NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS AND NEGRO CULTURE
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Thus far studies of the Negro press have placed little or no emphasis on the matter of advertisements. Naturally one looks first at news articles and editorials when one wishes to study the press as a social force or as a reflector of current opinions and cultural trends. There are some things, however, that advertisements say more plainly than any news story or editorial ever could. The present study was undertaken primarily with the idea of analyzing the advertisements in certain representative Negro newspapers in order to find out whether or not there is need for further research along that line. It was hoped that incidentally some light would be thrown upon the question of the status of the Negro's culture in the United States.

Briefly stated, the methods employed in the study were as follows: During the months of January, February, and March, 1925, all advertisements (except classified ads) in five representative Negro newspapers were measured in terms of column inches and tabulated under the following scheme:

**CLASS A**
- Clothing.
- Food.
- Fuel.
- Homes and real estate.
- Medical and other professional services.
- Insurance, savings, etc.

**CLASS B**
- Books, magazines, newspapers.
- Music and musical instruments.

Theatres and amusements.
Colleges.

**CLASS C**
- Beauty preparations.
- Patent medicines.
- Firearms.
- Cheap jewelry.
- Charms, good luck emblems, clairvoyance, etc.

Approximately 50,000 column inches of advertising material was thus surveyed. The papers used were the **Chicago Defender**, the **Negro World**, the **Norfolk Journal and Guide**, the **Atlanta Independent**, and the **Houston Informer**. All of these are weeklies. The first two are large metropolitan newspapers with a wide circulation throughout the nation. The others have a more or less local influence in their respective sections of the South.

The distribution of the three classes of advertising named above is summarized in Table I. One must, of course, be particularly careful in drawing conclusions from data of this kind. For example, the high proportion of space given to Class C in the Defender and in the Negro World is no more a discredit to those papers than the lower proportion in the other three papers is a credit to them. Certain advertisers do business only with publications which are circulated extensively. Thus the larger papers emphasize the advertisements that have national appeal at the expense of the local type of advertising. The smaller papers, on the other hand, being unable to command large shares of national advertising, are obliged to work the local field more diligently.

**TABLE I**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Chicago Defender</th>
<th>Negro World</th>
<th>Journal and Guide</th>
<th>Atlanta Independent</th>
<th>Houston Informer</th>
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<td>Per Cent Distribution of Advertising Space Devoted to Each Class in</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>13.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>79.6</td>
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Thus they get a fairly large proportion of the type of advertising which we have called Class A. Again, the poor showing made by Class B is to be expected, being largely due to the classification itself. Aside from all these considerations, however, one is justified in saying that advertisements of Class C seem to enjoy a prestige out of proportion to their actual worth.

Within Class C itself, beauty preparations easily hold first place, with patent medicines second, while firearms, jewelry, and “good luck” emblems rank very low in point of actual column inches. In fact, during the period covered by the study, one paper ran no advertisements of firearms,1 another ran none of “good luck,” and two advertised no cheap jewelry. Quantitative measurements, however, are merely suggestive indices of the importance to the Negro of various kinds of advertisements. A two-inch advertisement of a good-luck ring or a package of incense “guaranteed to influence your enemies” may be more significant than a full page devoted to Madam So-and-So’s beauty preparations. Let us examine, therefore, the content of the advertisements in Class C.

Very few of the advertisers of beauty preparations can afford any longer to advertise their products in a conservative way. Perhaps a few unscrupulous companies have forced all the others to the present policy. At any rate, practically all the beauty preparation advertisements now make their appeal to the desire for straight hair and light complexion. Here are extracts from a few representative advertisements that may be found in many of the Negro papers.

New 3-Way Skin Discovery Gives You WHITE SKIN BEAUTY OVERNIGHT—OR NO COST. Amazing Bleach Works Under the Skin. Science has perfected a new 3-way treatment to harmlessly bleach, lighten and make any ugly blotchy skin beautiful—or the treatment costs nothing. . . . Used by stage stars and prominent people everywhere. You will love these creations—results often the first night. The treatment is complete. Skin beauty can be yours.

LIGHTENS YOUR SKIN OR MONEY BACK—Safe—Sure—Quick—Bleach. Be more popular. Earn more money. Safely and secretly you can now remove the greatest obstacle to your success. Bleacho is guaranteed to lighten your skin regardless of what it is now.

Far more effective than any other skin bleach on the market. Endorsed by leading beauty authorities. Positively harmless. Lightens your skin or your money back.

NEW DISCOVERY WHITENS SKIN ALMOST OVERNIGHT. No more blackheads, no more sallow skin, no more freckles! Science has made a new discovery which clears and whitens your skin with amazing quickness. . . . Make This 3 Minute Test. There is hidden beauty in your skin. . . . So wonderful—so quick—are the results of this new scientific cream that we absolutely guarantee it! Get a jar now—today. Use it for only five nights. Then if you are not delighted and amazed at the transformation your money will be instantly refunded.

All of these advertisements are illustrated by the well-known before-and-after pictures. In the hair preparation advertisements the same tone is found.

Wonderful Gland Discovery Goes Direct to Root and Grows BEAUTIFUL STRAIGHT HAIR. Full, Healthy, Abundant—Without kinks. So easy now to have new hair—Luxuriant and straight—No hot combs—Results in 22 days, or no cost. F. D. A.—widely known scientist, discovers gland treatment that goes direct to the hair root; stimulates new growth; straightens and cures scalp troubles; straightens the hair overnight; stops falling hair in 48 hours; awakens dormant hair glands. . . . Ugly, kinky, scanty hair can be easily and quickly made to grow into lifeful, luxuriant abundance. . . . Science has perfected a hair treatment that gives the Race beautiful, straight and glorious hair.

TAKES KINK OUT IN 3 TO 6 DAYS. They are simply going wild over W—s famous Kink Straightener, new discovery; acts like magic; it’s different; contains no grease; does not harm the hair or turn it red. Guaranteed to straighten your hair or you can return bottle and your money will be cheerfully refunded.

MAKE YOUR HAIR STRAIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL. Try this quick and simple method which thousands now use. Don’t envy your friends who have gleaning masses of straight black hair. Have it yourself. It is a simple matter to achieve that glossy black, wavy effect, which our entire Race admires. Convince yourself of this by using our patented Dixie Curve-Tooth Straightening Comb.

After an acquaintance with advertisements like these one is not surprised to find the following device beginning to be advertised in the larger papers.

HOW TO OBTAIN BEAUTIFULLY SHAPED LIPS! Mr. T—s new lip-shaper together with its thick-lip astringent lotion, will now reduce protruding.
prominent, thick, unshapely lips to normal and thus improve your facial appearance 100 per cent. My new appliance is comfortable, easy to adjust, and is worn at night. It will also promote correct breathing and eliminate the harmful and annoying habit of snoring.

In the patent medicine advertisements, nothing is impossible. Rheumatism, gall-stone, rupture, asthma, goitre, childlessness, venereal disease—all are cured by a few doses or application of this or that. Such advertisements appeal to ignorance and naive desire to find a cheap, sudden, and complete cure for ills real or imaginary, serious or insignificant. Everyone is familiar with this kind of advertising, for it is found in many of the white newspapers. An unusual type, however, is found in those advertisements that have to do with sexual disorders. The first and second of the following are always accompanied by an illustration depicting a man and woman in close embrace.

GLANTOX. Eminent German scientists discover that 90 per cent of our ills are due to Rundown Glands! Glands can now be restored so that you can again enjoy the powers and vigors of youth by taking Glantox. Nervousness, lack of ambition, tiredness, rundown condition need not trouble you any more.

LOST GLAND VIGOR REPORTED RESTORED IN 24 HOURS WITH NEW DISCOVERY. Chicago Doctor Makes Test and Then Recommends New Gland Discovery to His Patients. Old men report startling rejuvenation. . . Youthful vigor, joys and vital gland activity reported by many within 24 hours, many tell of complete rejuvenation. They write like this: “Your gland discovery is worth a million dollars to me,” “I can hardly realize such magic return of gland vigor,” “I again feel the thrill of youth,” “My wife praises you to the skies.”

LOST VIGOR RESTORED TO AGED MAN. . . . If age, sickness, dissipation, abuse, overwork, or weakness has robbed you of your vital powers, if your system is weakened or run-down, your glandular vigor lacking, then your system and glands will quickly respond to this new, wonderful scientific discovery that science has given you. Glowing Health of Youth. Results—OR NO PAY.

GET NEW “PEP” IN 20 MINUTES! Send right now for the most amazing, quick-acting “PEP” producing tablet that has ever been created. Absolutely pure—no harmful or habit-forming drugs. Yet contains the most marvelous element in all nature for a quick “PICK UP” of VIGOR, STRENGTH, VITALITY.

The interesting thing about the jewelry advertisements is that the majority of them appeal not directly to a desire to own the jewelry as such, but to a desire to own something magical, something which connotes good luck.

BE LUCKY! Join the charmed circle of the fortunate ones. Your longings for good fortune, for Beauty, Wealth and Power—make them come true. Let us send you the Sacred Scarab Ring of the Pharaohs, the likeness of which was found in the tomb of King Tut-Ankh-Amen. RICHES, SUCCESS, LOVE, HEALTH and HAPPINESS shower on the wearer of this beautiful ring.

WHY BE UNLUCKY? Many strange reports of good fortune are traced to Imp-O-Luck Charm. Make things come your way. Get the Master Imp’s formula for good luck in love, business, games. Carry his symbol with you always on chain, ribbon, fob, or in pocket.

WEIRD MYSTO OUTFIT. The Original weird Mysto Talisman Ring—wards off evil spirits, sickness, spells, etc. Ancient belief, brings success to wearer in love, business, games. All undertakings. Green Gold finish, snakes set with Lucky Ruby and Emerald, fits any finger.

$800 IN 3 HOURS. “Made $800 in three hours after I put on CHINESE GOOD LUCK RING,” says M—W—, famous star. Others say it brings success, happiness, good luck in love.

The most striking advertisements of all, however, are those that appeal directly to superstition and belief in magical and occult powers.

PROF. E. O.— has just had some very wonderful African Lucky Temple Powder sent from Africa to help his many friends, which will make a complete change in one’s life. This powder will change your present disposition to a happier one, or your money refunded. The price is $5.50. Special love charms. Premiumatum master of helper in finance and love. No professor has ever made such an offer yet. Did you ever stop to consider why some are making a success and others fail, and you are one of the failures? Secret revealed if you will enclose $2.00.

PROF. E. E.—, MASTER OF SCIENCE. Moham median native of Africa and Oriental Science. Luck and advice given as to the whereabouts of lost friends or stolen articles, love, finance, etc., to those who desire it. Cure all kinds of diseases, drunkard, by Oriental Science. Positively NO medicine used at all. . . . Prof. E— is determined to bring relief to suffering humanity; nothing is impossible under the sun to him. He that can understand, let him understand it. Advice only. Send $2.00 in your letter. I will astonish you with the
marvels of African Science, Powerful Root Herbs and Incense. No matter how unfortunate you are, the Goethe incense will influence your enemies.

PROF. D.— Will bring Peace, Love, and Happiness to your Home. A gift of God, not done by Alchemy or Magic, but by the power of God. The Professor is an Occultist from Karo, West Africa. AFRICAN SECRET INCENSE brings luck and success in your home if you burn it.

THAT EVIL EYE for many years was the cause of my undoing. Take heed, lest it be yours also. Write me personally and confidentially for advice on Business, Domestic, Love Affairs, Every-Day Ailments. Thirty years world-wide experience solving these problems.

IF YOU WANT TO BE LUCKY, HAPPY, AND WELL, Tell Your Secrets To the Right Man. Happy in friendship, business, etc. Medical preparations for conjured pains. Love Apples In All Forms: High John the Conquerer, Adam and Eve, all kinds of roots and herbs.

STRANGE POWER! G— G— De L— . . . America's Illustrious Adviser, says: “Worry and fear can cause distress, disease, and discord. I can help you conquer this evil.” If business, domestic, love affairs or health conditions trouble you, write this beloved woman freely, frankly, and confidentially.

FOR SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS Consult PROF. S. B. A.— Master of Science. Special Offer. One package of Lucky Incense, the Five Questions answered, and a Lucky Amulet Charm with one bottle of Cough Tonic, all for $5.00. A natural root worker against all sorts of sorcery, all spells released which have been failed by artificial medicines or medical treatment from physicians.

These examples are sufficient to show the characteristics of the advertisements in what we have called Class C. It is quite evident that nearly all of these advertisements make their appeals in rather unusual ways. And yet, is it not true that the advertisers have adopted such methods of appeal as will bring the largest response? Certainly we may assume that no advertiser continues for long to put money into a field which does not pay. The continued and increasing exploitation of certain fields among the Negroes must mean, then, that such exploitation is profitable. This means, in turn, that no matter how pathological the whole situation may appear when viewed from the outside, the things advertised have subjective values and a certain efficacy for the Negroes who buy them. In view of these considerations, we must take for granted a rather extensive use of hair straighteners, skin whiteners, gland restoratives, magic cures, luck emblems, and the like.

Have hair straighteners and skin lighteners become permanent features of the Negro's culture? How can we reconcile the fact that their most extensive use is found in the class of Negroes who are most race conscious? Is this a contradiction, or is it merely the same thing viewed from different angles: namely, the Negro's readiness to do anything which will contribute to his chances for success? Mr. Dunford, in his "Conflicting Forces in Negro Progress," which appears in this issue of the Journal, has touched upon this question more fully. The present study cannot attempt to go into the various implications contained in the data considered above. It can merely point out the apparent existence of such-and-such a practice or attitude reflected in the advertisements and suggest a few of the questions which need further investigation.

The use of the questionable kinds of patent medicines is, of course, to be expected of the poorer and more ignorant Negroes, but it is more difficult to explain when found among those of the middle and upper classes. Does it indicate a reluctance even on the part of the cultured Negroes to trust the professional medical man? Or does it indicate inability or unwillingness to pay the regular fees for advice, treatment, operations, etc.? It may even be that many of the advertisements “create” ills in the most suggestible Negroes and cure them by a process of suggestion, so that the cures win prestige which, for all practical purposes, is real. Again, it may be that the cultured Negro has not yet weaned himself from all of his old heritage of superstition and voodooism.

The latter suggestion gains weight when placed alongside the advertisements of magic and good luck. Can it be that there is still a widespread belief in magic and voodooism? If it is as prevalent among the readers of newspapers (that is, the more well-to-do classes) as the advertisements seem to indicate, is it proportionately more prevalent among the unenlightened masses of Negroes? Here, again, we can only present questions that suggest themselves. Interpretation must wait upon research, and certainly here is an opportunity for interesting research.