advertising chromos commonly represented black men in the grossest demeaning imagery: chicken-stealing, watermelon-eating characters with big ears, big mouths, oversized hands and feet, and sloping foreheads. Most of these chromos characterized African Americans as attempting, but failing miserably, to imitate white middle-class consumption and to understand recent technological developments. Such representations were structured to assure white viewers that, despite the abolition of slavery, blacks would have no part in the white world of consumer capitalism. They addressed white “fears of upwardly mobile blacks by insisting that African Americans could never integrate into middle-class society.”³⁸

³⁷ Hale 52-55; Goings 8-10.

³⁸ Hale 157.

Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, focusing on images of women in chromo advertising cards, notes the prevalence of iconography in which black women serve as counterparts to middle-class white women in ways that specifically exclude them not only from “consuming domesticity” but also from “civilized nationhood.”³⁹ She notes that in many ads, black women serve in relation to white women either as foils, regressive types who accomplish tasks “the old way” instead of the modern white consumer’s “new way,” or mirrors, which redeem consumer culture through nostalgic plantation images of black women working with raw materials—again, in contrast to white women’s use of finished consumer products. She writes:

[T]he trade card’s pairings of black domestic labor and white (consuming) domesticity consistently constitute its primary iconography. This prevalent pairing can be attributed, in part, to the trade card’s representational participation in a larger national discourse—of plantation literature, the visual arts, and politics—mythologizing antebellum slavery as a more coherent, tranquil era “lost” to the uncertainties and upheavals of postwar urbanism, industrialism, and commercialization.⁴⁰

Whether as foils or mirrors, black women were cast outside of the world of consumption in a set of visual representations that drew from, and contributed to, the larger national project of racial exclusion.

³⁹ Mehaffy 152.

⁴⁰ Mehaffy 142.

Mehaffy notes that there was one stock character that falls outside of her foil/mirror binary: the savvy black maid who gave sensible advice to the missus on what cleaning products are best.⁴¹ Mehaffy attributes this exception to the social tensions of early commodity culture, with advertisers not being sure how black maids should be represented. To be sure, racial representations, just like every other aspect of chromo advertising, were far from stable. But the point I would emphasize is that while the savvy maid did not serve as either a foil or a mirror for the white consumer, she was still denied access to the nation of consumer-citizens by virtue of being a domestic servant. Black servant types (or Irish ones, for that matter) in advertising were not truly consumers: they were buying nothing for themselves and had no evident home or family of their own.

Even when black women, men, or children were represented apart from their relations to white women, blackness was at once distinguished and excluded from the realm of consumer-citizenship in chromo advertising. Since the categories of whiteness, citizenship, and consumption were collapsed even in their very formation, the exclusion of African Americans from any one of them meant their exclusion from every one of them. In chromo soap ads, the immutability of skin color was repeatedly emphasized, and black attempts at consumption ridiculed. A typical ad showed a Mammy type trying to scrub the black off a boy's skin, while the written copy emphasized the fact that, no matter how good the product, it couldn't possibly lighten the skin color of a Negro and bring him into the fold of consumer-nationhood (Figure 6).

⁴¹ Mehaffy 150.



Figure 6: Pearline soap, advertising card with mammy type, undated.
Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

But jabs at the problematic of black *citizenship* could be played equally well to deny black inclusion. Invoking references to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, cards used humor and ridicule to cast African Americans as mindless consumers, *and non-citizens* (Figure 7).⁴² Generally speaking, in chromo ads only the native-born of Northern European descent could consistently embody the perfection of white consuming nationhood. As Hale puts it, “Whiteness became the homogenizing ground of the American mass market.”⁴³ So

⁴² Lemons 105. These amendments had promised, in part, to grant citizenship and voting rights to newly freed black men, but failed to do so.

⁴³ Hale 168.



Figure 7: Magnolia ham, advertising card, undated.

**Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.**

although representations of African Americans were far from stable, a distinct pattern emerges in which blackness was defined as inconsistent with consumer identity. Because race was constructed as an identifiable, immutable, salient characteristic, representations of any failed black consumption or citizenship served the twin projects of disfranchisement and expulsion from consumer society. And although representations of whites that mark them as working class

were not extremely common, they were not exclusionary: the ideal of class mobility served to suggest the possibility of consumption. Carla Willard notes that, because commodity marketing associated blackness with pre-industrial, from-scratch home production, “advertising’s display of modern consumer lifestyles could thus appear more accessible to even working-class white women, simply because ‘leisure’ and elegant ‘bright women’ were consistently styled as white.”⁴⁴

The express exclusion of African Americans from the fold of consumer-citizenship worked to define a white consumer caste across class boundaries. This was part of a larger socio-cultural project of defining whiteness, by no means a natural or biological category, in nineteenth-century America. Blackface minstrelsy, an enormously popular cultural form in the antebellum North, is the site scholars have often noted for the making of a white working-class identity; and while I do not want to gloss over the enormous differences between it and chromos as a cultural form, I also do not want to overlook the continuities. The racial types found on advertising cards of the 1880s, while different in form and part of a very different political and cultural climate than antebellum minstrelsy, still served as part of a continuing project of defining working-class whiteness against blackness through white representation of African Americans.

Minstrelsy was an extremely complex phenomenon involving at once white working-class identification with black culture and the attempt to define itself against it, “creating notions

⁴⁴ Carla Willard, “Nation’s Maid: Realizing Jemima, Segregation Policy, and the Dark Side of Consumer Progress, 1880-96,” *Rethinking Marxism* 10.4 (1998): 2.

of white working-classness and blackness at one and the same time.”⁴⁵ In the industrializing North, white workers struggled against the developing exploitative system of labor, likening it to “wage slavery;” yet, rather than identifying with black Southern slaves, they called for “free labor” and expressly attempted to distinguish themselves from black slaves, in part through blackface performance:

If languages of class hinged on the quite vague definition of white workers as “not slaves,” the hugely popular cult of blackface likewise developed by counterpoint. Whatever his attraction, the performers and audience knew that they were *not* the Black dandy personified by Zip Coon. Nor were they the sentimentalized and appealing preindustrial slave Jim Crow.⁴⁶

Although the ultimate enemy was capitalism, white working-class frustration was often directed at African Americans. Indeed, for the large population of Irish immigrants, whose racial identity had been problematic, blackface served as an agent of acculturation into dominant white American culture through a displacement of ethnic Otherness onto black bodies.⁴⁷ David Roediger argues that the cultural idea of blackness that native-born and Irish workers constructed through performance was a projection of their own struggle with the work-discipline that was part of the process of industrialization:

⁴⁵ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford, 1993): 69.

⁴⁶ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991): 116.

⁴⁷ Lott 96.

[T]he white working class, disciplined and made anxious by fear of dependency, began during its formation to construct an image of the Black population as “other” – as embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed for. This logic had particular attractions for Irish-American immigrant workers, even as the “whiteness” of these very workers was under dispute.⁴⁸

Chromo advertising was part of the legacy of blackface. Because it thrived at a key historical moment for the formation of racial ideologies, and it promoted the products of industrialization, it served as a critical site in the process of articulating whiteness to consumption by exploiting representations of African Americans as preindustrial and ridiculous, doing things “the old way.” If the white working class had come to define itself against African Americans (whether in spite of or because of an identification with and appreciation of black culture) through minstrelsy, chromo ads may have contributed to the construction of failed consumption as nonwhite and un-American.

The way in which racialized imagery in chromo advertising may have hailed working-class whites as consumers is perhaps best understood when contrasted with that in magazine advertising of the 1890s, a time period that overlapped with chromo ads. While the creators of magazine ads drew from the visual field that included chromo ads, their assumed audience of

⁴⁸ Roediger 14. Of course, chromo ads do not comprise a seamless narrative of black/white difference; rather, they seem to suggest an emerging discourse of racial difference as it played out in relation to a burgeoning commodity culture. The positions of Irish and other ethnic types suggested an unstable relation to consuming white nationhood that persisted well into the twentieth century.

middle-class consumers is evident. In magazines, racial imagery was less prevalent and largely consisted of loyal servants, most commonly characters representing brands such as Cream of Wheat and Aunt Jemima (although the pickinanny stereotype was in evidence as well). Gentle, nonthreatening “uncles,” derived from sentimentalist plantation novels, dominated in magazines because they fit easily into scenes of white middle-class domesticity that dominated that medium in the 1890s. These pictures were produced by advertising agencies that began in that decade to target audiences and develop strategies for marketing to the small but lucrative class of professionals and managers.⁴⁹ In contrast, as I have discussed, chromo advertising’s relatively unrationalized system of production and distribution resulted in visual advertising images that reached beyond the middle class, with pictures that may have contributed to a nascent consumer identity among white working-class men and women. Hence, although a wide range of black types were in evidence in chromo ads, in magazines the chicken-stealing, watermelon-eating Sambo quickly faded away to be almost entirely replaced with Uncle Tom, a nonthreatening servant figure that may have been seen as comforting to middle class consumers.⁵⁰

Of course, chromo representations of African Americans as noncitizens and failed consumers were only part of the larger set of social practices, representations and conventions that problematized, but did not erase, black consumption in the late nineteenth century. Jim

⁴⁹ Ohmann 118-218.

⁵⁰ Carla Willard, “Conspicuous Whiteness: The New Woman, the Old Negro, and the Vanishing Past of Early Brand Advertising,” *Turning the Century: Essays in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Carol Stabile (Boulder: Westview, 2000): 206. Willard may overstate the differences between magazine and chromo advertising. She also makes the common conflation of “brand advertising” with magazine advertising, a conflation I take issue with, particularly in Chapter Three.

Crow segregation created arenas for the perpetual re-enactment of, and resistance to, the negation of black consumption. As Hale writes of the several decades beginning in the 1880s:

Advertising created an increasingly national market in part through the circulation of black imagery that figured the implied consumer as white. Yet consumer culture created spaces—from railroads to general stores and gas stations to the restaurants, movie theaters, and more specialized stores of the growing towns—in which African Americans could challenge segregation, both explicitly and implicitly.⁵¹

The middle-class African Americans who defied segregationist practices on railroad cars did so under the premise that their first-class ticket entitled them to the same accommodations as any first-class passenger. “The marketplace, they asserted, would not join the polling place as a potential arena of racial exclusion.”⁵² So while white general-store proprietors and landowners paternalistically controlled black consumption, storekeepers’ dependence on their black customers necessitated that general stores be, to a large extent, integrated. As a result, African Americans may have felt more comfortable at the store than at the courthouse or polling place (an extremely limited statement, to be sure).⁵³ While Jim Crow laws did cause the realization of the kinds of representations of failed black consumer-citizenship that filled chromo advertising,

⁵¹ Hale 125.

⁵² Hale 128.

⁵³ Hale 172-173.

black defiance and the material necessity of black consumption confronted the white dream of a pale, homogenous consumer-nation on a contested terrain.

2.4 Abstraction

As I have already discussed, images of African-Americans in chromo advertising should be understood in relation to racial types that circulated in cultural forms such as vaudeville, cartoons, popular music, and sentimental literature. These types and genres would have been familiar to members of many classes and social groups, and, as I have argued, were a site of white class mediation and racial Othering. Thus, when analyzing images of white, middle-class consumption, as I will do shortly, it is important to consider them intertextually, in that they formed part of a set of visual images in which blackness was constructed and placed outside of consumption. In other words, images of white consumers must be considered in relation to the developing racial ideologies that formed part of their socio-historical and visual contexts.

As I have suggested in the prior discussion about racial representations in chromo advertising, designers drew from the various common cultural forms with which they were familiar and adept, and with which audiences would have been familiar as well. Given that a number of designers of advertising during the chromo era were fine-artists, a significant proportion of the resulting ads were influenced by the various styles of painting that were widely reproduced and circulated. Genre paintings and their chromolithographic reproductions, familiar

primarily to the middle class but also the working class to some extent, were clear influences.⁵⁴

While incorporating elements of other styles such as portraiture, still life, and landscape, genre painting had certain conventions of its own: it generally represented human figures, as types rather than identifiable individuals, engaging in commonplace activities. The vernacular of genre was realism, and the painter included the details of setting and clothing that were considered typical for the figures' social position:

A genre painting portrays the labors, pleasures and foibles of anonymous people in the course of daily work and leisure. There should be no incongruity, and every incident should be typical: that is, characteristic of the time, the place, the social class, the age of the participants and their vocations, down to the last details of clothing, expressions, accessories and background.⁵⁵

Although the aesthetic style was realism, the point of a genre painting was not to depict reality, but to elicit an emotional response, commonly tenderness, nostalgia, longing, or sympathy, to the characters or the scene depicted.

Sentimental genre paintings were ideological constructions that perpetuated cultural myths.⁵⁶ With few exceptions, for example, black individuals were commonly painted

⁵⁴ Frances Couvares discusses the appreciation for genre painting by working-class Pittsburghers. See Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture In an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984): 37-38.

⁵⁵ Hermann Warner Williams, Jr., *Mirror to the American Past, A Survey of American Genre Painting: 1750-1900*. (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973): 16.

⁵⁶ Patricia Hills, *The Painters' America: Rural and Urban Life, 1810-1910*, (New York: Praeger, 1974): 1-2.

as happy and subservient; and, particularly after the Civil War, urban scenes of working-class people generally elided the harsh social conditions and exploitation of the urban working class. (This is perhaps best understood in relation to journalism and photography, which in a few cases took a different approach, trying to bring forth perceived injustices.) In general, workers were represented as “stalwart and contented with their lot,” a device that may have been intended to elicit at once sympathy and complacency on the part of the pictures’ presumed middle-class audience.⁵⁷ Many genre paintings featured happy children in rustic settings, which, far from being honest depictions of rural childhood, were part of the gradual construction among the Victorian middle class of childhood as a virtuous stage of life. While antebellum pictures told moralistic tales about children tempted by vice, the later trend was to depict country childhood as a golden time, in which being a little bit naughty was a healthy byproduct of the freedom children required. Sarah Burns argues that the ideological function of such representations of mythic “barefoot boys and other country children” was to gloss over the ugly realities of urban, working class childhood: homelessness, tenement conditions, crushing poverty and child labor.⁵⁸

Genre painters took human figures as their primary subjects, rather than objects or nature (in contrast to still lifes or landscapes), and depicted them as broadly-painted types rather than recognizable individuals (in contrast to portraits), and pictured them participating in commonplace activities rather than specific, remarkable events (in contrast to history paintings).

⁵⁷ Williams 218.

⁵⁸ Sarah Burns, “Barefoot Boys and Other Country Children: Sentiment and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American Art,” *American Art Journal* 20 (1988): 24-50. While Burns focuses on genre’s effacement of urban conditions, it may be noted that it certainly did the same in regard to the harsh realities of rural life.

Thus, these pictures not only depicted scenes from everyday life, but in such an abstract, generalized way that they could represent a scene from “anyone’s” life, in any place, on any day. Titles such as “Barefoot Boy” are indicative of this abstraction, referring not to any particular, identifiable boy, but rather to the mythic archetype of the free, healthy, wholesome, rural boy.

While few chromo cards, calendars or posters conformed entirely to the conventions of genre, its influence is reflected in chromo ads’ tendency to picture ordinary people as broadly-defined types in the course of everyday activity and in scenes that were sentimental. Thus, genre painting was most likely one of the cultural influences contributing to the sort of abstractness that came to be a key component of brand advertising. Michael Schudson, writing about late twentieth-century visual brand advertising, notes that its characters are broadly-painted types, rather than individuals with names and particular, identifiable relations to the world and other characters (as in, say, fiction or film). In doing so, it adheres to a “rule of abstractness” that is necessary to *national brand* advertising, which relies upon abstract relations: between, on the one hand, companies whose products are represented by brands, and, on the other, demographic groups of potential consumers. Schudson argues that the set of aesthetic conventions marked by abstractness, which he deems *capitalist realism*, serves, like socialist realism (did) in the Soviet Union, to promote and perpetuate the prevailing economic system—in this case capitalism—by flattening out reality and visually creating situations in which consumption serves as the way to solve problems and experience emotions.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic, 1984): 209-233.

Thus, by drawing upon and modifying the conventions of genre painting to create scenes from the “everyday life” of no one in particular—and thus everyone who can recognize themselves in the picture—chromolithographic advertising contributed to the development of a visual language uniquely suited not only to the promotion of particular brands, but also to the propulsion of an economic system based upon mass consumption. It was not only able to address its audience as members of social groups defined by age, gender and class (demographic groups), but also to employ emotions in the service of eliciting identification from viewers and promoting branded merchandise. “The genre painting’s source of strength is the rapport between seer and seen, calling for the establishment of a bond of sympathy—based on a familiar response to the human situation presented.”⁶⁰ The same is true of brand advertising.

In genre, emotions were often tapped through nostalgia, a longing for a real or imagined past. Depicting a “vanishing” way of life—rural scenes, old people—was genre’s response to the problems of industrialization.⁶¹ Similarly, advertising chromos were structured in such a way as to employ nostalgia to address consumers’ potential ambivalence toward the forces that made consumer culture possible: industrialization and urbanization. Drawing upon the conventions of genre, chromo ads often inserted branded, packaged products into idealized, tender, nostalgic scenes of typical people engaging in commonplace activities. In the Hires advertising card, the scene is of middle-class domestic refinement, a slice of life in which a woman reading the newspaper is interrupted by her daughter, entering from the pastoral scene

⁶⁰ Williams 17.

⁶¹ Hill 80.

outside to introduce her mother to the packaged consumer product, Hires Root Beer (Figure 4). The influence of the aesthetic movement, with its attention to bringing the beauty of nature into everyday life, is suggested by the Japanese print in the background; thus, the picture depicts a present that is idyllic because it is thoroughly “modern,” yet infused with the values of pre-industrial life. Finally, the picture was structured to harness feelings through the use of mother-child dyad, which carried a particularly strong emotional valence in the sentimental visual economy of the nineteenth century.

2.5 Children

Perhaps in part due to their perceived uses for eliciting emotion, white children populated perhaps the majority of chromo ads, for all types of products—soap, thread, canned food. But their presence in the ads is significant as well for related reason: it suggests a close relation between changing notions of childhood and the development of consumer culture. Beginning by the 1830s, as the middle-class grew, the dominant view of children’s role began to change; they ceased being regarded as primarily economic assets and came to be appreciated mainly in emotional terms. With the growth of industrialization and the ideology of “separate spheres,” which created the ideal of a middle-class home emptied of economic activity and recast as a place of rest and sanctuary presided over by women, childrearing became the province of women and the mother-child bond came to be valorized.⁶² By the end of the century, the idea among the

⁶² Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason, *Childhood in America* (New York: New York UP, 2000): 2-5.

middle class that children were emotional assets rather than productive members of the family had firmly taken hold.

Alongside these economic changes came theological shifts. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, Enlightenment views of children began to compete with Calvinist beliefs in the innate depravity of infants, and by the Civil War some popular literature began to articulate a complete rejection of children's innate tendencies to wickedness. Again, this change occurred just when changing notions of middle class women as guardians of moral virtue in the home began to take hold; authoritarian and repressive childrearing began to give way to advice that focused on the tender, kind care and moral guidance of the mother. By the 1850s, the idea of childrens' inherent virtue, their innate potential to be transformed into angels—given the proper care and feeding—was specifically articulated.⁶³ As Paula S. Fass and Mary Ann Mason write, “The more romantic notions of the early nineteenth century became the basis for the sentimentalization of childhood, in which sweetly innocent children were made newly lovable and vulnerable, and opened up play as a whole new arena for child life.”⁶⁴

The new child-focused middle-class family with its emphasis on playful, nonproductive children, combined with the emergence of mass-marketing, meant that manufactured children's toys became increasingly common in the late nineteenth century. There was a growing belief that childhood should be a time not only of preparation for adult roles, but also of experimentation and fantasy. Although play ideally remained an educational endeavor, it became increasingly

⁶³ Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1968): 11-23.

⁶⁴ Fass and Mason 4.

more about stimulating the imagination and free activity.⁶⁵ Another purpose of toys among the growing middle class was to compensate for the loneliness children experienced as families grew smaller and children were kept within the confines of the home out of fear of the rowdiness and uncontrollability of children's street society. Hence, as Gary Cross notes, "Children were expected to learn the rational culture of self-control in the isolation of the nursery, while they were also encouraged to enjoy the spontaneity and the pleasures of youth," and toys were



Figure 8: Pearl line soap, advertising card with young child, 1891.
Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁵ Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Harvard: Cambridge, 1997): 26-36.

brought in to resolve the contradiction: “Toys were both vehicles to introduce the ‘real world’ and fantasy objects shut off from that world in the child’s ‘secret garden.’”⁶⁶

The sweet, innocent, and playful child made her debut on chromo advertising by the early 1880s. Children were everywhere in chromo ads, sometimes engaged in domestic labor, but more often at play, either with toys or with packaged products that seem to “stand in” for toys: where you would expect a child to be interacting with toys, they are using brand packages. These are sometimes plausible scenarios, such as children using soap boxes as building blocks, and sometimes magical ones, such as a soap package that doubles as a jack-in-the-box (Figure 8). If, I have suggested above, toys in the late nineteenth century were supposed to mediate between opposing values—education and fantasy—perhaps the branded product is here similarly brought in as a mediator to solve one of the contradictions of consumer-culture ideology, namely that products are practical objects that meet “real” needs for survival, but they are also supposed to be fantastical, heroic means for delivering consumers from social problems (like loneliness) through the private act of consumption. Through the rational and controlled act of buying branded products, the consumer could both meet her needs and at the same time be invited to indulge in the fantasy that she had improved her life in a profound way by having made the right brand choices. Like toys in the nineteenth century, products in brand advertisements were practical as well as fantastical objects that performed their magic in the privacy of the bourgeois home.

⁶⁶ Cross 37.

But there is yet another way in which white children functioned ideologically in chromo ads. Children were not only represented as playful in chromo advertising, but also as little consumers, populating general-store interiors and exteriors, indulging in packaged foods, and incessantly interacting with branded products. This pattern, coupled with the fact that children were associated with play and fantasy rather than work in middle class culture, contributed to the emptying of productivity from the consumptive world represented in chromo advertising. Representations of “non-productive” white children thus complemented images of “non-consumerist” African Americans, creating an imaginary world in which consumers and producers exist in separate realms.

2.6 Women

In representations of women’s domestic labor, the social relations of production were similarly effaced by consumption, and again the sentimentalist vernacular was a key mechanism by which this was accomplished. Women from a range of social positions may have found points of identification in sentimental ads. Although most of the scholarly work on sentimentalism has focused on domestic novels, which are associated with women of the middle class, fiction that catered to the working-class market was also sentimentalist. The 1870s brought a spate of cheap fiction and melodramatic stage productions featuring factory-girl heroines, and sentimental songs and stories were used by workers and middle-class reformers alike.⁶⁷ Chromo ads exploited this pattern, as exemplified by the use by a sewing machine company of Thomas Hood’s “Song of

⁶⁷ Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987) 186.

the Shirt.” In chromolithographed advertising cards and booklets that spanned at least thirteen years, the New Home sewing machine company used the heart-wrenching verse, which told the tale of the intensely exploitative conditions a woman faced as an outworker in the needle trades. An advertising card produced in 1880 and a booklet printed in 1893 both provided illustrations for the verse that had long been a sensation in both the U.S. and Britain, and was used by workers and reformers to publicize workers’ plight.⁶⁸ The verse began:



Figure 9: New Home sewing machines, advertising booklet final page (detail), undated.

**Warsaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.**

⁶⁸ Christine Stansell, “The Origins of the Sweatshop: Women and Early Industrialization in New York City,” *Working Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (Urbana: Illinois UP, 1983) 90-91. See also Stansell, *City of Women*, 151-153. Stansell argues that in the context of the antebellum labor reform movement, the “Song of the Shirt” was used to publicize the plight of working women in New York City, but often was invoked by reformers and male trade unionists whose approach was paternalistic and saw women as they were represented in the song: as victims. According to Stansell, the sentimental image of the poor but virtuous workingwoman as victim may have helped to reformers to understand and publicize the particular problems outworkers faced as women laborers; however, it relied upon a particular notion of a middle-class construction of womanhood that foreclosed workingwomen’s ability to articulate their concerns from their own perspective.

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags
Plying her needle and thread.
Stitch-stitch-stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sang the “Song of the Shirt.”

In the New Home booklet’s pictures, page after page, the needleworker sat slumped over her piecework, at times sobbing. The departure from the song’s former use by labor reformers came on the last page: here salvation arrived in the form of consumption rather than workers’ solidarity or even charity. A final verse was added for the sake of the advertisement: “There’s no more need for grief/Or tears to hinder the hand...My ‘New Home,’ it runs with ease/As the ‘Song of the Shirt’ I sing.” (Figure 9). There was an evident link here between consumption and the construction of gender. While in the first picture, the seamstress was poor, in “unwomanly” rags, by the end, having consumed properly, her own clothes became miraculously transformed and she was suddenly propelled into the ranks of legible gender. A potted plant appearing in the background signified her ability to produce a tasteful home. The advertisement deployed a well-known sentimental tale, its drama drawn from deplorable labor conditions, as a mechanism to tap emotions in the service of selling a consumer product—rather than in the service of labor reform. At the same time, it worked toward the gendering of the consuming subject, as mediated through consumption.

The use of sentimentalism to forge a link between femininity and consumption would not have been new to many viewers of chromo cards in the 1880s, by which time sentimentalism had come to be feminized and associated with both mass culture and an overindulgence in emotion. Previously, in the mid-eighteenth century, the word *sentimental* had been closely related to *sensibility*; thus, sentimental was a broad concept with the positive associations of cleverness, agreeability, or a conscious openness to feelings. However, a century later, sentimentalism had broken off its close association with sensibility, and sentimentalism came to mean *too much* feeling, an excessive indulgence of emotions.⁶⁹ Beginning in 1860, but more commonly in the 1870s and 1880s, literary reviewers began using terms such as “maudlin” and “mawkish” to describe sentimental novels. They also came to define sensationalism and sentimentalism against realism, equating the former with food and medicine, and the latter two with addictive substances: alcohol, opiates. Since sentimentalism was associated with women readers and authors, the charge of addiction linked women’s culture with mass culture, which, these critics suggested, benefited from the public’s “dependency” on the manipulation of emotion.⁷⁰

Hence, chromo advertising circulated when sentimentalism was becoming feminized, denigrated, and linked to “addiction” and hence mass culture. By making such extensive use of sentimentalist imagery, chromo ads were part of a long process of articulating femininity to mass/consumer culture, a link that had earlier been made in the realm of literature. In *The*

⁶⁹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford, 1983) 281-282.

⁷⁰ Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 94-96; 121-2; 146.

Feminization of American Culture, Ann Douglas argues that women's societal role as consumer was forged in the first half of the nineteenth century, in part through the domestic novel. For Northeastern women who were confined to the home and compelled to enact the new domestic feminine ideal of true womanhood, the domestic novel served as an antidote to boredom and seclusion. From the 1840s to the 1880s these books were, Douglas argues, extremely pervasive and cloyingly sentimental celebrations of consumption. And, as the decades wore on and the virtuous and well-dressed heroines became increasingly focused on shopping, the figure of the woman consumer became indispensable. As a result, the ideal middle-class woman became "both a saint and a consumer."⁷¹

Lori Merish, in *Sentimental Materialism*, argues that in domestic fiction and advice literature, civility and refinement were located in the sentimentalized personal attachment to household goods, thus constituting the sentimental subject in taste.⁷² Moreover, she argues, sentimental novels were filled with vivid descriptions of domestic material culture in which personal possessions were endowed with "characterological import":

This delineation of domesticity as a regenerative, spiritually *animating* space is especially apparent in these novel's characteristic and often-noted depictions of domestic animism: it is precisely when objects cross the threshold from outside to

⁷¹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977) 44-79; 253-256.

⁷² Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) 17.

inside, and enter the humanizing realm of the home, that they are represented as having *feelings* rather than as inanimate “things”⁷³

Merish argues that sentimentalism in literature thus contributed to a middle-class investment in material objects, thereby legitimizing the expansion of consumer culture.

Like domestic fiction, chromo advertising imbued household goods with personalities, thus contributing to the construction of a domestic, feminine, consuming subject. But there is a crucial distinction between novels and advertisements: the latter added the component of branding. National advertising represented “personal” relationships with *brands*, rather than just generic objects. In chromo ads, brands gained personalities, often heroic and/or angelic ones. One advertising card sentimentally depicted a woman on wash day. “Will the drudgery of wash day ever cease?” she asks. “Yes woman,” answers one of two cherubs who have flown to her rescue carrying packages of soap, “when you use Pearline” (Figure 3). While the picture and dialogue fully communicated the idea of salvation through proper brand choices, the reverse text reinforced the message by adding facts and figures: Pearline reduces the labor of washday by “fully one half.”

Women from a range of class positions would have identified with the sentimental subject in this ad. Indeed, the dreaded washday became increasingly difficult for women throughout the nineteenth century, in part due to the advent of more cotton clothing to replace linen and wool: cotton was considered easier to clean, so it was expected to be cleaner. As Cowan notes, “In the diaries and letters of nineteenth-century women, laundering appears, for the

⁷³ Merish 143.

first time, as a weekly—and a dreaded—chore.”⁷⁴ Because laundry was heavy labor, which included hauling water—one complete wash required fifty gallons, or 400 pounds, of water—as well as rubbing, wringing and ironing, it was not a chore given to small children. And because industrialization and the “separate spheres” ideology combined to create a split between unpaid domestic labor and wage labor, men had no part in it; hauling water had become women’s work alone. Because women sought to relieve themselves of the labor of washing clothes whenever possible, laundresses were the most common type of domestic laborer, whether the work was done “in” or “out.” Thus, women who worked as domestic servants or laundresses, as well as women who could not afford help, were entirely responsible for this backbreaking labor.

This laundry soap advertisement, then, exploited a miserable social reality experienced by most women, one that was born out of the sexual division of labor and the erasure of the economic value of domestic chores, and recast it as a private problem to be solved by making individual brand choices. With its representation of a virtuous, suffering woman rescued by the brand, it was structured to sentimentally elicit pathos and identification—then offer a miraculous solution to the problem of women’s ever-increasing unpaid domestic labor. Like the New Home booklet mentioned earlier—and like so much chromolithographic advertising—it evoked sympathy for those plagued by social ills, and offered consumption as the heroic savior for virtuous sufferers. While few chromo ads are as explicit as this one, a very large number of them associated brands with angels, signifiers of virtue and salvation.

⁷⁴ Cowan 65. Laundry is but one example of the ratcheting up of standards that, Cowan argues, increased women’s domestic labor during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For a detailed account of the drudgery of washday, see also Strasser, *Never Done* 104-124.

2.7 Conclusion

It is not possible to determine precisely how Victorian symbols such as angels functioned in chromo advertising, nor to know the precise impact of its proliferation on developing consumer identities; one can only surmise by examining how these ads positioned the viewer, taking the socio-historical context into consideration. It is particularly tricky to consider how working-class people may have responded, for example, to representations of leisured childhood that in no way reflected their own lives or values. However, I have proposed that by advertising the types of products working people desired and needed, in a form that was part of their everyday lives, chromolithographic advertising hailed white viewers as consumers to some extent regardless of class position. Hence, chromo advertising was one possible component in the developing formation of consumer identities, not only among the middle classes of professionals and managers, but also among many men and women who were skilled and unskilled craftworkers, clerks, outworkers, domestic workers, and factory operatives.

I have also tried to show that through its visual structures and imagery, a significant portion of chromo advertising contributed to the conceptual elevation of consumption as the central, mediating activity of existence, while it defined consumption as coextensive with whiteness and citizenship. In chromo ads, African Americans were denied at once as legible consumers and as citizens, thus excluding them from the developing imaginary “consumer-nation” and contributing to the formulation of consumer identity as coextensive with citizenship. Meanwhile, many representations of white women and children interacting with commodities worked to efface the significance of any social relations not mediated through consumption.

Children, who increasingly represented non-productivity, were everywhere in chromo ads, interacting and playing with branded commodities and packages. Also common were scenes in which the domestic labor of white women was relieved, and their femininity sanctified, by making the right brand choices. Thus, in the chromo era, visual advertising structures were already being developed that served to support a central ideological construction of consumer capitalism, in which social relations of production are completely effaced by relations of consumption.

However, this is not to suggest that these ideological constructions were the result of conscious intention on the part of advertisers and advertising designers to install a culture of consumption. Rather, in the pre-professionalized milieu of chromo advertising production, designs were derived by means of an unrationalized system in which images that were familiar and understood to be appealing, such as those depicting sentimental scenes of childhood, were paired with brand symbols and packaged products in novel ways that designers and advertisers simply hoped would capture the interests of consumers. The result, nevertheless, was a body of emotionally loaded pictures that were visually structured, through representations of abstract types and generic situations, to support the system of consumer capitalism by at once eliciting identification from viewers and inflating the significance of brand choices. In the next chapter I will discuss in more detail the construction of the brand as a category, and outline the ways in which chromolithographic advertising was employed in the promotional strategies of consumer-product manufacturers.

3 “HOW CAN YOU MAKE MINCE-MEAT OUT OF PICKLES?”

At the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the American food exhibitors had a problem: they were relegated to an out-of-the-way location, a forty-four stair climb to the gallery of the Agricultural Building. While the main floor of the building was teeming with visitors, the booths in the gallery were all but deserted. After a period of panic, one of the exhibitors—Henry J. Heinz, who had secured the largest of the food booths to promote his pickles, relishes and condiments—came up with a solution: he ordered thousands of cards resembling baggage claim checks to be printed and scattered over the exhibition grounds, each one inviting the recipient to come to the Heinz booth and redeem the “check” for a free souvenir. Visitors flocked to the gallery, a total of one million of them straining the structural integrity of the gallery floor to claim their prize: a pickle-shaped watch charm.¹ The pickle charm idea stuck, over the years morphing into the widely-recognized plaster (and later plastic) Heinz pickle lapel pin. By the late 1890s, the pickle was ever-present on the company’s advertising lithography and came to symbolize the Heinz brand.

But even before the Heinz pickle became a well-known trade symbol, the H. J. Heinz Company had already established itself as one of the world’s most prominent food companies.

¹ Robert C. Alberts, *The Good Provider: H. J. Heinz and His 57 Varieties* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973) 119-122. See also Eleanor Foa Dienstag, *In Good Company: 125 Years at the Heinz Table (1869-1994)* (New York: Warner, 1994) 36-38.

Although its success is attributable to a range of factors, among them its use of advanced manufacturing, sales, and distribution methods, the company serves as a prime example of how the use of chromolithographic advertising and marketing materials contributed to brand-building in the nineteenth century. For this reason, I will return to Heinz frequently in this chapter, which argues that lithographic advertising was integral to the promotion of brands in general, and hence to the development of consumer culture. I will consider how and why advertisers chose to include lithographic advertising among the types of “publicity” (what we may now call marketing) that were available in the nineteenth-century. Although it was eventually replaced by newer forms of pictorial reproduction, generated by advanced technologies and distributed more rationally, the widespread use of chromolithography paved the way for these newer forms by establishing visual imagery as a permanent fixture in the field of advertising.

3.1 Branding and the Growth of Consumer Culture

The acceleration of consumer culture in the United States grew out of the rapid expansion of an urban, industrial economy in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. In that time, the nation’s Gross Domestic Product increased fourfold, while the number of cities with populations in excess of 25,000 grew from 52 in 1870 to 160 in 1900.² As part of this transformation, an increasing number of Americans began to meet their material needs by buying goods rather than making them from raw materials they either purchased or produced on their own. In her book

² Glenn Porter and Harold C. Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers: Studies in the Changing Structure of Nineteenth-Century Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971) 155.

Satisfaction Guaranteed, Susan Strasser describes the shift that took place between about 1880 and 1920:

Household routines involved making fewer things and purchasing more; consumption became a major part of the work of the household. Formerly *customers*, purchasing the objects of daily life from familiar craftspeople and store keepers, Americans became *consumers*. They bought and used mass-produced goods as participants in a national market composed of masses of people associating with big, centrally organized, national-level companies.³

As Strasser suggests, the proliferation of these new practices created a new cultural concept: the consumer, a term that differed from the older concept of “customer” in important ways.

Raymond Williams notes that while “customer” suggests an ongoing relationship with a storekeeper, “consumer indicates a more abstract figure in a more abstract market.”⁴ This new, abstract market, with interpersonal relationships extracted, was brought about in part through the introduction of brands; together with advertising, branding allowed manufacturers to communicate directly with the purchasing public about their products, thereby creating their own “personal,” yet abstract, relationships with consumers.

These new relationships, together with the development of a vast information and transportation infrastructure in the last quarter of the century, allowed manufacturers to develop

³ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon, 1989) 15-16. Emphasis in original.

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford, 1983) 79.

national markets for their merchandise by gaining control over distribution and sales. As Strasser argues, the move to create brands was part of an effort by large manufacturing concerns to wrest control of the market away from retailers and distributors. In 1860, customers bought household items such as soap, flour and pickles in bulk, unbranded. Store proprietors made their stocking decisions based on the availability, quality and wholesale price of the commodity—and they set their own retail prices. By 1900, consumers were inundated with advertising, forcing them to choose between several brands of products. The advertising of branded merchandise at the national level allowed large manufacturing companies to communicate directly with consumers by advertising a set price, convincing consumers of the superior quality or value of their brand, and exhorting them to tell their shopkeepers to stock it. Over the course of several decades, a shift occurred: customers ceased asking the storekeeper for pickles out of the large barrel, and began pulling a jar of Heinz pickles off of the shelf.⁵

Canned food was not the first type of product to be branded and heavily advertised. Patent medicines, which were among the initial individually packaged and branded products, led the way: nostrum makers were the largest single group of advertisers in the 1870s.⁶ The

⁵ This shift was not complete until well into the twentieth century. For example, Heinz catalogues show the company sold many of its goods both in bulk and packaged through the end of the nineteenth century. See Heinz catalogs, 1889-1900, box 4, H.J. Heinz Collection, HSWP. Strasser, 21, notes that stores did not become self service until after 1912. Lizabeth Cohen writes of the persistence of bulk purchasing among Chicago workers in the 1920s. See Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990) 113.

⁶ Pamela Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998) 19.

advertising trade journal *Printers' Ink* described the methodical way in which one patent medicine manufacturer went about creating national markets:

Dr. Pierce began advertising in a small way, but made it a point to cover thoroughly the territory which he entered. The local newspapers were employed, but the publicity given to announcements in their columns was backed up by house-to-house distribution of pamphlets and circulars. Dead walls and billboards were utilized to display attractive posters, and many tin signs were securely nailed where it was believed they would do the most good. Thus county after county and State after State were gone over, his aim being to create sufficient demand in every locality undertaken to warrant the retail dealer in ordering the medicines advertised; in fact, *to make the demand so active and persistent as to force him to buy.*⁷

As indicated here, the key was to create enough consumer demand that store proprietors would feel they had no choice but to stock the advertised item. Many types of household products were being systematically and widely branded and advertised in ways similar to this by the late 1880s. The combination of personal sales along with a wide range of advertising media allowed the canned-food manufacturer to create national markets and control sales the same way patent medicine makers had done for a decade or more.

Advertising effectively changed the power relations in the distribution of branded products. By the 1870s most goods were distributed by jobbers, who, replacing commission

⁷ Charles Austin Bates, "Some of America's Advertisers," *Printers' Ink* 12 (1895): 29. This article was originally published in *Peterson's Magazine*, Dec. 1894. Emphasis added.

wholesalers, bought goods outright from manufacturers and sold them to retailers.⁸ Initially, this put them in control of the distribution of consumer goods. However, with the acceleration of national advertising, jobbers eventually began to have less influence over which goods from which manufacturers retailers wanted to buy:

Once the manufacturer went over the wholesaler's and retailer's heads direct to the consumer via advertising....jobbing became more and more a distributive mechanism which routinely supplied the goods demanded by the public as the result of that advertising. Jobbers who grew disenchanted with a particular producer in the wake of some real or imagined grievance had little choice but to continue carrying his goods if they were nationally known, widely demanded items.⁹

With the jobber's discretionary power eliminated, large manufacturers took control over distribution, in some cases taking on the role themselves, in other cases merely reducing the role of the middleman. Richard Ohmann explains: "As producers learned to engineer sales, they sometimes took the wholesaler's function into their own organization, and when they didn't, they reduced that function to one of taking orders and delivering the goods, rather than selling."¹⁰

⁸ Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1977) 215.

⁹ Porter and Livesay, 224.

¹⁰ Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996) 72.

At the same time, retailing changed. Large powerful retailers arose—department stores as well as mail-order catalogues with nationally recognized names like Sears, Roebuck & Company—which over time helped to replace small mom-and-pop stores and increasingly “dictated what would be produced for their counters and catalogues,” sometimes by integrating backward into production.¹¹ And manufacturers began controlling supplies of raw materials.¹² In effect, large corporations were gaining control over every aspect of the market. New relationships slowly and unevenly developed between customers and retailers, between retailers and wholesalers, between wholesalers and manufacturers, and—through advertising—between manufacturers and customers. As Ohmann writes:

Distant and unequal relations gradually replaced the transactions of city shop and country store, where one bought from a neighbor, negotiated prices and terms, gossiped, or discussed crops and weather. New relations of selling occupied a new social space that was more abstract, in some ways imaginary.¹³

The new, abstract relationships, mediated by advertising and controlled by large national corporations, led to profound and permanent social and cultural changes. As Strasser puts it, “The triumph of these new relationships during the forty years or so around the turn of the century created the basis for contemporary consumer culture.”¹⁴

¹¹ Ohmann 72.

¹² Chandler 286.

¹³ Ohmann 78

¹⁴ Strasser 28.

However, the central role played by advertising in the development of these new social relations has at times been subordinated to the rapid increase in manufacturing capacity. Some writers have suggested that the enormous output resulting from the use of technologically-advanced manufacturing methods drove the need to build national markets, thus spurring the growth of advertising. For example, business historian Alfred Chandler argues that many manufacturers, realizing the potential for national (and international) markets that had opened up with solid transportation and information infrastructures, adopted continuous-process machinery; then, finding existing marketing and advertising practices inadequate to meet the high output made possible by the new technology, they began to integrate forward into these realms as well.¹⁵

Ohmann suggests that this approach oversimplifies complex historical events by placing too much emphasis on (over)production. While acknowledging that advertising for some goods, such as oatmeal, followed in the wake of massive production increases, he argues that markets for other products, such as the safety razor, were shaped and built previous to mass production. Moreover, while some heavily-advertised goods were produced in high volume with continuous-process machinery (canned and packaged “ready-to-eat” types of foods), others were not (bicycles).¹⁶ To locate the relationship between advertising and industrialization, then, he points to a trend in advertising in the final decades of the century toward more advertising of *new* types of products—not necessarily just those that were associated with high-volume production. Thus

¹⁵ Chandler 249-253; 287-299.

¹⁶ Ohmann 86.

the 1890s, he argues, were not “producer-driven” in any simple sense. Rather, the changes that occurred at that time were steered just as much by the realization by manufacturers that they could change consumptive routines: “Those who began and continued to advertise broadly were doing more than trying to dump surplus product. They were looking for—and if successful, they found—a nexus between high-speed, continuous-flow manufacturing and the reshaping of people’s habits and lives.”¹⁷ Thus, while acknowledging that advertising is not *always* effective at creating demand, Ohmann argues that with respect to the plethora of *new* types of goods in the late nineteenth century, advertisers were generally successful because they learned how to build markets by altering consumptive practices.¹⁸

3.2 The Cigarette Industry

The cigarette industry serves as a good example of the creation of new habits of consumption through advertising—even before mechanized production of the commodity was widely implemented. And, most significantly for my purposes, markets for cigarettes were built through a heavy reliance on chromolithographic advertising. Cigarette manufacturer James Buchanan Duke, who is often erroneously held up as a prime example of a businessman who turned to advertising *only after* being faced with the massive output from continuous-process machinery, actually used copious amounts of lithography to promote his brands even before installing the

¹⁷ Ohmann 91.

¹⁸ Ohmann 93-94.

technology.¹⁹ In fact, once he decided to stop trying to compete in the smoking (pipe) tobacco market and began making cigarettes, he set out immediately to create markets for the “newfangled smokes,” which at the time were the least common of all tobacco products (pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco and cigars were all more widely used). They were also the newest, the most amenable to hustle-and-bustle of urban living: pre-rolled cigarettes were convenient, quick, mild, and portable.²⁰

Duke’s promotional efforts actually presented him with a crisis of *under*production: Just six months after the first two Bonsack cigarette-making machines were finally perfected and installed in 1884, Duke still could not keep up with orders: “Though operating at full capacity in their Durham plant,” writes tobacco historian Nannie May Tilley, “the firm was more than six million cigarettes behind orders on October 20, 1884.”²¹ The machines were not even keeping pace with already-rising sales, let alone creating a glut right off the bat. It may be the case that, with the installation of several more machines, output eventually accelerated to the point of outpacing sales. However, as Chandler himself notes, Duke initiated a national advertising campaign even before he had made his basic contract to secure the Bonsack machines.²² This

¹⁹ Both Ohmann and Chandler cite the Duke company as an example of one that was faced with a crisis of overproduction. Ohmann 85-86; Chandler 290-292.

²⁰ And, to complicate things, they were also considered unmanly in some parts of the country. See Dawn Schmitz, “Only Flossy, High-Society Dudes Would Smoke ‘Em: Gender and Cigarette Advertising in the Nineteenth Century,” *Turning the Century: Essays in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Carol A. Stabile (Boulder: Westview, 2000) 100-121.

²¹ Nannie May Tilley, *The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929* (Chapel Hill: UP of North Carolina, 1948) 558.

²² Chandler 291.

campaign had many facets, among which was the distribution of collectible, chromolithographed cards in every package of cigarettes.²³ By 1889, Duke & Sons were spending \$800,000, on advertising—at twenty percent of gross receipts, this was an enormous sum—and dedicating most of it to offering premiums, prominent among which were the cigarette cards.²⁴ In fact, he spent so much on cigarette cards, as well as larger chromo show cards promoting the issuance of each new series of the cards, that one lithographic salesman called for his canonization.²⁵ The incredible popularity of the cigarette-card collecting fad was one factor that contributed to the creation of a market for the new, relatively unfamiliar new tobacco product, in part by playing off of its addictive capacities: cards were issued in large editions that encouraged some young consumers-in-the-making to collect the cards, and even to gamble with them.

Duke's advertising strategy worked, and was copied by his competitors, who also began to issue cigarette cards. Domestic cigarette sales rose dramatically: in 1880, 409 million cigarettes were sold; by 1889 the figure had grown to almost 2.5 billion. Of these, 834 million—representing a third of the market—were Duke cigarettes.²⁶ Of course, there were

²³ Tilley 558.

²⁴ The \$800,000 figure is from several sources, including Richard Tennant, *The American Cigarette Industry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1950) 24. Strasser, 172, is the source for the statement that most of this expenditure went for premiums. It should be noted that these numbers represent advertising not only for cigarettes but also for other tobacco products manufactured and sold by Duke.

²⁵ P.W.C., "A Necessity of Lithography," *The National Lithographer* 6.9 (1899): 1.

²⁶ The 1880 figure is from Jordan Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 230; the 1889 figures are from Tennant, 24-25.

other factors besides premiums that contributed to the successful promotion of Duke brands, such as a price cut to five cents per pack in 1883 made possible by a sharp reduction in taxes. But while it is true that these price reductions—both before mechanization and as a result of it—contributed to the phenomenal sales of Duke cigarettes, advertising and marketing were the key factors: cleverly-marketed Duke cigarettes eventually began outselling less expensive rival brands.²⁷ The cigarette marketing blitz, and cigarette-card collecting, only subsided in 1890 when, feeling pinched by the amount they spent trying to compete with each other, Duke and four of his competitors formed a trust, The American Tobacco Company.²⁸

The cigarette example suggests that chromolithography played a key role in the growth and shaping of consumer culture, not only by successfully promoting particular brands, but by contributing to the creation of markets for new kinds of products through the redirection of existing consumptive habits and the building of new ones. True, the precise role played by lithographic forms of advertising in the promotion of any particular type of commodity can never be precisely determined, because they were used in tandem with other kinds of publicity—not to mention the fact that the efficacy of advertising and marketing, even for new kinds of products in the nineteenth century, cannot be precisely ascertained. However, given that various kinds of chromolithography constituted, in some cases, the majority of a manufacturer's outlay for advertising a new kind of product, it is reasonable to suggest it played a role in the introduction of new consumptive practices.

²⁷ John K. Winkler, *Tobacco Tycoon: The Story of James Buchanan Duke* (New York: Random House, 1942) 66.

²⁸ Chandler 292.

And it wasn't just cigarettes. All kinds of products (old and new) were heavily advertised using lithography prior to, and during, the 1890s: tobacco products, yeast, baking powder, soap, patent medicines, sewing machines, thread, bicycles, musical instruments, alcoholic and "temperance" beverages, and convenience foods like cereal, soup, and condiments. Indeed, the 1880s were active ones for national advertising and brand development, despite the assumption commonly made in the literature that manufacturers of consumer goods began to build national markets only when they began to advertise in magazines in the 1890s. The following quote is representative of the existing literature:

Advertising was not, of course, a new phenomenon in American life, but the two decades around 1900 marked the first widespread attempts by manufacturers to reach a mass audience through national media. The success in the nineties of such low-priced, mass-circulation magazines as *McClure's*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Munsey's* created a medium through which producers could reach the American middle class. In that same decade, advertising enjoyed its first genuine impact on the nation.²⁹

While this statement is not entirely inaccurate, it is misleading in its suggestion that the magazine boom of the 1890s—when several general-interest monthlies began to make their profit chiefly from advertising revenue by slashing their subscription prices, raising their circulations, and dramatically increasing their advertising rates and the number of advertising pages—had no important precursors. In fact, there were brands that were nationally recognized before the 1890s.

²⁹ Porter and Livesay 223.

And perhaps more significantly, the practice of shopping for branded merchandise—that is, the move toward more abstract, advertising-mediated, relations of selling—was already underway.

Yet this has gone largely unremarked, precisely because magazines and newspapers have been the focus of much advertising history. For example, Ohmann observes that prior to the 1890s, only four companies were advertising “the modern way,” by branding and nationally advertising their merchandise: the makers of Royal baking powder, Pears’ soap, Sapolio cleanser, and Ivory soap.³⁰ It may be the case that only these four brands were advertised in national magazines, but, as I will show, there were other advertisers who relied more heavily on other forms of publicity, and with success. Indeed, advertising chromos were produced and distributed in ways that were so uneven and disorganized that they are little understood today, but brands that relied on them for promotion nevertheless gained national recognition.

Heinz is a prime example. As I will discuss in more detail below, the company did not advertise in magazines (or newspapers) until about 1900. Yet, the company was well-known throughout the country by 1888 and had accumulated enough capital to undergo a huge expansion in 1890, by which time Henry J. Heinz was known throughout the country as the “pickle king.”³¹ And many other advertisers were self-consciously attempting to reach consumers all over the nation and communicate with them “personally” through branding prior to 1893. By 1890, there were already a number of large companies that, like Heinz, had integrated production, marketing and purchasing, and were selling their brands from coast to

³⁰ Ohmann 82.

³¹ Guide to the Collection of the H. J. Heinz Company, HSWP.

coast; many brands had become household names nationwide.³² A few examples of the other brands that became well-known with the help of lithography by the end of the 1880s: Libby, McNeill and Libby canned meat products, which were advertised on chromo cards as early as 1880; Hires root beer and Quaker oats, which both used chromolithography prior to 1890; and Durkee salad dressings, which were advertised on chromolithographed posters as early as 1885.³³ While some of these brands became well-known primarily through their periodical advertising (Hires), others, like Heinz and Quaker, relied more heavily on lithography.

This is not to diminish the important role national magazines played in the transition to consumer culture, nor is it an attempt to argue that manufacturers were systematically and self-consciously changing consumer habits in any rationalized way prior to the expansion of the advertising industry in the 1890s. To be sure, these early attempts at brand-name advertising were far from the systematic approach to building consumer markets that was ushered in by magazine publishers and advertising agencies: They were neither the product of a class of trained advertising professionals, nor part of planned marketing campaigns. Yet, as the only method of mass-producing color illustrations until the 1890s, chromolithography was widely disseminated in the early days of brand advertising, and communicated with images that worked to not only construct the category of the brand, but also to create associations between brand names and certain “values and lifestyles” – to use a twentieth-century marketing term. As Ohmann correctly states, “As late as the 1880s, the practice of branding and nationally

³² Chandler 289.

³³ Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: UP of Missouri, 1987); Meat, beverages, cereal, and baking powder categories, WCBA.

advertising products was one way of doing things among many, not a standard system of marketing. Manufacturers were still ‘discovering’ this idea.”³⁴ As I will attempt to illustrate in the remainder of this chapter, it was through their experiences with chromolithography that many advertisers made this discovery.

3.3 The Heinz Brand

If a late eighteenth-century farmer encountered a magazine advertisement for Royal Baking Powder published a century later, interpreting it “would have been a challenge if not a mystery...like encountering a new dialect,” writes Ohmann.³⁵ No doubt this is true, and central to this new dialect would have been the vocabulary of the brand. The brand is a category that exists because companies were compelled to construct a way to refer to their products, or a subset of them, in advertising. The brand only became a meaningful category when, largely through advertising, manufacturers used it, and explicated it. Although brands developed out of trademarks, which first gave businesses the right to exclusive use of a visual symbol to distinguish their products in 1870, they soon came to be used to guarantee homogeneity for consumers who had no real personal connection to the company producing them.³⁶ This was a crucial development in the production of consumer culture, because it allowed manufacturers to develop the quasi-personal relationships with consumers I outlined earlier. Manufacturers had to

³⁴ Ohmann 82.

³⁵ Ohmann 9.

³⁶ John Philip Jones, *What’s in a Name? Advertising and the Concept of Brands* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1986) 25; See also Strasser, 45, on the trademark law.

communicate directly to the consumer that the products subsumed under one brand—whether it be one formula of scouring powder or fifty-seven varieties of condiments—shared certain qualities, and that they were distinct from their competitors’ products

Because the Heinz company eschewed magazine and newspaper advertising until after 1900, it serves as an ideal case study for how nonperiodical advertising contributed to the development of national brands. The Heinz brand became well-known through a large and highly-organized sales force complemented by outdoor advertising (horse carts, painted scenery), novelties, and chromolithographs. *The National Advertiser* wrote in 1901:

Now, even in his struggling days, Mr. Heinz was a great believer in advertising, but at that early period he had not the wherewithal to buy publicity. His original efforts were confined to lithograph cards for the grocery stores, calendars and show cards that could be hung where the customer would see them.³⁷

Indeed, the vast majority of the printed marketing materials used by Heinz were chromolithographed: An 1892 diary entry by Henry J. Heinz indicates that while in New York he contracted for one year’s worth of advertising—at \$10,000 this was more than he had spent in any one previous year—“Consisting of calendars, souvenir books, stamped-out pickle cards, pickle charms and spoons, and show cards for boxes.”³⁸ Judging from the types of materials described it is clear that the vast majority of the items listed (with the exception of novelties like

³⁷ “First, A Wheelbarrow: Humble Beginning of the Heinz Business,” *The National Advertiser*, 1901, series II: *The Good Provider*, Robert C. Alberts papers, HSWP.

³⁸ Diary of H.J Heinz, July 10-15, 1892, series II: *The Good Provider*, Robert C. Alberts papers, HSWP.

charms and spoons) were the products of lithography. Indeed, in the new factory which began construction on the North Side of Pittsburgh in 1890, Heinz included a print shop to produce many of their chromolithographed materials, including labels and some of their advertisements.³⁹ Although most manufacturers did not build their national brands by relying so heavily on these types of items, the Heinz example illustrates that lithography did play a key role in the introduction of the vocabulary of the brand even while magazine advertising was hitting its stride.

Indeed, Heinz advertising cards graphically illustrate how not only the Heinz brand, but also the very idea of the brand, was constructed in late nineteenth-century advertising. In Heinz ads, like many other lithographic ads, the trademark or other brand symbol dominates the design. For example, the image on one advertising card—two children sampling Heinz’s sweet pickles out of a jar—is framed by the keystone trademark and anchored by the slogan “Keystone Brand” (Figure 10). When contrasted with later magazine ads, in which the brand symbol is always evident but rarely dominant or explicated, this relatively early ad implies a reader who has yet to be familiarized with the category of the brand—one who is in the process of becoming literate in the language of brand symbolism. In more highly developed visual advertising the brand symbol is as crucial as the signifying image, but consumers have become so adept at locating the trademark and making the connection between it and the image, that it can be subordinated visually within the ad design. The reading of visual advertisements is not a self-evident activity; it has only come to seem so.

³⁹ Shortly after 1900, all Heinz point-of-purchase materials were designed and produced in an expanded and relocated print shop/art studio. Ed Lehw, personal interview, 13 Feb. 2003.



Figure 10: Heinz, keystone advertising card, circa 1890.
Library and Archives Division,
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh.

While the keystone—taken from the motto of the company’s home state of Pennsylvania—was used as early as 1878, the pickle came to symbolize the brand even more powerfully. Indeed, by 1897, H. J. Heinz had made the decision to use it in all of the company’s labels and advertising, wherever possible, and to give it even greater prominence than the keystone.⁴⁰ And just as the keystone shape dominated the earlier cards, these later cards, produced around the turn of the century or later, feature the shape and color of the pickle as the primary design motif: many of them were die-cuts, actually constructed in the shape of the pickle. A large series of these die-cuts featured figures, many of them young girls, (a minimum of 17 different ones) either emerging from, or embedded in, an oversize pickle (Figure 11). In some of these cards, the product itself was not represented: the designs included only the brand name and a figure (representing childlike or feminine purity, wholesomeness, goodness)—all subsumed within the brand symbol.⁴¹ Clearly these advertisements are less about selling any individual product than they are about selling the brand.

Of course, those who designed Heinz’s advertisements did not set out to contribute to the development of the visual language of consumer culture. Rather, this was a by-product of the company’s attempt to find a short-hand way of communicating to their customers about all of their products with one easily-recognized symbol. But because consumers were not yet literate

⁴⁰ Dienstag 38, 154; On the keystone trademark, see Diary of H.J. Heinz, 1876-1878, Series II: *The Good Provider*, Robert C. Alberts Papers, HSWP.

⁴¹ Advertising cards, box 1, H.J. Heinz Co. Collection, HSWP; Food category, box 8, WCBA.



**Figure 11: Heinz, pickle advertising die-cut, circa 1905.
Library and Archives Division,
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh.**

in the visual language of the brand, this process happened in fits and starts, over time. Even as late as 1905, a Heinz employee newsletter related the humorous story of visitors to a food exhibition who revealed their brand-illiteracy:

One thing was conclusively demonstrated [at the exhibition], that the trade-mark pickle has done its work and that the name Heinz is indelibly associated with a little green cucumber. Witness such remarks as: “It’s strange that you can make such good Apple Butter out of cucumbers. It really tastes as if it were made of apples;” and, “How can you make Mince-Meat out of pickles?”⁴²

Here, the writer suggested that the pickle symbol was successful simply because it was reliably associated with the Heinz brand. The fact that consumers failed to understand that the pickle did not stand as an indicator of product ingredients was considered a humorous by-product of this process that could be easily rectified by sampling and interpersonal communication at the exhibition booth. Still, whatever the intentions of the company may or may not have been, the proliferation of the green cucumber pickle with the name “Heinz” printed inside was one of the many brand symbols that circulated around the turn of the century, and helped to construct the category of the brand—and the trademark as the visual symbol of it. Indeed, the Heinz pickle is a good illustration of fact that the idea of the brand was emerging throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The notion that the pickle signified not Heinz products but the

⁴² “Agency and Branch Correspondence,” *The* 57 Jan., 1905:10-11, box 13, H. J. Heinz Co. Collection, HSWP.

Heinz *brand* was not immediately self-evident, and had to be communicated repetitively in order for buyers of Heinz products to become literate in the language of brands.

There is yet another element in Heinz advertisements that worked to communicate the brand idea: the slogan “57 Varieties.” This phrase was dreamed up by Henry J. Heinz after noticing an ad in a New York elevated train that advertised “21 styles of shoes.” As Heinz later recalled, he contemplated this, and determined that while his company did not exactly sell several *styles* of a product, it did sell many *varieties* of condiments and other canned foods. Although he mentally counted more than sixty varieties of Heinz products, he eventually settled on the number 57 because he felt the number seven had a particular resonance. Heinz later recounted:

“Seven, seven” — there are so many illustrations of the psychological influence of that figure and of its alluring significance to people of all ages and races that “58 Varieties” or “59 Varieties” did not appeal at all to me as being equally strong. I got off the train immediately, went down to the lithographer’s, where I designed a street-car card and had it distributed throughout the United States. I myself did not realize how highly successful a slogan it was going to be.⁴³

It is hard to argue with Heinz’s comment about the slogan’s success. Its staying power alone (to this day it can be found on every bottle of Heinz ketchup, for example, along with a diminutive pickle) may indeed attest to its resonance.

⁴³ E.D. McCafferty, *Henry J. Heinz: A Biography* (New York: Orr, 1923) 147-8. See also Alberts 130. Although sources vary on the date the slogan was adopted, it was most likely around 1892 or 1893.

But more to the point, the slogan communicated something fundamental about brands: they are a way to refer to a group of products made by a single manufacturer. Advertisements create associations between brands and particular values or lifestyles. In order for them to be legible, a notion that seems banal and obvious to the twenty-first-century consumer had to be established: the idea that many products are subsumed under one brand.⁴⁴ All by itself, the phrase “57 Varieties” incessantly communicated this general idea—no matter where it was printed or painted. H. J. Heinz not only used the slogan in all of his advertising, he plastered it on public spaces from coast to coast whenever he could get away with it. (Upon seeing the number adorning a prominent hillside, one foreign visitor is reported to have exclaimed, “My God! They number the hills here.”)⁴⁵ The fact that fifty-seven was a conjured number only fortifies its symbolic purpose as a message about the meaning of brands. The combination of the numeral 57, the pickle, and the brand name was everywhere in Heinz’s chromolithographic ads, along with an image signifying purity—an attempt, in the years before and immediately following the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 (for which H.J. Heinz himself lobbied) to establish Heinz products as completely unadulterated and manufactured according to the most progressive standards of hygiene. Heinz advertising was structured to work at several levels: to communicate the idea of the brand itself (that it includes several varieties of products), to

⁴⁴ For example, for the Nike trademark symbol to be meaningful, present-day consumers must understand that it does not refer only to the particular item it is associated with any particular time, such as an NFL jersey. Rather, the meaning the symbol picks up through its association with the NFL must be transferable to everything in Nike’s consumer product line.

⁴⁵ Alberts 127-131.

promote recognition of the symbol of the Heinz brand, and to create associations between the brand and the values of purity and wholesomeness.

Heinz was not the only company whose marketing contributed to the brand idea, but it serves as a good example of how important chromo advertising was to the development of that idea. Given what ads such as those I've discussed above communicated about brands, and considering their ubiquity in the years around the turn of the century, it is clearly important to recognize their importance to the development of consumer culture. Since chromo advertising was the only visual mass medium that one prominent company initially used in successfully making its brand a household name, it is clearly worth considering its significance for those companies that made it only a part of their advertising plan. I am not suggesting that this one category of advertising was more important than all others. However, since a hierarchy of significance of various advertising media for the construction of consumer culture can never be established, it is crucial that all realms be explored. At the very least, when considering magazine advertising around the turn of the century, it is necessary to place it in the context of the larger visual field that includes chromolithography.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss how lithographic forms of advertising were used in tandem with other advertising media in the drive to develop brands. I will consider how they fit in with the advertising mix, what value they were believed to possess, and how they were distributed nationally. My focus here will be primarily on the "general advertisers"—those, like the H.J. Heinz Company, whose intent was to build national markets for their branded products. I will end with a discussion of the rise of agencies, the concurrent rationalization of the advertising industry, and the demise of lithographic advertising.

3.4 Forms of Advertising Lithography

It was through a haphazard mix of types of publicity that brands and their trademarks became part of the national lexicon. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, there was a rich assortment of ways in which goods and services were promoted, in addition to newspapers and magazines. Letterpress and chromolithographed posters were on every fence and wall, “everywhere that the night-working billposter found a surface and didn’t get caught.”⁴⁶ Banners were strung across streets, trademarks were painted on rocks and barns; delivery wagons were emblazoned with advertisements, druggists’ counters were piled with lithographed almanacs filled with patent-medicine advertisements; boys on street corners handed out printed and lithographed cards and handbills; the walls of saloons were covered with brewery advertisements; in stores, show cards hung on walls and decorated counters, shelves and window displays. As historian Frank Presbrey writes of the immediate postwar years, “Advertising assailed the eye to an extent which was then sensational.”⁴⁷

As the century progressed, more rationalized forms began to replace older ones. For example, rock painting and other acts of “landscape desecration” (as described in the advertising trade press) began to fall out of favor while poster advertising became increasingly organized by local and national bill-posting companies. Likewise, advertising chromolithography took different forms which saw their heydays at different times. Small advertising cards, such as the

⁴⁶ Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (New York: Doubleday, 1929) 259.

⁴⁷ Presbrey 259.

Heinz advertisements described earlier, usually had promotional copy printed on the back. They emerged in the 1870s promoting local businesses and patent medicines, began to be used in the advertising of national brand-name products by the 1880s, and gradually died out around the turn of the century.⁴⁸ The term “show card” was usually used to refer to larger mounted chromolithographs of varying sizes for store display, and often were fitted with cardboard backs so they could be propped-up easel-style on a shelf or counter, or metal rings so they could be hung on the wall or displayed in a window. “Hangers” were usually unmounted chromolithographs that could be rolled up and sent through the mail.⁴⁹ However, the terminology was not that neatly delineated, and the term “show card” was sometimes used very generally to refer to all kinds of chromolithographed advertising work, as when the trade journal *The American Lithographer and Printer* announced it had received samples of “elegant show card work” and went on to describe a hanger (22 x 14 inches) and a calendar (14 1/2 x 11 inches.)⁵⁰ Show cards in this general sense were available as early as the late 1860s and were still seen at least until the first decade of the twentieth century. Calendars, which were often in the form of show cards or hangers, were increasing in popularity as the small cards were on the decline, in the late 1880s and 1890s. *The American Lithographer and Printer* declared in 1887 that “the demand for calendars—especially as advertising mediums—is rapidly increasing. The

⁴⁸ For a thorough, fully illustrated discussion of trade cards see Jay. Heinz seems to have used this type of advertising card later than most companies, perhaps because they installed their own lithography shop in their factory around 1900.

⁴⁹ Laird 84-85.

⁵⁰ “Specimens Received,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.9 (1888): 137.

days for circulars and cards as advertising mediums are rapidly passing away. A more permanent medium is sought after.”⁵¹ While this could have been an attempt to promote lithography over other types of job printing (circulars were usually letterpress work), the prevalence of finely chromolithographed calendars were also noted by advertising experts in the 1890s. An expensive, well-done show card or calendar may have included seven to twelve, or even more, colors.

Generally, posters were lithographed in three or four colors. Lithography came to dominate poster production in the last decades of the century, and the amusement industries made the most of lithography’s capacity for enormous multi-sheet color reproductions. Both circuses and traveling theatrical shows contracted with lithographers for large posters to affix to the sides of buildings and fences—as large as 150 sheets of 28x42 inches each—as well as smaller ones for billboards. But chromolithographed posters advertising branded consumer products were being printed in New York by the mid 1880s as well, for indoor as well as outdoor display.⁵² In 1883, soon after Procter & Gamble introduced Ivory soap, the Cincinnati company hired a lithographic firm in their city to design and produce an original poster to promote its new brand even while it aggressively pursued periodical advertising.⁵³ While some of the other early posters were less original, taking a stock design (perhaps a European painting that was legal to

⁵¹ “Calendars for 1887,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 7.12 (1887).

⁵² Laird 84.

⁵³ John W. Merten, “Stone by Stone Along a Hundred Years With the House of Strobridge,” *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 8.1 (1950): 28-30; Alfred Lief, “It Floats:” *The Story of Procter & Gamble*, (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1958) 56.

use in the absence of an international copyright law) and incorporating the brand name into the picture, they do illustrate the acceptance of using “circus style” publicity to promote brand-name manufactured products beginning in the 1880s. Eventually, regional and national bill-posting companies emerged that offered guarantees that posters would be put up and stay up on established bill-boards for a set amount of time.⁵⁴ This paved the way for the widespread use of posters for national advertising of consumer products. By the 1890s, many large corporations were following Barnum’s lead, using posters to promote their brands with the aim of building national markets. In 1894, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported:

Within almost the last two years, inspired by the results of theatrical advertising, manufacturers of various commodities have gone to pictorial printers and obtained fancy printing in imitation of those used in the show business. These have arrested public attention on the bill-boards in the thought that new attractions were coming to town. Instead it has been discovered that the fancily named thing was not a new play, but a new cigarette, chewing gum, patent medicine or breakfast food.⁵⁵

By 1898, among the many types of products advertised on such posters were groceries, pianos, bicycles and carriages, as well as patent medicines. Major advertisers of consumer goods that used chromolithographed posters around this time included Procter & Gamble, which continued

⁵⁴ Strasser 91.

⁵⁵ “The Billboard Endangered,” *Printers’ Ink* 12 (1895): 35.

its soap advertising in this form, and Quaker Oats.⁵⁶ *The National Lithographer* declared, “Nearly all the large manufacturing firms and corporations patronize lithography by ordering posters for advertising purposes. The lithographed poster has reached a point in the commercial world from which it cannot recede.”⁵⁷ In 1895, *Printers’ Ink* remarked on the significance of poster advertising, observing that it “is now seen to have a capacity for effectiveness and a breadth of application, as an accessory to newspaper advertising, not hitherto suspected.”⁵⁸

As these quotes suggest, it had taken some time before lithography had become an acceptable means of advertising by “legitimate” enterprises. By far, most of the advertising in the 1870s was still for local businesses, amusements and patent medicines—not for brand-name products. Indeed, in that decade, despite its ubiquity, advertising was not yet a universally-accepted practice, largely due to its strong associations with patent medicines, the circus, and other suspected humbug. Patent-medicine producers circulated chromolithographed cards heavily, and, as noted above, circuses and theaters led the way in terms of poster advertising, often with enormous posters that were considered to be in poor taste by advertising experts. As business historian Pamela Laird writes, “From the 1870s through the end of the century, medicine producers and entertainers such as theaters, circuses, and exhibitions dominated

⁵⁶ “Some Posters,” *The National Lithographer* 4.10 (1897): 4.

⁵⁷ Untitled article, *The National Lithographer* 5.12 (1898): 8; “Lithographic Posters Indispensable,” *The National Lithographer* 5.6 (1898): 10.

⁵⁸ “Posters,” *Printers’ Ink* 12 (1895): 17-18.

advertising to such an extent that many people associated the entire field of advertising, other than local retail and noncommercial announcements, with these dubious but lucrative trades.”⁵⁹

As I have already suggested, Heinz was one company that was not averse to advertising. The company made wide use of nonperiodical advertising, beginning with delivery trucks sporting the keystone logo, and eventually adding posters (first locally, then nationally distributed), signs, cards, stands at county and world fairs, pickle pins and charms, and street cars cards.⁶⁰ According to one biographer of Henry J. Heinz:

He plastered the Heinz name across America and Europe, on the sides of delivery carriages, buses, wagons, and trucks; on color cards in streetcars; on three-dimensional signs...; in newspapers and magazines (never on Sunday); on billboards, along railroad tracks, and carved into hillsides; on pickle cards, spoons, showcards, calendars, souvenir books, and in electric lights...”⁶¹

As I touched on earlier, periodical advertising came relatively late for the Heinz company. According to Presbrey, “When extensive newspaper and magazine advertising by Heinz began after the turn of the century it had been preceded by a quarter of a century of outdoor and novelty advertising on a large scale.”⁶² The company’s own records state that in 1899 the company’s advertising consisted primarily of window displays, store demonstrations, counter displays,

⁵⁹ Laird 22.

⁶⁰ Diary of H.J. Heinz, 1878-1892, series II: *The Good Provider*, Robert C. Alberts Papers, HSWP; Presbrey 422.

⁶¹ Dienstag 34.

⁶² Presbrey 422.

exposition booths, and one enormous electric sign at the corner of Twenty-third and Broadway in New York.⁶³

Demonstrations and point-of-purchase displays were the bread-and-butter of Heinz publicity, and they were heavily supported by chromolithographed signs: the Heinz pickle, the 57 Varieties slogan, the keystone, and other trade symbols were everywhere in the store displays. One common sign, dating to about 1895 and known in company literature as “The Vinegar Girl,” was a large chromolithographed cut-out of a young woman sitting on a Heinz-trademarked barrel holding a jug of vinegar.⁶⁴ A Heinz window display at a store in Lake Linden, Ohio, designed by the store proprietor, was pictured in the company newsletter and approvingly described as follows:

The lower rows are built of Gen Chutney bottles, flanked by preserve jars. Ten Ounce Pearl Onions and Sweet Midgets rise above them. Two rows of Apple Butter Crocks make a good foundation for the Vinegar girl cut-out. Columns made of various goods in glass and tin show on each side.⁶⁵

One of the reasons why displays were considered so effective was because of the attractiveness of the Heinz packaging itself. The company took great care in designing and lithographing its own bottles and labels, which it claimed had been so instrumental to the company’s success that

⁶³ “Brief Outline of the H.J. Heinz Company,” 1964, box 2, H. J. Heinz Co. Collection, HSWP. With more than 1,200 electric lights, the company estimated the sign was seen daily by 75,000 people.

⁶⁴ The date is estimated by Lehew.

⁶⁵ “Agency and Branch Correspondence,” *The 57 Jan.* 1905: 11, box 13, H.J. Heinz Co. Collection, HSWP.

other companies copied their package designs.⁶⁶ Grocers were sometimes convinced to display Heinz products prominently precisely because the packaging was so attractive.⁶⁷ Indeed, the company went to great care and expense in designing and chromolithographing their labels. With more than twenty colors and immaculate registration (meaning all of the layers of colors were lined up exactly where they should be), they were more expensive and time-consuming to produce than many well-executed chromo show cards.

While the reliance on point-of-sale marketing over periodical advertising was by no means a typical pattern—by contrast, Van Camp, Heinz’s rival in the canned foods industries, began publication advertising for its brand of pork and beans and tomato catsup well before Heinz—examining the company’s choices does further illustrate how methods such as signs, cards and calendars were successfully employed to help create a national brand. And Heinz was by no means entirely alone in its reliance on nonperiodical advertising. Quaker Oats was another company that built its brand by employing a range of methods that included free samples, demonstrations, billboards, street-cars, chromo booklets and cards, retail store displays, daily papers, as well as general-circulation magazines.⁶⁸ Indeed, by 1890, the trademark symbol of a man in Quaker garb perched on a globe and holding a package of oats in each hand had become “widely familiar”—and primarily through means other than magazines: Quaker Oats was spending a total of \$100,000 per year on all forms of advertising by 1892, but it wasn’t until

⁶⁶ Uncited printed source, box 6, series II: *The Good Provider*, Robert C. Alberts Papers, HSWP.

⁶⁷ “Displaying the 57,” *The 57* Nov. 1904: 9-10, box 13, H.J. Heinz Co. Collection, HSWP.

⁶⁸ Nathaniel Fowler, Jr., *Fowler’s Publicity* (New York: Publicity, 1897) 78.

1894 that the Quaker figure that had made its debut on packages hit the pages of publications and magazines became the largest single expenditure.⁶⁹ And even after the company's illustrated ads hit the pages of publications like *Munsey's*, it continued to distribute advertising cards and chromolithographed booklets as premiums, including one design that features several product packages stacked in an optical-illusion pyramid, with the trademark character challenging the reader to solve a puzzle by counting the number of packages.⁷⁰ The Quaker example suggests, as does Heinz, that advertisers used as many different types of publicity in tandem.

Indeed, there is no typical pattern of advertising expenditures for nineteenth-century manufacturers. For the most part, general advertisers made use of many multiple, overlapping, and mutually-supporting methods of publicity that included both periodical and non-periodical advertising. While many advertisers and advertising experts endorsed the daily newspaper as the most "judicious" way to advertise, the atmosphere was one in which it was unclear what the most effective methods were. In addition to lithography and outdoor advertising, companies could also choose from a wide variety of types of newspapers, including city dailies, country weeklies, and religious papers.⁷¹ And, of course, there were magazines, although prior to the

⁶⁹ Presbrey 406. The Quaker symbol was registered in 1877 by the Quaker Mill Company as a trademark described as "the figure of a man in Quaker garb." This was the first registered trademark for a breakfast cereal. The Quaker brand name was absorbed in the formation of the American Cereal company in the late 1880s, which was reorganized in 1891. In 1895 the brand name "Quaker" was added in another trademark registry. The Quaker Oats Company was formed in 1901. Arthur F. Marquette, *Brands, Trademarks and Goodwill: The Story of The Quaker Oats Company* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) 31, 43-44, 77.

⁷⁰ Jay 54; Marquette 118.

⁷¹ In 1870, 400 religious periodicals, with a total circulation of five million per issue, were getting a very large share of general advertising. Most of them accepted patent medicine

1890s the advertisements in them were usually relegated to a few pages in the back, and the pictures were relatively simple line drawings.

If any company represents a typical blend of advertising methods it may be Enoch Morgan's Sons, makers of Sapolio cleanser. The promotion of Sapolio, under the direction of advertising manager Artemas Ward, was not typical in terms of the amount of money spent on its promotion; indeed, it was one of the most heavily-advertised brands in the latter three decades of the century. However, in terms of the mixture of methods used, it may have been representative. In 1869, the company began running small ads in *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper*, all but the tiniest of which contained the brand's trademark illustration: a close-up of a man staring at his reflection in the bottom of a shiny pan. Given the general blandness of other newspaper advertisements of the period, the crude picture made for a remarkable and eye-catching ad.⁷² However, by the mid-1880s, Enoch Morgan's was also sending out an enormous number of cards advertising the brand and investing heavily in billposting as well.⁷³ In what was a standard ratio of expenditures for the time period, the company spent more of its \$70,000 advertising budget for 1885 on billposting, novelties, and printing combined than it spent on all forms of periodical advertising taken together.⁷⁴

advertising, and for some it was a major source of revenue, along with advertising for insurance companies. But a wide range of products could be found on their pages: soaps, books, department stores, banks. See Presbrey 455.

⁷² Presbrey 394.

⁷³ Jay 52.

⁷⁴ The company's advertising was broken down as follows: billposting: \$11,000; sign painting: \$8,300; street cars: \$5,500; magazines: \$9,000; newspapers: \$5,000; religious publications:

In the absence of a centralized system of advertising agencies that claimed to predict the relative effectiveness of different forms of publicity, companies would try anything once. Indeed, before agencies came to dominate the industry and direct the flow of advertising dollars, the most common advice given by advertisers and experts was simply to “Keep everlastingly at it.”⁷⁵ When asked to offer advice, one maker of stove polish offered, vaguely but in typical fashion, “Millions are thrown away every year in injudicious advertising.” When asked which kinds have been most effective for his company, he answered, again unspecifically, “We have tried, and still pursue all kinds,—sign painting, newspaper advertising, advertising in street cars, and elegant and expensive lithography.”⁷⁶ Another business owner, in an oft-quoted remark, communicated the frustration often expressed by entrepreneurs anxious to advertise “judiciously” but quite unsure of how to do so: “Half of the money I spend on advertising is wasted, and the trouble is I don’t know which half.”⁷⁷

In this climate of confusion, there was little consensus regarding the value of chromolithographic advertising; however, some patterns do emerge. For example, although many types of local advertisers used lithography, department stores tended to favor the city

\$1,100; novelties: \$5,000; printing: \$7,700; stunts and miscellaneous: \$19,400. Novelties and printing would typically include both lithographed and other items. By 1896, the company was spending \$400,000 per year on advertising. Presbrey 394.

⁷⁵ Presbrey 439.

⁷⁶ Elijah A. Morse of Morse Brothers, makers of Rising Sun Stove Polish, quoted in Fowler, 83. Advertisers and lithographers generally used the term “lithography” to refer to color advertising work, without bothering to add the prefix “chromo--.” I sometimes do the same.

⁷⁷ David Ogilvy, *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (New York: Atheneum, 1963) 59, quoted in Pope, 10.

dailies. This reflects their interest in reaching mainly local audiences, as well as their disregard, in some cases, for the use of illustrations; after all, customers could visit their stores and see the merchandise in person.⁷⁸ By the 1890s, neither Gimbels nor W. W. Whitney department stores reported using lithographic advertising, the latter describing it as “worthless.”⁷⁹ On the other hand, many manufacturers of consumer goods began to turn to lithographers beginning in the 1880s, for a wide range of reasons. As I’ve already mentioned, tobacco advertisers used their services extensively, spending large sums on collectible cigarette cards that were included in packs as premiums. And other forms of tobacco were advertised with lithography as well. The Lorillard company, makers of smoking tobacco and snuff, spent at least forty percent of its advertising on lithographic forms of publicity, and only ten percent in newspapers. (The other fifty percent, listed as “wall signs” and “outdoor display,” are unclear in terms of how they were produced).⁸⁰ Brewing companies depended heavily on it, since many periodicals banned beer and liquor advertising; saloon walls were lined with beer posters, and brewers and distillers also distributed small cards, store cards and calendars.⁸¹ This barrage of advertising was brought about in part by the stiff competition among brewers: since each saloon proprietor could keep only one or two brands on hand, due to the perishability of a tapped keg of beer and the high

⁷⁸ Laird 29.

⁷⁹ Fowler 901.

⁸⁰ Fowler 901.

⁸¹ Jay 40.

price of draft equipment, brewers had to provide every inducement possible to promote their product.⁸²

But, as I have already tried to show, the makers of more “legitimate” consumer goods also chose to add lithography into their marketing mix, with the aim of promoting their brands. By the 1890s, some advertisers were articulate about their drive to create brand recognition. Organ manufacturer Julius J. Estey reported that the key to his company’s success was to “keep the name of ‘Estey’ prominently before the public, so that whenever any one thinks of an organ or of a piano, he will associate the name of ‘Estey’ with it...”⁸³ By the time of this statement, published in 1897, Estey had been a longtime advertiser, and one of the first systematic advertisers in newspapers, beginning in the 1850s.⁸⁴ However, the company also made early and extensive use of visual advertising, including cards and posters, to create the association between the brand name and organs in general. Estey’s advertising cards ran the gamut. While many pictured the product in upscale parlors, others used more sentimental or whimsical imagery: a five-piece band of tiny tots, or a young man serenading his smiling beloved with a “banjo” fashioned out of a tennis racket. In the latter picture, neither the product nor the factory is even represented on the front of the card.⁸⁵ Taken together, the brand is associated with everything

⁸² Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic, 1983) 81-82. Bottled beer sales were negligible in the mid 1880s.

⁸³ Fowler 53.

⁸⁴ Presbrey 404.

⁸⁵ Advertising cards, n.d., organ category, box 1, WCBA. There is an image of the company’s Brattleboro, Vt., factory on the back of the card featuring the banjo player. See Laird for a discussion of the significance of factory images integrated into Estey and other advertisements.

from advanced manufacturing methods to the role music plays in the realm of romantic love. To be sure, this was not “modern” advertising; the company was not attempting to create a distinct brand identity by systematically creating ads that distinguished its products from those of its competitors. Rather, the picture of the young serenader was probably distributed in the hope it would be kept in an album, shown to guests and “talked over.”

3.5 Complementary Advertising

As I have already suggested, Estey, Heinz and Quaker were all brands that advertised successfully in a range of different media. But perhaps it is a root-beer maker that best illustrates how these many different types of advertising were used to complement one another. The Hires root beer company made a product that, like others which would now be called “soft drinks,” was promoted as a “temperance drink,” and a healthful “blood purifier.” The company began advertising in the late 1870s, and for ten years president and founder Charles E. Hires invested all of its profits in periodical advertising, running unprecedented full-page ads in the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* and, as early as 1888, taking out half pages in magazines.⁸⁶ Yet, by the late 1880s, the company was also distributing beautifully-lithographed cards as premiums. One of their remarkable aspects is that they refer directly to the company’s periodical advertising. For example, one pictures a young girl sporting a paper hat—fashioned out of an

⁸⁶ Presbrey 420.

issue of the *Public Ledger* featuring an ad for Hires root beer.⁸⁷ And this was not unusual: advertising cards depicting consumers encountering other forms of publicity were fairly common. This particular example may reflect company founder Charles Hires's stated preference for newspaper advertising: he rated all periodicals together at about three times the value he rated lithography. Still, he devoted a significant amount, twenty percent of his total advertising resources, to posters and chromolithographed cards and hangers.⁸⁸

The notion of complementarity explains why Hires may have spent valuable advertising dollars on lithography, despite his preference for newspapers. Chromolithographs had the elements of beauty and collectibility that were lacking in newspaper ads. These qualities suggest not only repeated viewing—newspapers could do that by being placed on a daily or weekly schedule—but extended gazing, enjoyment, and, some believed, cultural uplift. As I suggested in Chapter One, chromo advertising was believed to have a democratizing effect by educating “the masses” about artistic beauty and elevating their tastes. Moreover, by referring to the company's own newspaper advertising, chromolithographs could remind viewers repeatedly of ads that in themselves would not elicit such sustained attention. Finally, they could depict scenes that placed newspaper advertising (or other types) squarely in the center of everyday life, thereby perhaps serving to help “normalize” the late-nineteenth-century barrage of advertising. These

⁸⁷ Advertisements, beverages category, box 1, WCBA. Several of these Hires chromo ads refer to their newspaper advertising. See also Jay 88; 92.

⁸⁸ Fowler 901. While the posters may not have been lithographed, the cards and hangers, which made up 10 percent of expenditures, were.

collectible premiums saw wide distribution: by 1892, almost three million packages of Hires root beer were sold each year.⁸⁹

In addition to being used in tandem with newspaper and magazine advertising, lithography was often combined with other forms of publicity. The sewing-machine industry, in its drive to introduce a new and fairly complicated consumer product, raised product demonstrations to an art form, and made extensive use of chromolithography as well. As one manager stated:

We use cards, circulars, booklets, hangers, posters, etc.; newspapers largely and magazines somewhat; and supplement all by displays of ornamental machine needlework under the direction of a skilled operator, who gives practical demonstration of the range of work which can be done on the White sewing machine.⁹⁰

Another sewing-machine company combined demonstration with lithography by circulating a small card that pictures a demonstration taking place. In the image, a young girl sits at a Royal St. John sewing machine while a large multi-ethnic crowd of onlookers stand in open-mouthed awe.⁹¹ There is no printing on the back of the card; the promotional appeals are integrated into

⁸⁹ John J. Riley, *A History of the American Soft Drink Industry: Bottled Carbonated Beverages, 1807-1957* (Washington: American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages, 1958) 117,126. Each package contained concentrate that made five gallons of root beer. Bottling of the finished product began in about 1893, but packages of the concentrate, sold in boxes, were still pictured on advertisements, (sometimes along with the fully prepared product), at least until 1900. See Hires advertisements, beverages category, box 1, WCBA.

⁹⁰ S.A. Burgess, manager of the White Sewing Machine Company, quoted in Fowler 168.

⁹¹ Advertising card, sewing machine category, box 1, WCBA.

the scene, with signs that describe the machine's qualities. Here, the card allowed the consumer to be privy to the demonstration whether or not she was physically present; the point of view of the image even placed the card's beholder among the crowd of onlookers.

Publicity stunts and endorsements, like product demonstrations, were heavily supplemented with lithography. Like other entrepreneurs, bicycle maker J.W. Spalding reported valuing newspaper advertising the highest while still making use of nearly every other medium. Yet he specifically credits chromolithography with helping the company to capitalize on the fact that a rider mounted on a Spalding bicycle won the Irvington-Milburn road race in 1894:

The winning of that race did not amount to so very much in itself, but the way we handled that win did the Spalding bicycle more good than any other kind of advertising we did that year. We heralded the event abroad. Lithographs and posters of the winner were sent to all sections of the country and again the cry went up 'Spalding's luck' but from that day to this the Spalding bicycle has been the favorite...⁹²

Whether or not Spalding bicycles became "the favorite," this passage illustrates that entrepreneurs used lithography to supplement their other promotional endeavors, with the specific aim of creating national brand identities. Like the other brands discussed in this section, Spalding was promoted using a mix of publicity that, while not as apparently well-coordinated as the type of campaigns later instituted by advertising agencies, still incorporated mutually supporting forms.

⁹² Fowler 90.

3.6 The Perceived Value of Pictorial Advertising

All advertisers who used lithography shared a belief that, to some extent, illustrations were effective in publicity. From the 1870s to the 1890s, there was indeed a tight correspondence between lithography and pictorial advertising. Not only was lithography free from the bounds of the letterpress's column rules, "the chromo brought the brightest, boldest color to printed advertising that had ever existed."⁹³ Hence, an advertiser who wished to use mass-produced, elaborately designed and richly colored pictures had no choice but to use chromolithography. In contrast, until the 1880s, most periodical advertising was limited to the written word, or at most a woodcut or an electrotpe image, usually small in size and lacking in detail.⁹⁴ So while the letterpress was the best choice for printing the written word, even handbills, posters, and cards printed on a letterpress could include only a limited color spectrum. As a result of all of these technological limitations, most advertising pictures were lithographs, and most advertising lithographs were pictorial.

Predictably (and, in fact, presciently) lithographers promoted themselves by arguing that pictorial advertising was the wave of the future. One card distributed by J.H. Buffords' Sons lithographic firm began with a general statement indistinguishable from those of most advertising experts of the time period – "No good business man will attempt to do business

⁹³ Peter C. Marzio, *The Democratic Art: Pictures for a 19th-Century America* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979) 191.

⁹⁴ Presbrey 401; Magazine advertisements contained images in the 1880s, but they were small and black-and-white. See Ohmann, 177-179, for a graphic comparison of magazine advertising in 1880 with that of the 1890s.

without adopting some medium of making himself known to those whose trade he seeks” – but quickly parted ways with much of the expert advice, arguing that lithography was a more effective medium for advertising than newspapers. The ad asserted that customers’ zeal to obtain chromolithographed advertising cards was a fact which contained “volumes in favor of pictorial over any other mode of advertising,” and noted that people not only sought out the illustrated cards, they also collected them, and even made them a topic of conversation: “Imagine, if you can, people begging a grocer for copies of a paper containing his advertisement! A handsome picture will be kept, talked over, asked for, and bring customers.”⁹⁵

Many advertising experts, on the other hand, devalued lithography as a method of publicity. To some degree, this may be because advertising agents, whose income was derived from commissions paid by newspapers and magazines, had an interest in promoting periodical advertising. George Rowell, the successful and influential agent who established the trade journal *Printers’ Ink*, maintained that newspapers were superior because they reached those people who would never stop to gaze into a shop window to see a show card.⁹⁶ In 1891, *Printers’ Ink* published an article titled “Money Thrown Away,” which hailed the decision by cigarette manufacturers to discontinue “the use of fancy colored lithographs and cards” (a decision which, as I suggested earlier, was probably the result of the lack of competition brought by the formation of the cigarette trust in 1890). The author not only predicted (or attempted to bring about) the end of all lithographed signs, cards, and calendars for advertising purposes, he

⁹⁵ Advertising card, advertising industry category, box 7, WCBA.

⁹⁶ Laird 158.

also implied that pictures were entirely unnecessary in advertising, whatever the medium: “The day is rapidly approaching when this means of advertising will also be discontinued and advertisers will recognize the fact that plain printers’ ink is after all the most effective means of reaching the public...” Notably, according to this writer, the ineffectiveness of calendars as an advertising medium lie in their ubiquity: so many of them were sent out, unsolicited, that any given calendar was likely to end up in the waste basket.⁹⁷

However, not all advertising experts denounced pictorial advertising so completely. They did, however, argue about what made an illustrated advertisement effective, holding forth about the particular uses, forms and assets of advertising illustration. One common view was that pictures could be effective – but only as an accompaniment to text. For example, one reviewer of advertisements used a fishing analogy, suggesting that pictures could be effective (as bait), but only when accompanied by well-written text (the hook).⁹⁸ Other experts concurred, but also suggested that it was the quality of the picture that made the biggest difference:

“Lithographic posters, if properly designed, combine the advantages of scenic art with worded argument,” advised independent copywriter Nathaniel Fowler in his book *Fowler’s Publicity*.⁹⁹ Although the majority of Fowler’s book focused on the writing and composition of print ads, the author did take some time lauding the benefits of lithographic illustration. Lithographic posters, he argued, were uniquely “artistic,” making them well adapted “to the advertising of good

⁹⁷ O. Kling, “Money Thrown Away,” *Printers’ Ink* 4 (1891): 446.

⁹⁸ John P. Lyons, “Pictures in Advertising,” *Printers’ Ink* 12 (1895): 5.

⁹⁹ Fowler 763.

entertainments, and to every class of commercial commodity.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, he agreed with lithographers that the medium offered the best way to create effective advertising illustrations that would not only capture consumers’ attention, but also be retained. With regard to advertising calendars, which were used to promote a wide range of products, including beer, insurance, and condiments, he wrote: “Lithography offers the best means of producing the decorative part of a calendar, and with it, it is possible to produce the most unique, original, and striking designs, which will not only be appreciated when seen, but will be remembered.”¹⁰¹

In contrast to the aforementioned expert who said most calendars were thrown away, Fowler suggested that they were valued by their recipients because they borrowed the appeal and the cultural value of framed chromos. Therefore, in Fowler’s view, even though the calendars were distributed free of charge they were still highly appreciated and therefore as effective as periodical advertising: “Probably less than one ten-thousandth of one per cent. of the calendars used in parlor, chamber, office, and store are paid for by the owners,” he wrote, “yet the effort made to get them, and their intrinsic value, place them as advertising mediums, by the side of purchased periodicals.”¹⁰² He further suggested that the widespread need for home beautification and cultural uplift at a low cost made the lithographed calendars more effective than their letterpress counterparts for penetrating into the domestic setting: “The highly artistic calendar, and one of most elaborate design,—provided the calendar matter can be read,—is in

¹⁰⁰ Fowler 763.

¹⁰¹ Fowler 899.

¹⁰² Fowler 895.

many respects a better advertising medium than the perfectly plain calendar, if the advertiser desires to reach the home.”¹⁰³

Some advertisers believed good illustrations were the bread and butter of their publicity. Thomas Doliber, the president of a baby-food company, stated: “The pictures of the healthy, happy babies that have been made so by the use of the article advertised, is a kind of advertising that makes a favorable impression, and it has made a favorable impression for Mellin’s Food.”¹⁰⁴ Given his stated intent to associate his brand with happiness and healthfulness, it is no wonder that Doliber included chromolithographs in his advertising plan. The perceived advantages of color illustrations, as compared to newspaper ads, are suggested in the above passage: while images of a smiling baby’s face could be (and were) featured in newspaper display ads, the elements that could signify health could be communicated better with a well-executed color picture: fat, rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes. Indeed, the company distributed small cards and large, finely lithographed stand-up show cards that featured the round, smiling faces and bright eyes of little ones supposedly made vibrant by Mellin’s Food.¹⁰⁵ One card used a caption to reinforce the portrait of a smiling baby: “This bright-eyed, merry little girl loves her Mellin’s Food” (Figure 2).

A writer in the advertising trade journal *Printers’ Ink* praised a Mellin’s Food streetcar ad for its high-quality representation of a healthy baby: “This is simply a handsome lithograph of a

¹⁰³ Fowler 895.

¹⁰⁴ Fowler 48.

¹⁰⁵ Advertisements, food category, oversize box 21, WCBA.

particularly attractive, wholesome and winsome little girl, with red dimpled cheeks, bright blue eyes, and a pervading air of contentment.” The reviewer further suggested that the ad was not only attractive, but also effective, fulfilling the two main qualities in an illustrated ad: It should first “possess intrinsic interest, sentiment or humor, something that in itself appeals to the eye,” and second, and even more importantly, “the picture should be germane to the article advertised”: there should “at least be some association of ideas” between the picture and the advertised item. The writer concluded, “Even if one has never heard of ‘Mellin’s Food,’ he’ll know that whatever ‘Mellin’s’ is, it is something good for children, and if he has any children, he will begin to inquire about it.”¹⁰⁶

While the writer may or may not be correct in his assessment of the consumer response to this advertisement, this quote does reasonably suggest how a picture, particularly a color one, can communicate in a register not available in a text-only advertisement. Indeed, Fowler believed the influence of illustrations was so powerful they must be used with great care:

The illustration is education and is likely to influence people against the thing as well as to prepossess them in favor of it. It is always better not to use illustrations if the illustration does not properly illustrate, and it is still better to use illustrations whenever they will tell people the story better than it can be told without pictures. This is an age of pictures, and successful advertising must always be in harmony with conditions.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Lyons 4.

¹⁰⁷ Fowler 750.

Fowler's conflation of advertising with "education" implies the moral uplift that chromolithography still carried even into the late 1890s, when the heyday of fine-art chromos had already passed. Calendars in particular were often described, both within the lithography trade press and by advertising experts, as exquisitely designed and printed, and exhibiting the values of fine art.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, even for the reviewer quoted above who denounced chromolithographed advertising calendars for their ubiquity, did not criticize the quality of the lithography. To the contrary, he suggested that the calendars were so "elegant in design that many may be classed as works of art..."¹⁰⁹ Rather, his concern was with the high price it cost advertisers to have high-quality lithography work done.

3.7 Costs of Advertising Lithography

There are no figures regarding how much was spent on lithographic advertising as compared to other forms, such as newspapers, magazines and letterpress circulars and posters, since companies did not categorize advertising expenditures according to which method of production was used. (For example, categories include "printing" and "novelties," either one of which may or may not include work done by lithographers). Similarly, lithographers who produced advertising also made other types of materials: letterheads, billheads, diplomas, greeting cards, even fine-art reproductions, so comparing their revenues to those of newspapers, for example, does not shed much light. Moreover, as I mentioned in Chapter One, it is not always possible to

¹⁰⁸ For example, see "Artistic Calendars," *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.15 (1889): 229.

¹⁰⁹ Kling 446.

distinguish advertising lithography from “fine-art” lithography, since it was commonplace for information about businesses to be included in lithographs for hanging. Factory views with company names adorned parlor walls.

As I have already shown, there was no agreement among advertisers about whether lithography, with its relatively high printing costs, was a better or worse “value” than periodical advertising. Some believed that chromo ads would be kept, talked about, and shown to others. And indeed, even allowing for the fact that newspapers, too, were often passed around, it was probably the case that the average collectible or show card was looked at by more people (and looked at more times by many people) than was one insertion of the average newspaper ad. But just as newspaper ads varied by size, frequency, and circulation, as well as the presumed “quality” of the readership, lithography rates varied widely depending upon the quality of the work done, the size of the card or hanger, the number of colors used, the size of the order, and other factors.

For example, in the mid-to-late 1880s, a small card with a simple stock design from J. H. Bufford’s Sons, headquartered in New York City, sold for twenty dollars per thousand (two cents each), while William Karle, a Rochester, NY, lithographer, charged twice as much for hanging show cards measuring about a foot long and including printed ad, brass mounting, and ring at the top for hanging. (The same card without the hanger hardware was fifteen dollars cheaper per thousand.)¹¹⁰ Presumably, a great deal more people would see the show card, on display in a store, than would see the much smaller trade card, on display (or not) in someone’s home. Each

¹¹⁰ Advertisement, advertising industry category, box 7, WCBA; poster, lithography category, oversize, box 32, WCBA,.

of these prices were for items containing stock designs, rather than original work. Still more expensive were the 50,000 large hangers bought by the city of Cincinnati to advertise its Centennial Exposition: at \$3,400, they cost the city almost seven cents each. Printed in ten colors, and including an elaborate design depicting the founding of the city, they were costly indeed for the lithographer to produce; observers considered this price a bargain for the city.¹¹¹ Posters, which were typically printed in four colors, cost anywhere from three to ten cents per sheet of 28 x 42 inches.¹¹² The *Printers' Ink* article that denounced lithography indicated that the cost of each calendar ranged from four to thirty-five cents each, but that the “aggregate” cost, which included distribution, was as high as three dollars each.

3.8 Distribution

An important variable to keep in mind when comparing rates of lithography to print advertising is distribution. Obviously, distribution was included in the rates for newspaper and magazine ads (indeed, it is the main thing an advertiser is paying for), while the distribution of lithographic advertising was the responsibility of the company who ordered the job. But this did not make the choice between advertising media particularly easy, because just as it was impossible for advertisers to determine the success with which they were able to get their lithographs into the hands of consumers or on the walls of shops and saloons, the circulation rates of newspapers

¹¹¹ “Competition: Designs to Advertise the Centennial,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.25 (1887): 623.

¹¹² “Theatrical Posters,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.25 (1887): 615; S.G. Harvey, “Some Facts About Sign Advertising,” *Printers' Ink* 8 (1893): 343.

were often considered unreliable. Even after advertising agents began to compile more reliable circulation figures, some advertisers rejected publication advertising in favor of lithography and letterpress out of a desire to have greater control over distribution. According to Laird:

Not only were agents' opinions not yet authoritative, in some cases agents' poor advice drove clients away from periodical advertising altogether, and toward relying entirely on job printers' media. In 1889, for instance, the Lydia Pinkham patent-medicine firm spent its entire advertising budget on trade cards bearing pictures of granddaughters of the deceased Mrs. Pinkham. Charles Pinkham's concerns about the reliability of his agent's services had led to his decision to curtail all newspaper advertising.¹¹³

By the mid-1890s, when most forms of chromolithography were beginning to die out, and the field of advertising was becoming more organized and professionalized, agencies and publishers were more able to convince advertisers of the integrity of circulation figures. This provided a distinct advantage to periodical advertising.

Similarly, poster and street-car advertising became fully rationalized in the 1890s. Poster advertising, for example, was eventually controlled by a few companies that offered reliable national distribution on large sign-posting boards that lined streets and railways. *Printers' Ink* reported in 1893 that it cost three cents per week per single-sheet poster to be distributed the old-fashioned way, "put up by the bill-posters as chance may offer—that is, on fences or anywhere possible—without guaranteed display," but that an advertiser could pay the same price per sheet

¹¹³ Laird 87.

by contracting with a bill-posting company that controlled large bill-stands which displayed much larger posters of four sheets high and ten sheets long. For an extra two cents per sheet, an advertiser could secure a prime spot on the boards.¹¹⁴ By 1896 companies were offering twenty-five-sheet stands, in three hundred locations around the country, at a cost of \$1200 per month for printing as well as posting.¹¹⁵ (Around the same time, national firms sprung up to distribute cards in street cars across the country.)¹¹⁶ As the bill-posting industry became more organized, the high cost of guaranteed display of large prominently displayed posters favored the national advertiser with deep pockets over the smaller local advertiser. The poster industry also began to favor consumer-product manufacturers over the amusement industry. While circuses had large budgets, by the twentieth century, bill-posting companies were formally censoring their boards for content, in order to further legitimize their business and distance it from what they considered “objectionable material” on posters for circuses, the theater, and other amusements. A promotional publication put out by the poster advertising association in 1912 boasted: “Poster advertising is the only medium that keeps its skirts absolutely clean, and this has been brought about by the activities of the censorship committee of the Poster Advertising Association.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Harvey 343.

¹¹⁵ “How to Use Billboards,” *Advertising Experience* 4.2 (1896): 15.

¹¹⁶ Strasser 91-93. The advertising trade journal *Fame* (New York), edited by Artemas Ward, contained frequent advertisements for streetcar advertising in the 1890s. Ward, who had directed advertising for Sapolio, himself started a streetcar advertising firm.

¹¹⁷ Herbert Cecil Duce, *Poster Advertising* (Chicago: Blakely Printing Co., 1912) 31.

For most lithographs other than posters and streetcar cards, distribution remained haphazard through the end of the century, which sometimes posed a problem. Many large manufacturing firms wanted to communicate directly with customers by reaching them at the point of sale not only with their striking packaging, but also with collectible cards and colorful displays hanging from the walls, the ceilings, and propped up on counters. “In-store displays, window-dressing service, signs, calendars, novelty premiums, and the like were offered to retailers,” writes Daniel Pope. “These aids were designed to speed merchants’ turnover, help them offer customer service, and tie their personal selling to manufacturers’ advertising.”¹¹⁸ But there were a number of different mechanisms by which these materials were delivered and displayed, not all equally successful.

Perhaps the first chromo advertising cards were those stamped with the names of stores and distributed by those stores to paying customers. Gradually, as the price of lithography decreased due to competition, stores began to distribute them freely. In the promotional literature mentioned earlier, J. H. Buffords’ Sons suggested that by offering advertising cards at a low price, they would be allowing the cards to be distributed more freely, thereby preventing merchants from becoming overburdened with the task: “We think we have solved the problem of pictorial advertising so that these beautiful cards may be distributed freely,” the firm announced. “We offer them at low prices, in order that they may be scattered broadcast—as the legitimate advertising medium of the present as well as the future.” This ad suggested that merchants who were only able to give out trade cards with purchases were overburdened with

¹¹⁸ Pope 91-92.

the “careful doling out” of the cards, perhaps resulting in so much “annoyance that he would fain waive the benefits.”¹¹⁹

Small cards that advertised branded merchandise were distributed in stores as well. Patent-medicine makers and other manufacturers offered them to small merchants nationwide as incentives to order their products.¹²⁰ These and larger display materials such as hangers, show cards and posters were often distributed to stores by traveling salesmen. The standard practice was for jobbers to send “drummers” out nationwide on trains, horses and stagecoaches to drum up business even in remote places. These drummers served the small rural general stores and urban specialty stores where most people still bought their goods (despite the growth of urban department stores), and they did the work of distributing both products and sales materials.¹²¹ Some estimated fifty thousand drummers were on the road in 1871, either working on salary or commission for a manufacturer or jobber, making sales and distributing printed advertising materials to retailers. As Laird writes:

Through these representatives, manufacturers distributed their show cards, trade cards, calendars, or other promotional items, and took orders for their products. A good drummer could effectively distribute the advertisements, be sure that

¹¹⁹ Advertising card, advertising industry category, box 7, WCBA.

¹²⁰ Jay 39-40.

¹²¹ Strasser 61, 164.

retailers or other recipients put the advertisements on display, and gain considerable feedback information as well.¹²²

But, as manufacturers soon learned, drummers often sold goods for competing manufacturers, and therefore often had little interest in promoting the goods of one over another. As a result, advertisers couldn't count on these drummers to make sure their brands were well promoted at the point of sale.

Over the course of several decades, many companies began eliminating the wholesaler and organizing sales forces. While some companies did so fairly early—Heinz has its own sales force and distribution network from the start—many others followed suit in the years around the turn of the century. In some cases, manufacturers retained the use of wholesalers, but established their own sales forces to convince retailers to help promote their brand.¹²³ In any case, by the 1890s it was not unusual for manufacturers to take on the task of distributing their own marketing materials. The owner of a stove polish company reported in the mid 1890s, “We have two men traveling, visiting the stores, and putting up advertising cards.”¹²⁴

Some show cards, hangers and other display materials were sent to retailers through the mail or with orders. While this did not guarantee that retailers would display or distribute any particular piece of advertising, photographic evidence of nineteenth century stores suggests they were crammed with point-of-sale materials: posters and show cards graced walls, countertops

¹²² Laird 83-84.

¹²³ Strasser 81-82, 194.

¹²⁴ Fowler 83.

and windows, and even hung from the ceiling.¹²⁵ Specialty stores carried advertising matter, as well as grocers and dry goods retailers. As the advertising manager of a piano manufacturer advised in 1893:

It pays to encourage and advertise the dealer who takes an interest in your goods. You can materially assist him, and it is a rule that works both ways. We supply him with advertising matter, pretty cards for show and distribution purposes, posters, etc., and take space in his local paper. This tends to keep up his interest and influences sales very surprisingly.¹²⁶

Like this piano manufacturer, many advertisers felt that providing merchants with attractive and immediate marketing materials made them amenable to carrying their brands: “These colorful point-of-purchase sales devices appealed to manufacturers because they encouraged retailers to carry products that offered such vivid promotional support,” writes Laird. “Such items also presented consumers with promotional messages at the last possible moment before their purchase decisions.”¹²⁷

However, not all merchants were equally receptive to the use of these materials. “The path toward dealer cooperation was not always smooth,” writes Pope. “Retailers were often less than grateful for the flood of in-store selling material they received. Complaining merchants tossed away useless displays, unreadable house organs, and other worthless material the

¹²⁵ Laird 84-85.

¹²⁶ Farnham, H.G., “Piano Advertising,” *Printers’ Ink* 8 (1893): 443.

¹²⁷ Laird 85.

manufacturers sent them.”¹²⁸ In some cases, a company’s own sales force was less than diligent. The Heinz company spilled a great deal of ink in its company literature exhorting its salesmen to convince retailers to devote a prominent place in their store to elaborate displays of Heinz products. “There is no better method of selling goods than by showing them,” one newsletter article lectured employees. “Many of our friends among the retailers understand this. Others do not. Many of our salesmen understand it. Others do not seem to recognize the value of the plan.” What followed was a several-point plan for salesmen, including this advice: Get retailers to display Heinz products by convincing the grocer you’re working in his interests—and just as importantly, get the clerk on your side. “The clerk is the man who sells the goods, takes care of the stock, and in most cases trims the windows and makes the interior display,” the company reminded its salesmen.¹²⁹

It stands to reason that a significant number of retailers would have been resistant to “dealer helps,” not only because they felt store displays may have been useless, but also because they were doing the job they were intended to do: take control of distribution and pricing. As I suggested earlier, national brand-name advertising was intended to shift control of distribution away from small storeowners and jobbers and toward the manufacturing companies themselves. But it was perhaps the larger retailers who rebelled the most against manufacturers’ in-store brand advertising. While many small and rural retailers were receptive to manufacturers’ efforts at stabilizing prices through national advertising, the large urban storeowners were the ones who

¹²⁸ Pope 92.

¹²⁹ “Displaying the 57” 9.

most resented price setting, because it sabotaged their ability to buy in quantity and undercut small stores by charging customers less.¹³⁰ In any case, a 1912 survey found that only six out of sixty respondents felt that all the assistance they received from manufacturers was useful.¹³¹

But stores were not the only site for the display of lithographic marketing materials. As I have already mentioned, every available outdoor wall or surface was covered with advertising. And like stores, saloons were crammed with posters, show cards, and colorful calendars, which were distributed by brewers, along with bar furnishings and glasses, as inducements to sell their brand. Of course, any given brewer could not be certain their advertisements would grace the walls of saloons any more than food manufacturers could be sure their show cards would be displayed in stores.

3.9 The Demise of Chromo Advertising

Toward the end of the century, changes in merchandise distribution and retailing caused many types of chromolithographic advertising to die out. According to Robert Jay, the advent of the advertising post card—which allowed the targeting of consumer groups and for which postal regulations became more favorable in 1898—was a main reason for the decline in trade cards. But he cites other causes as well: Rural general stores—a major site for the display and distribution of advertising lithography—were threatened due to the advent of mail-order catalogues and rural free delivery; and advertising cards given out at the point of purchase

¹³⁰ Pope 91; Strasser 271.

¹³¹ Pope 92-93.

became less attractive to manufacturers who began to rely more on their own catalogues in the 1890s, replacing traveling salesmen who could help make sure that the cards were distributed.¹³² As sales and distribution of consumer products became more rationalized, advertisers sought ways to take the guesswork out of the distribution of their messages.

As I have suggested, lithographic billboard advertising, which did survive the nineteenth century, did so by promoting itself as an up-to-date industry with organized distribution. As the trade journal *Advertising Experience* put it in 1896:

When dry goods boxes, ash barrels, fences, trees, and every available little piece of space was covered with a poster (it seems a pity to dignify it with such a name) outdoor advertising bordered on the cheap and disreputable. Today it has been dignified by thorough, business-like methods and by the patronage of most of the great advertisers of the country.¹³³

The chief difficulty for advertisers under the old system, according to the article, was that, “No advertiser could feel certain that his poster would remain ten minutes where it was posted.” But, the journal assured its readers, the industry had now been systematized: “This has all been changed. Every foot of space in every city and town in the country is controlled by a few bill-posting companies.” In an accompanying article, a representative of the Associated Bill Poster’s Association, a national trade group, even assured its readers of one hundred percent market

¹³² Jay 99-101.

¹³³ “How to Use Billboards” 15.

saturation, claiming, “The circulation given by the bill-boards of any city is the same as the population of the city.”¹³⁴

Whether or not national advertisers believed every claim of the bill-posting companies, it was likely the promise of organized, guaranteed distribution that brought them to patronize billboards and streetcars. And all evidence suggests they were attracted to buying ad space in magazines for similar reasons: it relieved them of the burden of disseminating their messages, and they felt assured that their advertisements would reach the homes of thousands of reasonably affluent consumers nationwide each month. In fact, advertisers took advantage of the reliable distribution of magazines even while they were still having lithographers produce their color ads: the first full-page color magazine ads were actually lithographic inserts. In 1893, the back cover of the Chicago World’s Fair edition of *Youth’s Companion* was a chromolithographed advertisement for Mellin’s Food that included a reproduction of the painting *The Awakening of Cupid*. But this was an expensive venture: it cost the company fourteen thousand dollars, which stood for ten years as the highest expenditure for a single magazine insertion and made it “the talk in advertising circles for several years.”¹³⁵

But any lithographic picture included in a magazine had to be an insert, not printed along with the rest of the publication. A major problem with lithography was that there was no good way to combine images with pages of text; the chemical printing process on which lithography relied was entirely incompatible with the letterpress, which was used to print publications. The

¹³⁴ Miles Stanton, “Outdoor Publicity,” *Advertising Experience* 4.2 (1896): 13.

¹³⁵ Presbrey 386-391.

letterpress industry, seeking a way to efficiently combine full-color and photographic images with text, worked to develop the three-color halftone process in a way that was compatible with their presses. Once developed, this process was easily adapted to use in periodicals, enabling magazines to offer full-color advertisements at a reasonable cost. This technological development, which was commonly implemented by the turn of the century, along with the fact that magazines served as a reliable and value-added distribution mechanism for pictorial advertising, seems to explain why magazines became the medium of choice for many national advertisers starting in the 1890s.¹³⁶

However, all by itself, this explanation places too much emphasis on technology and elides an important set of questions: What explains why advertisers wanted or needed to run color pictures in magazines in the first place? What gave advertisers the impression that large, colorful, detailed images would be effective at selling their brands? If the answer to these questions lies in the fact that advertisers looked to their previous experience, it becomes clear that it was the widespread use of chromolithography that paved the way for full-page color ads in magazines, even if it was the halftone process was developed to make the practice affordable and convenient. Indeed, even before the halftone process had entirely replaced lithography for color magazine advertising, the value of rich, detailed illustrations in advertisements was articulated in the trade press. *Printers' Ink* declared in 1897 that “Ivory Soap has the prettiest advertisements”

¹³⁶ Ellen Mazur Thomson, *The Origins of Graphic Design in America, 1870-1920* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997) 18.

largely in response to their chromolithographed insert in *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* the year before.¹³⁷

3.10 Conclusion

If the rationalization of advertising production and distribution was the weapon that dealt the fatal blow to advertising lithography, it may have been advertising agencies that wielded it. The decline in the use of advertising lithography was, of course, accompanied by the expansion of advertising agencies, which began to offer production services in the 1890s, the largest of them devoting entire departments to artwork in that decade. These agencies also conducted market analyses and undertook the planning of campaigns. Presbrey writes:

Lord & Thomas, N.W. Ayer & Son, Pettengill & Co. and the J. Walter Thompson company were pioneers in the type of agency which analyzed and planned, and, instead of doing only what the advertiser proposed, made suggestions based on its own general experience and its own investigation into the advertiser's special problem.¹³⁸

While this new class of agencies changed advertising production by offering this expanded range of services, they continued to derive a profit in the same way agencies had since the 1850s: by earning a commission on periodical advertising. Therefore, as I suggested above, it is not surprising that agencies and the influential trade journal *Printers' Ink*, which was founded by an

¹³⁷ Presbrey 396.

¹³⁸ Presbrey 348.

agent, championed periodical advertising above other forms. (Eventually ad agencies earned commissions on fees paid to the billboard companies as well, which helps explain their acceptance of that medium in the 1890s.)¹³⁹ And in a similar fashion, newspapers and magazines themselves denigrated all other forms besides periodical advertising. In contrast, there were no similarly organized bodies or journals to champion chromolithographed cards and calendars. Lithographers did have trade, labor and professional organizations, and they did sometimes comment in their trade journals on the hypocrisy of newspapers who looked down on lithographic advertising while using posters to promote themselves.¹⁴⁰ However, the lithography trade press was not focused on promoting chromolithography to advertisers. Unlike *Printers' Ink*, for example, its audience was limited to colleagues in the trade, and did not include general advertisers. While this lack of an organized promotional network was not the ultimate cause of the demise of point-of-sale advertising lithography (all of the factors noted earlier were clearly more important), it is worth noting because it helps to put events into a historical perspective. As many types of advertising lithography died out, the advertising industry was becoming more efficient and offering a broader range of service. Big manufacturers hired advertising agencies to methodically plan and organize campaigns with the specific aims of changing consumer habits. Ohmann notes that by the 1890s, magazine advertisements consisted almost entirely of “new” types of goods, such as brand-name convenience foods and personal hygiene products,

¹³⁹ Laird 158.

¹⁴⁰ As the president of the lithographic artists' union put it in 1897: “If newspaper advertising is superior to lithography it is not very plain what possibly could induce the newspapers to have resort to lithography to advertise themselves except it be the fact that lithographic advertising is superior to anything else.” Edward Schneelock, “Causes of Business Stagnation,” *The National Lithographer* 4.7 (1897): 10.

and draws the conclusion that these were the types of products for which manufacturers had already learned (through trial and error) they could create markets through advertising:

“Manufacturers sensed or learned where advertising would work and where it would not; after a period of some confusion, they learned to advertise where old needs could be redirected or new ones created.”¹⁴¹ In this chapter, I have attempted to sketch out the boundaries of this period of confusion, focusing on the role played by advertising chromos in the drive to create markets for branded products. While there were as yet no organized bodies directing the flow of advertising dollars, actions taken by advertisers as they attempted to determine how and when to use and distribute chromo advertising nevertheless had lasting impacts for the development visual culture and consumer culture. In the next chapter, I will discuss the complex processes and negotiations by which chromo advertising was solicited and designed.

¹⁴¹ Ohmann 92.

4 “WE WANT IDEAS FOR CASH”

The *New York Sun*, in an 1890 article describing the meager existence of “the girl art student” (some were as young as fifteen) who came to the city to pursue her dreams, noted that she eked out a meager existence doing many kinds of commercial work to pay the rent at her “third-class” boarding house. The “typical” student, having saved up some money teaching in her home town, came to New York to learn to paint, but ran out of money before completing her studies. The *Sun* described her reaction to her dire situation:

Does she go back to the quiet plenty of her country home? Not at all. She pieces out her income by painting little fancy articles for the stores and exchanges, manages to get one or more pupils, either in painting or English grammar, as the case may be, sits up late at night, copying or illustrating for the papers, or on advertisements, or if worst comes to worst, goes home and teaches another year, and then takes it up again.¹

Although the description may have been melodramatic and skewed to confirm the writers’ thesis that the girl art student had “pluck,” the fact was that many art students had to somehow work their way through school. The late nineteenth century saw a boom in women’s art education, with scores of women from a range of backgrounds coming to cities seeking careers as artists.

¹ “The Girl Art Student,” *New York Sun*, 9 Feb 1890, Art Students’ League Papers, AAA.

Lithographers seeking advertising designers seized upon this ready pool of artistic talent. Between 1880 and 1900, the lithography trade morphed into an industry, becoming increasingly competitive as more and more firms sprouted up to meet the demand for labels, posters, show cards and advertising calendars. As lithography expanded and industrialized, countless entrepreneurs hung out a shingle declaring they specialized in “practical lithography.” But the number of firms eventually outpaced demand, resulting in a state of “ruinous competition” in which lithographers found it increasingly difficult to command a profit. Despite attempts to consolidate the industry toward the end of the century, competition remained intense. Most lithographers found themselves scrambling to get contracts—and making bids on commercial work that were so low they drained profits. It was this environment that drew lithographers not only to the art schools, but also to struggling-artists’ studios and amateur artists’ homes, hunting for original advertising designs that would give them an edge over the competition.

In this chapter I will discuss, within the context of the industrialization of lithography, the conditions under which chromolithographic advertising was produced and the relations between the parties involved: employing lithographers, lithographic salesmen, customers (advertisers), and lithographic artists and designers. By addressing the question of how designs were derived, I hope to lend a fuller understanding of the range of social positions and negotiations from which the field of visual advertising emerged—and to consider the significant but heretofore unacknowledged contribution of women to its creation. By examining lithography as a business, I hope to provide further insight into how lithographic advertising became so prevalent: by playing lithographers off each other, advertisers could count on getting more and more full-color pictorial advertising—often with original, custom-made designs by struggling and student

artists—for less and less money. I conclude that the intense competition for innovative designs, together with the conditions under which these designs were derived, helps to explain both the richness and prevalence of chromolithographic advertising between 1880 and 1900.

4.1 The Industrialization of Lithography

Between 1865 and 1900 an increasing amount of lithographers' business was in "practical lithography," a term that included items such as letterhead and diplomas, as well as labels, show cards, hangers and calendars.² But lithographic firms that published fine-art prints and greeting cards also branched out into advertising, and many firms emerged in the late 1870s and 1880s that produced only advertising and marketing-related lithography.³ By the late 1880s the fine chromos "suitable for framing," which had been such a cause for celebration among reformers who had widely declared them "uplifting" just a decade earlier, were being overshadowed by the more overtly commercialized uses of chromolithography. With so many lithographic firms relying on advertising contracts to stay in business, in 1887 one lithographic artist bitterly referred to his trade as the "humble hand-maid of commerce."⁴ A decade later, the trade was described as being used primarily for advertising goods.⁵

² Peter C. Marzio, *The Democratic Art: Pictures for a 19th-Century America* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979) 5.

³ Richard Zschaebitz, letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.15 (1888): 463.

⁴ H.A. Littmann, "To the Craft," *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.19 (1887): 518.

⁵ Edward Schneelock, "Causes of Business Stagnation," *The National Lithographer* 4.7 (1897): 9.

In the same decades that saw lithographic firms proliferating and becoming dependent upon advertising, lithographic establishments followed a common Gilded Age pattern: growing in size, mechanizing, and instituting specialization.⁶ For lithography, this took place decades after it occurred in the sister trade of letterpress printing, an industry which mechanized in the 1830s, spurred by the growth of book, journal, and newspaper publishing. Sean Wilentz writes that the mechanization of letterpress printing, and the specialization and dilution of skill that came with it, led to “a form of printshop sweating” in New York in the 1830s and 1840s.⁷ In contrast, in these same decades—before the introduction of chromolithography—lithographers still typically performed every task: grinding and polishing the stone, drawing, and printing. It was not until the 1870s that lithography was generally steam-powered, a profound development which allowed for production to be speeded up by a factor of ten and was accompanied by greater specialization.⁸ By the late 1880s, The National Lithographers’ Association, a trade group, delineated sixteen divisions of lithographic specialists: “artists’ foremen, artists, provers and provers’ assistants, transferrers and transferrers’ assistants, power-press printers, power-press feeders and power-press assistants, stone grinders and grainers, ink-grinders, drying-room

⁶ On Gilded Age growth of industry, technological change, and specialization, see Bruce Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989) 113-118.

⁷ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984) 129-132. Wilentz writes that this “technological revolution” in printing preceded that of other consumer finishing trades. On specialization in the printing trades, see also Laurie 38-39.

⁸ Marzio 88-89; 149-152. In the following chapter I will discuss the implications of the introduction of the steam press on the labor conditions of lithographic artists.

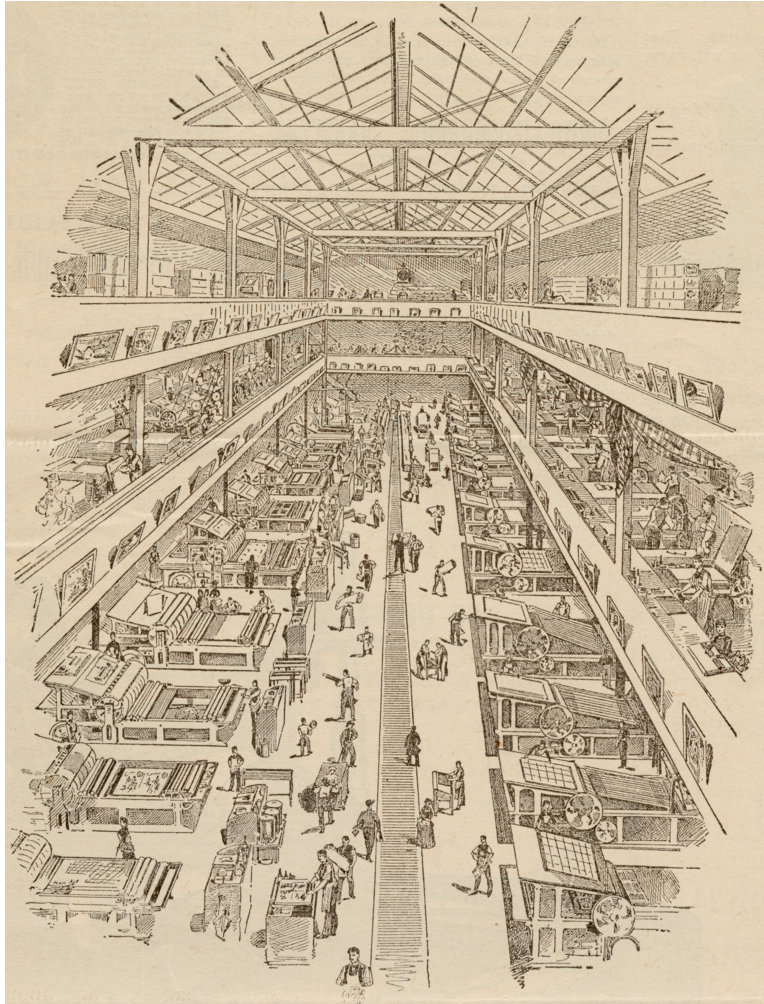


Figure 12: “A Model Lithographing Establishment,” *American Lithographer and Printer*, 1889.

**Division of Information Technology and Society,
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.**

help and stock-room help, paper handlers and cutters.”⁹ In 1889, a San Francisco firm described in the trade press as a “model lithographic establishment,” had thirty steam presses and employed about 200 workers.¹⁰ A depiction of the factory shows a three-story establishment, with dozens of men and women carrying out discrete tasks (Figure 12). By then, a high degree of labor division had become the norm.

The list of specializations quoted above includes only the production division of a lithographic establishment, not the equally important bookkeeping and sales divisions. Turnover among salesmen was high, with lithographic “drummers” charged with the task of traveling far and wide to convince dealers and advertisers to buy their firm’s products.¹¹ These salesmen had not only to convince manufacturers of the need to advertise using lithography, but also that their firm could offer the best and most “original” work at the lowest price. Because the production and distribution of chromo advertising was not controlled by advertising agencies, there was no central industry that rationalized the contracting system, assuring itself a profit by retaining a commission on all distribution costs. Rather, the usual practice for a company who wanted to issue cards, catalogs or calendars was to get bids and sketches from several lithographic firms, and award the job to one firm based upon the amount of its bid and the quality of the design presented. The abundance of lithographic firms competing for work in the late 1880s and 1890s allowed advertisers to choose among several possible designs, and drove lithographers to

⁹ Marzio 149.

¹⁰ “A Model Lithographic Establishment,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 12.9 (1889): 549.

¹¹ Marzio 154.

desperate measures in their attempts to get contracts. The result of this level of competition and disorganization in the industry meant that bids varied widely, as did the quality of work. As I will discuss later in the chapter, this atmosphere led to some dubious practices, as drummers attempted to obtain contracts by any means they could. But before dealing with the implications of this state of intense competition, I will discuss the design process in more detail.

4.2 The Designers

Some chromo show cards and calendars were designed by artists employed by lithographic firms. Most of these were *lithographic artists*, a term that referred to workers who “drew on stone” for mass production, whether inventing their own designs or capturing (on multiple stones) the nuances of light, shading, and color of other artists’ watercolor or pastel designs. In one 1886 issue of the *American Lithographer and Printer*, three classified ads were placed by lithographic artist-designers looking for work. A typical ad stated that “a first-class stipple artist also for sketching (Cigar labels, Calendars, and Chromo cards) seeks a situation in New York City. Wages \$25 per week.” A fourth ad was placed by a lithographic firm declaring that “an artist who can make designs may call on us for a steady and well paying situation.”¹²

During the heyday of chromo advertising, 1880-1900, the vast majority of lithographic artists working in firms were men. Although there had been a number of successful women lithographers in the early to mid 1800s (when lithography was a relatively new craft) along with industrialization came a sharper division of labor in which men dominated the more skilled tasks,

¹² Classified advertisements, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 7.3 (1886): 19.

and employers refused to hire women as apprentices. As a result, once *chromolithography* had been fully developed and came to be used widely for advertising, women were largely relegated to jobs like paper cutting and finishing work.¹³ Nevertheless, some women learned the art of lithography with private instruction or in schools of applied art, and toward the end of the century they found work as lithographic artists. In 1903, a widely-circulated news story about people with “unusual methods of livelihood” described some women who worked in the field of chromo advertising design, “illustrating the virtues of soap” and other products.¹⁴ Many of these women worked for lithographic firms, sometimes even as owners or partners, helping “merchants and manufacturers to celebrate the merits of their goods.”¹⁵ So, while women represented but a small minority of lithographic artists, a few were in influential positions.

At times, the owners and managers of lithographic firms hired painters or sketch artists who were *not* also printmakers to create designs, and, like the lithographic artists, these employed designers were predominantly male. They would produce sketches in pastel or watercolor, and lithographic artists would figure out how to replicate them for printing. A typical 1889 help-wanted ad stated: “WANTED—A first-class artist to design for general Lithographic Work, Colored Show Cards, etc. Not necessary to be able to Lithograph.”¹⁶ But

¹³ Helena Wright, *With Pen and Graver: Women Graphic Artists Before 1900* (Washington: Smithsonian, 1995) 3-5.

¹⁴ “Unusual Methods of Livelihood: Queer Feminine Vocations,” *Current Literature* 34 (1903): 294.

¹⁵ “Unusual Methods of Livelihood” 294.

¹⁶ Classified advertisement, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 7.5 (1889): 492.

whether they were looking to employ lithographic artists or designers, these firms were specifically looking for workers who could produce pictures for *advertising*. One short announcement in *The National Lithographer* stated that a particular artist was returning to the trade as an employee of a lithographic firm after a short sabbatical, and that the “re-entry of this talented artist to the ranks of the lithographers will cause a stir among the advertisers that will affect all branches of the industry.”¹⁷

It was not unusual for artist-designers employed by lithographers to strike out on their own, sometimes opening firms that furnished designs and/or lithographic work to the trade. One bulletin announcing such a move stated “designing will be a speciality.”¹⁸ Irish-born artist Frank Jones, who died in a freak train accident when returning home from an outing making sketches, is an example of a designer who worked at times for lithographic firms, at times out of his own studio. His obituary stated, “His independent spirit led him to open a studio and do work for the trade.”¹⁹ Some lithographers confined their own business to printing, relying heavily upon such design firms, which furnished samples to lithographers and provided estimates on design work.

Display ads for individuals providing designs on a piecework basis were common in the lithography trade journals. Many of these artists claimed to be jacks-of-all-trades, talented not only in sketching, but also in all types of lithography and lithographic engraving (a technique that was often used to do fine detailed commercial work, such as letterheads, billheads, and some

¹⁷ “Personal,” *The National Lithographer* 3.3 (1896): 9.

¹⁸ “Designing and Engraving to the Trade,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 10.21 (1888): 741.

¹⁹ “Frank Jones,” obituary, *The National Lithographer* 2.3 (1895): 11.

advertising). Toward the end of the century, some of these artists not only did designs for lithographers, but also did “advertising illustrations,” which could have referred to work done for magazines or newspapers.²⁰ The language used here is instructive, and helps to place creators of lithographic advertising within the larger field of visual advertising as it shifted toward newer technologies of mass production. While the term *designer* was often used to designate an artist who made sketches for lithographers, *illustrator* was usually used to refer to those who drew for reproduction in periodicals. For example, in one newspaper article, those who “invent attractive advertising matter, whether of pictures, trade marks, book covers, posters, or what not” were called “designers.” This was distinguished in the article from “illustrators,” which was used to designate creators of book and periodical illustration.²¹ Nevertheless, since the fields of illustration and advertising had yet to be professionalized, the two terms at times seemed to be used interchangeably. Eventually, as visual advertising came to be dominated by agencies who created it for magazines, *illustrator* would eventually become the dominant way to describe an advertising artist. However, during the chromo era, this period of flux, many artists who created advertising worked as both *illustrators* and *designers*.

Artists with a range of educational backgrounds and experience listed themselves as designers in the 1887-1888 *Lithographers' Directory*.²² Most of them did not have art careers that brought them significant lasting public recognition; out of twenty-seven individuals listed,

²⁰ “Chas. Juehne, sketch artist,” advertisement, *The National Lithographer* 4.12 (1897): 12.

²¹ “Average Incomes in Town,” *Brooklyn NY Times* 28 Mar. 1901, Art Students' League Papers, AAA.

²² *Lithographers' Directory* (New York: Lithographer Publishing Co., 1887-1888) 10.

only about six of them had careers in art that were considered significant enough that more information about them could be found by searching reference books such as the three-volume *Who Was Who in American Art*.²³ Those who were listed in both the directory and *Who Was Who* included artists who worked in fields such as illustration, painting, etching, engraving, and designing. However, *Who Was Who* entries leave out any mention of lithographic advertising, no doubt because of the publication's bias toward higher status types of art and design: exhibitions and finer illustration work. Of the six artists crosslisted, some of them exhibited their work several times, some only once or twice. Of all of the twenty-seven artists listed in the directory, one of the most accomplished was Miss S.E. Fuller of New York City, the only one who was clearly a woman.

Listed as Sarah E. Fuller, engraver, in the New York City directory for the same year, she is also described in *Who Was Who* as “One of the pioneer wood and steel engravers in this country” who did work for *Harper's* and “most of the prominent publishing houses of New York.”²⁴ She also exhibited her wood engravings at the National Academy of Design in 1861 and 1862. While it cannot be said definitively that Fuller actually got any advertising-design jobs, the fact that she listed herself in the directory suggests that she was looking to supplement her income with this type of work. Because she is described as an engraver rather than a painter, she may have been advertising her services as a lithographic engraver to do vignettes for various

²³ Peter Hastings Falk, ed., *Who Was Who in American Art* (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1999). This reference relies largely on records of exhibitions, so artists whose work was not included in prominent art shows are not included.

²⁴ Falk, vol. 1, 1213.

kinds of commercial work executed in monochrome, such as diplomas, letterhead, and stationery.

Most of the non-lithographic artists who submitted designs for chromo advertising worked in the media of pastel and watercolor. There is abundant evidence that many individual painters, both women and men working out of their studios or homes, provided designs to lithographers. Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to determine who they were, because they did this work anonymously and they did not publicize their services in lithographers' journals or directories. And, as I have already mentioned, due to its low status, lithographic advertising-design work is almost never credited or mentioned in artists' biographies. The denigration of advertising lithography was most likely due not only to the fact that so much of it was executed with low artistic standards, but also because it was circulated at a time when cheap chromos were beginning to flood the market and advertising had more than its share of critics. Therefore, for successful artists, this work was routinely done quietly on the side or at the very beginning of their careers; at times, artists who freely admitted doing magazine illustration did not acknowledge their chromo design work. And for the many anonymous men and women who made countless advertising designs but never achieved much professional recognition, their lives and work are completely obscure to the present-day researcher.

While it is possible to surmise that certain artists probably designed chromo advertisements, considering their associations with certain lithographers or with other artists, concrete evidence is elusive. However, despite the weakness of the historical record, it is possible to locate the names of a very few painters and illustrators who definitively did advertising-design work for lithographers. I will offer here brief sketches of these artists and

their work, as a way of providing some sense of the range of educational backgrounds from which these artists came. I cannot claim that this brief list is at all representative of all ad designers. Indeed, this list only includes those artists on the more professionally successful end of the scale, since I rely upon published accounts of their life and work. These are artists who either had work included in public exhibitions or who did illustrating work for prominent magazines. For the artists profiled, advertising-design work was only to provide supplemental income or to start their careers.

One of the most prominent artists who can be definitively linked to chromo advertising design is Rosina Emmet Sherwood. While it is well established in biographies that, in addition to painting, she did commercial work such as book illustration, textile design, and greeting card design, any mention of her chromo advertising work does not appear. In a brief announcement, however, she is listed under her maiden name, Rosina Emmet, as the third place winner of an 1881 chromo advertising design contest for which she received \$100.²⁵ Unlike the greeting-card competitions for which Emmet won prizes, this design competition was not sponsored by prominent lithographer Louis Prang. However, it is possible that the chromo design for which she received this prize was done for Prang, who did produce advertising although he is more often associated with fine-art chromos, greeting cards, and educational materials. Prang, who was supportive of women artists, showed a keen interest in Emmet and her friend, artist Dora Wheeler. The two women were among the most prominent of the dozens hired by Prang over

²⁵ "Competitions," *American Art Review: A Journal Devoted to the Practice, Theory, History and Archaeology of Art* 2.8 (1881): 90.

the years, most of whom did their design work (which probably included advertisements) anonymously.²⁶

Emmet became involved with the textile-design firm Associated Artists, established by Dora's mother, Candace Wheeler, a pioneer in interior and textile design. From 1877 to 1879, Emmet worked at the Society of Decorative Art, where she was a very successful painter of portrait plaques of children, a common medium for recording likenesses before photography became predominant. In 1879, she took portrait-painting classes at the well-respected Art Students' League in New York under painter William Merritt Chase, and studied with him privately as well. She also traveled frequently to Paris, where she studied at the Académie Julian in 1884-85. In 1887 she married Arthur Sherwood, with whom she had five children; she remained active as an artist and her work continued to be exhibited. She worked well into her eighties, having established herself as a portrait artist working in watercolor and pastel.²⁷

Emmet's career trajectory was not unusual, and it is more than likely that other women artists who gained a degree of fame in applied art, fine art, and/or illustration also started out doing all kinds of design work, including advertisements for lithographers. While many successful commercial artists may have done so only early in their career, others may have turned to this line of work when they needed some quick cash or to get through a bad patch. An obituary for cartoonist Bernhard Gillam in February, 1896, stated that before getting steady work

²⁶ Amelia Peck and Carol Irish, *Candace Wheeler: The Art and Enterprise of American Design, 1875-1900* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001): 169.

²⁷ Peck and Irish, 178-182; Martha J. Hoppin, *The Emmets: A Family of Women Painters* (Pittsfield, MA: The Berkshire Museum, 1982) 13-21.

as a cartoonist he supplemented his work as an illustrator by “making crayon and oil portraits, designing show cards and engraving wherever he could find work to do.”²⁸ But often, even for book and magazine illustrators, anonymity in their chromo design work was paramount. A 1901 newspaper article stated that many illustrators made sure they did their commercial work on the side “very quietly,” and confided that “the chromos that illuminate the gift calendars of great business firms—these are the works of well known and extra capable artists, who paint or draw them for splendid pay, but would consider themselves disgraced were they to put their signatures to a single one.” By way of example, the article offered an established artist (anonymous) who made a calendar design, but turned down an offer of an extra \$500 by the advertiser for a signed copy to hang in his home. The artist feared for his reputation.²⁹

But many designs were made by less well-known artists. While the artist mentioned above received \$200 for the design, by all accounts this was an unusually large sum. Lithographers generally paid between \$50 and \$100 for a sketch. As one lithographer pointed out, it did not generally pay successful artists, who could count on getting \$500 for a painting sold in a gallery, to design for lithographers. He suggested that, since a picture accepted by a lithographer “has immediately a commercial value outside of any other real or fictitious ones,” the work was most profitable for those artists who “wish to add to their incomes while waiting

²⁸ “The Late Bernhard Gillam, Cartoonist,” obituary, *The National Lithographer* 3.2 (1896): 12.

²⁹ “Average Incomes in Town.”

for fame to come to them.”³⁰ Thus, in their search for talent tinged with desperation, lithographers descended upon the art schools.

Among the students at the Art Students’ League in New York who provided sketches for advertising was Frances Throop. In an oral history, artist Louise Cox recalls how Throop, a fellow pupil at the League, had, at some point between 1883 and 1887, “successfully competed for subject matter to be used in an advertisement.”³¹ Throop later went on to exhibit her work and to write and illustrate for children’s magazines.³² That Throop became fairly prominent soon after she left the League is evidenced by a newspaper article which outlined the careers of several women artists and emphasized the increasing number of serious women artists in the 1880s:

If one were to begin with Frances Hunt Throop and enumerate all the women in New York who are doing work that marks them off from the daubers of plush and decorators of little pink jugs, and then were to run over the art groups of Boston and Philadelphia and Cincinnati and Louisville, the number of women artists would be seen to be by no means small nor their success inconsiderable. The field is a comparatively new one, but this tillage is being industriously pursued.³³

³⁰ A.E. Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 2, *The Art Amateur* 32. 2 (1895): 50.

³¹ Richard Murray, “Louise Cox at the Art Students League: A Memoir,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 27.1 (1987): 16

³² “Gotham’s Fair Artists,” *New York Mail and Express*, 13 Dec. 1890, Art Students’ League Papers, AAA.

³³ Eliza Putnam Heaton, “Woman Artists at Work,” *Republican* (Akron, Ohio), 9 Dec. 1889, Art Students’ League Papers, AAA.

Of course, such articles as this make no mention of the fact that artists such as Throop may have helped to pay for their education by doing commercial design work—this would have put them in the category of “daubers of plush” (textile designers?) or “decorators of little pink jugs” (china painters?). Yet, as the examples of Throop and Emmet show, women who trained at prestigious schools were among those who, early in their careers, participated in the invention of the field of visual advertising.

Of course, as I have already suggested, many of the artists who made designs for lithographic advertising have remained obscure. Advice books directed at women who suddenly found themselves without an income routinely included a section discussing the various artistic endeavors in which women could find remuneration. While activities such as illustrating (books, magazines, and greeting-cards), industrial design (textiles, wallpaper), and china painting were more often mentioned and more elaborately explained, illustrating or designing for advertisements was sometimes addressed. One book suggested that an education in an industrial-design school could prepare one for work for various kinds of publishers: “Any number [of graduates] are working in the pattern departments of shops where printed goods, wall papers, challies, lawns, ginghams, oilcloths and prints are made, while others have been most successful in the creation of book covers, Christmas and Easter cards and other dainty novelties for publishers.”³⁴ Toward the end of the century, as advertising became professionalized, some

³⁴ Florence Elizabeth Corey, “Industrial Design,” *What Women Can Earn: Occupations of Women and Their Compensation*, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1899) 248.

authors mentioned the possibility of doing advertising design in a chapter focusing on that field, without specifying the medium of reproduction.³⁵

This advice literature suggests that women with little art education, and even little talent, could find some work designing lithographic advertisements. Authors regularly cautioned women with a yen for art that most women artists earned very little—unless they turned to teaching or to some form of commercial endeavor. One author, in a chapter entitled, “Artists of the Humbler Kind,” painted a particularly grim picture for her aspiring-artist readers, chastising them for daring to believe they may have the slightest aptitude for the work. Upon briefly mentioning a few no-talents whose “failures and discouragements are too distressing to record,” she went on to discuss the various branches of art in which “those of minor talent have succeeded and can succeed.” Here she mentioned advertising art foremost, specifically naming “the posters and showy advertisements seen in street cars.”³⁶

A different author, who wrote a book of advice specifically for home artists, was more thorough and encouraging:

A very prolific source of employment for all artists and designers of all classes is in illustrating stories and poems for book publishers, designing calendars for insurance companies, patent medicine manufacturers, etc., designing labels for cigar boxes, designing advertising matter of various kinds for soap manufacturers,

³⁵ Frances Elizabeth Willard, *Occupations for Women* (New York: The Success Co., 1897) 149-150.

³⁶ Helen Churchill Candee, *How Women May Earn a Living* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1900) 265-266.

furnishing designs for Christmas, New Year's, Easter and birthday cards, covers and illustrations for juvenile books, etc. The field being a very wide one and offering opportunities for all grades of ability and experience.³⁷

This author may have been *too* optimistic and encouraging: the artistic labor market in the 1890s was flooded with women artists who had been formally trained during the 1880s, creating a downward pressure on wages in freelance artwork.³⁸ On the other hand, consider the audience for this book (and the previous one mentioned): readers who may have had little art training and who needed only to supplement their individual or family income. It was in this pond of cheap labor that many lithographers trolled for their advertising designs.

An article in the lively magazine *The Art Amateur* alluded to the glut of artistic workers, suggesting that the talents of both professionals and amateurs alike would find a perfect match in lithographers' insatiable need for advertising designs. The magazine declared:

At the present time, when talented young artists and gifted amateurs are producing in this country much in the way of original and applied design for which they have no outlet in a profitable direction, the great lithographic houses, which are constantly under the call of various advertising businesses, appear to be on the search for just what it would seem these very designers could provide. The call for novelties in advertising designs is incessant.³⁹

³⁷ Charles H. Wilcox, *The Home Artists' Guide* (Chicago: Great Western Art Co., 1895) 142.

³⁸ Nina de Angeli Walls, *Art, Industry, and Women's Education in Philadelphia* (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 2001) 112.

³⁹ "A New Market for Ideas," *The Art Amateur* 24.2 (1891): 36.

Assurances were provided for hesitant amateurs: technique was not nearly as important as a fresh idea. Even poorly drawn pictures were accepted, because the lithographic artist could correct problems of modeling, shading, color, etc. In a separate article in the same magazine, a representative of the Gast Lithographing and Engraving Company, identified only as Mr. Gray, provided an example of an artist who submitted a design that required tweaking. The designer's technique had been amateurish; she had "not been satisfied to let the shadows bring out the contour of cheek and chin, but had emphasized them with precise lines." But no problem: "'That,' I said, 'can be rectified when our artist comes to draw the design on the stone.'"⁴⁰

The Art Amateur implied that while there were plenty of skilled craftsmen to draw designs on stone, their creativity had been all but tapped out. The magazine emphasized that what was needed, therefore, were sketch artists with new "ideas" for advertisements:

The time was never more auspicious than at present for young men and women who can adapt their artistic abilities to the use of the advertising public. Even when they may not have acquired a perfect technical skill, their ideas would find a market. Clever technicians can always be hired to adapt the ideas of others, but such people, working in a groove, generally lack originality of invention themselves. Artists are abundant enough, but they are rarely practical men who

⁴⁰ A.E. Ives, "Designing for Lithographers," part 1, *The Art Amateur* 32.1 (1894): 15. One lithographic artist placed an employment-wanted ad in *The American Lithographer and Printer* which claimed an ability to "work from rough sketches." See Classified advertisements, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.26 (1887): 642.

can compass the commercial calls of the hour. “Give us ideas!” cry the
advertisers and their agents. “We want ideas for cash!”⁴¹

This suggests not only that lithographers accepted fairly rough or poorly-executed sketches, but also that they were desperate to find new kinds of pictures, novel ways to represent commodities and illustrate advertising messages. Their lithographic artists did not have “ideas;” they did not understand (or were uninterested in) “the commercial calls of the hour.” Hence, in effect, what lithographers really needed was not artists at all, but conceptual advertising experts: ad men and ad women. In the years before advertising production became professionalized and endowed with its own nomenclature, however, there was no real language to articulate what they were looking for. Thus, lithographers used the language of novelty to express the emerging desire on the part of advertisers to find the kinds of images that would capture the hearts and minds of consumers.

4.3 “Original Ideas”

Lithographers continually declared that they needed more novel designs for advertising. Value was placed on the originality of designs as much as on any other factor. As one trade journal editor wrote, “Excellence of materials and execution and originality of design” were the foremost factors that their purchasers demanded.⁴² Many even regarded the ability of lithographers to produce original design work for advertisers as the key to the survival of the craft. Echoing what

⁴¹ “A New Market for Ideas” 36.

⁴² “Quality Versus Price,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.4 (1888): 49.

Gray had written about the inability of lithographic artists to create advertising, one lithographer observed in 1897 that “what we most lack to-day are designers with original ideas who are capable of giving us something which is ‘catching’ to the general public...”⁴³ Not surprisingly, it was not uncommon for lithographers, in their help-wanted ads, to call for designers “of original ideas.”

Gray emphasized the fact that lithographers were under pressure from their customers to give them something different: “Everyone who comes in to give us an order says: ‘Think---think of something new.’ So you see how glad we are to get an idea.”⁴⁴ He emphasized that it was for this reason—the problem of giving their customers something original—that lithographers turned to studio artists rather than relying only on their own workers. He informed the readers of *The Art Amateur* that, “We are always on the lookout for original ideas, and are very glad to pay for them when we find them,” and took special care to encourage women: “There is never any discrimination as to sex in the matter. A picture is always accepted solely on its merits.”⁴⁵ *The Art Amateur* suggested that lithographers’ thirst for new ideas for their advertising-design work was virtually insatiable: “The lithographers’ agents scour the studios for subjects,” the magazine declared, “and still the cry goes up for more.”⁴⁶

⁴³ J.F.S., “High Art and Commercial Art,” letter, *The National Lithographer* 4.10 (1897): 2.

⁴⁴ Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 2, 50.

⁴⁵ Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 1, 15.

⁴⁶ “A New Market for Ideas” 36.

Of course, “originality” is a relative term; it is indeed impossible to know precisely what nineteenth-century lithographers meant by “original” and “new.” In their call for novelty, lithographers did not appear to be denouncing, for example, the use of “specimen books” that provided “ideas” for artists and designers. In fact, so indispensable was the language of novelty in describing meritorious work that the trade journals lauded these books as, themselves, providing “original” ideas for virtually any type of consumer product advertised with lithography:

New and original designs will be found in this splendid collection suitable for almost any line of business or branch of trade, but especially for work such as cigarette, drug, medicine, liquor, soap, tobacco, matches, coffee, beer, tooth powder and cosmetics, confectionery, perfumery, groceries, pomade, toilet requisites, preserved and canned goods, teas, chocolates, cologne, paper, book, olives, colors, champagnes, wines, etc. ⁴⁷

That unlimited artists inevitably used the same “original” ideas was not considered a contradiction; the specimens in books such as this one, created by a Viennese artist, were sold specifically to be used and reused. But at other times designs were copied without permission, and in the absence of an international copyright law, there was no penalty for using designs of European origin—leading many lithographers to print copies of European paintings and sell them to advertisers. One designer complained in 1888 that advertisers had been so spoiled by

⁴⁷ “Artistic Specimen Books,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.6 (1888): 84. See also advertisements for example: The Lithographer Publishing Company, advertisement, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.8 (1888): 122.

having had access to reproductions of art from the European masters that they would be satisfied with nothing less.⁴⁸

To some extent American artists and lithographers also borrowed—illegally—from their compatriots' work. One prominent lithographic and art-publishing firm complained that some of its designs had been stolen by artists and designers who then “dispose[d] of them as original to unsuspecting lithographers.”⁴⁹ Some artists complained that lithographers placed help-wanted ads for designers simply so they could steal the ideas the artists submitted in their samples.⁵⁰ One lithographer was accused of selling the same design to two different advertisers, claiming to each that it was uniquely created for them.⁵¹

An original design did not have to be one that was specifically to be used for a particular advertiser. Lithographers kept storehouses of stones with stock images, some of them general enough (a child's head) to be used in advertising a range of products, others (a child sitting on a barrel of flour) specific to one particular type of product. During slow times, lithographic artists were kept busy producing these stock designs. The stones were then shelved and ready for printing in anticipation of future orders, which could be filled quickly.⁵²

⁴⁸ F. Cambensy, letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 10 (1888): 540.

⁴⁹ “Copyrighted Designs,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 10 (1888): .24 (1888): 788.

⁵⁰ “An Injustice to Artists,” letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.17 (1889): 265.

⁵¹ “Not an Honorable Business Transaction,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.10 (1889): 152.

⁵² Marzio 16.

Sometimes advertisers went to importers and bought chromos printed in Europe with stock designs, but often these had been designed by freelance American artists. As one observer wrote:

Nearly all the lithographic products (calendars included) that are imported from Germany are all designed in New York city, by native born Americans, and sent to Nuremberg and other provincial towns in Germany to be lithographed and printed. The agents of the German lithographer visits the American importer and many of the dealers annually. He purchases designs by the hundred...⁵³

According to a different report, European lithographers turned to American designers when they wanted to make pictures that had “a very American, a local character.”⁵⁴

But even for domestic production, stock designs were sometimes provided by independent artists, who would make sketches and take them around to local lithographers to see if they found favor. A well-executed sentimental picture could be counted on to appeal to many different kinds of manufacturers. One artist made a design of “two curly-headed children in torn straw hats, resting against each other, and wreathed with sprays of May blossoms,” and brought it to a lithographer, who showed it to a potential client, a patent-medicine manufacturer. The client liked the picture and had the lithographer reproduce it for a calendar. A rival firm had

⁵³ “American Artists Do the Work,” *The National Lithographer* 8.3 (1901): 12.

⁵⁴ Max Libourel, letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.11 (1889): 169.

been vying for the contract, but could come up with neither a stock design nor an original sketch that met the customer's satisfaction.⁵⁵

In point of fact, there was often no clear distinction between stock designs and original ones in advertising lithography. While there were some designs that were so specific to one particular advertiser that they were of no use to anyone else, often figures and other images were used and re-used, adapted to pictures for this advertiser or that. There were clearly parameters set up by advertisers and lithographers regarding appropriate style and subject matter, and it seems evident that what was *not* desired was something so new that it exceeded these bounds. So while Gray counseled amateur and aspiring artists to think of something new, he also provided them with guidelines that were somewhat narrow. He gave general suggestions: "Just now the rage is for children. The faces and figures of pretty women are next in favor." As well as more specific ones: For tobacco labels and cards "they always demand the faces or full-length figures of beautiful women," and for soap manufacturers "the full-length figures of children" were called for, while patent medicine makers insisted on "the heads of pretty children."⁵⁶ Within these parameters, he suggested, the place for originality was in coming up with something for these faces and figures to *do*. He clarified:

But both the women and children must be doing something. The public always wants a picture that tells a story. It may be two girls reading a letter, and

⁵⁵ Ives, "Designing for Lithographers," part 2, 50.

⁵⁶ Ives, "Designing for Lithographers," part 2, 50.

appearing much interested or much amused. It may be one is holding something over the head of another, with which she is going to surprise her, and so on.⁵⁷

Whether or not Gray really knew what “the public” wanted, it was the guidelines laid down by people like him, trying to predict his customers’ desires (and probably influencing them as well), that determined the acceptable limits for subject matter in advertising. Similarly, style was dictated: “Anything like the impressionist treatment of a face will not be tolerated by the buyer of lithographs, because he knows the general public will not have it.”⁵⁸ So while artists were confined to a conservative, realist aesthetic and sentimental subjects, they were also pressed to come up with original scenarios and signifying images.

Negotiating the tricky balance between originality and conservatism was part of the larger context in which lithographers and designers began to work out some of the codes and conventions of visual advertising. As I suggested earlier, the call for novelty was vague because the field of advertising design was so new and unprofessionalized that there was as yet no agreement about, or at least no way of articulating, what made for a good design. As artist Louise Cox recalls in her oral history, the 1880s was the “heyday” for commercial artists because there was as yet little direct competition from photography. As a result, “a few artists palmed off some awful stuff on the public. Advertising was in its infancy and a rather dull art...” She implies that one of the reasons for its dullness, aside from lack of competition from photography, was that art students were given no specific instruction in how to create the various kinds of art,

⁵⁷ Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 1, 15.

⁵⁸ Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 2, 50.

commercial and otherwise. At the end of her life, with more than a touch of ambivalence, she compared twentieth-century art instruction to that of her youth:

In the great art institutions of today [1945], the art student is handled as a possible future cog in the expansion of public benefit. He is taught to direct his studies to an end. I do not mean necessarily commercially, but that his efforts will be better if they accomplish an objective. In other words, he does not have to work aimlessly. There is the scope of the decorator, painter, illustrator, teacher, cartoonist, the field of advertising, etc.; but we had none of that in our instruction. We were taught how to draw a correct arm or leg or background, but our instructors were with us such a short time that they did not attempt any objective in our painting such as telling a pupil he was especially fitted for mural work and directing him toward that end. I ate my heart out trying to arrive at some knowledge of the ultimate uses of art study.⁵⁹

Cox, who ended up becoming a portrait painter in oil (and whose commercial art, if any, has not been recorded), reflects on the difficulty with which she attempted to negotiate her formal art training in the context of a world in which commercial art was becoming increasingly prominent. Although there were other types of art schools, notably the more vocationally-oriented, industrial design schools for both men and women, illustration was rarely a part of any curriculum until after the turn of the century. The 1880s were a transitional period, in which the emerging art of illustration was just taking shape as a discrete field. According to art historian Michele Bogart,

⁵⁹ Cox 19.

educators felt “art instruction was just another aspect of the artistic enterprise. Students had to learn the fundamentals first. They had to become artists before deciding upon a vocation.”⁶⁰

Cox recalls only one composition instructor who touched on the question of the distinction between illustration and fine art, painter T.W. Dewing:

Dewing was a tall, handsome man, witty, and though somewhat ruthless, he pulled us up to a real understanding of what composed a picture. I remember even now a clever differentiation between the method used for a painting and that used for an illustration—*something that had never been explained to us.*⁶¹

While Cox’s explanation of what this distinction was is somewhat unclear in her oral history, the point here is that it was during this era, the 1880s, that artists and art instructors (at least at the fine art schools) were only beginning to articulate the question of what distinguishes illustration from fine art. Indeed, it was during the chromo advertising era that many of the problems of visual advertising were worked out. What I am suggesting here is that a haphazard group did this work, many of them complete amateurs, and all of them uneducated in the not-yet-formed field of advertising illustration.

Lithography trade journals, like art schools, addressed specific artistic questions and problems, particularly in figure drawing, but again there was much less specificity regarding how to design a good advertisement. In general, the most specific statements regarding lithographic advertising suggested that the goal was to make a picture that was beautiful enough to be

⁶⁰ Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art* (UP of Chicago, 1995) 26.

⁶¹ Cox, 19, emphasis added.

displayed in the home or store, yet still had some relation to the product advertised. In a typical fashion, one lithographic artist summed up the role of the designer as follows: “As a rule, a label or a show-card has only show, in some original and attractive way, what the manufacturer, manager of theatre or any other enterprise wants to advertise.”⁶²

In the absence of a professionalized cadre of advertising illustrators, lithographers turned to independent artists who figured out on their own how to create pictures that would find favor with advertisers. By turning to studio and home artists for new ideas, lithographers were able to compete in the stiff market for advertising work by presenting their customers with novel, yet still familiar, ways of marketing their goods. Gray stated that the Gast firm kept only one or two artists on salary “because we prefer to pick up fresh material wherever we can find it.” Artists who submitted sketches whose “ideas and execution” met with the firm’s favor were placed on a list for future reference. This process, in which artists were paid by the piece, helped lithographers to keep getting fresh ideas (while keeping labor costs down). As Gray himself explained it, rather than employing a designer full time, “we think it better to be at liberty to accept any picture offered to us which has just those qualities we require.”⁶³

Recognizing the contribution of studio artists and amateur painters to the development of lithographic-advertising design helps to provide a fuller understanding of the range of influences that came to bear on visual advertising at this crucial stage in its development. As I have already mentioned, advertising designers did their work anonymously and there is virtually no historical

⁶² Libourel 169.

⁶³ Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 1, 15.

record linking any specific ad to the work of any particular artist. This makes it even more imperative to understand the many types of artists who contributed to the body of work as a whole. The few advertising historians who have taken lithographic advertising seriously as a cultural form have made inaccurate assumptions about who was responsible for its design, entirely erasing student, studio, and home artists from the picture. One of the most problematic implications of this exclusion has been that women have effectively been written out of the history of this era of visual advertising.

In *Fables of Abundance*, Jackson Lears provides a fascinating analysis of the imagery of animism, fertility and abundance that was common in lithographic advertising, contrasting this worldview with the one of personal and managerial efficiency expressed in later agency advertising.⁶⁴ He attributes the prevalence of the abundance imagery to the fact that a great number of lithographers were German-born artisans who expressed their nostalgia for rural life through their work producing advertisements. But while a great number of lithographers were indeed German immigrants, a fact which may account for some measure of the abundance imagery, there are other equally valid explanations for the prevalence of imagery and motifs signifying the harvest and a close connection between humans and nature. One distinct possibility is that some of it was produced by native-born artists, women prominent among them, who were influenced by the Aesthetic movement's emphasis on the beauty of nature infusing

⁶⁴ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic, 1994).

everyday life through the applied arts.⁶⁵ To give one example, advertising designer Rosina Emmet was linked to the Aesthetic movement through Candace Wheeler. Emmet's own work for Associated Artists, such as a textile design titled *Autumn*, often relied heavily upon iconography of fertility and the harvest.⁶⁶

Like Lears, business historian Pamela Laird makes certain unwarranted assumptions about the agents behind lithographic advertising design. In *Advertising Progress*, she searches for evidence of the design process in archival sources as well as in a huge array of trade journals (but not the lithography trade press or art magazines) and finds few clues, except for some general instructions provided to letterpress printers by the manager-entrepreneurs who contracted for advertising work.⁶⁷ Her conclusion is that the images of industrial progress and heroic entrepreneurship common in many lithographic ads reflect the (often egocentric) notions about progress and modernity of these manager-entrepreneurs. It is indeed probable that the designs that foregrounded this progressive, managerial worldview were dictated, in a more or less specific way, by those who ordered the advertisements from lithographers. To be sure, it was these men who had ultimate control over which designs would be produced and circulated. However, it seems important to consider, too, the creative labor of those women and men who

⁶⁵ Mary Warner Blanchard analyzes advertising cards and other commercial art in relation to the influence of the Aesthetic movement, focusing on gendered representations. See Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998) 207-223.

⁶⁶ Peck and Irish 181-182.

⁶⁷ Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998).

were enlisted in the project of giving shape, form, color, and emotion to the self-indulgent dreams of these businessmen.

Moreover, a significant amount of lithographic advertising can best be described as sentimental, and suggests neither the worldview discussed by Laird nor that analyzed by Lears. The sentimental imagery that was so prevalent in these designs could equally have been the work of painters or lithographers who were either women or men, either respected artists or unknowns. While it may seem natural to assume that certain subject matter was women's artistic territory, and other subjects the domain of men, this temptation must be avoided. As print curator Helena E. Write notes of the work published by Louis Prang:

Prang's artists, both men and women, drew angels and animals, birds and flowers, childhood scenes, and religious subjects for the greeting cards, calendars, prints and novelties the firm produced. There is no discernable difference between the works created by male and female artists.⁶⁸

As Wright points out, artwork that seems excessively sentimental to the present-day observer fit squarely in the prevailing style of the period. But even taking this into consideration, it might be tempting to assume that the advertisements (not necessarily those made by Prang) with the most overwrought sentimental images could not have been the work of respected artists. It is important to remember, though, that artists working for reproduction adapted their styles to what lithographers would accept. In general, this meant an approach different than many artists would be inclined to take on their own.

⁶⁸ Wright 10.

Lilly Martin Spencer is an example of an artist who had to consider first and foremost the dictates of the market. Although she was one of the most well-known painters of the nineteenth century, Spencer struggled her entire life to financially support her family. Ironically, one of the reasons she was so well-known was also the reason she struggled: she sold a great deal of her work for widespread lithographic production without receiving any royalties or credit for the resulting prints. One of her biographers notes that her depictions of “women and children as household pets and decorative objects” was not necessarily a reflection of the times, nor of Spencer’s own relations to—or attitudes toward—work, gender roles and family, but rather to the exigencies of the market.⁶⁹

Similarly, the commercial work of artist Fidelia Bridges, who became one of Louis Prang’s designers along with Rosina Emmet and Dora Wheeler, differed from her easel paintings. According to a biographer:

This [working for Prang] provided financial security, but increasing commitment to commercial illustration affected the character of her work; freshness and clarity of execution suffered and subjects became somewhat sentimental. This shift in

⁶⁹ Elsie F. Freivogel, “Lily Martin Spencer,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 12.4 (1972): 9-14. Freivogel suggests that Spencer produced these kinds of depictions because they were “impeachable and saleable.” Whether or not different depictions would have been equally saleable is beside the point here, what matters is what pictures lithographers would buy for reproduction, what they believed would sell. Lithographers may have been overly conservative in their anticipation of consumer desires; it is not possible to know.

emphasis from straight transcription to storytelling is particularly obvious in some of the paintings of birds intended for lithographic production.⁷⁰

But it may not only have been respected artists who were inclined against sentimentalism and had to be steered in that direction. Even the readers of *The Art Amateur* had to be instructed to provide images of children with “idealized” faces in pastoral settings.⁷¹

Not only is it impossible to distinguish the designs of accomplished artists from those provided by amateurs simply through consideration of the subject matter and artistic style, it is similarly difficult to do so by considering the quality of the artwork. A card or poster with a poorly-drawn design or a beautiful one could equally have been taken from the work of an accomplished painter or an incompetent one. In the end it was the lithographic artist who put the design on the stone who deserved the credit or blame for the way the reproduction came out artistically, even if he or she did not always come up with the “idea” for the picture. Indeed, since it was a collaborative and negotiated process, it is virtually impossible to determine what kind of person designed or produced any particular lithographic advertisement, or under what conditions. Thus, while it may be tempting to attribute the worldviews expressed in lithographic advertising to the particular subject-positions of its creators, this is not really tenable, considering the anonymity that marked the design process, not to mention the heterogeneity that comprised the group of designers. In the next section, I will discuss in more detail the collaborative and negotiated nature of chromo-advertising design.

⁷⁰ May Brawley Hill, *Fidelia Bridges: American Pre-Raphaelite* (New York: Barry-Hill Galleries, 1981) 19-20.

⁷¹ Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 1, 15.

4.4 The Design Process

The design process was not uniform enough to lend itself to quick and easy generalizations, but it is evident that a number of different parties may have had a hand in the production of any given design. While advertisers and their representatives ultimately made decisions regarding which sketches would get reproduced and circulated, and may at times have even provided ideas to be “worked up,” the bulk of the creative work was done by painters and lithographic artists. As I will show, however, there were others who influenced the process as well, namely artists’ foremen, sales managers, and drummers.

There is little evidence to suggest that customers—the businesses purchasing advertising matter from lithographers—provided detailed designs for artists to work from, but it is likely that they often had a hand in the final product. An 1877 exchange between the Cincinnati firm of Strobridge & Co. (later Strobridge Lithographing Company) and the Keystone Manufacturing Co. of Sterling, Illinois, suggests there was a great deal of negotiation that occurred in the process of creating a design to be used on letterhead, billheads, and show cards. Patterson, the correspondent from Keystone, initiated the exchange by requesting the lithographing firm send an artist out to make a sketch of the Keystone factory, which had undergone improvements since they last had a sketch made by Strobridge. Over the course of the next four months, notes and proofs were sent back and forth, with Patterson deferring to the lithographers on such issues as the style of lettering while making clear his desires on other design questions, including the use of color and the way in which the factory was represented. “In our letter of last Saturday we forgot to instruct you,” he wrote on Nov. 26, “in reference to large show card, to put more

lumber piles in lumber yard, but not enough to hide the view of the railroad track entering the warehouse.”⁷² Notably, this letter was sent even after several letters and proofs had already been exchanged, in which Patterson still had not committed to doing business with Strobridge, writing that he wanted to see one more proof of all work before “fully deciding.”⁷³

It is not clear how often (potential) customers gave guidelines from which they wanted artists to work, but it seems evident that it was common for them to rely upon lithographers to provide sketches, either from their own artists or independent ones. By the 1890s, in figuring the cost to lithographers of completing a job, the cost of coming up with a sketch is routinely included. This strongly suggests, again, that while customers may have provided instructions, they did not, themselves, provide the detailed sketches from which lithographic artists worked. Some potential customers reviewed as many as a dozen designs, which suggests that there were significant differences among them and that any instructions provided were not so specific that all of the pictures would have been essentially the same. It seems evident, then, that designers often worked only from very general instructions, and sometimes from none at all.

Often, designs submitted in the bidding process were so specific to an individual advertiser that they could not be used again. This created a problem for those lithographers who devoted considerable resources to developing designs but failed to secure the contract. Getting a sketch was routinely priced at \$50-\$100, (presumably the cost paid to the designer) which was

⁷² Patterson to Strobridge & Co., 26 Nov. 1877, box 5, Strobridge Lithographing Company Papers, CHS.

⁷³ Patterson to Strobridge & Co., 22 Oct. 1877, box 5, Strobridge Lithographing Company Papers, CHS.

lost if the lithographer did not get the contract. For example, one advertiser asked twelve different lithographing houses for a sketch and an estimate for a hanging calendar, and then chose only one of them, without compensating the rest. The aggregate loss to the eleven rejected lithographers was estimated at \$900.⁷⁴ A British observer, commenting on this waste of resources, compared the customer to a man with irregularly shaped feet who ordered twelve pairs of boots from different bootmakers, only to purchase one pair:

This instructive little story runs almost on all fours with that of a man afflicted with a club foot at the end of one leg and a bunion, the size of a pumpkin, as a terminal to the other, who ordered a dozen pairs of boots from as many different bootmakers, selected the pair he liked best and returned the others, which for all they were worth, might just as well have been pitched on the dung heap.⁷⁵

The future worthlessness of the eleven losing sketches was made worse by the fact that there was no way to cut down on the costs of getting a sketch. In their expense breakdowns, lithographers routinely stated that “the cost of the sketch is certain” and, “the cost of the original design or sketch...can rarely if ever be cut down at all.”⁷⁶ The fact that the cost of getting the design was the most fixed cost strongly suggests not only that lithographers had to come up with a design in

⁷⁴ “Shakespeare Applied to Lithographers,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 10.6 (1888): 505; “A Subject of Vital Importance,” letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 10.7 (1888) 516.

⁷⁵ “The Way They Do It In England,” letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.12 (1889): 180.

⁷⁶ Frances Ficke, Moses Bernstein, and J.L. Jones, “The Artists’ Side,” *The National Lithographer* 3.7 (1896): 5.

order to get a contract, but also underscores the fact that designers working independently on a piecework basis were often the source of these designs. Indeed, the cost of the sketch is routinely figured separately from the “artistic work” (putting the design on stones). While this artistic work would not begin until the contract had been signed, the sketch was often produced in the hope it would help to secure the contract. Unfortunately, for lithographers, most sketches were eventually rejected and, for all they were worth, may as well have been “pitched on the dung heap.”

But the bidding process was not always so risky for the lithographer; at times, contracts would be awarded based only on the bid. In these cases, instructions for the design would be given to the drummer, who would then relate them to his employer. One contributor to a trade journal criticized this process, suggesting that salesmen, not being familiar with lithography, were detrimental to the process because they were unable to communicate what the advertiser wanted in the sketch:

The drummer puts the lithographers in the position of a third party to the order.

The drummer being unacquainted with the manner of production, understands the customers’ instructions and desires after his own fashion: he may get it right; he may get it wrong; it is usually wrong.⁷⁷

According to this writer, the situation was made all the worse by the fact that there were already too many people between the artist and the advertiser. Instructions had to go not only through the drummer, but also through his boss before getting to the artist. The unfortunate result was

⁷⁷ G. A. Lott, “Abuses in Lithography,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 7.2 (1886): 13.

that “by the time the sketch or proof is shown, it is found out that something different was desired.”

Both employed lithographic artists and independent artists worked, at times, from general instructions. In such cases, they were approached with ideas the lithographer or the customer wanted “worked up.” Gray, of the Gast firm, said that he had come up with an idea for a picture to promote a brand of thread, and had worked with an independent sketch artist on the design:

[W]e wanted a design to show on a little card the strength of a brand of spool cotton. I suggested to the artist that we have some of the spools, like wheels, hitched to some animals, driven tandem, the thread serving for lines. The design he submitted, which was about three by five inches, showed two chubby children, sitting back to back, in chairs tipped against an immense spool of thread, to which the seats were fastened, the whole being drawn by three dogs, hitched up tandem, and going off at a smart trot.⁷⁸

In this case, Gray evidently was accurate in his anticipation of what the customer wanted, and the designer came through: “The little picture was well drawn and colored and carefully finished; and was so amusing that it immediately found favor with the firm.”

Some designers resented the number of individuals who meddled in their work. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, many salaried lithographic artists chafed at the basic fact that their craft had become so dominated by advertising, and that they were spending all of their days creating what they felt was unattractive advertising matter for men who knew nothing

⁷⁸ Ives, “Designing for Lithographers,” part 1, 15.

of art and only cared about commerce. Fritz Schumann, a lithographic artist and designer, bitterly described the process this way in 1900:

Instead of allowing the designer full liberty in the choice of colors and ornaments, he has as a rule to work from “instructions,” given either by the buyer or the seller of the sign; its nature and character; the general “lay-out” is mostly settled between those gentlemen, and it is their “suggestion,” or order, that the artist has to carry out, and to the approval of their judgment.⁷⁹

Although Schumann had no respect for advertisers and resented having to work for them, his primary concern centered on the assumptions his own boss, the artists’ foreman, made about what advertisers expected of his designs. Therefore, although he predicted the suggestion would be considered unfeasible, Schumann called for “bringing the buyer and the designer of the sign closer together.”⁸⁰ He evidently felt that he had a chance of convincing the customer to share his own artistic vision, if only he could communicate with him directly.

Perhaps in response to perceived troublemakers like Schumann, advertising experts warned of the tendency of artists to attempt to control the design process, of their desire to create beautiful pictures that were not necessarily effective at selling goods. In his book of advice for advertisers, Nathaniel Fowler acknowledged that, “A first-class artist knows how to produce a calendar design which has all the realistic effect of theatrical scenery, with fine, beautiful lines for close scrutiny,” but also warned that the typical artist “cannot design an advertisement,

⁷⁹ Fritz Schumann, “An Essay on Signs,” *The National Lithographer* 7.6 (1900): 3.

⁸⁰ Schumann 4.

because he is too much filled with his art.” He described the ideal advertising manager for a manufacturing company as a man who knew enough about both art *and* commerce to rein in advertising artists: “He must be enough of an artist to know how to make artists produce business art. He must add the element of business to the art of the artist, that the pictures may be artistic enough to please the public, and businesslike enough to bring business.”⁸¹ So while Schumann complained that his artistic work suffered from the “interference” of businessmen who were “ignorant” about art, Fowler advised businessmen to hire advertising managers who could speak the artist’s language without letting him get the upper hand.

As I have tried to show, the design process involved negotiations between advertiser and lithographer, between boss and worker, between artist and businessman. Moreover, given the fact that lithographic advertising was not produced under a rationalized, relatively stable and uniform system, there was no single process that can characterize the creation of all or most designs. It was not a static process, but one that took many different forms and changed over time. In the foregoing discussion, I have not even exhausted all of the productive sites for lithographic advertising.⁸² I have, however, attempted to relate the negotiated nature of the process, and the ways in which the talents and energies of various types of artists were engaged in the creation of visual advertising. In the next section I will provide an overview of how the structure of the lithography industry contributed to the conditions for the mass circulation of this developing cultural form.

⁸¹ Nathaniel Fowler, Jr., *Fowler’s Publicity* (NY: Publicity, 1897) 695.

⁸² For example, some big advertisers like the H.J. Heinz Co. had their own lithographic print shops.

4.5 “Ruinous Competition”

By the mid-1880s, the lithography trade press was packed with observations about why it was so difficult to make a profit in the business. Part of the problem was that the industry’s dependence on spending by advertisers meant the boom-and-bust cycles of the late nineteenth-century economy hit lithographers particularly hard. “A depression of business in general is felt immediately in our trade,” wrote one lithographer, “as the manufacturing of refined advertisements anticipates a certain wealth and every business house takes care not to spend more than is absolutely necessary for advertising purposes.”⁸³ Artists, as much as workers in any other branch of the trade, felt their prospects were uniquely tied to the overall economy.

Reflecting on a downturn in the economy, the president of the artists’ union wrote in 1897:

Since lithography in this country is largely utilized for commercial purposes—i.e. to advertise goods, &c.—it constitutes about as reliable an indicator of the status of general trade as any other, and we know from our sad experience that business has been bad, very bad. It is easily understood that in times of depression the manufacturer will not consider a profitable return of an investment as probable, and that he will therefore refrain from expending money for advertising until things look more promising.⁸⁴

But even when times were good and the advertising dollars were flowing, the trade suffered because often there were simply too many lithographers vying for the orders available; one trade

⁸³ Zschaebitz 463.

⁸⁴ Schneelock 9.

journal noted that the number of lithographing establishments had doubled in the years from 1877 to 1887.⁸⁵

Indeed, many observers commented on the “ruinous competition” from which the industry suffered as a result of the overabundance of lithographers, who underbid each other for contracts with such consistency and determination that they routinely undermined their own profitability. The National Lithographers’ Association, an industry group formed in 1888, determined that underbidding resulted from a failure to organize their industry, as well as a lack of agreement as to what the standard cost of production should be. In a declaration, they castigated themselves: in an age when manufacturers were consolidating into powerful oligopolies, they had remained fragmented, leaving themselves open to exploitation by advertisers and other customers. While the leaders of many other industries grumbled about deflation and then proceeded to engage in collusion to fix prices, the lithographers merely grumbled: “[A]s a result of our shortsightedness,” they declared, “we are left to the whims and mercies of the classes who profit by our genius, and who have the sharp discernment to measure our weakness, and who put the screws on accordingly.”⁸⁶ Among those whom they cited as exploiting their weakness, in addition to their customers, were those businesses that profited from the overproduction of lithographic products. One lithographer wrote that the manufacturers of steam presses offered “the most ridiculous inducements to parties setting up in business” and

⁸⁵ “To the Craft,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.14 (1887): 439.

⁸⁶ “A Few Plain Words With the Trade,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.12 (1889): 177.

that paper manufacturers, seeking new markets, often extended credit even to insolvent businesses.⁸⁷

But most of the lithographers reserved their criticism for each other, accusing their tradesmen of contributing to “deadly competition” through the pernicious practice of underbidding. One Milwaukee lithographer wondered how a Buffalo firm could have underbid him by \$3000 on a catalog-cover job he figured at just under \$7000. The potential customer sent him a letter praising the quality of the sketch the firm had submitted and included a \$50 check for reimbursement of the same. “This is the second time that you have offered us designs that were highly satisfactory,” they wrote, “and yet on account of your high price, we were not able to give you the contract.”⁸⁸ *The American Lithographer and Printer* agreed with the rejected firm, wondering how the winning firm could have possibly made a profit on the job.

The interrelated problems of underbidding, falling prices, and poor quality were variously blamed on the lack of discernment on the part of the customer, the public, and even the employing lithographer. “A bright patch of red, blue, or yellow, is generally more appreciated by the majority of people than many a really artistic creation,” one writer complained bitterly. But perhaps more common was the opposite view, that consumers’ tastes had been elevated. One observer suggested that the public’s standards had been raised by the sheer volume of lithography to which they had been exposed by advertisers: “The general public has been

⁸⁷ “To the Craft” 439. As I discuss in the next chapter, the industry did begin to consolidate around 1890.

⁸⁸ Daniels, W.A., “Deadly Competition,” letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.26 (1887): 631.

educated to such a high plane of artistic appreciation by the innumerable reproductions of lithographic art which have been placed in their hands by live advertisers that they will be satisfied with nothing which is not first class in every respect.” According to this writer, the problems faced by the industry could only be addressed by the introduction of more designers “of original ideas.”⁸⁹

Particularly common was the suggestion that lithographers could charge more and redeem lithography if they stopped undercutting each other, offered quality, “original,” work, and charged what the work was worth. The editor of *The American Lithographer and Printer* instructed lithographers:

The people are continually asking for something neater, prettier, less common, more suggestive, and all the rest. Why don’t you provide them and make your charges accordingly? Your customers can no longer dispense with your services; you are a cheap necessity and have made it so.⁹⁰

As the century drew to a close, the trade press became even more impatient with lithographers whom they felt had failed to cash in on the fact that they had created an indispensable product for advertisers, “a cheap necessity.” Trade journals charged some lithographers with shortsightedness in their drive to execute work as cheaply and quickly as possible. Describing a particular show card (produced by a firm that had recently lost an account) as “vile—beastly,” with “execrable” artistic work, “atrocious” printing, and “abominable” color, the editors of *The*

⁸⁹ J.F.S., 2.

⁹⁰ “To the Craft” 440.

National Lithographer suggested such “slouchy” work would be to blame if the industry fell to the new technologies for color reproduction. To save the trade from the encroachment of these new processes, they insisted, “What is required is high grade lithography.”⁹¹

Many in the trade placed the blame for the dire state of the industry squarely on the shoulders of those who owned lithographing firms but knew little about the craft. One artist complained, “Few employers in lithography are men reared in and trained up to the business. This everybody will admit. They understand figuring admirably, but can not personally determine the exact character and value of any technical work in progress.”⁹² He blamed the decline in quality and profitability on the promotion of ungifted but “cheeky” men to supervisory roles, where they oversaw a cadre of ill-paid and inexperienced artists. The bosses, in response to such charges that employing lithographers were to blame for hiring incompetent artists and underpaying them, retorted that it was the artists’ overly generous wages that drained profitability and endangered the trade.

But while artists and their employees fought over whether wages were too high or too low, both groups placed the greatest blame for the industry’s problems on the system of submitting sketches for free in the attempt to get contracts. The National Association of Lithographers estimated that the industry as a whole wasted more than \$400,000 annually “by the pernicious custom of competitive designs and plates.”⁹³ Because of the tremendous losses

⁹¹ “One Effect of ‘Slouchy’ Work,” *The National Lithographer* 4.6 (1897): 9.

⁹² Hal, “Another View,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.16 (1887): 471. Signed simply “Hal,” this could have been written by lithographic artist Herman A. Littmann.

⁹³ “Organized Lithographers,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.9 (1888): 138.

sustained by lithographers who paid artists to make sketches that were not accepted, members of the craft often called on each other to stop furnishing sketches for free. Although frenetic competition was characteristic of the Gilded Age in general, lithographers felt it was particularly bad in their business. “If you know of any other industry in the United States doing business habitually on the same *idiotic* plan,” one lithographer inquired, “please mention the industry, its misery will love company.”⁹⁴

One lithographer observed that the consistent underbidding was the result of increasing competition and new kinds of cutthroat sales tactics. Writing in 1888, he recalled an earlier time when his firm never offered a sketch until a deal had been made. Practices had since been altered, he asserted, by desperate firms that sent out drummers who promised to offer sketches even for prospective customers:

Our rule for so many years was never to make a sketch until we had made a price, then if the price was satisfactory we agreed to make a sketch or sketches until the party was suited. But more ambitious houses, seeing their way to make money quickly, would send out their drummers and agree to make sketches for anything and trust to getting an order to repay them for their outlay.”⁹⁵

Some in the trade suggested not that the entire system of competitive designs be eliminated, but merely that lithographers should insist on being paid even for designs that were not accepted.

The editors of *The American Lithographer* optimistically suggested that advertisers, in all

⁹⁴ “Shakespeare Applied to Lithographers” 505. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁵ “A Subject of Vital Importance” 516.

fairness, would agree to the rule that they should pay for all design work, whether accepted or not. He predicted they would understand that “if they desire a choice of designs and sketches to select from, they must, as demanded by natural equity and commercial logic, remunerate unsuccessful submitters for the expense incurred on their sketches.”⁹⁶ Unfortunately for lithographers, this gentlemanly way of doing business never became the norm, and advertisers continued to reap the benefits of having several designs to choose from at no extra cost.

Because of their heavy influence on the system of getting contracts, some in the trade blamed drummers for the problems of cutthroat competition and underbidding. Referring to what he dubbed “The Know-Nothing Drummer,” one writer complained, “There is nothing to which he will not agree, absolutely nothing, so long as he believes himself in a fair way of obtaining an order.”⁹⁷ He accused the drummer of a competing firm of telling a potential customer that after all bids were in, his firm would top the best offer by ten percent. In general, the temptation to underbid must indeed have been overwhelming for drummers, who received, by one account, a ten percent commission on all contracts negotiated. One salesman took an \$11,000 order (for 50,000 show cards and 500,000 “very expensive” labels), which would have earned him an \$1100 commission—had he not boasted about his endeavors to his competitors, one of whom underbid him and stole away the job. (Unfortunately for the braggart, he had treated his colleagues to a half dozen bottles of champagne in anticipation of the order).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “Shakespeare Applied to Lithographers” 505.

⁹⁷ Lott 13.

⁹⁸ “Abuses in Lithography,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.7 (1887): 326.

H. A. Littmann, a lithographic artist and designer, complained that the system of using commission salesmen was flawed because it created a situation in which the customer had the upper hand, playing desperate drummers against each other. Concerned that low prices meant low wages for workers, he argued that advertisers should be treated as what they are—customers—who would pay the asking price for a commodity as long as they couldn’t get it cheaper anywhere else:

If, for instance, those patent medicine men would not find every other morning a half dozen of drummers in their offices, presenting sketches free of charge and making ruinous offers, these gentlemen would soon feel obliged to be less fastidious, would repair to some establishment, and give their orders in person instead of being waited on like sovereigns who simply nod their assent.⁹⁹

The notion that drummers treated advertisers like royalty and made them more “fastidious”—able to demand more at lower prices—is significant because it suggests that salesmen would bend over backward for customers in order to secure a contract, that the same system that was deadly for lithographers was great for advertisers. But not all writers blamed drummers for the fact that lithography had been so overproduced and undervalued that advertisers could get it at lower and lower prices. One writer defended drummers, suggesting that it was easy enough to “get up” a design—finding a buyer for it was the hard part. The market had been so flooded with cheap and gratuitous “pictorial matter,” he suggested, that it was ever more difficult to find anyone who would *buy* the stuff: “The man that effects the sale”

⁹⁹ H.A. Littmann, letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.13 (1887): 431.

he argued, “is the most valuable man in the lithographic and the printing business in these verily graphic-laden times.”¹⁰⁰

Indeed, blaming drummers for an unprofitable system that resulted in a glut of cheap, ubiquitous advertising matter would seem to have been misguided. If, like advertising agencies, lithographic firms had earned a guaranteed commission on every account they had won, they wouldn’t have needed to worry about the costs of getting up losing sketches. But, unlike advertising agencies, lithographers only produced advertising; they had no role in the profitable capacity of distributing it. Given their singular role as producers and not distributors, they had little choice but just to try harder to get contracts, even as the unrestrained competition got heavier. As a result, they became even more aggressive in sending out their salesmen to actively seek out advertising business.

These drummers wine and dined prospective customers, sometimes meeting a company’s advertising manager for an expensive lunch, only to be left with the bill and no contract. As one long-suffering drummer recounted:

After “the little cuss” who has the power of giving out the orders for showcards, labels, wrappers and other advertising specialties eats his lunch at the expense of the unfortunate; after he has consumed divers potations and is helped into a cab to be taken to his home, he makes a promise to see the agent again, but his brain had become so confused that he fails to recollect what occurred until his dear friend,

¹⁰⁰ F. Cambensy, “Lithographic Drummers,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.16 (1889): 248.

the solicitor, calls a few days later and learns that the order in question had been awarded to an out-of-town lithographic firm several days before.¹⁰¹

Salesmen such as this one, in their drive to drum up business, not only provided free dinners but also felt they had to offer unbeatable terms on their advertising products: These were discretionary purchases even for companies intent on advertising. Indeed, the products of lithography were by no means considered by advertising experts or businessmen to be indispensable, or even necessarily advisable, for the promotion of consumer products.

Despite this, but given the fact it was offered at cut-rate prices, lithographic advertising spread while its producers struggled. Given that there were no publications or professional organizations specifically dedicated to promoting it, advertising lithography did not benefit from the kind of systematic boosterism from which newspaper and magazine advertising gained. It would seem, in fact, that the drummers made up the only recognizable group who made the rounds of businesses singing the praises of the showcard. Their race-to-the-bottom tactics, however, while beneficial to the growth of visual advertising, may have been ruinous to the lithographic industry.

4.6 Conclusion

Precisely because the lithographic industry suffered from “ruinous competition,” with firms undercutting each other and scrambling to find more new and original ideas for advertising,

¹⁰¹ “Troubles of the Litho. Solicitor,” *The National Lithographer* 8.4 (1901):10.

lithographers and their salesmen contributed significantly to the growth and development of visual advertising. They created a sort of laboratory where lithographers, artists from a range of backgrounds, and advertisers experimented to come up with ideas for pictures they felt would be appropriate and effective. The system of lithographic production that brought forth these early visual advertisements can be understood as anything but profitable, efficient and streamlined. Yet it helped spawn a highly profitable and influential advertising industry that controls, to a large extent, cultural production in the U.S.

It is important to recognize that among these innovators were a significant number of women artists working out their studios and homes. Acknowledging the role played by these women in the development of visual advertising is crucial because it works to shatter the gendered binaries that are so often implicit in the histories and criticisms of consumer culture: men as producers of advertising, women as consumers. In the next chapter, I will attempt to further strain the gender—and class—assumptions about nineteenth-century consumer culture by examining how lithographic artists, overwhelmingly male, identified as consumers yet resented being enlisted as producers of advertising.

5 “THE ILLUSTRATED LIES OF ADVERTISERS”

“I have myself always found more real pleasure and satisfaction by doing useful work, such as illustrations for scientific books, than in catering for some fraudulent advertiser.”¹

On Feb. 11, 1896, lithographic artists throughout the United States and Canada sent their bosses a list of demands: the elimination of piece work, a minimum weekly wage of \$18, time and a half for overtime, a 44-hour workweek (a reduction of three and a half hours), and stricter regulations on the hiring of apprentices. Although most employers quickly agreed to the artists’ terms, those in New York City and two in Buffalo refused, saying they took exception to the union’s use of the term “demands.” In response, the union called a strike, and on February 24, four hundred artists walked off the job. Although a number of the employers then acceded to the union’s conditions and several artists went back to work, the majority of New York employers, prominent among them the American Lithographic Company trust, refused to budge on the minimum wage and piecework issues. After the strike had dragged on for three weeks, one observer, a longtime defender of the organized artists, expressed surprise at the “grit” they displayed. “We did not think it possible,” he remarked, “that the artists could be induced to strike, and if they did, that the strike would last five days.”²

¹ F.S., “The Future of Lithography,” *The National Lithographer* 4.6 (1897): 4.

² “The Artists’ Great Strike,” *The National Lithographer* 3.3 (1896): 1. See also Fred C. Munson, *Labor Relations in the Lithographic Industry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1963) 88.

After all, compared to their compatriots in many other branches of the trade, lithographic artists organized fairly late. Perhaps because they generally had the privilege of a higher level of education, relatively good working conditions and comfortable wages, artists did not see their interests tied to those of their co-workers, who, like many other industrial workers, began forming stable unions in the 1880s. While the artists briefly joined a national union formed by lithographic press operators in 1882 (initially chartered under the Knights of Labor), they soon abandoned it due to a lack of interest in agitating for a shorter workday—at that time, the artists already had a relatively short nine-hour day (six days a week).³ But within a few years, as the artists saw their wages stagnate and their working conditions deteriorate, they, too, began to organize in earnest. In 1890 the International Lithographic Artists' and Engravers' Insurance and Protective Association of the United States and Canada was formed, and it was this union that called the strike of 1896.

Although it was not the first or the last strike in which lithographic artists participated, the circumstances leading up to “The Artists’ Great Strike” illustrate how the economic conditions of the late nineteenth century affected these artistic workers. Lithography had long since ceased its brief tenure as a handicraft and had morphed into an industry, a development which occurred concurrently with lithographers’ greater reliance on advertising and commercial

³ Munson 85-87. According to Peter C. Marzio, this unionization effort was impeded because of factionalism throughout the trade: “[A]rtists disliked being classed with pressmen, pressmen thought it below their station to association with stone grinders, and so on down the labor line.” See Marzio, *The Democratic Art: Pictures for a Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979) 172.

work of all kinds: collectible and display cards, product labels, posters, calendars.⁴ As in other industries during the same time period, intense competition and the need to produce more, faster, led to large capital investments in machinery and an increase in production. As I discussed in the previous chapter, fierce competition, particularly in lean times, led to a profit-draining “race-to-the bottom,” as lithographers ruthlessly underbid each other for contracts. As in other industries, these conditions led to the formation of conglomerates. In 1892 the American Lithographic Company was formed when Joseph Knapp, a New York lithographer whose firm specialized in advertisements, labels and business cards, swallowed up eight of his competitors in an attempt to gain control over the market.⁵

Industrialization also brought the worker militancy that came with unbearable wages and working conditions. All lithographic workers felt the sting of boom and bust cycles, since manufacturers’ advertising budgets were the first to go when the economy took a downturn, as it did in 1893. To make things worse, many employers, notably American Lithographic, responded to this market volatility by implementing the piecework system as a hedge against payroll demands when orders were down. This replacement of steady wages by the piecework system—which took place throughout the industrial sector during roughly the same time

⁴ In Chapter One, I discuss the growth of the lithographic industry upon the introduction of its use in advertising. See Marzio, Chapter 10, on transformation from handicraft to industry; and Chapters 11 and 12 on the drift in chromolithography from art to advertising.

⁵ Marzio 51, 156.

period—had served as a final straw for artists, pushing them to a feverish stretch of organizing that culminated in the 1896 strike.⁶

In this chapter, I will outline the arguments artists offered as they agitated for higher wages and better working conditions, and discuss how, through these appeals, they identified as consumers as well as workers. Despite their acceptance of the consumer role in society, however, they rejected advertising, the central discourse of consumer culture. Because their background and education was in art and printmaking, not in advertising, these artists resented the fact that they found themselves, day in and day out, creating nothing but pictures to illustrate what they felt were the dishonest claims of commerce. In many ways, their situation highlights the unprofessionalized, strained and negotiated conditions under which lithographic advertising was produced. My argument is that while lithographic artists resented having to put their skills to work in the dubious interests of the manufacturers of consumer products, they nevertheless embraced their identity as consumers – in the course of fighting for their rights as workers.

5.1 Declining Wages and the Consumerist Turn

Stagnant or declining wages were main concerns of workers in all of the creative branches of lithography: crayon artists, stipple artists and lithographic engravers.⁷ It is difficult, however, to

⁶ On the piecework system, see Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Knopf, 1976): 47. The striking artists in 1896 wrote: “[T]he first break of any consequence from the wage system to the piecework system was inaugurated by the American Lithographic Company.” See Francis Ficke, Moses Bernstein, and J.L. Jones. “The Artists’ Side,” *The National Lithographer* 3.7 (1896): 4.

⁷ Lithographic engraving entailed a process somewhat dissimilar to that of normal, planographic lithography. The engraver etched designs into the stone with a sharp tool rather than drawing

determine the precise wages paid to these workers over the course of the late nineteenth century; census figures give industry totals, so the wages paid to artists are lumped in with all lithographic workers. To complicate things further, wages varied widely, depending not only on the time period in question, but also on the type of artistic work being done. In 1887 one employer claimed to pay artists anywhere from \$20 to \$80 for a 45-hour week.⁸ The records of the Cincinnati-based Strobridge Lithographing Company similarly bear out that there was an enormous wage range, indicating that the firm paid its artists anywhere from \$8 to \$200 per week in the 1880s, with the mean and the median both around \$40 - \$42.⁹

These figures, which include neither those who were paid on the piecework system nor apprentices, who were paid from \$1.50 to \$4.50 per week, suggest that lithographic artists in general made out relatively well compared with other workers in the same time period. Almost all of them made more than that of the average daily wage for all workers, which in 1890 was \$1.50, or \$9 per week (working six days per week). In fact, most lithographic artists made wages that in the 1880s would have placed them in the “aristocracy of labor” – those skilled

them on the stone with a crayon or oily ink. (The term “engraving” rather than “etching” was used because in lithography the latter refers to the chemical process in which acid is applied to the stone. See Chapter One for a brief explanation of the lithographing process.) Lithographic engraving, while only used for single-color printing, allowed for accuracy, fine detail, and good impressions. It was used for many kinds of commercial or “practical” lithography. See W. D. Richmond, *The Grammar of Lithography: A Practical Guide for the Artist and Printer* (London: Wyman & Sons, 1886) 131-139.

⁸ The editors of *The American Lithographer and Printer* were dubious, contending that most firms did not pay such high wages. “To the Craft,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.14 (1887): 438-440.

⁹ Artists’ contracts, box 9, Strobridge Lithographing Company Papers, CHS.

workers earning more than \$700 per year, or \$13.50 per week – enough to support their families and make it unnecessary for their wives or children to work.¹⁰ Still, while some highly-skilled and experienced poster artists may have commanded as much as \$100 or more per week, the wages of most lithographic artists paled in comparison.

But more importantly, unlike the wages of industrial workers overall, lithographic artists' wages actually declined in the final decades of the century, causing artists to suffer a decrease in earning power despite a reduction in inflation during the same period.¹¹ In 1894, The National Lithographers' Association, a trade group, reported average wages of \$28 per week for crayon artists, and these were the highest paid group of lithographic workers at that point.¹² Crayon drawing was believed to offer the most freedom and hence was associated with more artistic productions, while the more labor-intensive work of stippling was considered more mechanical and brought lower wages. Thus, stipple artists, who did much of the commercial work, were less well compensated. One employer, Charles Armstrong, even advised an apprentice against learning to stipple because "I can hire all the stipplers I want for fifteen dollars a week who can stipple all the way down this room and out into the street."¹³ An 1886 employment ad stated that

¹⁰ Figures pertaining to overall wages are from Laurie 127-128.

¹¹ Laurie indicates that average wages of industrial workers rose fifty percent, from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per week, between 1860 and 1890. See Laurie 127.

¹² Marzio 153.

¹³ Leeds Armstrong Wheeler and Marilee Wheeler, *Armstrong & Company: Artistic Lithographers* (Boston Public Library, 1982) 64. For an explanation of the difference between crayon lithography and stippling, see Richmond, chapters 8 and 9.

a New York stipple artist was hoping for a position that paid \$25 per week.¹⁴ In 1898, “Brooklynian,” a stipple artist writing in a socialist newspaper said wages had decreased steadily over the previous fifteen years, indicating that while in the early 1880s their weekly pay had ranged from \$25 to \$65, by the end of the century firms were paying \$25 at most.¹⁵

Artists frequently railed against declining and unfair wages. In 1888, the newly-formed Boston Lithographic Artists’ Association complained that artists’ compensation had diminished in the previous few years and claimed that artists who deserved \$35 to \$40 per week rarely received that much. The group, which did not call itself a union and denounced strikes and militancy, nevertheless organized, in part, with the aim of increasing their wages.¹⁶ They insisted that workers in other branches of the trade were paid more fairly. Indeed, artists in the 1880s often claimed that wages of workers in the unionized branches of the trade, notably press operators, were more fair. In 1888, German-born artist and agitator H.A. Littmann called attention to “the sad fact that lithographic artists, on an average, are less appreciated and less paid than their more fortunate co-operatives of the printing department.”¹⁷ Although artists were not yet consistently earning less than press operators, by the end of the century many were. In

¹⁴ Classified advertisement, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 7.3 (1886): 19.

¹⁵ Brooklynian, “Past and present of the Artists’ Craft,” *The National Lithographer* 5.9 (1898): 3-4.

¹⁶ “The Boston Lithographic Artists’ Association,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 9.22 (1888): 340. Artists in other cities followed suit. The Boston group raised money by auctioning off their own sketches.

¹⁷ Littmann, H.A., “Life in the Artist’s Room,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 9.25 (1888): 393.

1900 the *National Lithographer* reported that artists were no longer the highest paid workers in the trade, nationwide. While most pressmen were consistently garnering at least \$30 per week, they found, “some artists are paid \$30, \$40 or \$50, but great numbers are paid less than \$20. They are young men not having had experience.”¹⁸

Indeed, many in the trade observed that in the drive to cut costs, employers hired untrained artists who worked at a fraction of the wages paid to their more experienced counterparts. One artist bitterly complained about employers who wondered why their businesses suffered after they hired “a small army of incompetent youths, lacking experience and real interest, working at ‘starvation wages’ and never capable of other than mediocre work.”¹⁹ In 1898, the trade journal *The National Lithographer* reported that “the first-class workman, who is paid \$35 or over, is the last to find employment and the first to be discharged, while the man who is conscious of his own inability to do good work, but is willing to attempt existence on \$15 per week, finds steady employment.”²⁰ The practice of hiring a large number of inexperienced “apprentices” to carry out advertising and commercial work was a common complaint of artists and was behind the union’s demands in the 1896 strike to limit the number of workers hired as apprentices. Still, despite the best efforts of the artists’ union, many young artists were still

¹⁸ “Artists’ and Pressmen’s Wages,” *The National Lithographer* 7.9 (1900): 10.

¹⁹ Hal, “Another View,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.16 (1887): 471-2. This may have been H.A. Littmann.

²⁰ “Competition Which Kills,” *The National Lithographer* 5.4 (1898): 10.

being paid on the piecework system at the end of the century. And for those receiving a salary, earning a measly \$12 per week was not unusual.²¹

In addition to demanding that their employers stop hiring inexperienced and unskilled men who would work for rock-bottom wages, artists repeatedly called on employers to end the price-undercutting so rampant in the lithographic industry. It was only by charging their customers fair prices for good work, the artists argued, that they could in turn pay workers a fair wage. Littmann reasoned that just as workers were forced, as consumers, to pay the going rate for commodities to meet their needs, so the customers of lithographers (advertisers) should be forced to pay a decent sum for lithographic productions: “As I have frequently stated in these columns,” he wrote, “the public will pay any reasonable price for fair work. If, by way of example, I must have a coat, I pay what is asked for it, provided I cannot get it cheaper elsewhere. I may grumble but I pay. So it is with our lithographic productions.”²² Here, Littmann drew an analogy from his own experience as a consumer to illustrate for his bosses the need to charge their customers a reasonable price. Indeed, it was not unusual for lithographic artists to give indications that they identified as consumers at the same time as they agitated as workers.

The internalization of a consumer identity among lithographic artists was part of a larger development among organized workers in the nineteenth century. As Lawrence Glickman writes in *A Living Wage*, it was then—not the 1920s as some other authors have argued—that workers

²¹ Brooklynian, 3.

²² H.A. Littmann, letter, *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.13: 431.

first began to think of themselves as consumers. And it was then that they began fighting for their rights as workers in consumerist terms, arguing that they needed sufficient wages to meet their needs in the consumer marketplace.²³ This did not happen overnight, however. Even with the enormous industrialization that occurred after the Civil War, workers still did not even accept the notion of wage labor. The prevailing belief among workers was one in which the wage system was akin to “wage slavery” since under it workers could never receive the “full fruits” of their labor, sometimes expressed as a “just equivalent” for the work they performed. But between the Civil War and the end of the century, this “producerist” ethos began, slowly, to be displaced by an acceptance of the wage system, which replaced the idea of equivalence with the goal of earning a “just reward” for one’s labor. Hence, the economic notion of equivalence was replaced by a political one, justice. And as organized labor came to a grudging acceptance of wage labor, along with it came a demand for a living wage. The “living wage” was not consistently defined, but in general terms meant wages high enough for a worker to meet the needs and desires of his family in the consumer marketplace. Glickman calls this the “consumerist turn” in labor organizing.

The striking artists in 1896 peppered their arguments with references to the high cost of living in New York, evidence that, even while referring to themselves as “journeymen” in the nomenclature of artisans, they acknowledged their position as wage laborers and consumers.²⁴

²³ Glickman, Lawrence B. *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997).

²⁴ By the turn of the century, workers stopped referring to themselves as journeymen altogether. See Laurie, 113.

Indeed, as I have already suggested, far from positing an opposition between production and consumption, these artists recognized that workers were consumers in a capitalist wage economy. Echoing a view expressed by labor leaders in many industries, artists argued that, because workers were consumers too, an increase in wages would result in more consumption, which would turn the wheels of commerce.²⁵ Responding to an argument by “Ohio,” a pressman, that artists’ wages were too high in relation to workers in the printing department, O.F. Roller, a lithographic engraver, concluded:

The high wages of the artist, therefore, instead of being hurtful, by increasing consumption and thereby favoring production, is of benefit to all other workers. If all those who now receive good wages were reduced (sic), consumption would be lessened, business would become dull, competition fiercer, and it would be necessary still further to reduce the wages of the much-abused printer. Instead of demanding lower wages for the workers, ‘Ohio’ should ask for higher for himself.²⁶

While the pressman had argued in more producerist terms—that the printing department was the only “value-creating” branch of the business—Roller responded with an argument based on the valuable economic role played by workers as consumers. In this case, the consumerist argument was part of a more radical agenda—pay all workers more—than that of “Ohio.”

²⁵ Glickman 60.

²⁶ O.F. Roller, “To the Craft,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.20 (1887): 534.

As Glickman notes, when workers used the term “minimum wage” it was in ways that suggested it was more like a living wage than the sub-subsistence, rock-bottom income conceptualized by some middle-class reformers around the turn of the century: “Workers rejected the distinction between living wages and minimum wages in order to preclude the possibility that minimum wages might become a national standard for wages; for them, all wages should represent some kind of living wage.”²⁷ Indeed, in their arguments for a base wage of \$18 per week, the artists striking in 1896 used the term “living wage” interchangeably with “minimum wage.” Noting that artists across the country had already won the \$18 per-week minimum wage (as well as the abolition of piecework and the 44-hour week), they argued that if the New York lithographers were not forced to pay their artists the same base wage, workers and employers across the country would suffer from unfair competition. “On the other hand, if these rules and regulations are established here as well as elsewhere,” they asserted, “the prices to the customers will be kept up throughout the country, and the entire craft of journeymen artist lithographers will be enabled to obtain a living wage, so long as there is work for them to do.”²⁸

Artists’ arguments against the piecework system were similarly consumerist. While they claimed that the system prevented them from doing “first-class work,” they also argued in the same breath that it was “overtaxing their vitality,” causing them to be laid off for days of recuperation, thereby resulting in lower wages over the course of a year, and a declining standard of living. While employers argued that eliminating the piecework system was an infringement

²⁷ Glickman 136.

²⁸ “The Artists’ Side,” *The National Lithographer* 3.7 (1896): 4.

on “the personal liberty of contract,” the workers retorted that “the economic conditions of t-day have in all trades practically put an end to the liberty of contract, except such liberty as means that of working for starvation wages...”²⁹

Like the many union organizers Glickman studies, lithographic artists called for higher wages not in economic terms, as a means to attain the “full fruits” of their labor, but in terms of morality: workers needed to make a living wage in order to be full and productive republican citizens. “Man is like a flower: blossoming and bearing fruits in the sunshine of wealth,” wrote Littmann in 1889, “but withering and pining away in the shade of poverty.”³⁰ Like other workers, Littmann felt that working for “starvation wages” led to spiritual and moral degradation. “It is well-known that wealth and comfort tend to elevate men; while poverty tends to degrade them,” he wrote. “Even a conscientious man may be tempted to deviate from the path of rectitude when he finds himself in a state of want, or within the shadow of approaching want.”³¹ This connection between living wages and morality was a common theme in labor rhetoric, as union leaders argued that only by possessing an adequate standard of living could the laboring masses achieve the physical, mental and moral foundations necessary for responsible citizenship.³²

²⁹ “The Artists’ Side, 3-4.

³⁰ Littmann, H.A. “Our Chatty Corner,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 12.4 (1889): 472.

³¹ Littmann , letter, 431.

³² Glickman 83-84.

Like other workers, artists argued that in order to achieve the level of comfort necessary for full citizenship, they needed to enjoy a standard of living that was uniquely American. Glickman notes that, on the one hand, the “American Standard of Living” was an important part of living wage discourse that allowed workers to demand economic independence and full participation in civic life. On the other hand, the American Standard was rarely defined, except in negative terms: immigrants, white women, and all African-Americans were those whom labor leaders identified as failed consumers, because they either existed on too little, spent too much, or simply consumed the wrong things. In effect, the inability of these groups to earn a living wage was turned against them.³³ Thus, racial and gender exclusion was not just a circumstantial aspect of the living wage movement, it was one of its defining components. Like other white male workers in the labor movement, artists found any easy and frequent target in Chinese workers: “If lithographers should consent to go down to the Chinese standard of wages, even the most generous employer would pay Chinese wages. Competition would compel him to do so,” wrote Littmann.³⁴ Another lithographic worker, railing against protectionism that kept out desirable consumer products while allowing in foreign workers, wrote: “We can safely take all the cheap fans and the teas of China. They add to our comfort. But to take the Chinese themselves—that hurts.”³⁵

³³ Glickman 78-91.

³⁴ Littmann, letter, 431.

³⁵ Van, “How Workingmen are Protected,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 10.8 (1888): 537.

While artists often argued for higher tariffs on European imports, which were produced by German and French artists whose wages were low compared to their own, their criticisms did not extend to direct denunciations of their European brethren's failed consumptive patterns. While they often contended that American lithographic artists did superior work, they did not suggest that Europeans had unwholesome diets and lived in squalor. As Glickman observes, the invocation of the American Standard, while providing a framework for trade unionists to argue for higher wages, also worked to define American-ness against "the Other" — but, as the arguments of the artists suggest, American-ness was not based on where one lived or the citizenship one claimed. While some living on American soil were considered insufficiently American, Europeans did not suffer the same criticisms.

Toward the end of the century, lithographers began a union-label movement whose primary aim was to distinguish lithographs made in the United States from imports. In contrast to the union label movement among workers who made consumer goods such as cigars or hats, the lithographers' label movement was not directed at workers-as-consumers, since by the late 1890s the vast majority of lithography was bought not by consumers but by businesses and dealers in advertising novelties.³⁶ Therefore, a plan was devised for committees of lithographers, as well as their wives, sisters and daughters, to "interview brewers, bottlers and dealers in wines, liquors, cordials, patent medicines and drugs, to explain how much we need protection against the products of underpaid European labor" and to tell dealers in advertising novelties "how unjust it is for neighbors to try to sell foreign made goods while American artisans are unable to

³⁶ See Glickman, 108-128, on the union label movement.

secure a just reward for their labor.”³⁷ This organizing drive, while not aimed at workers-as-consumers like other branches of the union-label movement, is nevertheless suggestive of these workers’ responses to the burgeoning consumer culture: it illustrates how closely workers in the lithography industry saw their fates tied to the whims of advertisers.

5.2 Industrialization and Alienation

Along with industrialization, declining wages, and greater reliance on advertising, came deteriorating working conditions. Although the artisanal system of production that briefly prevailed in the first decades of lithography (the early 1800s) soon developed into an industry marked by specialization, lithographic artists were highly-skilled and often formally-educated workers who experienced relatively favorable working conditions even in the years following the Civil War.³⁸ Indeed, until about the 1880s they often enjoyed not only high wages, but also a degree of freedom and autonomy.

However, by the turn of the century many veteran artists complained that their life’s work had become drudgery, that they had become cogs in a machine. In 1898, “Brooklynian,” the socialist activist, observed that “fifteen years ago ... the conditions of employment were then very liberal and favorable. The utmost freedom was allowed in the artists’ room. Conversation, whistling, singing, acrobatics and other time consuming diversions were indulged in during the hours of labor...” But times had changed; in the intervening years, bosses had employed various

³⁷ “To Promote the Use of American Lithographs,” *The National Lithographer* 4.9 (1897): 3.

³⁸ See Marzio on specialization, 149-152.

means of disciplining their artistic workers: “Time slips, time clocks, time keepers and time systems of all kinds, together with rules and regulations designed to extort the greatest amount of product out of the labor employed, are in general use to-day.”³⁹

The establishment of an increasingly regimented workday was experienced by workers in many industries in a similar fashion. As Herbert Gutman notes, however, these changes did not occur overnight, as workers in a range of industries—dockworkers, cabinetmakers, cobblers—managed to retain preindustrial work habits to some degree until well into the late-nineteenth century. “Despite the profound economic changes that followed the American Civil War,” Gutman writes, “Gilded Age artisans did not easily shed stubborn and time-honored work habits.”⁴⁰ Like workers in other trades, lithographic artists used kinship and subcultural ethnic ties to resist the pressures of work discipline. Artists generally dated the implementation of a more rationalized workday and rigid enforcement of repressive work rules to the 1880s—a decade of enormous expansion in the lithographic industry.

At Armstrong and Company, a lithographic firm located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, artists enjoyed a raucous work atmosphere—most markedly in the years prior to 1887 before the business left its location in a set of rustic cottages close to the Charles River and relocated to a larger, newer, building. The firm emphasized artistic rather than “practical” or commercial lithography, particularly in the early years, and the artists were serious about their art: they organized sketching classes and taught each other the techniques they had learned studying in

³⁹ Brooklynian 3.

⁴⁰ Gutman 36.

Europe. But they were also given to horseplay and general silliness. Good-natured banter (in a number of native European languages), wrestling, singing, and practical jokes were common, and attendance at the workplace was not entirely mandatory. At times an artist would be gone for days, working at home or elsewhere, forcing the proprietor, Charles Armstrong, to send a co-worker or apprentice out to find him or to fetch the stone on which he was working.⁴¹

Eventually, Armstrong did make some half-hearted efforts to rein in the artists' behavior. He appointed several of the worst verbal offenders to a Committee for the Reduction of Profanity in the Artists' Room and instituted a sign-in system to curb tardiness; latecomers were supposed to write down the time of their arrival and their reasons. The latter effort, at least, was not entirely successful. Artists regularly "dittoed" any excuse given by a previous latecomer, and Armstrong himself often enjoyed repeating the story of how on one occasion no less than twelve tardy artists dittoed the explanation, "Wife had a baby last night." (The artists' own practical jokes may have been a better way to punish tardies: according to a bit of doggerel written by one of the artists, buckets of water were sometimes installed over the doorways to douse incomers.)⁴²

Interviewed by Armstrong's grandson fifty years later, artists reported having felt a strong identification with their boss, who had himself started out as an artist and had worked for Louis Prang among others. Artists considered spending a lovely afternoon out of doors,

⁴¹ Wheeler and Wheeler, *Armstrong & Company*, 51-60. This essay about the lithographic artists at Armstrong & Co. was researched and written in the 1930s and 1940s by Armstrong's grandson, Leeds Armstrong Wheeler, based upon interviews with artists who had worked at the firm as young men.

⁴² Wheeler and Wheeler 52, 59.

individually or in groups, to be necessary for maintaining their “artistic feeling and temperament,” and Armstrong either approved of—or at least tolerated—such outings:

Of a summer’s day the word might go around, “It’s a fine day.” Without more, one of the apprentices went off to get beer and sandwiches and then the artists all set out in the sailboat owned by [one of the artists] Ralph Klucken which was kept anchored nearby. No thought was given to the amount of work which the firm had to complete, perhaps at a nearby date. They spent the day sailing up the Charles and picnicking on the bank. They felt this a prerogative to which the artistic spirit entitled them and they were confident that Armstrong, as an artist and yachtsman, would sympathize with them.⁴³

Although a degree of workplace autonomy and a sense of kinship between artists and their employers lasted well beyond the Civil War era at firms like Armstrong & Company, it eventually evaporated as lithographic firms expanded, proliferated and industrialized, and layers of middle managers were hired to supervise artists. As Bruce Laurie notes, the frenetic competition of the Gilded Age economy created such instability that even those craft-minded employers who had based their businesses on the knowledge and autonomy of their skilled workers began to exert more control over work processes.⁴⁴ At the Strobridge firm, several workers in the early 1880s (and perhaps sooner) signed standard pre-printed contracts that

⁴³ Wheeler and Wheeler 53-55. Years later, Ralph Klucken would serve as president of the executive board of the New York branch of the union that struck in 1896. See “What Led to the Settlement,” *The National Lithographer* 3.5 (1896): 2.

⁴⁴ Laurie 118-122.

included a host of stipulations, including abiding by the “Rules of the Establishment” regarding hours of work and productivity, including beginning work promptly at eight o’clock in the morning. According to the provisions of this contract, a worker was not to expect to be paid for any time spent idle even if there was no work for him to do—unless he filled out a standardized forms alerting the supervisor that “I shall be out of work in ____ hour and waiting for another job, please have it ready for me.” However, some contracts were handwritten and bear evidence of negotiations. One highly-paid artist, Edward Potthast, signed a contract specifically including a provision that he *would* be paid for time spent not working if there was no work for him to do, and Paul Jones’s contract provided that he not be made to work overtime if suffering from a physical disability. Still, other artists were apparently not so successful at negotiating: For example, Harry Bridwell signed two separate contracts specifically stipulating that he had *no* right to expect “supper money” when working overtime. Taken as a whole, these contracts reflect an effort, though not always successful, by the company to exert greater control over artistic labor through the establishment of regular working hours, mandatory overtime, and a ban on idleness.⁴⁵

It may have been a decline in autonomy as much as lower wages that pushed artists to unionize. One labor organizer in the late 1880s, after reflecting on how the atmosphere in “the artists’ room” had gone from one of casual camaraderie to one of repressive management controls, segued into an appeal to join the union:

⁴⁵ Artists’ contracts, box 9, Strobridge Lithographing Company Papers, CHS.

We are also forced to see the former freedom and confidence pervading the “Artist Room” gradually vanishing, until now it is conducted on factory principles and under the strictest rules, beneath which, in many cases, the most common class of laborers would revolt, but to which Artists are in most cases obliged to submit, owing to the fact that in the past there has been so little organization.⁴⁶

This writer suggested the tables had been turned on the artists. While they had earlier shunned efforts at organizing, they woke up in the late 1880s to find themselves ill-compensated and ill-treated compared to their co-workers. “Why does the Artist and Engraver, from who is expected good judgment and who furnishes the brain work of the Lithographic trade, receive less (on an average) than the other branches of the business which are only practical and mechanical?” he demanded. “Why? Because they have been organized and we have not.”

H.A. Littmann felt that the strict rules and the heightened concern with the bottom line which artists had been forced to endure were the very thing that would hinder unionization. Writing in 1888, Littmann observed that as more inexperienced young artists were employed, and more rules were laid down to control them, artists began to lose the sense of camaraderie that had existed in earlier days. He noted that rules that restricted talking and playfulness backfired when, the manager having left the room, “pandemonium” broke out. “In some instances,” he wrote, “these outbursts of checked vivacity develops (sic) into a brisk bombardment, in which sponges, cardboards, wood, crayon, in short, all available things are used as missiles.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “The Boston Lithographic Artists’ Association” 340.

⁴⁷ Littman, “Life in the Artist’s Room,” 393.

But despite these outbursts, Littmann sadly observed, artists were increasingly forced to endure the “oppressive,” dehumanizing rules. The camaraderie and good humor that had, in part, defined their occupation having been stripped away, artists were increasingly in it only for the money. The rare artist who still possessed “a warm heart” was disappointed to find his colleagues grasping their paychecks on Saturday afternoon without bothering even to say goodbye. “It is, therefore, not surprising,” he lamented, “that artists, being more and more mere working machines, lose the qualification for the *corps d’esprit* of former times, and succumb to the many odds that lower their self-esteem, and make them almost misanthropists.”⁴⁸ Such a situation, Littmann suggested, was not conducive to the solidarity necessary for union organizing.

Nevertheless, as I have discussed, artists did manage to form unions to combat worsening labor conditions. Artists felt they needed and deserved the special freedoms they had previously enjoyed. They insisted that the type of work they did justified and depended upon it, and they felt their unique role as the cultivators of culture and society warranted special treatment. “The average artist is, as a rule, much higher educated and more intelligent than any class of men,” a New York artists’ group declared in a statement. “To his treasures of study, reading, travel and experience he unites talent, imagery, radiant thought and the love of the beautiful, and is, perhaps, without an equal to adorn society and delight mankind with his beauty of thought and polish of utterances...”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Littmann, “Life in the Artist’s Room,” 393.

⁴⁹ “N.Y. Lithographic Artists’ Association,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 11.24 (1889): 372.

But employers rejected artists' claims that their educational level, and their special role as society's beautifiers, meant they needed better working conditions. In their arguments before the arbitrator in the 1896 strike, the employers asserted that lithographic artists were not really artists at all, but:

practically artisans, and this distinction should be clearly kept in mind, for much of the claim made on their behalf rests on the assumption that they are 'artists' and, therefore, a superior class of beings, who should be exempt from the discipline and restrictions which are inevitable in the relations which exist in a factory between the employer and employee.⁵⁰

While the employers did concede that "some of them are artists; many of them possess artistic skill in a greater or less degree," they nevertheless maintained that "they are not, generally speaking, artists, as they do not originate designs, but simply reproduce on stone, *more or less mechanically*, the designs of artists, in oil, water color or black and white..."⁵¹

However, in the same brief, the employers seemed to change their position on whether litho artists' work was artistic or "merely" mechanical. In a section dealing with the minimum wage issue, the employers argued that lithographic artists' work *was* special and cited this as a reason they should *not* expect steady, predictable wages: "[T]he minimum wage in an occupation like that of drawing on stone is an absurdity," they argued. "The minimum wage of a machine tender or a motorman on a trolley car is reasonable enough, for the product of their

⁵⁰ "The Employers' Side," *The National Lithographer* 3.6 (1896): 2.

⁵¹ "The Employers' Side" 1-2. Emphasis added.

labor can be accurately gauged. One man is as good as another on a trolley car; the occupation can be learned in a few hours...”⁵² Not surprisingly, the artists felt the employers insisted on having it both ways: “[T]he employers seem to desire to at one moment consider the artists lithographers as professional men and as artists,” they retorted, “and the next moment, when it suits their purpose to do so, to consider them as purely mechanical workmen.”⁵³

Contradictions such as these expressed by employers not only reflect their attempts to discredit the union’s demands and maintain control of working conditions and compensation, but also indicate some of the problems inherent in attempting to industrialize a craft that still relied on the labor-intensive creative work of drawing on stone. As the demand for advertising, labels and other commercial work accelerated in the 1880s and 1890s, the need to produce thousands of prints quickly grew as well. Hence, a key element in the shift to industrialization was the introduction of the steam press, which replaced the hand press and speeded up production. The shift from hand to steam between 1870 and 1890 (which took place across many industries during roughly the same time period) reflected a growing emphasis on speed that affected the artists’ work in many ways. As art historian Peter Marzio writes, “With the transition from hand to steam came the metamorphosis of chromolithography from a handicraft to an industry.”⁵⁴

Using the hand press was tedious work: The artisan lithographer or press operator had to carefully adjust the bed of the press—which held the inked stone, the paper and a leather cover

⁵² “The Employers’ Side” 3.

⁵³ “The Artists’ Side” 4-5.

⁵⁴ Marzio 89.

called a tympan—to meet a scraper blade, and then pull a side lever or turn a wheel to crank the bed across the scraper. After the impression was made, the pressure was released, the bed drawn back, the tympan lifted, and the printed paper peeled off the stone. This produced a single print, and for color lithography only one color; the entire process had to be repeated to add subsequent colors or to make more prints. Even the most efficient lithographer could make only 200 to 250 single-color impressions in a day.⁵⁵ By contrast, workers using a steam press could produce ten times that number. With a steam press, the stationary scraper blade was replaced with a rotating cylinder, and most aspects of printing were mechanized: a worker would feed paper into the machine where it would be picked up and carried forward with the cylinder, and delivered at the other end, an impression made. Inking and dampening was done with mechanized rollers. While some hand presses were still manufactured into the 1890s, and most shops still had some of them until that decade, chromolithography generally became steam-powered in the 1870s.⁵⁶

With industrialization and the introduction of steam power, more types of printing specialists were called for. In the earliest days of lithography, the same artisan ground the stones, mixed the inks, drew designs on stones, and printed them on a hand press. While lithography began to specialize fairly soon, the steam press exacerbated this process. By 1890 there were sixteen divisions of lithography specialists.⁵⁷ But not only were separate tasks

⁵⁵ Marzio 79-81.

⁵⁶ Marzio 88.

⁵⁷ Marzio 149. The various specialists were: “artists’ foremen, artists, provers and provers’ assistants, transferrers and transferrers’ assistants, power-press feeders and power-press assistants, stone grinders and grainers, ink-grinders, drying-room help and stock-room help, paper handlers and cutters.”

divided up—artwork, proving, presswork, and so on—often artistic work was subdivided as well. Artists complained about having to work on a picture along with several other artists. In 1898, “Brooklynian,” described the shift:

Formerly an artist reproduced a sketch alone, consuming as much time as would be allowed. Specialization is now the rule, and sketches are cut in many pieces. Some men draw only the better colors, like black, while other draw the lesser ones, like blue. This result is making the artists an interactive body, working in minute co-operation with one another, thus saving time and producing more.⁵⁸

This writer characterized specialization as part of a larger trend toward worsening labor conditions in the craft. Another artist, possibly Littmann, pointed out the inefficiency of having five or six men turn out one job: “[T]ime is wasted and the last worker must account for the sins of the family.”⁵⁹

Artists felt the industrialization of their craft and the increasing division of labor resulted not only in demoralizing working conditions, but also in poor quality work. This, in turn, brought a keen sense of alienation: they no longer recognized the prints coming off of the presses as anything resembling the expression of their “artistic feeling.” This was difficult for lithographic artists, many of whom had had formal training in art schools where they had

⁵⁸ Brooklynian 4.

⁵⁹ Hal 491-92.

internalized romantic artistic values such as integrity, self-expression, independence and truth.⁶⁰

In large part, these ideals had begun to be articulated in the late eighteenth century, and by the last half of the nineteenth the notion that a work of art should be an expression of the artist's feelings began to take hold.⁶¹ Lithographic artists, perhaps because they were aware that their work was considered by many to be not an "art," but "merely" a craft, often put forth the notion that they should work independently and be free to express themselves.

One artist, writing in 1886, explained that in the day of the hand press artists produced works with originality—but that with the introduction of the steam press, the greater division of labor, and the need to produce ads quickly and efficiently, all individuality had been lost and *technique* was given precedence. Artists were only valued to the extent they could perform like interchangeable inanimate objects: "The man that can stipple or crayon as even and smooth as a machine is the favorite of both transferrer and printer," he complained. "What do these good folks care for your artistic feeling, your individuality in art, your originality in touch, and the like?" Sure, he argued, the artistic work that resulted from this mechanistic process lent itself well to mass reproduction on the steam press:

But look at the result: harshness, crudeness, insufficient modeling and bad drawing, are the rule and not the exception in our showbills, cards and labels. This regulation style is sickening, and the reason of it is to be found in the fact that the

⁶⁰ Bogart, Michele. *Advertising, Artists, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995): 13, 67. Although Bogart does not consider lithographic artists, her observations about the values learned by illustrators in art schools in the nineteenth century are relevant.

⁶¹ Bogart 18.

artist of feeling and original power is crowded out by the mere lithographic technician and his warm friend at the machine. The foreman-printer's word is stronger than the artists' study and crayon, however versatile.⁶²

This artist was primarily concerned with the implications, and results, of art being produced on factory principles. Invoking one of the least wholesome work environments imaginable, he proclaimed: "An art establishment simply cannot be run on the principal of a meat abbatoir." He was one among a number of artists who wrote of being demoralized by having to work under the alienating conditions brought about with industrialization and the high demand for commercial jobs.

5.3 The Humble Hand-Maid of Commerce

Many lithographic artists bemoaned the fact that they had become so dependent on advertising work to earn a livelihood. Some felt that their noble calling was sullied when used for blatantly commercial purposes, and resented the role they were forced to play in the profusion of advertising. On the other hand, they did express the desire to create other kinds of art for mass production—book illustrations, schoolroom decorations, monochrome crayon portraits—anything except advertising. Indeed, much like the reformers discussed in Chapter One who lauded chromolithography as educational and democratizing, the artists strongly suggested that the mass production of beautiful and artistic pictures could serve as an elevating and cultivating force in society.

⁶² Cambensy, F., "Artistic Feeling and Mechanism," *The American Lithographer and Printer* 7.8 (1886): 70.

Lithographic artists' contentment with producing illustrations and other types of mass productions may also be related to the enhanced status of book and magazine illustrators in the late nineteenth century. Michele Bogart writes that several respected artists such as Winslow Homer, Edwin Austin Abbey, John La Farge, and Howard Pyle, had gone between illustration and fine art, thereby elevating the former.⁶³ However, while some of the artists, including Homer, took brief forays into lithography mid-century, their interest in it was rarely sustained.⁶⁴ Unlike other types of printmaking, as the century drew on, lithography began to hold a relatively low cultural position—probably because its most common uses were not in respectable types of illustration, but in advertising and marketing. Indeed, Marzio argues that by the end of the nineteenth century chromolithography's total association with patent medicines, cigar box labels, theatrical posters, and the like, had resulted in there being no split between artistic and commercial lithography—it was all the same, and all debased. “This lack of distinction” between artistic and commercial lithography, he writes, “was largely because lithography as a branch of fine art was not recognized.”⁶⁵ One American printmaker and illustrator, Joseph Pennell, asserted that from 1870 to 1900, the “creative artist... had no place in the lithographic establishment.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Bogart 19.

⁶⁴ Marzio 12.

⁶⁵ Marzio 12.

⁶⁶ Marzio 13.

Lithographic artists were thus in a tight spot. While longing for their artistic integrity, they were not respected among artists. At the same time, they recognized that in order to maintain a livelihood they had to produce art that could be mass-produced. By the 1880s, they were working for businessmen who had made huge capital investments in machinery, and demanded to see a return on those investments. Lithographic artists therefore began to argue that they should try to free themselves from the shackles of advertising, while at the same time keeping the presses running. Littmann was one artist who called upon his brethren to find new uses for their trade, to free it from its dependence on the whims of advertisers. Lithography, he noted:

[h]as become the humble hand-maid of commerce. Our entire craft depends upon the fickle phases of the latter, and if it should happen that theatre managers drop their posters, patent medicine men and cigarette manufacturers their show-cards, brewers their bock beer bills, tea and fancy stores their pictorial presents, then almost all our establishments would come to a stand-still.⁶⁷

Littmann criticized lithography-firm owners for depending upon large commercial contracts rather than attempting to create a market for artistic lithography. “Instead of educating the public taste with really artistic work and thus creating an increased demand for it,” he wrote, “those are considered the champions who can turn out editions by the hundred thousand in the shortest time and at the lowest price.” Littmann accurately predicted the formation of “monster establishments” like the American Lithographic Company trust, and regretted the fact that while

⁶⁷ Littmann, H.A., “To the Craft,” *The American Lithographer and Printer* 8.19 (1887): 518.

there was a will to establish a cooperative lithographic firm, there was no money to do so. With some resignation he concluded, “This is all deplorable.”⁶⁸

Littmann’s metaphor of lithography as business’s humble servant was repeated a decade later by a different artist. Writing in the late 1890s, Fritz Schumann was, if possible, even more resentful than Littmann that lithography had become so dependent on advertising. But, unlike Littmann, he was witnessing the sharp *decline* in the demand for advertising lithography that his predecessor had accurately predicted would take place at the end of the century. This put Schumann in a tricky position, for while he celebrated his craft’s growing freedom from base commercialism, he also dreaded its consequent demise when its services were no longer required by advertisers. While he conceded that advertising was a “necessary weapon” for business during hard economic times, he still suggested it was undignified for lithography to be placed in the service of selling products. Invoking Littmann’s metaphor of chromo advertising as commerce’s handmaid, Schumann wrote:

The principal use of lithography has hitherto in this country been in the service of advertising, and in our commercial strife this necessary weapon has been made all the more powerful by attractive illustrations. Colored illustrations being the most attractive, lithography was just the medium to be employed. But this not very dignified position of the art of lithography as the handmaid of commercialism is

⁶⁸ Littmann, “To the Craft,” 519.

now a shaky one, and we should rejoice for the sake of lithography were it not that it is depriving us of earning a living in our craft.⁶⁹

Like Littmann, Schumann called for lithography to be put to more artistic uses. He perceived that the “public taste” had been elevated to the point where many would appreciate fine lithographs—not gaudy chromos but more refined crayon work in tints and monochrome—for the home. He also called for lithography to be put to educational uses, such as schoolroom decorations and textbook illustrations. To aid in the latter, he called on lithographers to perfect the process of printing text, confident that for small editions lithography would remain more efficient than the three-color process if only lithographers could figure out how to combine text and pictures adequately.⁷⁰

Schumann anticipated the objection that his ideas were neither profitable nor practical. In answering this, he did not pass up an opportunity to call on those lithographers who had profited by advertising to use their riches in a nobler, yet still remunerative, direction:

I am well aware that at present it is not a sufficient reason for the making of an article that the article be useful and desirable, but that there must also be an assurance against risks and a fair prospect of profit to the entrepreneur. But I should think that as the hitherto frivolous use of lithography as an advertising medium has been able to make these men rich in money, the further use of our art

⁶⁹ Fritz Schumann, “The Present Position of Lithography” *The National Lithographer* 4.9 (1897): 4.

⁷⁰ Unlike relief processes like woodblock printing, in which the block could be used on a letterpress, lithography was not compatible with letterpress printing.

in the nobler directions pointed out should, with a public every day advancing in education, not be less full of promise to the men who have at present the direction and control of our art in their hands.⁷¹

This description of advertising as “frivolous” was a comparatively mild criticism. A lithographic engraver, writing in 1901, was more vituperative. He charged advertisers with exploiting the skills of engravers “in their efforts to get a living out of profit and cram good, bad and indifferent commodities down the throats of the consumer, who is also the producer.” This writer, while acknowledging that the demand for advertising kept him working, did not concede there was anything worthwhile about the practice. He matter-of-factly proclaimed of the lithographic engraver:

It is he who tastefully prepares enticing and luring announcements of the commodities, for each manufacturer, jobber, middleman and retailer engaged in the battle royal, which announce in many attractive ways and in thousands of different voices that thousands of manufacturers, middlemen, jobbers and retailers have all got the same thing to offer, and to be bought back by the labor which produced it.⁷²

This writer described a sticky situation: As a worker, he was dependent upon advertising jobs; but on a larger scale, he felt advertising was a dishonest tactic forced upon consumers that served

⁷¹ Schumann, “The Present Position of Lithography,” 4.

⁷² “To the Litho-Engraver and Others in the Craft,” *The National Lithographer* 8.5 (1901): 8.

to benefit only the ruling classes. Since, as a worker he was also a consumer, this put him in a double bind.

An essay written by an artist who, identified only as “F.S.” may have been Schumann, also characterized advertising as profoundly dishonest. Expressing himself in no uncertain terms, “F.S.” complained that his work consisted entirely of “catering for some fraudulent advertiser” and stated that he would rather be doing useful work like illustrating scientific books. And lest his point still be missed, he offered the totalizing question: “With some very rare exceptions, what are the works produced by lithography to-day but illustrated lies of advertisers?”⁷³

Of course, lithographic artists were not alone in their distrust of advertising. Before the turn of the century, advertising—particularly signs, posters, and other chromolithographed forms—were far from universally accepted, in part because of the dubious types of products and entertainments widely promoted by and associated with them: patent medicines and circuses.⁷⁴ But even the more respectable types of products advertised with lithography, such as packaged foods, were not completely trusted. Until the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed in 1906, it was widely believed (sometimes with good reason) that food products were adulterated. Therefore, many associated advertising with deception, quackery and humbug. But artists had a specially charged relationship to advertising: they found themselves suspicious of it like

⁷³ F. S., “The Future of Lithography,” *The National Lithographer* 4.6 (1897): 4.

⁷⁴ Laird, Pamela, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998) 22-23.

everyone else, but also uniquely dependent upon it for their livelihood and complicit in its dishonest practices.

Schumann blamed all those responsible for the proliferation of advertising for forcing him to betray his principles. He had become an artist to promote education and cultivation through producing beautiful works of art, but his bosses and their customers had different goals. Schumann felt demoralized because the signs he designed were displayed in public places such as stores and streetcars, and so he was complicit in the dissemination of low, debasing art. As I discussed in Chapter One, the beauty of chromolithography was considered by many middle class reformers in the Victorian era to have an educating and cultivating influence. To Schumann, his best efforts at beautifying public places were impeded by advertisers who cared about nothing except a picture's attention-getting qualities. "Subservient to the demand for 'a stunner' and pulling qualities," he declared, "is the demand for beauty." The result was loud, ugly signs screaming in primary colors, and any artist who resisted this was soon disciplined:

"It is very pretty, but will it please the customer" is what one of my employers said about the design for a showcard I made the other day, and I am sure my brother artists have all listened to similar remarks. It is this object of "pleasing the customer" that is the real or primary cause of the brutality in the signs put before the public. It is this low aim, this playing to the gallery, which is forced upon the artists, that is ruinous to all this is noble and truthful in him.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Fritz Schumann, "An Essay on Signs," *The National Lithographer* 7.6 (1900): 3.

Like many artists and illustrators who had come of age previous to the huge mass-media explosion of the 1890s, Schumann had adopted the expectation that he should be in complete control of the images he produced. Many nineteenth-century illustrators “balked at the idea, as interpreted by publishers and advertisers, that serving a popular audience meant not edifying but pleasing...”⁷⁶ Like other commercial artists, Schumann resented the fact that his work, rather than educating, should appeal to the lowest common denominator. While Schumann recognized that the purpose of advertisements was to sell products, he believed this goal was consistent with the aim of cultivation. The fact that his work was manipulated by individuals entirely deficient in the latter is what frustrated him the most:

What I want here to draw special attention to, is the deplorable fact, that the art value, and consequently the educational influence of the sign, is to be determined by men who are absolutely ignorant in matters pertaining to decorative art, of men who know nothing whatever of the laws of beauty, and of those which regulate the combinations of color. The result could not be any other than vulgarity, ugliness, noise and its evil consequences.⁷⁷

Schumann felt advertisements could be both tasteful and effective. For him, the real cause of the lack of morale on artists' part was not that they produced advertising, but that they were forced to answer to advertisers—to his mind, the very antithesis of artists. While artists

⁷⁶ Bogart 11.

⁷⁷ Schumann, “An Essay on Signs,” 3.

brought beauty, truth and refinement to the world, those men who used advertising signs to promote their goods cared only about profit, not about the social implications of public art:

Of course, it is neither pleasing nor encouraging, nor conducive to high efforts in the artist to know that the judges of his work—which often is the outcome of many years of hard study and struggle, and nearly always of an educated eye and a cultivated taste—consists of brewers, drug sellers, food adulterators and other commercials.⁷⁸

As a remedy for the sheer demoralization of advertising artists, Schumann called for employing lithographers and their customers (advertisers) to give artists more autonomy. “Give the designer more freedom,” he implored, “let him alone.” What was at stake was nothing less than the artist’s sense that his life had meaning:

At present he suffers from the interference of ignorant people. The place in society of the designer of signs ought to be more that of a public educator than as at present, a mere handmaid to the commercial drummer. He would then have the satisfaction of knowing that in his pains and labors he was contributing his part toward the shaping of finer forms, purer and sweeter lives and more gentle manners, now and in coming generations; and that his life was not an empty one, but that by his work he would leave the world a better and pleasanter one that when he entered it.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Schumann, “An Essay on Signs,” 3-4.

⁷⁹ Schumann, “An Essay on Signs,” 4.

Such harsh criticism of advertising, and of those who bought and sold it, was not the official line of artists' organizations. In 1897, with artists feeling the effects of the recent economic downturn, the president of the artists' union called for the encouragement of consumption, and hence the expansion of advertising, to curb business stagnation and help artists get back their livelihoods.⁸⁰ Still, the vast majority of artists who were published in the trade journals expressed either a grudging acceptance of advertising or an outright denunciation of it. Those, like Schumann, who accepted the premise of chromolithographic advertising—to create beautiful pictures that are related to the products advertised—nevertheless hated it in practice, with its lies and its loud, ugly designs.

5.4 Conclusion

The 1896 strike lasted five weeks, ending in arbitration. The artists declared victory: employers had already conceded to the demands regarding the hiring of apprentices and overtime, and the union prevailed on most of their other demands as well. While the work week stayed at forty-seven and a half hours, piecework was abolished and a minimum wage of \$18 was set.⁸¹ Many of the artists could not return to work, however, with employers claiming the Easter trade was affected by the strike and some work had been sent to Europe.⁸² This exacerbated what was

⁸⁰ Edward Schneelock, "Causes of Business Stagnation," *The National Lithographer* 4.7 (1897): 9-10.

⁸¹ "Decision in Favor of the Artists," *The National Lithographer* 3.5 (1896): 1; Ficke, Bernstein and Jones 3; Munson 88.

⁸² "The Artists' Strike Settled," *The National Lithographer* 3.4 (1896): 1-2.

already becoming a poor employment outlook for the artists. Greater numbers of advertisers were turning away from lithography and toward magazines. The development of the three-color process, which was more efficient than lithography at photographic reproduction and—even more importantly—compatible with letterpress printing, facilitated this transition.⁸³

The large number of unemployed artists in the wake of the strike led *The National Lithographer* to suggest they start a cooperative studio, equipped to provide all of the latest types of photo-processing services, which could do portraits, furnish cartoons to the press, as well as do advertising. Recognizing that “conditions have forced many talented artists to cater to the commercial line,” the writer was quick to stroke their egos, asserting that “...our American commercial artists are far and away above their fellows in European countries...”⁸⁴ This call for artists to learn and apply skills in more up-to-date technologies—and to try and come to terms with their commercial work—illustrates the bind many lithographic artists found themselves in at the close of the century: out of work, their trade in sharp decline after it had sold out to advertisers, who were quickly moving on to new technologies that were better suited to the mass distribution of their advertising images.

⁸³ Photolithography, in which photographic halftones were produced using textured stones coated with photo-sensitive substances, was used as early as 1860. However, its development was slowed in the mid 1860s due to the development of collotype and photogravure and, in the 1890s, relief halftone, which were all better ways to reproduce photographic images. Thus, photolithography, though used from time to time in the nineteenth century, could not compete until improvements were made to offset lithography in the 1920s. *Printing and Graphic Arts*, exhibit, 3 March 2003, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁴ “A Suggestion to Unemployed Artists,” *The National Lithographer* 3.5 (1896): 9.

While poster artists remained in demand for several more decades, many other lithographic artists were forced to find other ways to make a living. Some departed from artistic work altogether, learning new trades or opening small businesses. But many others learned the new photomechanical methods—and found that the working conditions in those establishments were even worse than in lithography. They were left, according to “Brooklynian,” with even less leisure time to devote to “the arts and professions” than they had had as lithographic artists. Referring to the unemployed artists, he wrote:

Some have undertaken more laborious and disagreeable pursuits, going into such trades as mason and such businesses as saloon keeping. More, however, have adapted themselves to the use of these [new photomechanical] processes. It cannot be said that in so doing they acquired the leisure and opportunity necessary to devote themselves to the arts and professions, &c., any more than they acquired the same in lithography.⁸⁵

The desire on the part of artists to have the time and income to devote to cultivating pursuits was a driving theme in their labor struggles. In order to maintain their identity as artists, rather than mere machines churning out ugly signs, they wanted what many of them reported experiencing in the immediate postwar period: the freedom and opportunity to create artistic productions. To achieve this, they not only needed greater autonomy on the job, they needed steady wages. They argued for these rights by appealing to the political concept of justice, rather than the economic

⁸⁵ Brooklynian, 4.

one of equivalence, as many workers did in the last two decades of the century. They appealed for their rights in consumerist terms.

This appeal was problematic—contributing to a definition of the “consumer” that was racially exclusive—and thus ultimately limiting as a labor strategy. However, it should not be interpreted as an unequivocal celebration of consumer culture. More accurately, it was simply a recognition that in a wage economy, one meets one’s needs and wants in the consumer marketplace. Certainly, the lithographic artists’ embrace of a consumer identity did not mean these workers welcomed advertising, the central discourse of consumer culture. To the contrary, they considered it dishonest and degrading, and felt it worked against their cultivating and educational aims. This may seem contradictory, but to identify as a consumer and yet to condemn advertising is not an unreasonable response to consumer culture. In the capitalist wage system of production, consumption is a fact of life. But this does not dictate acquiescence to the proliferation of advertising, with its single-minded promotion of consumption alone—at the expense of all other social considerations, including the respect for workers’ rights, artistic autonomy, and the aesthetics of public space.

POSTSCRIPT

Inspired by Thomas Anshutz's painting, *The Ironworkers' Noontime*, the artists at the Strobridge Lithographing Company, along with some other workers from the Cincinnati firm, assembled on the roof of their factory one day in 1883 or 1884 and posed as foundry workers washing up after work.¹ A photograph was taken of the scene, and the artists then used the photographic image as the basis for a lithographed poster, changing the background to resemble the outside of a foundry (Figure 13). The product advertised on this fourteen-foot-long poster was Procter & Gamble's newest brand of soap, Ivory, bars of which can be seen floating in the tubs in the picture.

I relate this story because it highlights the creative energy that lithographic artists applied to their work and symbolizes how they identified as both workers and as consumers. It serves as a reminder that artistic workers, laboring in a tumultuous industry in uncertain times, were enlisted

¹ There is some question about the date of this event. While the painting dates to 1880-81, Frances K. Pohl writes that Procter and Gamble was prompted to use the painting as the basis for an advertisement after it was reproduced in *Harper's Weekly* in 1884. See Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002) 247-48. The reproduction of the poster included here as Figure 13, as well as the account of its production, is taken from: John W. Merten, "Stone by Stone Along a Hundred Years With the House of Strobridge," *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 8.1 (1950): 28-29. According to Merten, the ad was produced in 1883. The original twelve-sheet poster is believed to no longer exist. This may be a partial reproduction of the poster, since the brand name is not evidenced anywhere.

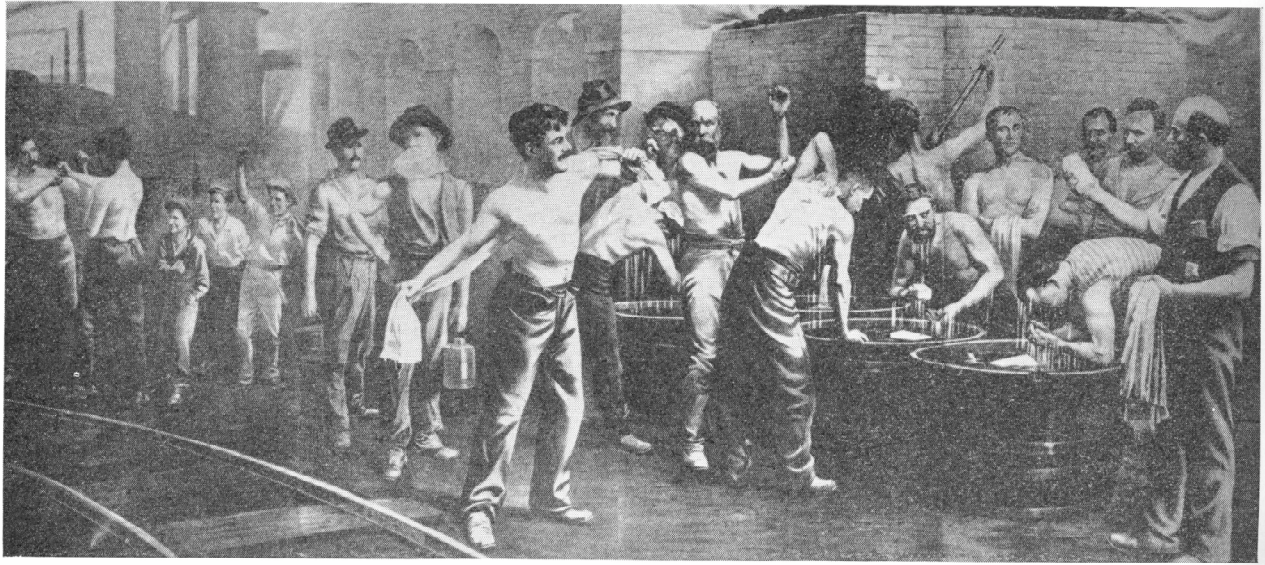


Figure 13: Ivory soap, poster, circa 1883-84.

Cincinnati Museum Center - Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

in the creative development of early visual advertising that helped build brands that have become household names. Yet, in histories of Procter & Gamble, its early magazine advertising is emphasized over its use of lithography.² This is typical of advertising histories, too, the vast majority of which foreground the work of advertising agencies. Indeed, for the most part, the historiography of consumer culture has assumed the professional categories of the present: the advertising agency, the ad man, the advertiser. My methodology in this work was to consider the labor and business categories that existed in 1880—artist, lithographer, designer, lithographers' foreman, advertiser—and see how advertising got produced within these ranks. Thus, one of my goals in *The Humble Handmaid of Commerce* has been to supplement existing histories, in part by investigating how lithographic artists, while they struggled with worsening labor conditions and

² Alfred Lief, *It Floats: The Story of Procter & Gamble* (New York: Rinehart, 1958); Oscar Schisgall, *Eyes on Tomorrow: The Evolution of Procter & Gamble* (Chicago: G. Ferguson, 1981).

deteriorating artistic autonomy, were also among those who contributed the formation of the codes and structures of visual advertising.

They were not alone in this. The design process for creating chromolithographic advertising was complex and negotiated, involving advertisers (the owner-entrepreneurs of consumer-product manufacturing companies) and their representatives, as well as lithographic-firm owners, managers and supervisors of lithographic artists, the artists themselves, and independent designers. This occurred in a specific socio-economic context, when the craft of lithography was industrializing and specializing down to discrete tasks, with even artistic work being broken down into its component parts. Steam-powered presses cranked out a greater number of images more efficiently, but artistic workers felt a loss of control with the advent of mechanization. These artists, some of whom had trained as apprentices to understand the “art, mystery, and trade” of the craft of lithography, sometimes expressed dismay that they were not given the autonomy they needed, and complained that their craft had become nothing but the lowly servant of advertisers.³ To compound these alienating conditions, they found themselves enlisted in a process in which advertisers insisted upon ugly, loud designs with which they then marred the urban landscape. Like many who today criticize the encroachment of commercialization into every nook and cranny of public and private life, they expressed outrage that the sellers of goods had such a strong influence on the aesthetics of public life.⁴

³ The quote is from apprenticeship contracts, 1870s-80s, box 9, Strobridge Lithographing Company Papers, CHS.

⁴ See Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, rev. ed. (New York: Picador, 2002).

Also like some present-day critics, this criticism of advertising did not extend to a wholesale denunciation of the consumer economy itself. Like other industrial workers during the same time period, artistic workers were not fighting for equivalence between the value of what they produced and their paycheck, but for wages high enough to enable them to support themselves and their families. When lithographic artists felt stung by worsening labor conditions and stagnating wages, they began to demand higher wages, more leisure time, and an end to getting paid by the piece. In New York they went on strike to force employers to end “starvation wages” and guarantee artists a “living wage.” They even insisted that their very ability to be creative depended upon these demands.

While many of these lithographic artists left a record of their experiences and their perspectives in the lithography trade press, less is known about the independent artists who contributed advertising designs. We do know, however, that lithographers scoured the artists’ studios for ideas for designs that they felt were innovative enough to capture consumers’ attention. They knew they already employed competent artists; what they sought were new ways to represent consumer products and the people who used them. With the lithographic industry mired in “ruinous competition,” lithographers relied upon these independent watercolorists and pastel artists, both men and women, amateurs as well as students and professionals, to provide them with fresh designs that would help them win advertising contracts.

Lithographers placed a great deal of importance on these new ideas, since a winning design gave them an edge in an overly-competitive climate. Their only other strategy for getting contracts was undercutting their competitors’ prices, a profit-draining yet common practice. Salesmen were an integral part of the system, offering potential advertisers cut-rate services, and possibly

convincing them to use visual advertising to a greater extent than they may have otherwise been inclined to do. Thus, while these drummers were the bane of the artists' existence—artists felt salesmen were unable to communicate effectively about designs and pushed prices (and wages) lower and lower—their tactics nevertheless may have helped to propel the use of visual advertising.

Whether or not it was because they were offered terms they couldn't refuse, many advertisers used chromolithography, employing it in addition to other forms, whether pages in periodicals, painted signs, electric lights, signboards, etc. In an atmosphere in which advertisers felt there was little clear evidence regarding what forms of advertising were the best, a common attitude was that trial-and-error was as good as any other strategy. Thus, while the advertising trade press, along with newspapers, generally proclaimed that periodical advertising was the best, advertising chromolithography enjoyed wide—if somewhat haphazard—distribution. Although storekeepers may not have always displayed or distributed all of the advertising matter sent to them, they used enough chromolithography to make it a significant source of publicity.

When consumer-product manufacturers used chromolithography to promote their individual brands, they helped to construct the brand idea. Although the brand is a concept that has become naturalized through advertising, it is a symbolic category that required definition and reinforcement. Many chromo advertisements explained brands and trademarks—and why they were significant—information that consumers no longer require. Through advertising cards, calendars, booklets, and posters, consumers were instructed to look for the trademark on the package, accept no substitutes, and ask their grocer to carry the advertised brand.

By speaking “directly” to the consumer about brands, chromo advertising was one of the initial ways in which the new, abstract relations that came to characterize consumer culture were forged. Public advertising was very common beginning in the antebellum years, but brand advertising marks a shift, because it used a quasi-personal mode of address, allowing manufacturers to communicate “directly” with consumers, thereby bypassing the more interpersonal relations between storekeeper and customer that had characterized commerce previously. Starting with lithographic advertising, each brand was given an identity and consumers were invited to have a “relationship” with it. As a result, even though chromo advertising lacked the sophisticated psychological appeals that characterized later advertising, it did play a significant role in the changing relations of consumer culture.

Contributing to these new relations was most likely not a conscious decision. While the intentions of the advertising designers is not known—there is no record of how they understood their work, and indeed, there may have been no language for them to communicate about it—what is known is that they were charged with the task of digging into their visual repertoire and coming up with interesting and pleasing imagery that in some way included depictions of branded consumer products. Making use of the types of imagery and aesthetic forms available to them, artists created designs that met the very general specifications set down by advertisers and their agents, who in turn felt they knew what would be appealing to consumers. The aesthetic style was thus conservative and the imagery sentimental, with adorable children everywhere. And—crucially—they were to be *doing* something, which in most cases meant interacting with packaged consumer products. The result, therefore, was the creation of situations designers

believed would ring familiar, or be interesting, to consumers, and in which all activity revolved around consumer products and consumption.

The ideological implications of this are evident. Chromo advertising focused attention entirely toward the moment of commodity exchange—consumption—in its depiction of typical human relations and situations. All social interactions and relationships were mediated by commodities, and questions of production and the civic realm were negated. White children were everywhere in chromo advertising, populating sentimental scenes that were believed to be pleasing to advertising-card collectors (many of whom were themselves children) and other consumers. While these children were sometimes depicted working at tasks ranging from domestic labor to shoe-shining, they were more often represented making purchases or playing with products and packaging. Since, among the middle-class, children had ceased being a source of family income and childhood had come to be seen as a virtuous stage of life, the representation of white children as consumers served to symbolically elevate consumption while distancing it from production.

Just as childhood play was mediated by consumption in chromo advertising, so was gender. It was common in chromo ads for women to become more womanly—better wives, better homemakers—through proper brand choices. By making correct choices, women were saved from grueling housework, often in sentimental scenes that included angels and cherubs. In such scenarios, branded consumer products did not simply mediate exploitative social relations of domestic labor, they were downright messianic, offering to deliver the consumer from domestic toil. Sentimentalism, a sensibility that had at times been associated with political reform, was exploited in the service of branding.

Just as chromo advertising contributed to the construction of gendered identities, it also worked to define consumption racially through a mutually-constitutive process in which the successful consumer was represented as white, while whiteness itself came to be constructed in and through smart consumer choices. African Americans were depicted not precisely as nonconsumers, but as failed consumers: trying to use soap to scrub the pigment from their skin, or stupidly indulging in an enormous ham as if it is a proper substitute for rights as a voting citizen. (Figures 6, 7). Thus, just as African Americans were excluded from citizenship, so they were cast out of the realm of proper consumption. Whereas white people were shown improving their lives (and their class positions) through consumption, African Americans were represented as utterly inferior in this central realm of social activity. With both groups, citizenship and consumption were conflated, but this conflation worked to bring whites into the fold of consumer-nationhood, while excluding African Americans.

It is significant that chromolithographic advertising, while largely directed at the middle class, did not exclude the white, native-born working class from the realm of consumption. In fact, as the Ivory poster indicates—as do the Dusky Diamond soap advertising card (Figure 5), the Pearline soap advertising card depicting the woman burdened with housework (Figure 3), and New Home the booklet depicting a needleworker who is transformed to the middle class and appropriate gender by buying the right brand of sewing machine (Figure 9)—white working-class people were represented as consumers in chromolithographic advertising, often by employing narratives of social mobility. As I have suggested, this fact may have made advertising in the nineteenth-century more relevant to working-class people than has previously been acknowledged,

particularly since they were consumers of the types of products advertised with chromolithography and they made use of chromo advertising to brighten up their lives.

There is no evidence, however, that working class people believed their exposure to chromolithography, whether in advertising or another form, was valuable for its educating and uplifting influence. This was the position of middle-class reformers, who valued advertising chromos for just this reason (that is, until they became so wholly associated with advertising, and their quality deteriorated due to hurry-up and cut-rate production, that they became denigrated by many). Reformers further claimed that this potential for uplift and education was democratizing, that by being exposed to the finer things like chromolithography, workers would improve their lives. Of course, they were wrong. While chromo advertisements may have provided access to no-cost color pictures to decorate drab rooms, and may have addressed workers as potential consumers, chromo advertising did not significantly improve the lives of workers in the ways imagined, or at least claimed, by reformers.

It is indeed unlikely that being confronted with vast amounts of advertising did, or does, make a positive contribution to anyone's life. While the larger and more complex question of the relative merits of living in a consumer economy is one which I will not address, my personal orientation toward visual brand advertising itself is overwhelmingly negative. Because it inflates the significance of brand choices and represents branded products and services as the central, mediating component of existence, it diminishes other ways of forging human relationships and characterizes social problems (lack of health care, dangerous transportation systems, poverty wages, feelings of alienation) as consumer problems. I am not suggesting there are no competing frameworks that serve to undercut the consumer ideologies that circulate in advertising; clearly

there are. However, because advertising makes up such a large percentage of mass culture, and strongly influences the production of all the media it supports financially, it exerts an undue influence on the creation of belief and value systems.

It is thus with a certain amount of ambivalence that I have approached this investigation of advertising chromolithography. To my eye, relatively untrained in art appreciation, a great number of cards, posters and calendars were beautifully done. Without romanticizing chromolithography, I think it is possible to say that when it was done well, it produced colors with an organic richness and an integrity absent from reproductions done with the three-color process. (Of course, the digital reproductions included in this document do not properly convey this since they are composed of pixels and approximated colors). It is certainly possible to see that a great deal of advertising chromolithography was created with great care by highly-trained artists and artisans who rightfully took pride in their work—when they were granted artistic freedom and autonomy. I believe beauty and art, even when mass-produced, can enhance people's lives, even if not in the grandiose ways claimed by nineteenth-century reformers.

On the other hand, as I have already discussed, there were problematic implications of some of the images that circulated in advertising chromos. While I do not believe there were conscious aims to create advertising that would define and exclude populations by race or centralize consumption in the universe of human activity, I also do not believe these ads simply reflected society at large. Advertising, then as now, is an important mechanism for the symbolic creation of meaning, and thus is a component in the construction of societal belief systems. It is both distinct from, and wholly integrated within, the larger symbolic systems that constitute

culture. By examining the chromo era, we are reminded that visual advertising must be understood intertextually, in relation to other products of the culture industries.

Also through this examination, we get a clearer picture of how brand advertising was invented in historically-specific conditions, not just by experts in advertising (although they may have been involved to an extent) but by artists, printmakers, and others who found themselves enlisted in the project of promoting brands. The process and the conditions under which this was done were not sustainable: they were disorganized, inefficient, and not reliably profitable for lithographers. Yet, despite these conditions—or even in some cases due to them—chromolithographic advertising provided an incredibly rich source of imagery and structures that served as the basis for the continuing development of visual advertising. The pictures that independent and lithographic artists created were designed to be arresting and pleasing to the eye, but they also worked to help create the social categories and the abstract relations that define our culture of consumption.

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