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# Discriminating Tastes: How Advertisements Taught Consumerism and Race to Gilded Age Youths

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DISCRIMINATING TASTES: HOW ADVERTISEMENTS TAUGHT  
CONSUMERISM AND RACE TO GILDED AGE YOUTHS

by

Jaclyn N. Schultz

A Thesis Submitted in  
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May 2013

ABSTRACT  
DISCRIMINATING TASTES: HOW ADVERTISEMENTS TAUGHT  
CONSUMERISM AND RACE TO GILDED AGE YOUTHS

by

Jaclyn N. Schultz

The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2013  
Under the Supervision of Professor Joe Austin

Commercial and social trends of the Gilded Age combined to give a unique and novel power to colorful advertising trade cards that were collected, exchanged, and preserved in scrapbooks by middle-class children living in the Northeast. These children were members of one of the earliest generations to grow up with mandatory co-educational schooling and to be part of a distinctive youth culture created through peer interactions. After 1876, advertising trade cards became ubiquitous and were a significant component of that peer culture. The cards were also innovative in that they were the first example of colored images to be made available to the public at no direct cost. For the children who amassed collections of advertising trade cards, the ephemera were meant to function as “object lessons,” a pedagogical practice of the late-nineteenth century that taught through observation of actual objects or images of things. By viewing their advertising trade card collections, children were educated about the world as they studied the images present on their cards. What the pages within the scrapbooks created by Gilded Age children reveal are pedagogies that taught them to desire brand-named goods, to self-identify as a consumer, and to

understand the value of certain products available in the burgeoning consumer marketplace. The advertisements also disseminated caricatures of African Americans and instilled racist notions of blackness and black people through stereotyped images. The selection and arrangement of such cards in scrapbooks indicate that young collectors were familiar and comfortable with notions of white superiority. As revealed in his memoir, W. E. B. Du Bois was just one victim of the “othering” of black people that these images facilitated. An understanding of how Du Bois and other Gilded Age children like him were indoctrinated into both consumerism and racism against African Americans suggests some reasons for turn of the century social outcomes as well as highlights the importance of the history of children more broadly.

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## Chapter One

### The Gilded Age in Historical Context

‘Above all things, my children, be honest. Above all things, be pure-minded as the snow.’<sup>1</sup>

Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner  
*The Gilded Age*

When Twain and Warner coined the moniker “The Gilded Age” with the publication of their book by that name in 1873, the implication of the phrase went deeper than the new-found wealth of this era of industry. Indeed, the word “gilded” suggests the dazzling sparkle of gold but it equally evokes the idea of a thin layer of the shiny metal covering something much less spectacular. Furthermore, the gilded layer itself may not be of any real value and may only take on the appearance of gold. Historians have found this characterization useful in describing the last few decades of the nineteenth century, hence, Twain and Warner’s epithet lives on.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age*, vol. III (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1874), 143.

<sup>2</sup> Here, I periodize the Gilded Age as 1876 through 1896, bookended by two important presidential elections. However, the periodization of the era has been fluid in its scholarly treatment. John A. Garraty, *The New Commonwealth, 1877-1890* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), xiii considers the transformative period to be 1877 through 1890. Charles W. Calhoun, “Introduction,” in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 1 extends the Gilded Age by naming it as “the last third of the century.” Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 117 simply defines the Gilded Age as “the post-Civil War era.” Recently, some scholars, especially labor historians, have argued for a merging of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era into one long periodization; the Long Gilded Age. See Leon Fink, Scott Reynolds Nelson, and Alison M. Parker, “Rethinking the Long Gilded Age” (panel at the annual meeting for the American Historical Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, January 4, 2013).

As evidence of the period reveals, locating both the thin layer of gold of the Gilded Age, as well as the reality it hides is necessary in order to fully appreciate the era and its historical legacy. The standard narrative of the Gilded Age as an industrial boom hiding the squalor of the working class is just one such example. In this history I locate late-nineteenth century children's culture and will argue that these children were ultimately as "gilded" as was the era that they grew up in.

This study evaluates how instrumental advertisement collecting among Gilded Age children was to the expansion of American consumerism and the perpetuation of racism against African Americans following Reconstruction. The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera at Winterthur Library in Delaware provides clues to the ways in which young people of the Gilded Age were socialized through the processes of collecting and scrapbooking advertisements to perceive racial difference, to give preference to whiteness, and to desire specific brand-named, luxury goods. In order to substantiate these claims, late-nineteenth century scrapbooks can be read as primary sources and the advertisements within them as lessons on consumerism and race.

My research builds on the works of others like Robin Bernstein, whose recent monograph *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* explores some of the gaps in the existing histories of childhood. In Bernstein's own words, her study on the history of dolls "makes a case for the centrality of girls and girlhood to U.S. racial formation," "by considering dolls not as objects or texts that

contain racial meanings but instead as things that script a repertoire of behaviors.”<sup>3</sup> One important and often overlooked expression that Bernstein addresses is the fact that many white children “lynched” and burned their black dolls around the turn of the twentieth century, even in the North.<sup>4</sup>

While many Gilded Age adults truly believed their children to be as *pure-minded as the snow*, this gilt of innocence ultimately hid the often less-than-virtuous core of young people that the adult world and youth culture itself had a hand in shaping. According to childhood historian Steven Mintz, nineteenth century parents may have realized this binary. They believed children to be “innocent, malleable, and fragile creatures who needed to be sheltered from contamination,” a perception that in many ways has persisted on through today.<sup>5</sup>

Also similar to today, during the Gilded Age one common threat to a child’s easily influenced and not inherently-innocent core was the newly expanding industry of advertising. While not directly speaking to the experience of children, historian Roland Marchand’s explanation in the introduction to his research on American advertising in the 1920s and 1930s is useful for understanding this threat: “By disseminating certain incessantly repeated and largely uncontradicted visual clichés and moral parables, the ads were *likely to shape or reinforce* the same popular attitudes

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<sup>3</sup> Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 210-1.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

they sought to *reflect* [emphasis added].” Marchand argues that advertisements have often been distorted representations of social reality that, in spite of their inaccuracies, have worked to create “frames of reference and perception” for those exposed to them. Gilded Age children would have been weakly able to create alternatives to the “common discourse” and “basic societal assumptions” Marchand states advertisements produce.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike during other eras, advertising of the Gilded Age was a medium that appealed solely to the sense of sight, making visual literacy paramount in its consumption. Hence, knowing the complicated natures of children and cultural changes in the United States during the period is instrumental to an understanding of how the introduction of mass-advertising altered the ethos of both. As historian Melani McAlister explains in her work which uncovers the legacies of particular images for those who viewed them in the past:

If the conversations that surround the image sometimes also seem to operate at some distance from it, that is not surprising. Instead, it highlights the sly way that culture works. Culture packs associations and arguments into dense ecosystems of meaning; it requires us to know a thousand things about politics, social life, and correct feeling in order to ‘get it’; and then, in a remarkable sleight of hand, it makes the reactions it evokes seem spontaneous and obvious.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), xx.

<sup>7</sup> Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 269.

According to McAlister, only by setting the scene for the complexities of life for the Gilded Age child can we hope to understand the way that advertising images exercised influence over the youngsters in the ways suggested by Marchand.

Furthermore, such an exploration of the Gilded Age cohort can bring later periods of American history into focus by locating the “structure of feeling” prevalent among these children who would grow up to dominate American politics and economics, as well as social and cultural institutions. Raymond Williams, who introduced this theory, described the *structure of feeling* as being as “firm and definite as ‘structure’ suggests, yet [operating] in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization.”<sup>8</sup> Williams’ elaboration in generational terms is particularly poignant:

One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come ‘from’ anywhere... the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling.<sup>9</sup>

Gilded Age youths appropriated a discursive field created for them by the adult world and altered it to create a unique *structure of feeling* through peer cultures and playtime, both recently transformed childhood phenomena.

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<sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1961), 64.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 65.

## Gilded Age Childhood

American childhood underwent dramatic changes during the nineteenth century. Victorian ideals of childhood innocence began to overshadow earlier beliefs that children were simply small adults whose labor was of primary value to the household. Prior to around 1850, education was an unstandardized luxury of the upper classes. Alternatively, most Americans relied on their child's labor at young ages, either at home or away through forms of apprenticeship or domestic service. While this cultural system of child rearing remained a necessity for many working class families once the nation industrialized, the shift to viewing children as innocent shells over pliable cores led to institutional changes in childhood; in particular, mandatory schooling.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1850s, the states of Massachusetts and New York led the nation in enacting compulsory education laws that were soon adopted in the rest of the Northeast as well as in the Midwest.<sup>11</sup> It was believed by nineteenth century reformers that mandatory schooling could assist in the Victorian goals of middle-class childhood, which were

to shape children's character and implant habits of self-control through self-conscious maternal nurture; to shelter children from corruption by keeping them home for longer periods; and to enroll them in age-graded schools with a curriculum emphasizing lessons in industry, regularity, and restraint. Precocity was attacked, and order was imposed on young people's lives.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 17-20.

<sup>11</sup> Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 123; Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 92.

<sup>12</sup> Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 92.

Except in the southern states and most rural areas of the nation, the new system of separating students in grades by age became normalized by the 1870s, as did the use of standardized curriculums.<sup>13</sup>

These are only two examples of the many different ways educational reformers hoped to instill self-control in children while shielding them from potentially debasing influences. Coeducational schools also became entrenched by the 1890s due to the prevailing belief that boys would learn to behave better if schooled in tandem with their female peers. To further encourage virtue, schoolhouses were strategically located “not too near the center of town or the highway, for then children would have to listen to the coarse language of teamsters or the taunts of street rowdies.”<sup>14</sup> Finally, truancy legislations in some places allowed for detention as punishment for nonattendance and created negative incentives that worked to further normalize schooling during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of these many changes to institutional learning during the nineteenth century (especially among middle-class, urban children living outside of the South) around sixty percent of American children between the ages of five and nineteen were enrolled in school in 1870, a significant increase over prior decades.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 123.

<sup>15</sup> Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?: Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 36; Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 142 and 123.

<sup>16</sup> Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 135.

In turn, this restructuring of the lives of young people fostered cultural changes, namely the emergence of recognizable forms of juvenile delinquency and peer culture. Since school nonattendance became a punishable offense for youngsters, truancy laws regulated a crime that only children were able to commit. Furthermore, schools existed as much for instruction in etiquette as they did for academics. This rigidity led to sometimes-severe penalties for students failing to adhere to strict codes of self-control, regardless of intellectual achievements. As historian Harvey J. Graff has ascertained from his readings of Gilded Age diaries, students punished under these conditions often left school

for failing to behave in accordance with normative expectations... Middle-class mores were becoming embodied in institutions and policies that were themselves inseparable from class-linked paths of growing up. Any failure to meet these standards, even relatively minor deviance, if detected and punished could lead to drastic consequences, including more deviance and delinquency. This new order increasingly impinged on the young of other classes, especially on working-class, immigrant, and other minority youth.<sup>17</sup>

These subaltern groups of children were often subject to discipline at school for not being proficient in middle-class cultural norms. Graff argues that “the new definitions of deviance had a powerful effect in practice and in cultural symbolism. Helping to define deviance were new stereotypes of adolescents as prone to misbehaving in a variety of ways.”<sup>18</sup> During the Gilded Age, the idea of the delinquent was a child whose guilt of innocence had eroded to expose a ruined core.

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<sup>17</sup> Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 293.

<sup>18</sup> Graff, *Conflicting Paths*, 293.

Peer culture was especially relevant to Gilded Age children's *structure of feeling* and was the direct consequence of mandatory, coeducational schooling for the majority of one's adolescent years. Historian Jane H. Hunter's study on the evolution of girlhood in the nineteenth century speaks to the influence classmates had over one another at the time: "The nineteenth-century school was essentially a peer culture, like its twentieth-century successor, and presented a strong challenge to the influence of maternal domesticity." Hunter goes on to stress that "walking to and from school in company with peers, girls as well as boys inhabited the public space of cities and towns... Freed from the constant scrutiny of adults, these girls created a culture which allowed for a greater sense of fun and play than their elders encouraged." In coeducational schools, boys and girls alike developed peer cultures that evolved with the cohort. In turn, High School publications of the 1880s often showcased the cultural activities of these groups. One such paper's editors claimed their periodical to be 'Devoted to the Interests of Boys and Girls of the Present Generation.'<sup>19</sup>

However, the development of youth culture during the Gilded Age was in direct opposition to the goals of adult reformers of the period as stated above: children were thought to require maternal influence, shelter, structure, and order, all of which potentially ran counter to the notions developed in the exclusive presence of young counterparts. And as adults pushed against youth culture by imposing more and more restrictions on the leisure time of young people through organized group activities and sports, Gilded Age adolescents resisted by attempting "to assert an

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<sup>19</sup> Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 4-5 and 244.

independent identity and a sense of competence” through autonomously formed cultures.<sup>20</sup>

Gilded Age children formed their culture around more than assertions of independence, as Mintz argues: “Childhood has never been insulated from the pressures and demands of the surrounding society, and each generation of children has had to wrestle with the social, political, and economic constraints of its own historical period.”<sup>21</sup> As such, Gilded Age youth culture was both shaped by and reflected responses to these other, adult-centered factors as well.

### **The Adult World**

The Gilded Age was a time of explosive growth in almost every measurable aspect of the economy, and yet, this boom veiled the bust of an economic depression that lasted for decades. Industrialization made its dramatic entry onto America’s center stage and, as a result, between 1870 and 1900 nonfarm laborers increased from 48 to 60 percent of all workers, total miles of railroad nearly quadrupled, American cities with populations over 50,000 jumped from twenty-five to seventy-eight, wheat production more than doubled, and steel production increased by a factor of one-hundred-forty-five. Meanwhile, a stock market crash in 1873 bankrupted thousands of businesses, overproduction caused prices to dip, high interest rates plagued investments, and international market irregularities led to layoffs, reduced wages, and

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<sup>20</sup> Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 199.

<sup>21</sup> Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, vii.

other employer cutbacks. This original “great depression” persisted from 1873 until 1896 and left all but the richest 1 percent financially insecure and often inconceivably poor.<sup>22</sup>

The development of full capitalism led to the creation of a recognizable three-tiered class system. And yet, upon close inspection, this transition experienced severe growing pains.<sup>23</sup> As historian Robert H. Wiebe explains of what he termed “the distended society,”

Small businesses appeared and disappeared at a frightening rate. The so-called professions meant little as long as anyone with a bag of pills and a bottle of syrup could pass for a doctor, a few books and a corrupt judge made a man a lawyer, and an unemployed literate qualified as a teacher. Nor did the growing number of clerks and salesmen and secretaries of the city share much more than a common sense of drift as they fell into jobs that attached them to nothing in particular beyond a salary, a set of clean clothes, and a hope that somehow they would rise in the world.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, mass-produced commercial goods appealed to those with disposable incomes. As a result, department stores and mail-order catalogues found a firm footing in the Gilded Age economy.<sup>25</sup> But things were bleak for the working

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<sup>22</sup> Calhoun, “Introduction,” in *The Gilded Age*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun, 2; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 39; Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 117.

<sup>23</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 13-4.

<sup>25</sup> W. Bernard Carlson, “Technology and America as a Consumer Society, 1870-1900,” in *The Gilded Age*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun, 36-8.

class and by 1890, 1 percent of Americans received half of all income dollars and owned 99 percent of all property.<sup>26</sup>

Adding to the woes of the Gilded Age proletariat, laissez-faire politicians worked in collusion with industrialists to break-up attempts at unionization and protest. Violent clashes between militias and strikers occurred nationally throughout the era and especially in 1877, 1886, and 1892 through 1894. The angst of the working class materialized into nearly 37,000 strikes between 1881 and 1905 that involved over 7 million workers. Meanwhile, farmers who remained tied to the land became the victims of bankers, railroad magnates, and the industrial technology that eased their work while overproducing their crops, leading to low returns. Many of these rural Americans joined the Populist Party in search of redress.<sup>27</sup>

During the Gilded Age the entrenchment of industrialists in the realm of politics was highlighted by the government's use of police and national guards to disband strikers and force them back to work without concessions. More generally though, political machines in large cities functioned on capitalist patronage, as did much of Washington. In 1869, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. lamented about New York's Tammany ring: "It is a new power, for which our language contains no name.

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<sup>26</sup> Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 89 and 80; Carlson, "Technology and America as a Consumer Society, 1870-1900," in *The Gilded Age*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun, 33; Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 127.

We know what aristocracy, autocracy, democracy are; but we have no word to express government by moneyed corporations.”<sup>28</sup>

Social services as well as economic regulations were avoided by Gilded Age government bodies since they were deemed antithetical to human progress. Social Darwinism preached “survival of the fittest” in the realms of human society and popularized the belief that one’s position in life was inevitable. Similar to laissez-faire capitalism, Social Darwinism promoted liberty as the freedom from any interference in the processes that create the powerful, the middle class, and the proletariat. A man’s success was solely the consequence of his efforts in combination with his natural abilities. At a more realistic level though, Social Darwinism became a device of ethnic and racial oppression that argued that immigrants and African Americans were not wealthy property owners as a result of biological inferiority, not institutional barriers to success.<sup>29</sup>

This ideology fit neatly with the prevailing belief that Reconstruction had been an utter failure. Having occupied the agendas of Radical Republicans since the Civil War, governmental protection of the rights of former slaves was a waning cause at the start of the Gilded Age. The great majority of southern white Americans had never come to terms with the social, political, and economic equality of African Americans but in the early 1870s the North began to retreat from the ideals of Reconstruction as well. Certainly, the immense changes quickly introduced to

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<sup>28</sup> Charles F. Adams, Jr., “A Chapter of Erie,” in *Chapters of Erie, and Other Essays* by Charles F. Adams, Jr. and Henry Adams (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1871), 97.

<sup>29</sup> Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 120-2.

northerners in the years following the war made the depression and working conditions more immediate concerns than the condition of blacks in the South. However, racism re-emerged after a short hiatus, and the language of Social Darwinism was used to explain that Reconstruction had been an unachievable endeavor. As historian Eric Foner explains:

In the economic crisis of the 1870s, however, as the nation looked for scapegoats, racism increasingly reasserted its hold on northern thought and behavior. Engravings in popular journals depicted the freedpeople not as upstanding citizens harassed by violent opponents (as had been the case immediately after the Civil War) but as little more than unbridled animals. By the mid-1870s, it was quite common in the North to write, in the words of the contemporary historian Francis Parkman, of ‘the monstrosities of Negro rule in South Carolina.’<sup>30</sup>

In another example from 1874, the editor of *The Nation*, a paper that only eight years previously had argued that racism was the only possible justification for the withholding of African American votes, stated matter-of-factly that the African Americans of South Carolina’s “low-country” were “not much above the level of the brute.”<sup>31</sup> The article went on to accuse African Americans of being a “very degraded race of human beings” whose political participation “succeeded in carrying South Carolina a long way on the road to ruin” since, “as a South Carolina legislator, [the African American man was] merely a horrible failure.”<sup>32</sup> In 1877, Reconstruction was

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<sup>30</sup> Eric Foner and Joshua Brown, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 192.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 313; *The Nation*, April 30, 1874, 282.

<sup>32</sup> *The Nation*, April 30, 1874, 282.

officially abandoned as was the effort to ensure the rights of those freed from slavery just over a decade earlier. Paradoxically, the language of slavery was instead borrowed in the North during the Gilded Age by whites attempting to secure liberties for women and the working class.<sup>33</sup>

## Popular Culture

Gilded Age popular culture reflected the dramatic changes occurring in the larger society. Entertainment became a way for entrepreneurs to achieve financial success, technology made popular culture more accessible as well as more grandiose, and ethnic and racial ideologies were both recreated and reinforced through appeals to the senses, primarily vision. One of the most celebrated cultural forms of the time was the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 that more than 27 million people attended. The electric-powered fair featured recent achievements in technology, including electricity itself, moving walkways, and, of course, the Ferris Wheel. Juxtaposing these symbols of modernization were the ethnographic villages of the Midway Plaisance which purported to show authentic non-Westerners in replicas of their natural surroundings. As representatives of their ethnicity's supposed progress toward civilization, these villagers were inspected by fairgoers who explained

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<sup>33</sup> See Ellen Carol DuBois and Richard Candida Smith, eds., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Feminist As Thinker: A Reader in Documents and Essays* (New York: The New York University Press, 2007) especially "National Protection For National Citizens, Address to the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, January 11, 1878, Washington, D.C." and "Divorce Versus Domestic Warfare" (1890); "'The Great Labor Parade of September 1st,' Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 9/13/1884," Images from Josh Brown's lecture, "Seeing Boom and Bust: Capital and Labor in the Gilded Age Pictorial Press," *Illustrating the Gilded Age: Political Cartoons and the Press in American Politics and Culture, 1877-1901*, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio, May 20/June 6, 2008, accessed April 30, 2013, <http://www.joshbrownnyc.com/hayes/93.jpg>.

away America's progress as an inevitable consequence of the workings of a dominant race.<sup>34</sup>

Popular amusements were also everyday affairs for those of the Gilded Age, especially in the Northeast. Stage performances like vaudeville shows evolved from blackface minstrelsy while circuses and midways borrowed the freak show popularized in museums earlier in the century. These amusements of the stage and tent enhanced the patron's experience over earlier counterparts through their employ of the emergent spectacles of technology and marketing. And yet, in terms of its popular entertainment, the Gilded Age could hardly be called progressive.<sup>35</sup>

Vaudeville shows were advertised to women and families and were broken down into several acts that sometimes included acrobatics and juggling as well as dancing, comedy, and opera. Blackface acts were omnipresent. These acts were often performed by African American actors who "were generally required to perform in blackface, use dialect, and sing 'coon' songs." Coon songs, from which the derogation "coon" originated, was ragtime music with lyrics that introduced songs like "All Coons Look Alike to Me" and dances like the cakewalk to audiences who gazed upon the vaudeville stage.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ellen M. Litwicky, "The Influence of Commerce, Technology, and Race on Popular Culture in the Gilded Age," in *The Gilded Age*, Carles W. Calhoun, ed., 187-8; Foner and Brown, *Forever Free*, 215.

<sup>35</sup> Litwicky, "The Influence of Commerce, Technology, and Race on Popular Culture in the Gilded Age," in *The Gilded Age*, Carles W. Calhoun, ed., 188-9. See also Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001) for a history of the first freak shows.

<sup>36</sup> Litwicky, "The Influence of Commerce, Technology, and Race on Popular Culture in the Gilded Age," in *The Gilded Age*, Carles W. Calhoun, ed., 192-6.

Another popular form of entertainment during the Gilded Age was the freak show. Historian Rachel Adams argues that freak shows, like the ethnographic villages of the World's Fair, "often provided American audiences with their primary source of information about the non-Western world." However, when taking into consideration the people most often chosen for display as entertainment, Gilded Age Americans likely thought they were also learning about people closer to home. For example, one exhibit of P.T. Barnum's in New York City featured a black man on display as the "missing link between primitive humanity and the orangutan." An advertising poster for the attraction, simply called "What Is It?," claimed the oddity to have been "captured in a savage state in Central Africa." The creature, supposedly neither man nor animal, was said to have the "skull, limbs, and general anatomy of an ORANG OUTANG and the COUNTENANCE of a HUMAN BEING."<sup>37</sup> The What Is It? freak show was so popular, in fact, that it successfully ran from the 1860s until 1924, all the while equating African Americans to a lesser species.<sup>38</sup>

While children were not immune to these adult-oriented forms of popular culture, they also consumed their own. Children's unique popular culture during the Gilded Age often included shopping, playing sports, taking walks, spending time at "penny arcades, dance halls, and amusement parks," or playing with manufactured or

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<sup>37</sup> The performer was, in fact, an African American man by the name of William Henry Johnson.

<sup>38</sup> Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 28, 31 and 36-7.

homemade games and toys.<sup>39</sup> These activities most often occurred in groups and added to the creation of a Gilded Age youth culture, forms of which were not prevalent in earlier generations of American history. Certainly, schools and institutions of popular culture allowed for unique *structures of feeling* among young cohorts experiencing similar childhoods at the time. Meanwhile, the technology of the Gilded Age introduced mass-produced goods at relatively inexpensive costs as well as the high-speed transfer of people, goods, and thought. These many factors ultimately allowed for Gilded Age youth culture to expand across regions, ethnicities, and class.

### **This Study**

Two of the primary historical legacies of the Gilded Age are the industrialization of the United States and the departure from Reconstruction, both ideologically and in practice. But what role did children play in the materialization of an American consumer culture and in furthering racist attitudes towards African Americans? In order to better understand how the development of peer cultures through shared playtime influenced the Gilded Age cohort's *structure of feeling* in these regards, this study turns to the extremely popular practice of collecting advertisements.

Advertisements provided Gilded Age children with a language for interpreting the world around them, particularly since the era was wrought with visual primacy.

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<sup>39</sup> Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 136.

Chapter Two explores the history of advertisement collecting among Gilded Age youths, noting the newness of colorful images fully accessible to all classes for the first time. Pedagogical practices of the era are also considered, as vision and knowledge were intertwined in ways that emphasize the impact advertisements ultimately had. Finally, the practice of collecting among Gilded Age children is examined to explain how deeply youth culture was affected and how easily ideas of consumerism and race would have been developed through this form of playtime.

Chapter Three uses Gilded Age advertisement collections to gain insight into how children with little to no spending power were instructed to desire and demand particular brand-named products. This chapter also shows how the success of certain advertising campaigns led to the continued appeal to children by advertisers as well as to the creation of a consumer society in the United States. Chapter Four similarly investigates advertisement collections created by Gilded Age children to understand how ideas of race were introduced and reinforced through their images. In particular, these collections show that Gilded Age children were taught that African Americans were a lesser race of people whose inherent shortcomings led to their position in society. This idea, once entrenched, had lasting implications for those who subscribed to it and for African Americans themselves.

My attempt here is to offer a correction to earlier studies on Gilded Age childhood and play which almost completely neglect race and consumerism, often by furthering notions of childhood innocence that are simply untrue. Only by rejecting this bias can we hope to uncover the legacy of racism against African Americans that

came on the heels of Emancipation and Reconstruction as well as the power that late-nineteenth century children ultimately had in the furthering of white supremacy and America's consumer nation.

## Chapter Two

### Technology, Pedagogy, and Playtime

E. W. Gurley mused in 1880 that “our life is a living Scrap-book. Clipped from the scroll of Time and pasted in by the hand of Fate, every day brings its contributions, and the leaves accumulate until the book is filled.”<sup>40</sup> Historians have come to accept Gurley’s argument that scrapbooks are representative of the time and life of their contributors. Through this lens, scrapbooks are recognized for their usefulness as autobiographical primary sources in lieu of more traditional documents such as journals and letters. The anthology *The Scrapbook in American Life* highlights this shift toward a new set of primary sources and the book’s editors, Katherine Ott, Susan Tucker, and Patricia P. Buckler, rightfully describe scrapbooks in their introduction to the text as the “material manifestation of memory – the memory of the compiler and the memory of the cultural moment in which they were made.”<sup>41</sup> According to this interpretation, scrapbooks represent history on two levels; the history of the time and place whose conditions produced the ephemeral scraps housed within the albums, and the history of the creator of the scrapbook, whose deliberate choices of what to include and how to arrange those things led to the finished product.

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<sup>40</sup> E. W. Gurley, *Scrap-Books and How to Make Them* (New York: The Authors’ Publishing Company, 1880), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler, eds., *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 3.

In addition to the cultural memory derivative of scrapbooks, as primary sources they are arguably less fantastical than diaries have the potential to be, perhaps especially when created by children. But as typically non-narrative sources, attempting to decode the dual histories told through the contents of nineteenth century scrapbooks, whose creators were often children who left little to no autobiography besides their albums, might make truths seem just as elusive as when interpreting a child's diary. As Katherine Ott described in her 1996 article "It's a Scrapbook Life; Using Ephemera to Reconstruct the Everyday of Medical Practice," establishing a rubric for the interpretation of scrapbooks would be essential in order for historians to "recreate the lived, as opposed to the reported, experience of nineteenth-century people" through the use of this important primary source.<sup>42</sup> As will soon become apparent however, scrapbook makers of the Gilded Age occasionally expressed volumes while literally composing nothing at all.

Scrapbooking was an extremely popular pastime for young people of any means during the Victorian era in the U.S. Throughout the period, scrapbooking styles evolved concurrent to available methods of printing and the popular accessibility of ephemera. For example, among other bric-a-brac, a mid-nineteenth century scrapbook would have most commonly contained original poetry and artwork, preserved flora, transcribed works of others, and newspaper clippings (among the classes able to afford print material at the time). Later, chromolithographed cards, and especially advertising trade cards, whose own history

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<sup>42</sup> Katherine Ott, "It's a Scrapbook Life: Using Ephemera to Reconstruct the Everyday of Medical Practice," *The Watermark* 20 (Winter 1996): 1.

began in Britain around the start of the eighteenth century, became a ubiquitous and sometimes sole component of American scrapbooks around 1875, especially in the Northeast, and continued to dominate the practice until their own demise around 1900.<sup>43</sup>

### **Chromolithography**

Begun as prints from engravings, the labor costs involved in the production of early forms of advertising trade cards restricted their distribution to exclusive merchants in the American colonies initially in this country, and only to the most well-off and discerning customers. The technological advance of lithography, taking root around 1820, made the production of images infinitely easier and less costly than engraving. By producing an image on the smooth surface of a slab of limestone with a grease-based implement, lithographers were able to make endless numbers of black and white facsimiles by wetting the stone, covering the image with an oil-based ink, and pressing the stone to paper. Since oil and water cannot mix, the ink was pulled only from the area of the original rendering.

Early on, lithography's ingenuity was primarily exploited by printers in the production of large images for adorning the home, often replicas of priceless works of art. The trade card itself remained a financial extravagance as a giveaway for merchants and continued to be so when color lithography first became an option

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<sup>43</sup> The following discussion on the history of advertising trade cards and chromolithography is largely drawn from Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987) and Joni L. Kinsey, *Thomas Moran's West: Chromolithography, High Art, and Popular Taste* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

around 1850. This process, also referred to as chromolithography, required the use of multiple printing stones, sometimes as many as fifty-six, each representing a different shade in the final image. The skill of accurately drawing each shade's stone was carefully carried out by an artist referred to as the "chromiste," whose many images were printed one on top of the other to create a complete work.<sup>44</sup>

The individual most responsible for the ubiquity of advertising trade cards in the United States during the Gilded Age was probably Louis Prang, a German immigrant '48er whose printing business flourished during the Civil War by selling card-sized images of war generals for ten cents apiece. After recognizing the potential popularity of color prints following the war, Prang ventured his lithography firm in two directions by mass-producing chromolithographed versions of both trade cards and replicas of fine art in order to lower the prices of each. Here, "trade card" is used to describe any manor of chromolithographed images on card stock that during this period ranged from larger versions like advertising trade cards to smaller ones like visiting cards (similar to the business card of today and sometimes referred to as calling cards). While all types of chromolithographed cards varied in size, the most common advertising trade card was approximately three by four inches while visiting cards were generally only two by three.

Prang's vision was a success. In no time the American public was participating in what Prang himself referred to as "the democracy of art" as they were suddenly surrounded by a proliferation of both varieties of colored images which

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<sup>44</sup> Kinsey, *Thomas Moran's West*, 4.

were, according to art historian Joni L. Kinsey, “part of a revolution in American visual culture, one that transformed the value system of the art world and our relationship to the printed image.”<sup>45</sup> The connections that Kinsey makes between Americans and images is one that was complicated by several factors concerning print material in the last third of the nineteenth century. Photographic reproductions had not yet been perfected, making this form of image still sparse and often distorted when available. Photography was indeed novel in its ability to capture real life in paper form but chromolithographed cards, distinct from black and white photographic images of considerable cost, were likely the first color prints beheld by all classes and ages of Americans. Indeed, photographs sometimes assisted as blueprints for chromistes, allowing for the creation of ever more realistic representations, but the chromolithographed card was ultimately the image that was accessible to the general public.

Further contributing to the democratization of colorful images were the chromolithographed versions of high art, whose originals were reserved only for the wealthy. These prints allowed for the newly-forming middle classes to guide their homes into the visual epoch through small purchases for adorning their walls, and many took advantage of the opportunity. The availability of chromo-art at this time was contentious among the upper classes who felt that inexpensive replicas would forever destroy the intrinsic value of fine art. Yet, in spite of these protests, the coupling of colored images and American culture proceeded rapidly in the late 1870s,

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<sup>45</sup> Kinsey, *Thomas Moran's West*, 3.

so much so that the word “chromo” immediately became a household term – referring either to the chromolithographic images themselves or as a prefix to almost any noun, modifying it to refer to the inauthentic, machine-made, or unrefined version of the original.

Miles Orvell’s work further values the relationship between Americans and these images historically in that he supposes that they helped to usher in modernity through the dilemmas introduced merely by their existence:

[T]he question first posed by industrial technology in the nineteenth century would become the question we are still trying to answer: how has the machine, with its power to produce replicas and reproductions, altered our culture? Has it, for example, degraded the quality of civilization by flooding our world with sham things? Or has it enlarged and democratized the base of culture? That question was debated during the years following the Civil War in terms, especially, of the ubiquitous chromolithograph, which became a symbol of the new culture.<sup>46</sup>

Orvell’s overarching thesis is that modernity was in fact a rejection of Gilded Age simulacrum and a search for authenticity amidst a culture of endless reproductions. This buttresses the notion of chromolithography’s importance to America’s cultural history and suggests a new tension regarding what was real and true.

The influence of images on modernity proposed by Orvell is extrapolated by Suren Lalvani in the introduction to his text on nineteenth century photography and the human form: “A number of thinkers have argued that modernity consists of the powerful privileging of vision and that it represents a distinctive ocular-centric

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<sup>46</sup> Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 36.

paradigm, quite different from the organization of vision in previous epochs.”<sup>47</sup> It is his thesis that “vision is irrevocably tied to domains of knowledge, arrangements in social space, lines of force and visibility, and a particular arrangement of bodies.”<sup>48</sup> Lalvani’s line of reasoning regarding modernity, which is drawn from the works of Heidegger, Derrida, and Nietzsche, is generally applied to discussions surrounding the emergence of photography. However, I would agree with Orvell and argue instead that it was chromolithographic images rather than photographs that signaled the shift toward an *ocular-centric paradigm*. American discourse did indeed begin to favor knowledge and power based on what is seen, but many more Americans of the Gilded Age came to value the chromo image as a vehicle for understanding the world around them than they did the photograph, merely through their ubiquity and the novelty of color.

### **The Object Lesson**

In addition to the fact that chromos were the first colored images to enter virtually all American homes, the medium was also often tied to the era’s ubiquitous “object lesson,” a pedagogical strategy putting emphasis on the senses and based on the principle that learning occurs primarily through seeing.<sup>49</sup> One Primary School

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<sup>47</sup> Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> See Sarah Anne Carter, “The Object Lesson in American Culture” (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2010) for a comprehensive history on object lessons.

textbook published in 1885 under the title *Primary Object Lessons, for Training the Senses and Developing the Faculties of Children: A Manual of Elementary Instruction for Parents and Teachers* explained the rationale behind the *object lesson*: “Instruction must begin with actual inspection, not with verbal descriptions of things. From such inspection it is that certain knowledge comes. What is actually seen remains faster in the memory than description or enumeration a hundred times as often repeated.”<sup>50</sup> When described as a process of childhood instruction, the mid- to late- nineteenth century practice of training young minds through inspection is further defined:

To bring the child to perception of things by the senses, we must have, before we have A B C books, object-lesson books to make clear and luminous to him by perception (by the help of well-chosen real objects, which are either presented to his senses in their actuality, or in *well-executed pictures* or models) the notions which we wish to give him by speech. [emphasis added]<sup>51</sup>

Gilded Age Americans did not simply teach their children through the lessons emanating from “well-executed pictures” at school though; the entire vernacular of the period surrounding knowledge and learning was presented through a discourse on *object lessons* and what is seen. Any number of examples could be addressed here, as books as well as magazine and newspaper articles referring to *object lessons* proliferated during this time. In one example, an 1889 *The Washington Post* article signed L. H. T. argues against the use of buxom women in the advertisement of tobacco and whiskey

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<sup>50</sup> John Amos Comenius quoted in N. A. Calkins, *Primary Object Lessons, for Training the Senses and Developing the Faculties of Children: A Manual of Elementary Instruction for Parents and Teachers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1885), iii.

<sup>51</sup> Auguste Pinloche, *Pestalozzi and the Foundation of the Modern Elementary School* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 215-6.

since, as *object lessons*, these images promote the “inconvenience and useless martyrdom” of women.<sup>52</sup> The article begins:

This is a pictorial age. Illustration plays a great part in its development. The object lesson is not confined to the kindergarten, and he who runs need not stop to read, but only look to see ‘ideas’ pictured forth in every variety of color and form... The cheap picture, no matter whether it is a copy of a masterpiece or the alluring [*sic*] idea of the business advertiser... can easily find their ways into simple places to reflect their meanings into simple minds...<sup>53</sup>

Occasionally, the lessons taught by advertisements were not as concealed as the ones referred to by L. H. T. for tobacco and whiskey; some even touted themselves as *object lessons*. The series of advertising cards distributed by the Arbuckle Bros. Coffee Company of New York is an excellent example of this forthright method (Figure 1, Back). These fifty cards, each representing one state or territory of the U.S., cast themselves as “instructive” studies, “object lessons for both young and old,” because they provided the coffee consumer or card collector with general information about a specific area of the country, mainly through images.<sup>54</sup>

The card providing instruction on the state of Georgia, for example, listed its current population and area but also showed an image of African Americans picking corn in a vast field (Figure 1, Front). The woman in the foreground has a smile on her face and a wide-brimmed straw hat on her head, the lesson perhaps being that the

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<sup>52</sup> L. H. T., “In Many Gay Pictures: How Soap, Tobacco, Whisky and Beer are Advertised,” *The Washington Post* (November 10, 1889): 16.

<sup>53</sup> L. H. T., “In Many Gay Pictures,” 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Trade card for Arbuckles’ Ariosa Coffee*, ca. 1890. Col. 669 70x130.24.46a. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

Nº 53

**ARBUCKLES'**  
**Ariosa Coffee**

**COSTS MORE AND IS  
WORTH MORE THAN OTHER  
BRANDS OF COFFEE.**

**WHY?**

- 1st. It is made from green coffee of higher grade and better drinking quality; and it is glazed at an actual cost to us of three-eighths of a cent per pound.
- 2d. Its entire strength and aroma are retained by our process of glazing coffee.
- 3d. The ingredients used in glazing are the choicest eggs and pure confectioners' "A" sugar; in testimony of this fact, see our affidavit on each package of coffee bearing our name.
- 4th. The glazing, composed of eggs and sugar, not only retains the full strength and aroma of our coffee, but gives to it a richness of flavor unknown to other coffees; besides it saves the expense of eggs used in settling unglazed coffee.

**BEWARE** of buying low-grade package coffee, falsely purporting to be made of Mocha, Java and Rio; this being a cheap device, employed by the manufacturers, to deceive unwary consumers.

**ARBUCKLE BROS.**  
**Coffee Company,**  
**NEW YORK.**

**READ THIS.**

This series of cards is at once the most interesting, instructive and artistic, yet offered as an advertisement. Every card is a study in itself, and affords an object lesson for both young and old. THE SERIES CONSISTS OF FIFTY CARDS, each one of which shows a correct map (properly bounded) of one State, or Territory. The pictures illustrating the peculiar industries and scenery of the States and Territories are entirely new, and by the very best American artists.

If you chance to get two cards of one kind, your neighbor also may have two of a kind, in which case you can exchange with each other.

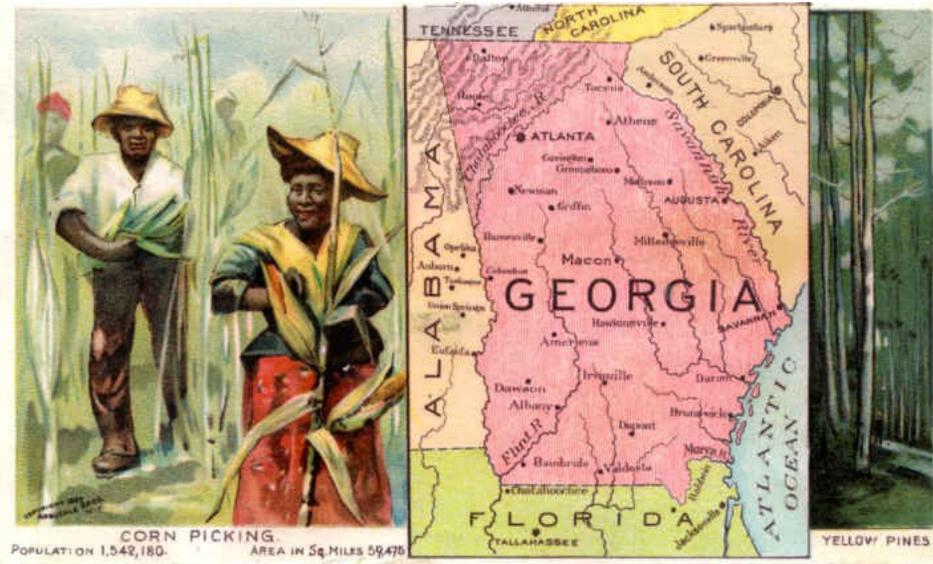
Alabama.	Missouri.
Alaska.	Montana Territory.
Arizona Territory.	Nebraska.
Arkansas.	Nevada.
California.	New Hampshire.
Colorado.	New Jersey.
Connecticut.	New Mexico Ter'y.
Delaware.	New York.
Dist. of Columbia.	North Carolina.
Florida.	North Dakota.
Georgia.	Ohio.
Idaho Territory.	Oregon.
Illinois.	Pennsylvania.
Indiana.	Rhode Island.
Indian Territory.	South Carolina.
Iowa.	South Dakota.
Kansas.	Tennessee.
Kentucky.	Texas.
Louisiana.	Utah Territory.
Maine.	Vermont.
Maryland.	Virginia.
Massachusetts.	Washington Ter'y.
Michigan.	West Virginia.
Minnesota.	Wisconsin.
Mississippi.	Wyoming Ter'y.

LITH BY DONALDSON BROTHERS, N.Y.

70x130.24.46A

**Figure 1, Back.** Trade card for *Arbuckles' Ariosa Coffee*, ca. 1890. Col. 669 70x130.24.46a. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

weather in Georgia is warm but the productive corn picker is content. Finally, a rendering of yellow pines on the far right gave an impression of what the Georgian hinterland might have looked like at the time and a context for contemporary discussions surrounding the state.



**Figure 1, Front.** Trade card for Arbuckles' Ariosa Coffee, ca. 1890. Col. 669 70x130.24.46a. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

As is evident through these examples, advertising trade cards were passing on knowledge through both conscious and subliminal *object lessons* during the Gilded Age. The *ocular-centric paradigm* had clearly begun and it seems likely that it was chromolithography which heralded in this new age.

### The Card Craze

Louis Prang sensed this cultural change in the post-bellum years, even as he helped to cause it. In the creation of advertising trade cards, Prang's lithography firm initially made many versions of chromo cards with varying, colorful images on them and no particular brand or shop's name or logo. In this way Prang's company produced the early form of advertisement en masse for manufacturers to stamp their names on later and disseminate cheaply. The introduction of zinc plates and steam-powered printers to the production of chromolithographed images further reduced the cost

and increased the availability of the ephemera by a wide range of lithography firms after the 1870s. Merchants of the many new goods and services of the budding consumer nation recognized the innovation of chromolithography and by 1876 advertising trade cards became commonly distributed by shopkeepers and were often packaged within brand-name commodities to steer buyers away from bulk-goods. Many successful businesses eventually chose to commission their own unique advertising trade cards through increasingly omnipresent lithographers.

The success of advertising trade cards partially hinged on the fact that children and adults alike eagerly collected the ephemera and awaited the availability of conclusions to card series (like the Arbuckle's example above) which often told stories through sequential chromolithographed cards, a gimmick retailers relied on to bring the customer back time and time again. Children in the Northeast collected advertising cards for all sorts of products, shops, and brands. General interest for the cards was so high, in fact, that stock versions of trade cards were also made available for purchase by the general public, ten cards for ten cents according to one advertising card promoting them (Figure 2).

Similar to baseball card collections, young people often traded cards when they had duplicates and then viewed their collections with friends. The so-called "card craze" (coined in one 1885 trade-journal) was especially rampant in the Northeast but apparently reached every corner of the country as collections grew in



**Figure 2.** Trade card for New York Observer. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.8. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

size and more and more people sought to have one.<sup>55</sup> Ellen Gruber Garvey briefly discusses the social and cultural phenomenon that ensued through these collections in her larger work on late-nineteenth century magazines' influence on American consumerism:

Within this 1880s rationale and understanding of collecting, seeking out and amassing trade cards was understood as sharpening the collector's eye to notice more trade cards and other forms of advertisement, to learn their language, and to learn about the world through them... Just as among stamp collectors, 'no lad who studies his stamp-book can be ignorant of changes of rule and nationalities,' no girl who collected trade cards could remain ignorant of brand-named goods, their claims, and the images and narratives associated with each.<sup>56</sup>

The attention given to these collections and their *object lessons* in many ways birthed the American industry of advertising as we've come to think of it today. When coupled with the introduction of the railroad and telegraph, which Jay T. Last

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<sup>55</sup> "The Advertising Card Business," *Paper World* 10 (1885): 5 cited in Marilyn Maness Mehaffy, "Advertising Race/Racing Advertising: The Feminine Consumer(-Nation), 1876-1900," *Signs* 23 (1997): 132.

<sup>56</sup> Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25-6.

argues “allowed businesses to consider the whole country to be their market, not just their immediate neighbors,” the advertising industry took off.<sup>57</sup> Soon, advertising trade cards were distributed through salesmen and shopkeepers, on public transportation, in packaging, and by the post office. They were collected and traded by young people who pasted them in scrapbooks and revisited them with their friends or family. By 1900 advertising had multiplied ten times during the three decades since 1870 (a rate of increase greater than that of the American economy as a whole) and it was the trade card itself that arguably set in motion this rapid upsurge of the industry through its popularity.<sup>58</sup>

### **Youth Culture**

For young American girls experiencing their childhoods in the late-nineteenth century, collecting advertising trade cards truly became a staple of their culture of play. This is evidenced by Lina and Adelia B. Beard’s 1887 release *How to Amuse Yourself and Others: The American Girls Handy Book*. The Beard sisters state: “The fashion of collecting pictured advertising cards, so much in vogue among the children a few years ago, seems to have run its course, and dying out, it has left on the young collector’s hands more cards than they know well what to do with. Many of the

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<sup>57</sup> Jay T. Last, *The Color Explosion: Nineteenth-Century American Lithography* (Santa Ana, CA: Hillcrest Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>58</sup> Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America*, 34.

collections have been pasted in scrap-books.”<sup>59</sup> The Beards’ suggestion for those bored of their trade card collections and the scrapbooks made out of them is to make new types of scrapbooks, more in line with storytelling than collage, by cutting out the images from the chromos and arranging them in various ways. However, the majority of Gilded Age scrapbooks now housed in archives are consistent with the collage style of preserving trade cards, suggesting that few had actually tired of the traditional method.

More than simply a culture of play however, these young, late-nineteenth century scrapbookers were also early participators in the new culture of consumerism taking hold in the U.S. As mentioned above by Garvey, young people were trained through their collections to notice brand-names and the claims made by certain products. In addition to a consumerist indoctrination, collecting and scrapbooking trade cards also introduced the Gilded Age child to a much older culture of white supremacy and racism against African Americans. This is due to the fact that the method of advertising on colorful trade cards resulted in the mass distribution and subsequent collection by countless young people of ephemera depicting racist images of African Americans. From caricatures of late-nineteenth century stereotypes, to paternalistic representations of helpless blacks and homages to the plantation South, the majority-northern, young, white, children who participated in this early form of popular culture simultaneously read consumerism and racial difference through the objects of their playtime.

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<sup>59</sup> Lina Beard and Adelia B. Beard, *How to Amuse Yourself and Others: The American Girls Handy Book* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 396.

Youth culture was, in fact, so affected in these ways by the images on chromos during the period that in his seminal work on the realities of blackness in America, W. E. B. Du Bois not only introduced concepts like “the veil” and “double-consciousness,” he also spoke of his personal experience with the ephemera. Here, Du Bois shared with his reader the exact moment of his youth when he came to realize racial difference from the white students he studied alongside in Massachusetts:

I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England... In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards – ten cents a package – and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, – refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.<sup>60</sup>

The importance of moments like these in the childhoods of African Americans cannot be understated and as such it is no wonder that Du Bois felt the need to relate his experience in the second paragraph of *The Souls of Black Folk*. But to grasp the full implication of Du Bois' narrative the historian must also ask “what of the ‘tall newcomer?’” At what moment in this young, white girl's childhood was she made aware of racial difference and was then prompted to refuse young Du Bois' card that formative day? In truth, the girl's moment of racial indoctrination may have come no sooner than Du Bois', as the images printed on the cards themselves may have directly instructed their viewers to judge black bodies. And as advertisements, they

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<sup>60</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003), 8.

also worked to inculcate a desire for brand-named, luxury goods even in youngsters with no means to acquire the mass-produced products of the Gilded Age.

## Chapter Three

### Young Consumers-In-Training

The Arbuckle Coffee Company advertisements of the Gilded Age were colorful trade cards that instructed the card collector in ways beyond their *object lessons* regarding American states and territories (Figure 1). Arbuckle's advertisements, like others, also trained the consumer in methods for properly decoding the claims made by manufacturers about their products as well as in acceptable habits of consumption. Arbuckle's advertisers did this by delineating why their Ariosa Coffee cost more than competitor brands by valuing the quality of their product. The discussion present on the back of an advertising trade card for Ariosa Coffee ultimately warns customers to "BEWARE of buying low-grade package coffee," implying that purchasers must learn to detect quality products from imitators and give preference to products of higher standards over those which are less expensive.<sup>61</sup>

This use of scare tactics in advertising was prevalent during the Gilded Age and was the direct consequence of the emergent competition at the time between brand-name goods and traditional bulk-goods. Learning the brand-names of products and the supposed reasons for their higher costs was necessary in order for American consumers to transition from being people singularly in need of goods, to being desirous of and willing to pay a higher price for indulgences. Recognizing this, Gilded Age advertisers employed many strategies for transmitting consumer skills to

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<sup>61</sup> *Trade card for Arbuckles' Ariosa Coffee*, ca. 1890. Col. 669 70x130.24.46a. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

potential patrons. Some, like Arbuckle, emphasized that quality *costs* more. Others insisted that quality *lasts longer* and ultimately saves the consumer money in the long run. Others still attempted to normalize the use of quality products by making certain purchases seem obvious. All worked to glamorize luxury purchases through what historian Jackson Lears considers to be “attempt[s] to conjure up the magic of self-transformation through purchase while at the same time containing the subversive implications of a successful trick.”<sup>62</sup>

The Gilded Age is often remembered by historians as the time when America’s legacy as a consumer nation began to take shape due to industrialization and the availability of mass-produced goods. At the time, advertising trade cards seemed a symbol of this shift toward a consuming nation to contemporaries. One *New York Times* article in 1882 articulated this sentiment:

The custom of using picture cards and curious printed devices for advertising purposes in this country has been one of a few years’ growth... At first but a few dealers would condescend to place their business announcements upon picture cards. Now there is scarcely a large retail house in any kind of business that does not issue something in the way of a fancy card. The motive that leads to this general gratuitous distribution of picture cards is not rivalry alone, but it is the desire on the part of dealers to put some sort of a card into the hands of buyers that will attract attention and will not be carelessly thrown away... The Superintendent of a very large fancy goods store in this City said to the reporter not long since that he had observed scores of ladies making little purchases in his store for no other reason than as an excuse to ask for one of the firm’s elaborate Spring announcements. These pretty devices are,

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<sup>62</sup> Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 42.

of course, carried home by the ladies, carefully preserved, and shown to friends, who, in turn, lose no time in visiting the store that issues them.<sup>63</sup>

What the unnamed author of this article may not have realized in 1882 is that *these pretty devices* were also playthings for Gilded Age children who possibly influenced their parents' purchasing power in attempts to secure larger and more complete advertising trade card collections. These children certainly created trading networks with their peers who conducted transactions of their own involving advertising cards as collectors' items.

Advertisers themselves did come to realize that children were consuming their trade cards and thus began concerted efforts to appeal to child consumers. Lisa Jacobson, the historian perhaps most associated with studies on the socialization of young people through America's consumer culture, argues that most Gilded Age advertisers had yet to realize the full potential of children as consumers. She does point out, however, that advertisers of the era did attempt to influence children at the point of sale. For example, Jacobson states that at the height of the distribution of advertising trade cards, "business leaders theorized that alluring trade cards, judiciously placed on store countertops, would help children decide which brand to buy, if their mother had neglected to specify one when she sent them on a shopping errand."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "QUAINT DEVICES IN TRADE: THE EXTENSIVE GROWTH OF PICTURE-CARD ADVERTISING," *New York Times*, June 18, 1882, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 19.

However, the scrapbooks of young advertising trade cards collectors show a deeper level of consumer indoctrination occurred at the time, and not exclusively at the point of sale. Ultimately, Gilded Age advertisers succeeded in gaining the attention of young people as consumers through trade cards, whether by intention or not. In turn, these advertisements coached the youngsters, perhaps even more so than they taught their parents, to recognize brand and store names as well as to aspire to own brand-name, luxury goods. As a result, approximately four decades before allowance-giving became a recognized practice in American households, seemingly powerless children found ways to exercise consumer sensitivities.<sup>65</sup>

### **Imagining Child Consumers**

Depictions of children on advertising trade cards of the late-nineteenth century were extremely varied, but a noticeable theme is the placement of babes in adult clothes and grown-up situations. Jacobson explains that by “combining purity and precocity” such representations “toyed with and sometimes even subverted more traditional iconographic representations of childhood innocence and purity.” The goal of the advertisers who employed such images was apparently to have customers associate their product with the supposedly-innate better qualities of youth, namely purity, integrity, and the absence of ill intention.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Lisa Jacobson, “Advertising, Mass Merchandising, and the Creation of Children’s Consumer Culture,” in *Children and Consumer Culture in American Society: A Historical Handbook and Guide*, ed. Lisa Jacobson (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2008), 7.

<sup>66</sup> Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 21.

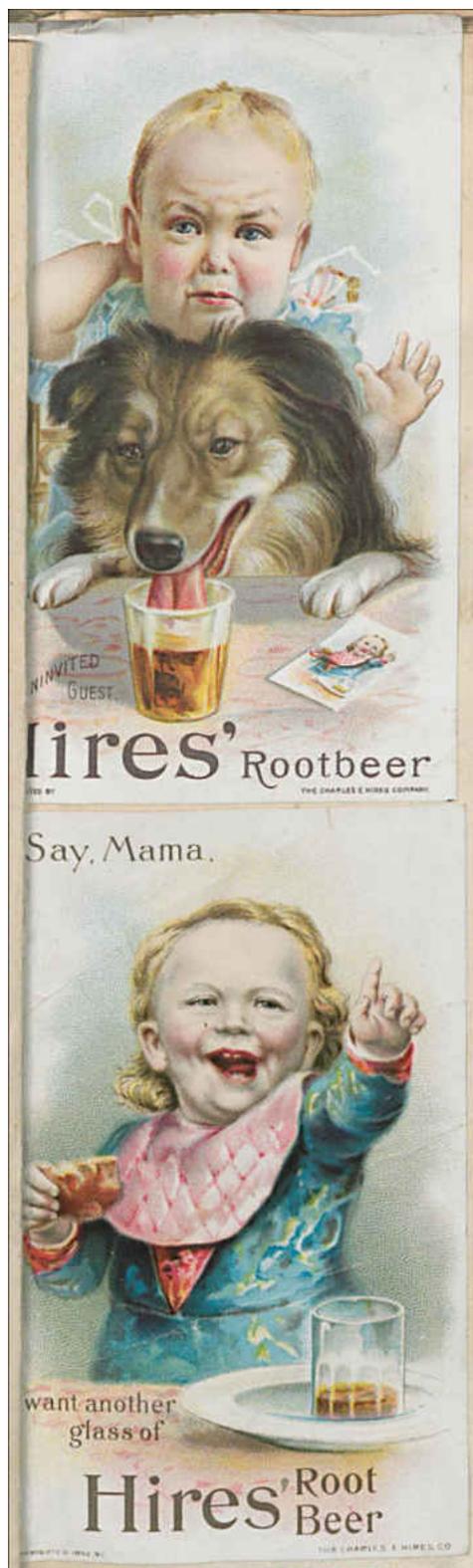
The child consumer, viewed at the time by the general public as the oxymoronic outcome of placing a youngster in the “grown-up situation” of having agency over purchasing power, is one such trope visible on advertising trade cards found in Gilded Age scrapbooks. As *object lessons*, cards employing such representations worked to inculcate consumer habits onto the young collector’s mind through what Marchand calls “incessantly repeated and largely uncontradicted visual clichés and moral parables.”<sup>67</sup> One particular Gilded Age scrapbook in the Thelma Seeds Mendsen Collection at Winterthur Library is of unknown ownership but offers insight into how this learning process might have worked.

Early in the pages of this scrapbook we find two advertising trade cards hawking Hires’ Root Beer and featuring images of young advocates of the product (Figure 3). On the first card, a toddler is shown being visibly upset, nearly to the point of tears, due to the fact that the pet dog is freely enjoying the child’s root beer. This child is presumably unwilling to share his tasty beverage with the dog but is also unable to stop the much larger animal from imbibing his drink. On the second Hires’ Root Beer advertising card, which this particular scrapbooker placed directly below the image of the child and the dog, a very happy youngster is shown exuberantly requesting more of the product from their mother. This particular card directly instructs the card collector, as both child and influential member of a consuming household, to “Say, Mama. [I] want another glass of Hires’ Root Beer.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xx.

<sup>68</sup> Trade card for Hires’ Root Beer. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.33. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



**Figure 3.** Two trade cards for Hires' Root Beer. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.33. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

Adding to the clout of this second advertisement, a copy of it is shown on the table in the first card, next to the dog's paw. When seen as a card series, which this particular scrapbooker certainly did, the caption of the child happily enjoying their root beer works on two levels. It not only instructs the card collector to request the beverage from their mother, it also instructs the imaginary child on the first advertising card to do the same. Requesting more Hires', in fact, may be the only way for this child to overcome his grief felt over the dog's thievery of his root beer. Interestingly, the crying child's eye contact with the card collector and visible plea for help may have turned the Gilded Age card collector from *object lesson* pupil into avid instructor, since in this case it is the imaginary child that requires consumerist tutelage to ease his sadness. By reading this image and trying to help the crying child, the Gilded Age collector might have recognized the trade card on the table and understood, even if the imagined child did not, that this boy should tell his mother: "I want another glass of Hires' Root Beer."

Another page of this Gilded Age scrapbook shows two more children making adult-like, consumerist decisions, this time surrounding White House Coffee. The two cards of this series each feature a young man, in what appears to be a baker's hat and jacket. One of these boys is seen loudly proclaiming, with closed eyes and a wide smile: "That's Good, that WHITE HOUSE Coffee!"<sup>69</sup> The other young man on a second trade card is seen playfully winking to an imaginary figure to his right, possibly

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<sup>69</sup> Trade card for White House Coffee. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.33. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

the first child, as he says: “If Mother knew I had been sipping..... WHITE HOUSE Coffee!?!?”<sup>70</sup>

These images may have been directed toward adults and simply utilized images of children to vouch for the virtues of White House Coffee. However, child collectors would have read the cards uniquely as a result of their self-identification with the boys. As opposed to the children in the Hires’ Root Beer trade cards, who supported the solicitation of parents by thirsty children, these young men advocated the sneaky imbibing of coffee by their generational counterparts. Furthermore, the coy wink of the second child implies that the answer to *if Mother knew*, is that she may be upset with the boy or alternatively, she may allow the boy to continue drinking White House Coffee, even if only in small, sipped doses. The overall playful quality of these cards ultimately urged child card collectors to freely taste products, even if they seemed to be off-limits, in order to make informed choices as consumers, if not today, definitely in the future.

Another advertisement near the end of the scrapbook, this time for Hecker’s Self-Raising Buckwheat, shows a screaming child reaching out for pancakes (Figure 4). Similar to the Hires’ Root Beer crying child, this image suggests that the tantrum was used in advertising as a model for consumer lack. Through such representations, anger became a substitute for unsatisfied desire, and when associated with a child’s purity these responses became acceptable. In the Hecker’s image, the toddler-aged

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<sup>70</sup> Trade card for White House Coffee. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.33. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



**Figure 4.** Trade card for Hecker's Buckwheat. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.33. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

boy stands on a kitchen chair in order to reach for the pancakes, all the while knocking over place settings and nearly pulling the table cloth onto the floor. He has a grimace on his face and appears to be crying, the pancakes still just out of his reach. Meanwhile, the child wears a hat made from the Hecker's Buckwheat packaging, the contents of which presumably having been used to make the flapjacks.

Ultimately, this child is more than just a hungry boy taunted by a nearby breakfast; he has been assigned the role of consumer. Located at the bottom of the

image, instead of a stamp for a local grocer selling the product or even a clearer announcement of what exactly the card is trying to sell, a printed statement appears, purposefully appearing to be handwritten. It explains the boy's tantrum by stating: "He knows a good thing when he sees it!"<sup>71</sup> As if written by a caring parent or a close friend, the handwritten nature of this caption makes it appear more genuine and personal. Such an "embodied" image, in combination with that of the innocent child, gives a sense that this advertisement, and potentially Hecker's Buckwheat itself, is unadulterated. Furthermore, the sentence given to this boy by the artisanal caption implies that he is a consuming member of his household, even if he is too small to physically acquire the goods he knows he wants.

The children imagined on these many advertising trade cards taught young collectors, through both suggestion and self-identification, what it meant to be a consumer and how one could participate in this emergent culture. The suggestion was for the young card collector to try new products, determine which ones they liked, and then ask their mother to get those things for them. Furthermore, if these goods could not be acquired, having an emotional outburst was a perfectly acceptable, even normal method of getting something just out of reach, whether literally or figuratively.

What these five cards also collectively demonstrate is the fraternal nature of consumerism that children of the Gilded Age were constantly being invited to take

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<sup>71</sup> Trade card for Hecker's Buckwheat. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.33. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

part in. As Ellen Gruber Garvey explains about advertising trade cards more generally, “[they] were gifts from the world of commerce, even trophies for shopping. That the cards were mass-produced may have even made them more desirable: not only did their duplication offer new ways of playing, but also it gave the collector the pleasure of being like every other girl.”<sup>72</sup> Extrapolating Garvey’s argument, an unintentional consequence of placing children in scenes as consumers was the implication for young collectors that *being like every other girl* meant not only owning the same trade cards as one’s friends, it also meant drinking the same root beer, eating the same oatmeal, and bathing with the same soap. Hence, the socialization of young card collectors was a process that involved not only viewing advertising trade cards individually and learning their *object lessons*. Equally important to this youth culture was amassing collections of them through interactions with parents as purchasers as well as with peers as co-collectors, traders, scrapbook inspectors, and importantly, as fellow consumers.

### **Lessons on Product Claims**

As cards like the Arbuckle series demonstrate, the claims made by business executives about their products on advertisements were delivered to children simply as a result of the process of collecting the ephemera. During the Gilded Age, advertisements explained that Ariosa Coffee cost more because it was worth more, Alma Shoe Polish ultimately saved customers on shoe expenses since it preserved leather, and Ayer’s

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<sup>72</sup> Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor*, 49.

Cathartic Pills cured all ailments of the digestive organs.<sup>73</sup> As with advertisements of other eras, all manner of adjectives and sale words were used during the Gilded Age to describe a product's benefits to the consumer as well as its overall value compared to similar commodities. While most of these claims would seemingly be dismissed by young card collectors more interested in colorful images than the advertisements themselves, scrapbook evidence reveals that this was not always the case.

The scrapbook of K. J. Hughes, a child who included Rewards of Merit from Sunday School in their album, highlights this particular child's awareness of Gilded Age bombardments of product claims.<sup>74</sup> Included on a page of K. J.'s album is a cutout from a black and white periodical of an image titled "The New Primer" (Figure 5). The image depicts a coeducational classroom of young children learning the ABCs of product claims. For example, the instructor seems to be teaching through rote that "I" is for "is invaluable," "M" is for "millions use them," "P" is for "purchase at once," and "X" is for "X.L.N.T."<sup>75</sup> While some of the students appear

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<sup>73</sup> *Trade card for Arbuckles' Ariosa Coffee*, ca. 1890. Col. 669 70x130.24.46a. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera; *Trade card for Alma Polish*. Col. 669 71x247.9.5a. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera; *Trade card for Ayer's Pills*. Col. 669 71x247.8.7b. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

<sup>74</sup> During the Gilded Age, children often received Rewards of Merit from their school teachers to congratulate them for good attendance, hard work, and success. Rewards of Merit came in many sizes and designs but were also similar to the trade cards housed next to them in scrapbooks in that they often included colorful images produced on card-stock. These cards had space for instructors to handwrite their student's name, their own name, and often the date as well. Hence, Rewards of Merit place the scrapbooking process in a particular time when dated and suggest a frequent re-visiting of the album with family since the Reward of Merit scrapbook doubles as a vehicle of academic pride.

<sup>75</sup> Advertisement "The New Primer." Hughes, K. J. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1876-1881. Fol. 314. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



**Figure 5.** Advertisement “The New Primer.” Hughes, K. J. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1876-1881. Fol. 314. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

distracted, many are standing at the chalkboard concentrating on and possibly discussing the lesson. One student is even shown raising their hand to either ask or answer a question of the tutor, evidence of their great interest in the topic or a desire to please the teacher.

K. J.’s inclusion of the caption on the scrapbook page for this advertisement selling August Flower and Boschees German Syrup is telling. Without the caption, one could potentially argue that K. J. simply found the scene pleasing. Instead, by labeling the image “The New Primer,” K. J. acknowledged the actual lessons of consumerism taught to children through the constant advertising of product claims.

Furthermore, the choice to include the social commentary inherent in the title “The New Primer” implies that K. J. and scores of other Americans likely recognized the truth behind the satire.

The idea that American children were being taught commercial rhetorics of persuasion during the Gilded Age was apparently relevant social commentary then, and even among children themselves. Jacobson tackles the trope of advertised goods invading the classroom which was still omnipresent in turn of the century advertisements. She concludes that such images “suggested [to contemporaries] that children’s engagement with commerce could serve wholesome, even edifying ends, free from any taint of worldly corruption.”<sup>76</sup> However, for those bombarded by ads during the Gilded Age, mainly children collecting trade cards, “the new primer” must have seemed a replacement for an older textbook. Even if the inclusion of the caption is evaluated without any irony, the ambiguous conclusion of the image reveals that although such lessons *could* serve wholesome ends, it was not inevitable that they did.

K. J.’s scrapbook is not the only one of the Gilded Age that shows such evidence either. Morgan A. McLean’s scrapbook (further discussed in Chapter Four) has pasted within its pages of advertising trade cards a different black and white image of similar purpose to K. J.’s. In this image, children are both instructor and student of a lesson on Solar Tip Shoes. According to this advertisement, these leather shoes had the potential to last more than four months, apparently a long time

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<sup>76</sup> Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 23.

for Gilded Age footwear. The young man who is leading the Solar Tip Shoes lesson holds a stick similar to the one held by the teacher in K. J.'s image as he points to the company's trademark with his finger. Many young students look on in attentive curiosity, their necks craning to get a good look at this supposed symbol of quality. One of these children is a young lady who appears to be a happy pupil and has written "Solar Tip Shoes" on her personal blackboard. Meanwhile, other youngsters are seen on the floor inspecting the shoes themselves, presumably as *object lessons* able to affirm the product's claims.

However, more than just the product's claims, this advertisement encouraged its owner to learn how to spot Solar Tip Shoes amid any competition and to associate the trademark with the product name. By combining lessons on quality, name recognition, and visual identifiers, this advertisement preached the tenants of active participation in consumerist America to any who beheld it. And by further associating such lessons with children, these images in Morgan and K. J.'s albums naturalized the child consumer, both as an idea to consider and as an entity in training. Moreover, the creation of the child consumer through such images would have been a spontaneously occurring process since as Stuart Hall has pithily concluded:

[Children] learn the system and conventions of representation, the codes of their language and culture, which equip them with cultural 'know-how' enabling them to function as culturally competent subjects... They unconsciously internalize the codes which allow them to express certain concepts and ideas through their systems of representation – writing, speech,

gesture, visualization, and so on – and to interpret ideas which are communicated to them using the same systems.<sup>77</sup>

Hence, it is not necessary for advertisers to have targeted children or for children to have been willing participants. Exposure to images like those housed in Morgan and K.J.'s scrapbooks would have compelled consumer indoctrination among Gilded Age youths.

### **Advertising Trade Card Series**

Young advertising trade card collectors often strived to acquire complete card series. As with the accumulation of actual goods, the difficulty inherent in successfully obtaining full sets of card series likely created status for some collectors relative to their peers. Among the extremely popular card series that are found in many Gilded Age scrapbooks (although never as complete sets) are those that were then contained within Arm & Hammer packaging. While Arm & Hammer is synonymous with baking soda today, during the Gilded Age it may have been more associated with the tiny trade card series, commonly known as “insert cards,” located inside the boxes of the company’s products.<sup>78</sup> Arm & Hammer made different series of species of animals, flowers, and birds in sets of various sizes to be collected, traded, and preserved. This promotion was so successful, in fact, that Arm & Hammer continued to include these ephemera in boxes of their products for several decades.

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<sup>77</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997), 22.

<sup>78</sup> Thelma Seeds Mendsen. *Typed Notecard*. Col. 669 70x130.26.11a. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

As the insert cards became tantamount to Arm & Hammer itself, a Gilded Age child would have likely asked their parents to purchase the products as a way of expanding their card series collections.

In Morgan A. McLean's scrapbook we find full sets of card series for Clark's O.N.T. Spool Cotton, Henry Stiles Fine Boots and Shoes, and Higgins' German Laundry Soap, as well as partial sets distributed by many other shops and manufacturers. Morgan's complete set of a Higgins' German Laundry Soap series is an impressive display of his navigation of the consumer market from a relatively powerless position (Figure 6). The full set of seven cards is proudly displayed, in exact order, on a two-page spread towards the end of Morgan's scrapbook. Morgan may have received help from his friends in trades allowing for the completion of his series, but Morgan's main accomplice would have been someone who purchased Higgins' Soap during the period of time when the company distributed this particular card series.

It is unimaginable that such sequential advertising trade cards, whether in full or partial sets, were amassed without any pressure from children on their parents to make certain purchases. On the contrary, I would argue that influence over the use of family dollars is confirmed vis-à-vis trade card series found in the scrapbooks of Gilded Age youths. The accumulation of full sets would have likely required multiple purchases, either of a single product or from one store, potentially during a short period of time relative to the product's usage. Furthermore, the array of advertising trade card series found in Gilded Age scrapbooks suggests the collections to be more



**Figure 6.** Double-page spread of Higgins' German Laundry Soap trade cards. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1870. Fol. 290. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

than just discarded scraps handed down by parents. Instead, these series can be seen as evidence of the persuasive power many of these children ultimately held over their parents' purchases.

Morgan's ultimate success in securing all seven Higgins' Soap cards is testimony to his successful navigation of his relationships with friends and family and places the McLeans in a position of relative financial security. Gilded Age scrapbooks that do not include full card series probably suggest the collector to be of a certain class more than they suggest that the children who owned them did not attempt to influence their parents' purchases. In her research on the child consumer, historian Lisa Jacobson uncovered evidence that turn of the century commentators

“fretted over their children’s nasty habit of begging for money.”<sup>79</sup> As previously discussed, young people were indeed driven to throw tantrums as expressions of consumerist desire. The images of children outraged by an absence of a certain good worked to infantilize the consumer by making the infant a model of consumption and child-like behavior appropriate when communicating a want for commodities. It is not difficult to imagine the practice of begging for money to have also occurred during the Gilded Age as a result of trade card collecting among young people, all of whom likely realized that specific purchases of brand-named goods increased the number of series they owned and consequently, their status among peers.

### **Bribes**

Perhaps recognizing children’s power of their parents’ purchases, Gilded Age advertisers also offered children inducements beyond the colorful trade cards themselves. Young people were sometimes encouraged by advertisers to influence their family’s purchasing power through a bartering system that occurred directly between child and corporation. Although advertising trade cards often sufficed for companies like Arm & Hammer and Higgins’ Soap, bribes such as paper dolls were occasionally used by advertisers to entice children into asking their parents to make certain purchases.

One such gimmick is visible on a trade card produced by D. Goff & Sons. This loose trade card was obviously once owned by a child, as juvenile handwriting

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<sup>79</sup> Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 56-7.

has embellished the card with a circular drawing and the letter “R.” On the front of the card is a printed image of an owl that is more ornate than the images on most advertising trade cards. The detailed scene is of an owl on a branch under a nighttime sky. Also, the border surrounding the main image is particularly intricate. Meanwhile, the back of the trade card begins with the printed statement: “The other side will adorn your room,” as the advertiser clearly explains the reason for such a detailed drawing being found on the reverse. The card then goes on to say:

In return for this pretty little card, will you, the next time you want a piece of braid to bind your dress, ask for Goff’s Braid? See that the figure ‘61’ is on every spool, and also the name ‘Goff,’ and you will get our widest and best goods. The figure 61 means that the braid contains 61 threads. Other braids have 53 threads. Very respectfully, D. Goff & Sons. *November, 1878.*<sup>80</sup>

While this thoughtful letter printed on the back of a Gilded Age advertising trade card was no guarantee of a Goff’s Braid purchase, it certainly encouraged it. At the very least, it instructed the young lady who owned the card to never settle for generic braids, whose quality were of a lower standard than Goff’s and whose sellers were not kind enough to provide artistic renderings for children’s rooms. If the advertisement ultimately worked, the young owner of this trade card would have ideally felt compelled to make consumerist decisions when in need of braids.

In the years following, the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company became the most prominent retailer to participate in another quite popular promotion, this time involving paper dolls. The Kickapoo Company sold patent medicines and cure-alls,

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<sup>80</sup> *Trade card for D. Goff & Sons.* Col. 669 71x247.9.33b. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

supposedly the concoctions of American Indian medicine men.<sup>81</sup> The company also solicited young ladies to become Kickapoo consumers (or influence their parents to be) in order to receive paper dolls. However, unlike the Goff's Braid gift, these paper dolls were only attainable *after* a Kickapoo purchase had been made.

A colorful advertisement for the paper dolls, and ultimately for Kickapoo's products themselves, is preserved in a Gilded Age scrapbook at Winterthur. A paper doll with a separate paper dress and paper hat is included as part of the advertisement which reads: "We will send the entire set of 9 Dolls, all dressed, upon receipt of 3 2-cent stamps and one wrapper from either the Kickapoo Indian Oil, Worm Killer, Kickapoo Indian Pills, or the Kickapoo Indian Salve."<sup>82</sup> While it is possible that a parent would have seen this advertisement and purchased the product for the sake of gifting the paper dolls, a more likely scenario would have involved young ladies requesting Kickapoo wrappers and stamps from their families. Since the advertisement included a paper doll within it, Kickapoo advertisers were clearly targeting young people with influence over their parents' purchasing power.

Preserved collections of Gilded Age Kickapoo paper dolls located in archives today indicate that more than a few children held sway over their parents' purchases. Of course, the use of children's novelty items as rewards for purchase was persistent

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<sup>81</sup> See Kevin C. Armitage, "Commercial Indians: Authenticity, Nature, and Industrial Capitalism in Advertising at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Michigan Historical Review* 29 (2003): 70-95 for a history of Kickapoo Company advertising.

<sup>82</sup> Advertisement "Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company's Paper Dolls." Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*. Col. 669 70x1.10. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

in advertising well beyond the Gilded Age. However, Gilded Age examples are unique, and not only because they shed light on the earliest forms of such gimmicks. At a time when children had no personal income or allowance, the Goff's Braid and Kickapoo Medicine prizes were inducements for young people to earnestly find ways to spend their parents' money, even if indirectly.

### **A Consuming Nation**

Advertising trade cards, through their use of images of child consumers, their instruction to young people in product claims, their novelty as parts of series, and their use as devices mediating gift exchange between child and corporation, worked to train America's future income earners to consume. Young Gilded Age card collectors were taught to know the value of a product, to recognize it in the store, and to request it from parents or shopkeepers. They also became spenders of their families' money at young ages, even if their parents ultimately handled the monetary exchange with a retailer. Through these processes, Gilded Age youths came to discern how to function in a consumer culture.

While not a perfect indication of the consuming power of Gilded Age youths, the mere success of many of the businesses that seem to have targeted children as agents of purchasing power suggests that these children were indeed influential and that their indoctrination worked. Products like Arbuckle's Ariosa Coffee, Hires' Root Beer, Clark's O.N.T Spool Cotton, and Arm & Hammer Soda all still exist in some form and are available for purchase to this very day. Some of these companies have

since been purchased or have merged with newer companies, but all have chosen to retain a form of their original product name that was inculcated in young minds over a century ago.

As early as the turn of the twentieth century, these lessons were no longer happy accidents for advertisers; they became their mantras. Newly-inexpensive magazines geared toward men, women, or children proliferated in the U.S. after 1890 and advertising within these pages was standard. Within no time, the power children had had over their parents' purchases since the introduction of advertising trade cards became a recognizable phenomenon that magazine advertisers took full advantage of. In turn, those advertisers who didn't join the bandwagon in petitioning children became targets of the magazines themselves, who touted the virtues of such ads. One 1916 advertisement found in *Printers' Ink* and commissioned by the young men's magazine *St. Nicholas* told manufacturers to take out ad space in their periodical for many reasons, including such "facts" as:

For 15 years St. Nicholas has been educating its readers to 'buy by name.' It has now become their fixed habit... Youngsters have a way of their own of getting what they set their hearts on... Nine out of every ten St. Nicholas readers do much of the buying of your kind of goods for their parents – and they *study* St. Nicholas advertisements until they *know*... Young folks are impressionable and progressive. They respond readily and enthusiastically to an appeal about 'Something good to eat – *try* it!'... St. Nicholas gives you a friendly introduction to young folks at the age (9 to 17) when they are forming life-long *habits* [emphasis in original].<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> "How Does This Service Fit Your Needs?," *Printers' Ink* 94 (January 20, 1916): 72 reproduced in Jacobson, ed., *Children and Consumer Culture*, 86.

The perhaps unplanned consumerist indoctrination of Gilded Age youths had worked, and future advertisers reaped the benefits of the lessons of the past.

As for Gilded Age children themselves, they not only participated in a youth culture that centered on concepts of economic value, choice, exchange, and ownership, they also became catalysts as adults for a consumer nation that saw spending power as a mark of freedom. As historian Eric Foner explained about the Progressive Era, a time when some Gilded Age scrapbook-makers had entered the workforce as adults,

exclusion from the world of mass consumption (and unequal access to department stores, restaurants, and other sites where consumption occurred) would come to seem almost as great a denial of the entitlements of citizenship as exclusion from voting once had been. Workers' increasing 'wants' inspired struggles for a 'living wage,' while the desire for consumer goods led many workers to join unions... The argument that monopolistic corporations artificially raised prices at the expense of consumers would become a weapon against the trusts.<sup>84</sup>

The notion that autonomy was experienced vis-à-vis consumer power was not new to the Progressive Era, however. These same historical actors that Foner refers to, those who advocated for Progressive legislation after the turn of the century, had been participating in a culture entrenched with consumerism since they were young people amassing advertising trade card collections in Gilded Age scrapbooks. The same ideals that were hegemonic to their youth culture ultimately spilled over into adulthood and helped the vision of America as a consumer nation take root.

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<sup>84</sup> Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 148.

## Chapter Four

### Branding Race Consciousness

As Gilded Age youngsters learned the lessons of consumerism through their interactions with advertising trade cards and the images located on them, so too did they become acquainted with the language of race. In ways analogous to the *object lessons* discussed in Chapters Two and Three, chromolithographed images, whether loose or confined to a collector's scrapbook, passed on knowledge of racial hierarchies to young collectors through the act of seeing repetitious images and tropes. Through this process, young people were able to learn the language of race by viewing African American bodies on chromolithographed cards. Suren Lalvani gives weight to the absorption of lessons on people and power through images when (as discussed in Chapter Two) he states that "vision is irrevocably tied to domains of knowledge, arrangements in social space, lines of force and visibility, and a particular arrangement of bodies."<sup>85</sup>

For those young people unable to learn the dominant culture's social hierarchies through physical interactions, advertising trade cards and their *object lessons* became alternative educators. What is of particular interest is not that racism simply existed in the Gilded Age. Indeed, minstrel traditions worked to create a vocabulary of race well before the Civil War was fought. But while adults were certainly well-versed in racial mores during the Gilded Age, children subsequently learned the

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<sup>85</sup> Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies*, 1.

language of white supremacy during their playtime, as they were taught the visual vocabulary of race by the chromolithographed images on their advertising trade cards. Through repeated exposure to advertisements degrading African Americans, these young people became privy to white adult ideas of race that substituted for actual knowledge otherwise learned through interpersonal relationships.

The majority of participants in the collection of advertising trade cards were middle-class, white, northerners, most of whom had little to no contact with African Americans in their everyday lives. According to U.S. census data, during the Gilded Age the African American population of the entire northeast region never exceeded 1.8 percent of the region's total population. Also, the Northeast was home to only 3.5 percent of all black Americans in 1880.<sup>86</sup>

Empathy can be a potent force in combatting racism. This is supported by Mary Niall Mitchell's work on the powerful influence of photography on northerners who came to support Union efforts during the Civil War. Mitchell argues that the contact between people that empathy often requires can be equally successful when it comes in the form of an image. When northerners viewed images of child slaves rescued in Louisiana who appeared to be white, the repugnant truths of chattel slavery became more real to white families. Some of these northerners, so distanced from the peculiar institution physically and ideologically, began to consider themselves and their children fit for service as slaves through these images. Since

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<sup>86</sup> "Table 2. Northeast Region - Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990," Last accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab02.pdf> and "Table A-17. Race for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States: 1880," Last accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tabA-17.pdf>.

skin color appeared to be less of a distinction between slave and slave owner than had previously been thought, many who viewed these photographs readily joined the abolitionist bandwagon.<sup>87</sup>

Advertising trade cards likely worked against images that have instilled empathy across boundaries like the ones written about by Mitchell of freed slave children. Instead, advertising trade cards showed derogatory images of blackness and black people that created ideological and social distance between races of people already physically separated. The resultant “othering” of African Americans learned through the images found on advertisements also had the effect of making northeastern whiteness appear superior to all who viewed the cards, regardless of race. The available scrapbooks left behind by Gilded Age children reveal that advertising trade cards assisted in racially indoctrinating collecting youths. Furthermore, the choices made by scrapbookers in their arrangement of cards with African American images on them sometimes provide direct evidence of racial inculcation.

Of course, the culture of racism in America toward African Americans has been well-studied by historians and social scientists alike. But as sites of autobiography, Gilded Age scrapbooks offer unique insight into the lives of young people at a time of their cultural development. As such, the use of individuals and their albums as case studies can offer compelling evidence of the formation of racial

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<sup>87</sup> Mary Niall Mitchell, “Rosebloom and Pure White, Or So It Seemed,” *American Quarterly* 54 (2002): 369-394. Mitchell’s work also argues that these images simultaneously worked to heighten northern white anxieties over “passing” and the place for freedpeople following Emancipation.

ideologies among Gilded Age youths. While a more quantitative approach could be taken in such analysis, conclusive arguments can be elusive when dealing with simply *how many* late-nineteenth century youngsters owned *how many* derogatory images of black people and black culture. Instead, I hope to reveal a deeper understanding of the culture of racism among Gilded Age white children by studying how individual ownership and playtime affected specific youngsters. In an attempt to address this, the scrapbooks of Helen C. Snyder, Morgan A. McLean, and the Grant family have been chosen as case studies, not because they stand out as different from the lot, but because they are representative of the majority. As archetypal Gilded Age scrapbooks, these three albums can inform us of specific ways that children's playtime, namely the collection of advertising trade cards, informed this generation of youth in both racial order and the language of race.

### **Helen C. Snyder**

Helen C. Snyder's scrapbook is a beautiful, gilded hardcover album with tissue paper carefully placed between its now-browning pages, weakly attempting to preserve the integrity of the album as well as the images adorning its pages (Appendix A). We know very little about Helen C. Snyder but her March 14, 1867 birthdate places her at an age appropriate for this type of scrapbooking in 1880 (the earliest date found within the aged pages) as well as makes her less than one year older than Du Bois, who traded the cards himself as a child. Through her scrapbook, we can learn much about Helen as well as other middle-class, white, northeastern children simply by

analyzing the scraps she included in her book and the way she organized them on the pages of her album.

The actual merchants and products advertised on the trade cards pasted in Helen's book are many. However, it does appear that Helen attempted to amass advertising trade card series, as each individual page of her book holds multiple cards advertising a single product or shop. Also plentiful are the cities where the advertised shops or product headquarters are located, but they all place Helen in the Northeast, possibly in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Other cities listed on Helen's cards include New York and Boston, but since many manufacturers made their homes in these early American metropolises, it seems likely that Helen's actual residence was in the smaller city of Scranton. Nonetheless, many of the cards advertising individual store fronts are also for businesses in New York City, indicating that Helen or someone close to her spent considerable time there, either as a resident or tourist.

Helen arranged the colorful images of her scrapbook in a grid style, most often with four trade cards on a page. Sometimes the advertising cards were positioned straight up and down on the page while at other times they were turned in towards one another on a slight angle. Generally, Helen placed one smaller image in the center of the four cards. This image was most often a colorful flower arrangement on embossed paper, another type of ephemera available for purchase at the time at a rate of twelve for twenty-five cents according to one advertisement for

them.<sup>88</sup> Helen's scrapbook is approximately ninety-six pages in total and includes advertising trade cards on nearly every page.<sup>89</sup> Those pages that do not have advertising cards instead have smaller, un-stamped visiting cards, as well as the embossed flowers included elsewhere.

Of the ninety-six pages in Helen's scrapbook, only two contain images of African Americans, a much lower ratio than most. All of these images are on advertising trade cards. The first of the two pages containing chromolithographed images of African Americans has four cards pasted to it, all peddling *Trifet's Monthly* (apparently a periodical out of Boston) and presenting images in the common theme of children dressed like adults and in adult situations. One of these advertising trade cards shows a young, African American boy in minstrel clothes, namely a top hat and morning coat, being punted through the air by a young, white circus clown who is skipping rope. The child-clown offender is all the while doe-eyed with a guiltless smile. The image of the minstrel portrays him from behind, making his character secondary to that of the clown and not well-delineated. It is also possible that the minstrel is actually in blackface, as a tin of blacking polish is shown flying through the air along with the young man and what appears to be a banjo. Whether the blacking

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<sup>88</sup> "My heart for thine" Embossed Hands Advertisement. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*. Col. 669 70x1.38. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

<sup>89</sup> The number of pages of the scrapbooks discussed here are all approximate. Many of the scrapbooks at Winterthur Library have their pages already numbered. However, some of these counts do not include the empty pages of the albums. In the case of scrapbooks that do not already have their pages numbered, the pages were counted manually by the author.

was for the boy's face or for his shoes (or to polish someone else's for that matter) is unknown.

As racial commentary the image is very nearly the visual manifestation of what Robin Bernstein has called "the divergent paths of racial innocence." Bernstein argues that pain was a distinction employed in America to separate black from white children in the middle of the nineteenth century. Bernstein states: "The white, tender, vulnerable angel-child co-emerged with (and depended on) the 'pickaninny,' who was defined by three properties: juvenile status, dark skin, and, crucially, the state of being comically impervious to pain."<sup>90</sup> While this particular young man may not fit neatly into other understandings of the pickaninny stereotype, Bernstein's interpretation has its merits. As she shows in *Racial Innocence*, portrayals of young black children *being comically impervious to pain* abound in nineteenth century material culture.

We cannot know if Helen found the story told in the image of the minstrel and the clown to be humorous, but comedy was undoubtedly the artist's intention. In fact, the physical humor of the card comes directly from the supposed innocence of the white child, who in all appearances did not even realize that he assaulted the African American boy. Perhaps the clown did not notice the minstrel as he skipped along, jump rope in tow, kicking anyone (any pickaninny?) who got in his way. Read as an *object lesson*, the white clown retains his innocence because the pickaninny is insensate and, as such, sympathy for him is not required on the part of the reader.

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<sup>90</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 19-20.

On the second page of Helen's album displaying images of African Americans we find perhaps the most blatant expression of racial sentiment found in a Gilded Age scrapbook. On this page Helen chose to affix four advertising trade cards with images of African Americans on them. Importantly, instead of the usual embossed flower bouquet in the center of her page, Helen chose to affix an image of a monkey labeled "Gorilla" (Figure 7). Clearly, Helen's use of the image of a monkey on this page more than suggests that she self-identified as white and likely viewed African Americans as a lesser category of human. Augmenting the racism apparent in Helen's choices for creating the page, the cards surrounding the image of the gorilla contain "Blackville" comics on them; popular Reconstruction-critical cartoons that employed only black characters in supposedly amusing struggles to lead successful lives.

"Blackville" illustrations were the work of Sol Eytinge, Jr. and were originally drawn for the publication *Harper's Weekly*. As was par for images of African Americans during this era, the caption on the one advertising card of Helen's page that quotes a "Blackville" character is written in broken English. The African American man in the comic is huddled under a tattered umbrella with three others in an attempt to cool off from the intense heat as he shouts to a boy nearby: "Hi! Abe. Come under de brellar! Does yer want to sunstruck yerself? De fremoniter's gone up more'n a foot!"<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Trade cards for Calrence Brooks & Co.'s coach varnishes. Waldron, Maxine Maxson. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 121 91x126.11. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



**Figure 7.** Page with four trade cards for Clarence Brooks & Co.'s coach varnishes. Waldron, Maxine Maxson. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 121 91x126.11. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

In spite of the common usage of supposed black dialect in the popular press and advertising trade cards like these, African Americans themselves found no semblance between such captions and the language they spoke. As Charles W. Chesnutt, the African American writer and intellectual explained in 1916:

The fact is, of course, that there is no such thing as a Negro dialect; that what we call by that name is the attempt to express, with such a degree of phonetic correctness as to suggest the sound, English pronounced as an ignorant old southern Negro would be supposed to speak it, and at the same time to preserve a sufficient approximation to the correct spelling to make it easy reading.<sup>92</sup>

Hence, constant exposure to imagined black vernacular among collecting children like Helen would have worked to instill a belief in inherent African American ignorance. Without any contradiction, whether in the form of images or actual contact with black people, Helen and other Gilded Age children would have been feebly able to imagine black people any other way. The “Blackville” comics, the use of black dialect, and African Americans themselves ultimately had nothing to do with the Clarence Brooks & Co. Fine Coach Varnishes being advertised but were instead carefully selected by advertisers as eye-catching jokes that would seem unremarkable to Gilded Age adults well-versed in the “common sense” of racial assumptions. But the advertisements simultaneously worked to teach young people like Helen a harmful racial pedagogy about a group of people that such youngsters may only have been exposed to in the form of images like these.

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<sup>92</sup> Charles W. Chesnutt quoted in Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1954), 241.

These four trade cards in Helen's scrapbook advertising varnish for staining one's stage coach through "Blackville" comics exemplify Joshua Brown's historical interpretation of "Blackville" as having "offered readers across the county a continuous supply of buffoonlike portrayals of freedpeople."<sup>93</sup> This characterization was apparently not lost on Helen, whose maybe thirteen years of life had fully prepared her to understand America's racial hierarchy, at least in part through her card collection. That racial knowledge was then applied during her playtime when she chose the same page for images of African Americans and a gorilla, both similarly "buffoonlike" in Helen's estimation. On no other page of Helen's album was an animal image employed in such a way.

Helen's disconcerting association was likely evoked when she designed a later page of her scrapbook, one adorned with advertising trade cards depicting a monkey in suit and top hat (Figure 8). Through Helen's perspective, the images on the cards instantly recall the minstrel tradition and the Zip Coon stereotype, described by Kenneth W. Goings in his work on black collectables as the African American man of the North who was "a 'citified,' 'dandified' slave, who wore a fashionable (but worn) morning coat and top hat (castoffs from his master, no doubt)."<sup>94</sup> It cannot be determined what exactly was being advertised with these cards since the front has no indication and the back is held tight to the page. However, it is evident that the cards

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<sup>93</sup> Foner and Brown, *Forever Free*, 157.

<sup>94</sup> Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 43.

were part of a series, since the individual cards' captions are numbered. The captions on the four cards read:

1. The Promenade – Morning.
2. The morning drink
3. Will you dance with me?
4. On his way home – Night.<sup>95</sup>



**Figure 8.** Page with four trade cards by Jno. Haddock, Philadelphia. Waldron, Maxine Maxson. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 121 91x126.11. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

<sup>95</sup> Page with four trade cards by Jno. Haddock, Philadelphia. Waldron, Maxine Maxson. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 121 91x126.11. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

It becomes obvious through the story told by this series that the monkey-in-man's-clothes who seemed perfectly happy throughout the day, was rejected by whomever he asked to dance. As a result, he hangs his head in disappointment on the slow and lonely walk home. As an *object lesson*, Helen likely reasoned that this result was inevitable, for who would want to dance with a talking monkey?

Unfortunately, Helen's particular brand of racism against African Americans, likely learned through her coach varnish advertisements as she became visually literate, has even greater implications for this card series and its ideological power. Arguably, Helen saw a dandified African American man instead of a monkey and transposed her racial antipathies onto the main character imagined in this series.

As historian Eric Lott has skillfully argued, during the nineteenth century the black dandy's transcendence of supposedly-strict boundaries of class relative to race heightened anxieties in the Northeast over interracial relationships. In fact, the 1834 anti-abolitionist riots in New York were partially fueled by a rumor "that charged black dandies with the wooing of white women."<sup>96</sup> Perhaps the dandified monkey asked a white woman to dance in the third card of this advertising series. Fortunately for those who subscribed to white supremacy, the woman refused the dandy's request.

Zip Coon, the black dandy in his ubiquitous blue morning coat, was a popular character of blackface minstrelsy who embodied what Stephanie Dunson calls "assurance" for white, middle-class Americans of their status through his undue

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<sup>96</sup> Eric Lott, "'The Seeming Counterfeit': Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy," *American Quarterly* 43 (June 1991): 242-7.

attention to his appearance juxtaposed by his blackness. Dunson explains that Zip Coon

delighted and amused white audiences with his absurd attempts to pass himself off as a refined gentleman. For white audiences saddled with their own social insecurities, Zip Coon offered a figure they could laugh at and look down upon, whose failures at refinement out-measured their own shortcomings, whose station on the lowest rung of the social ladder assured their own tenuous hold on propriety.<sup>97</sup>

Although blackface minstrelsy reached its height of popularity earlier in the century, remnants were prevalent during the Gilded Age in the form of arts like music and vaudeville as well as in popular memory itself. While the Zip Coon trope would have certainly not been new to Helen and others like her who collected this particular card series, the easily recognizable character visible on advertisements like these would have worked to reinforce the racial lessons Lott and Dunson highlight. In particular, the assumption that even African Americans of the highest standing are lower than the lowest whites and that in order to protect white supremacy any mixing of the races should be abhorred.

Ultimately, Helen's advertising trade card collection taught, or at the bare minimum reinforced, ideas about black people and black culture: that young black children felt no pain; that Reconstruction had been a terrible mistake; that African Americans were inherently ignorant, leading them to speak incoherently; that northern blacks were foolish in their attempts to fit in; and that white women should

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<sup>97</sup> Stephanie Dunson, "Black Misrepresentation in Nineteenth-Century Sheet Music Illustration," in *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 48.

beware of black dandies. Helen's use of the gorilla image on her scrapbook page implies that she truly believed some of these distortions of blackness to be reality. And at the very least, such advertisements taught Gilded Age children the racial codes of the minstrel tradition that they may have otherwise been oblivious to.

### **Morgan A. McLean**

A scrapbook of similar size also found at Winterthur Library is one that has seen more wear and tear than Helen's; the pages are browned, brittle, and broken and some have been reinforced with cloth tape at the inner binding. The visible amount of deterioration existing throughout this scrapbook gives the impression that it has been viewed frequently. Stamped autographs inside the album name our scrapbooker as "Morgan A. McLean." As with Helen's scrapbook, most of the images within Morgan's album are advertising trade cards and are stamped or printed with various business and city names. Morgan's cards most often come from Albion, Rochester, or Buffalo, New York. It seems likely that Morgan grew up in the smaller town of Albion while many of the specific products advertised came from manufacturers in the bigger cities of Rochester and Buffalo.

There is some evidence to suggest that it was a boy who chose many of the scraps pasted inside the album, including a proliferation of images of animals. Interestingly, a Google search for "Morgan A Mclean Albion NY" reveals a man by that name who lived in Albion and was born in September of 1866, just six months

before Helen and seventeen months before Du Bois.<sup>98</sup> The possibility also exists that this scrapbook was shared between siblings or friends, which would also help to explain the worn-through condition of the pages. Nonetheless, of the eighty-three Gilded Age scrapbooks I thumbed through at Winterthur Library, Morgan's album, whether created jointly or as a collaboration, had more pages that include images of African Americans than any other. Of the eighty-nine pages of Morgan's album, twenty include images of African Americans, usually on advertising trade cards.

Because images of African Americans are so common in Morgan's scrapbook, there is only an opportunity to discuss a few of the pages here. However, there are some choices that Morgan habitually made in his use of African American images, as well as some general themes about the cards themselves, that are vital in complicating our understanding of the influence advertising trade cards ultimately had. First, Morgan never segregated his images of African Americans from those of other races of people except in the event of a card series. Second, unlike in Helen's scrapbook, Morgan in a few instances cut the images of African Americans out of the advertising trade cards and did not include the exterior of the scrap. In doing so, Morgan left no indication of whatever possibly offensive language or auxiliary images were included in the original rendering. Finally, the advertisements in Morgan's scrapbook utilizing African American images run the gambit. From national-brand soap to local shoe stores and druggists, there is no theme to the distributors of these cards; they come from all manner of brands, products, stores, and locales.

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<sup>98</sup> "Morgan A. Mclean," Hart Family History, accessed January 18, 2013, <http://hartfamilyhistory.com/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=I2653&tree=tree1>.

These characteristics give us a glimpse into Morgan's life and tell us about both him and the advertising industry itself. Mainly, Morgan's inclusion of African American images amongst the other illustrations throughout his scrapbook seems to suggest that Morgan did not harbor a feeling of African Americans as "others" that should be made separate from white Americans. This rings particularly true since many other scrapbookers of the Gilded Age did not allow the two races to occupy the same space or pages of their albums. Furthermore, Morgan's detachment of some illustrations of African Americans from their larger advertisements suggests that he did not feel either the need or the desire to include the likely degrading storyline and captions visible in the larger image.

Interestingly, the ubiquity of African American chromolithography available to young Morgan in Albion, New York is astonishing for a tiny town whose African American population would have been negligible in the 1880s.<sup>99</sup> Clearly, advertisers and chromolithographers often chose to include African American images in their designs even when the product, store, or city had no association with African American people. What this also suggests is that those collectors like Helen, whose Gilded Age scrapbooks did not include many (or any) images of African Americans, made a deliberate choice not to include these prolific ephemera. This exclusion, which was uncommon in scrapbooks of advertising trade cards but did occur, was a choice likely driven by distaste, either for African Americans themselves or for the

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<sup>99</sup> U.S. Census data for 1880 shows 497 African American residents in Rochester, NY (or 0.6 percent of the city's population of almost 90,000). Albion was a much smaller town and is less than fifty miles west of Rochester. See "Table 33. New York - Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990," Last accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/NYtab.pdf>.

insidious stereotypes portrayed on the cards. Unfortunately, as with Morgan's cut-outs of African American images from their larger cards, the motivations behind these exclusions are elusive.

The three pages of Morgan's scrapbook discussed here were chosen because they open the door to other discussions on racial attitudes of the period and are relevant to stereotypes still pervasive over a full century after chromolithography's demise. However, these three pages are certainly not the only examples from Morgan's scrapbook worthy of discussions on racial indoctrination. Certainly, when the images on them are examined independently, these three pages, as well as others, leave the case for Morgan's egalitarian attitude thin. And at the very least, they express what the dominant culture likely felt about African Americans following the end of Reconstruction.

On the page opposite of one that includes several advertisements for Clark's O.N.T. Spool Cotton (thread) interspersed with once-blank cards stamped "Morgan A. McLean," we find four advertising trade cards for Den-Sha-Sho (Figure 9). Den-Sha-Sho is apparently a brand of toothpaste or tooth whitener manufactured in Rochester, NY. These four cards advertising the product participate in what has been dubbed "the cult of vernacular," an apparent obsession with ethnic, racial, and regional dialects that consumed American culture following the Civil War.<sup>100</sup> While the four representations in the card series and the misuse of vulgar dialects may be

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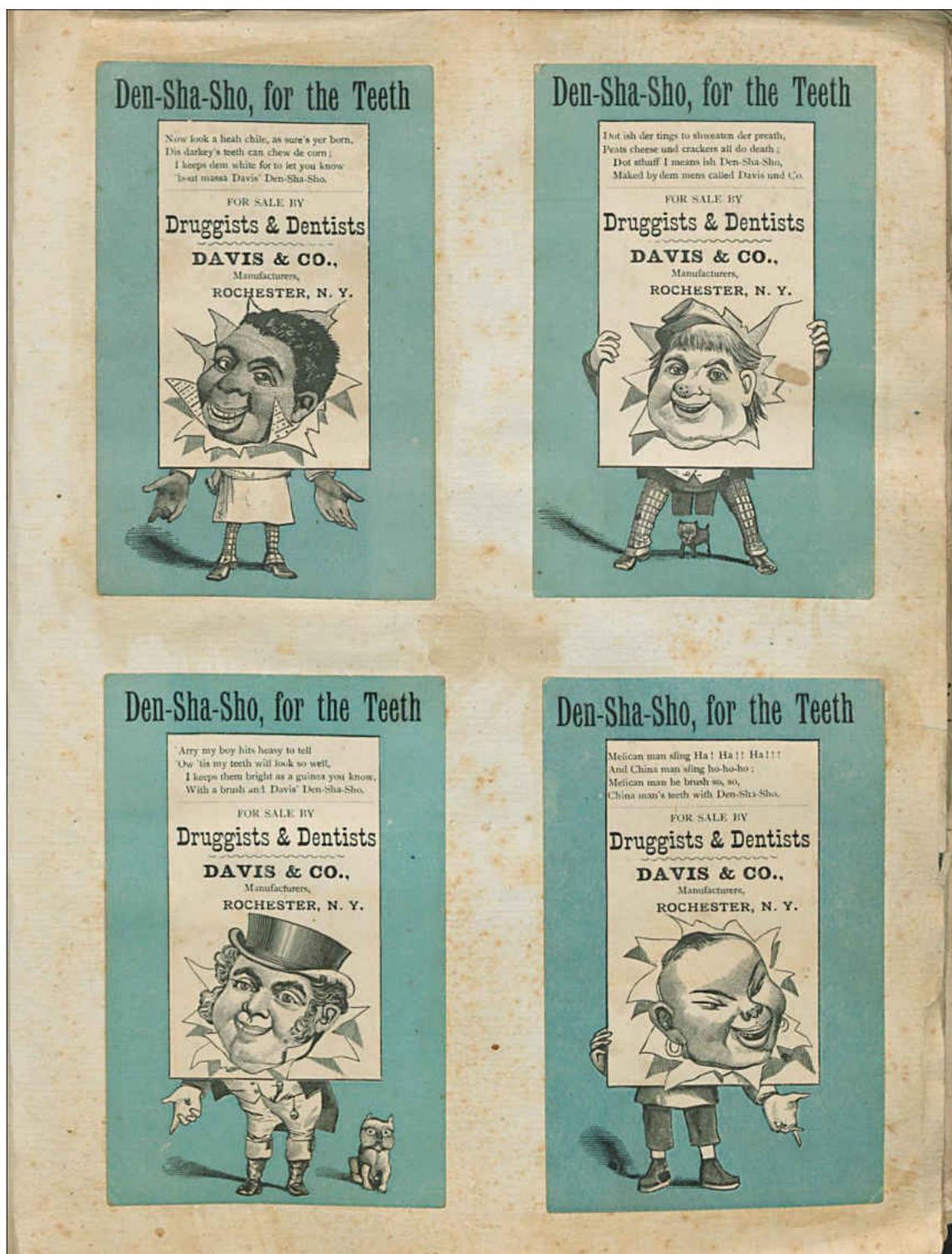
<sup>100</sup> Hamlin Garland, "Vernacular Poets and Novelists" in *Roadside Meetings* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 90-108 cited in Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1.



**Figure 9.** Double-page spread of trade cards and calling cards. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1870. Fol. 290. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

surprising to viewers today, they likely produced no such reaction at the time of their distribution. On the other hand, the stereotypical vernacular reproduced in the caption included with a Chinese man's image is one recognizable even in some of today's popular culture. On this card the "American man" becomes the "Melican Man" when spoken by the Chinese man who transposes the letters "r" and "l" (Figure 10).<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile, the ethnic stereotypes of the two white men do not resound today. Instead, the nationalities of the two white men, likely quite obvious to Gilded Age observers, have been forgotten by the national consciousness over time.

<sup>101</sup> Den-Sha-Sho trade card. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1870. Fol. 290. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



**Figure 10.** Page with four Den-Sha-Sho trade cards. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1870. Fol. 290. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

Other than the fact that the four men are drawn as caricatures with exaggerated features, there is nothing about the African American man's appearance that is exceptionally vulgar in comparison to the others. Instead, it is his words. All four men have different captions above them where they promote Den-Sha-Sho through popularized ethnic and racial dialects. The African American man's caption reads:

Now look a heah chile, as sure's yer born,  
Dis darkey's teeth can chew de corn;  
I keeps them white for to let you know  
'bout massa Davis' Den-Sha-Sho.<sup>102</sup>

On this advertising trade card the recognizable stereotype of Sambo, the dutiful "darkey," is smiling widely to share with the reader that his "massa" sells a product that everyone needs for their teeth. The use of an African American character in an advertisement for Den-Sha-Sho is perhaps unsurprising since, in the white imagination, blacks were often associated with foolish grins of white teeth that made them detectable in the dark. In fact, this association was so prevalent during the Gilded Age that Chesnutt called whiteness of the teeth of African Americans "a racial synonym."<sup>103</sup>

This Den-Sha-Sho caption worked against the seemingly normal portrayal of the African American man on the card by "identifying the speaker as black and

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<sup>102</sup> Den-Sha-Sho trade card. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1870. Fol. 290. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., Robert C. Leitz, III, and Jesse S. Crisler, eds., *Charles W. Chesnutt: Essays and Speeches* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 279.

indicating certain social characteristics that ensure the speaker's status as an outsider who does not fit."<sup>104</sup> Chesnutt elaborated on the specific word usage of this advertisement and other narratives in 1916 when he wrote:

Another classic solecism is that which puts into the mouths of colored servants, at the North, in our own day, the word "Massa." I think it safe to say that no colored servant at the North, and few anywhere... ever uses the word "Massa..." It is a concrete personal suggestion of slavery, which even the most stupid Negroes are willing to forget, except as a historical fact, so far as the white people will let them.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to the assertion of black ignorance that we saw with the advertisements in Helen's scrapbook, the use of specific words like "Massa" evoked memories of a slave-past that became reinterpreted through images like the one on this Den-Sha-Sho card. Instead of reflecting reality, images like these made the horrifying and recent history of slavery seem playful, acceptable, and remembered fondly by black Americans. The words "darkey" and "massa," in particular, simultaneously conjured a reminiscence of slavery and the lessons taught by the loyal slave stereotype known as Sambo. Furthermore, the use of a former slave in this ad for Den-Sha-Sho is not nearly as shocking as the former slave's acquiesce, feeding into the growing national sentiment that African Americans had been better off under slavery and the protection of their white masters. As Goings explains:

Sambo was 'happy' no matter what the master did to him. His happiness derived from the fact that he knew the master always had his best interest at heart, much like a father guiding an errant child. Also, the sambo was a great

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<sup>104</sup> Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>105</sup> McElrath, Jr., et al., *Charles W. Chesnutt*, 430.

defender of slavery. What better image could there be of the positive nature of the system and the master-slave relationship than the happy-go-lucky darky – Sambo?<sup>106</sup>

These paternalist lessons of an imagined past were common in Gilded Age popular culture and, through images like these, the truths of the recently ended institution of slavery were concealed. For children like Morgan who were born after the Civil War, creating alternatives to this history reproduced on their advertising trade cards would have been a near-impossible feat.

Another advertising trade card in Morgan's scrapbook having African American images is one attempting to sell Prince Royal Baking Powder and advertising B. Franklin as the only distributor of the product in Albion, NY. It shows an image of two African American boys, a dog, and a white farmer. The story told on the card pulls together different discussions of nineteenth century stereotypes as well as one that still resonates in the twenty-first since two African American boys are shown attempting to steal watermelons from a white farmer's property.

Interestingly, the lettering on the card stating "Prince Royal Baking Powder" and "B. Franklin" is colored black while the rest of the printing on the card is red. Furthermore, the crooked nature of the black letters compared to the rest of the card signals that they were stamped on and that the card itself is a stock card, not one commissioned by the merchant. As such, children throughout the U.S. may have had this particular card in their collection, although what was being advertised may have been entirely different from that of Morgan's version.

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<sup>106</sup> Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose*, xix.

The two African American boys on the advertisement are shown in the process of climbing over their victim's fence in an attempt to flee. One of the boys has fallen flat on his chin, his legs are still airborne behind him at the moment captured in the image and a shattered watermelon lies to his left. Meanwhile, the other young man is sitting atop the fence, one giant watermelon under each arm, while the farmer's dog attempts to drag him back onto the property. The dog has the boy by a mouthful of the boy's clothes secured within its powerful jaws. In the background, a small house is seen as well as the farmer himself, who looks to be approaching the commotion, rifle in tow. The caption below the image reads: "WHICH WILL LET GO FIRST THE DOG OR THE DARKEY."<sup>107</sup>

The young men in this image reinforce the stereotype of the pickaninny, as they meet Bernstein's qualifications of being young, dark, and comically insensate. Both of the boys are in positions of what should be extreme pain, one falling forward from a fence nearly of his own height and onto his face while the other is being attacked by a guard dog. However, the only expression on the boys' faces is surprise, certainly not the wince of pain. Furthermore, the stereotype of the "coon" is present, the troubling-making, countrified (read ignorant) black man who steals his supper and has a short fuse. This imagined persona is present not simply through the theft of the fruit, but also in the overall scene's ode to the rural South and the young men's ill-fitting and tattered rags doubling as clothes. The paternalistic implication through

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<sup>107</sup> Prince Royal Baking Powder trade card. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1870. Fol. 290. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

their crime is that black men need white masters. Soon, the white yeoman will teach these African American boys a lesson appropriate for their crime.

Unfortunately, for some, the association of African Americans with eating watermelon has persisted to the present day, likely over 120 years since this image was pasted into Morgan's scrapbook. Due to its ongoing legacy, Goings' analysis of the history of the watermelon trope is worth quoting at length:

The bright, primary (read primitive) colors were thought to be attractive to African-Americans. There were also fondly repeated tales of slaves stealing into the watermelon patch during the dead of night, only to be caught by the master. The reason they were caught was that while their dark skin provided camouflage at night, the whites of their eyes, like those of a wild scavenger (such as the raccoon), gave them away. It was assumed that the watermelon seen in these images was stolen, thus reinforcing the myth that 'the only honest darky is a dead darky.'<sup>108</sup>

Perhaps in this narrative it was not only the whites of their eyes but also their shiny white teeth that made African American thieves detectable in the dark. Regardless, the horrifying implication of this commentary is that the young black men depicted in Morgan's advertising trade card might be assumed to have let go before the dog did, but only after the white farmer and his rifle settled the score.

In an interesting flip of the pickaninny stereotype as described by Bernstein, a different page of Morgan's scrapbook includes an advertising trade card that suggests that pickninnies are not completely insensate. On a black and white card advertising S. G. Reynolds, Harness Maker of Albion, NY we find an image of two toddlers, one white, the other African American. Both children are in white dresses and black

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<sup>108</sup> Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose*, 37-40.

shoes and are kneeling or seated atop tall chairs. The image appears quaint except that the white toddler is washing the hair of the black child while the black child screams in pain, tears rolling down her face. Meanwhile, the white child pays no heed to the crying toddler as he smiles off into the distance. It is as if performing the vital duty of washing the African American girl's hair is more important to the white child than the black girl's comfort. More importantly though, this image of an African American child deepens the pickaninny stereotype as defined by Bernstein. As an *object lesson*, this screaming child adds a dimension to the pickaninny since she is young, dark, and comically receptive to the pain of *being cleaned*. This is not the only example of such representations; black babies shown crying while being washed are present in many other scrapbooks as well as on another page of Morgan's album (Figure 6).

Morgan learned many lessons about racial hierarchies through his advertising trade card collection, as did other children who participated in the same culture of play. In particular, the three pages of Morgan's album discussed here highlight the rampant paternalism that followed Reconstruction. What these images of the Sambo, the coon, and the crying pickaninny all reinforced during the Gilded Age was the commonly-held belief that African Americans could not properly function in society without direction from whites. Here, the Sambo recognized his shortcomings and happily yielded to the white man's power, the coon alternatively could not be taught without violence, and the pickaninny was too naïve to realize white kindness. As Marchand suggested, it is not merely the constant bombardment of value-laden

images that can change one's consciousness, equally important is the lack of any real contradiction to the advertisements' suggestions.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, not a single image in Morgan's scrapbook directly challenges the soundness of racial paternalism.

Besides the chromolithographed images present in Morgan's scrapbook, the young man also chose to include what appears to be a newspaper clipping, undated and of unknown origin. It reads:

Never choose for a friend someone who would urge you to pull out a single thread from the warp of character. Never choose a friend that you feel you have lowered *your standard of purity* and right one single inch to gain. If you cannot step up in your friendships, you need not step down. Raise your standard and stand by it. You need not want for companionship; *only see that the society is kept high and pure*. Keep a strict watch at all the doors, and what a blessed thing it will be to live even amid outwardly adverse circumstances [emphasis added]!<sup>110</sup>

As a result of the visual literacy gained through his advertising trade card collection, it is easy to imagine that Morgan would have excluded African Americans from those being worthy of his friendship. Morgan would have likely viewed blacks to be detrimental to his calling to keep society *high and pure*. Furthermore, as a result of the racial demographics of late-nineteenth century Albion, Morgan's exclusion of African Americans from his circle of friends as a child would have been purely ideologically motivated, even if he was ultimately unable to put this exclusion into practice.

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<sup>109</sup> Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xx.

<sup>110</sup> Periodical cut-out. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1870. Fol. 290. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

## The Grant Family

The Grant family scrapbook is full of both Rewards of Merit and advertising trade cards promoting stores in and around White River Junction, Vermont (Appendix B). The Rewards of Merit indicate that at least two children, Ellen and Willie Grant, lived in the household and also suggest a frequent re-visiting of the album with family since the Reward of Merit scrapbook doubles as a vehicle of academic pride.<sup>111</sup> The towns listed on advertising trade cards include Richford, Rutland, Springfield, and Brattleboro, Vermont as well as Plymouth, New Hampshire. A few cards for New York City are also included. Unlike some other scrapbookers who had multitudes of cards from a few local storefronts, the Grant family's variety of card locations possibly indicate that they were well-travelled and were wealthy enough to afford luxury goods manufactured throughout the Northeast and sold in nearby towns.

Two pages of the Grant family scrapbook are of particular interest to racial indoctrination during the Gilded Age. One is located on a two-page spread of the scrapbook and is filled with embossed images, a religious visiting card, and advertising trade cards, many for businesses in towns around White River Junction and some doubling as calendars (Figure 11). Since calendars for August 1885 and August 1886 were included it is possible that this scrapbook, and this page specifically, was turned to often as a device for measuring time (Figure 12). The choice to include these calendars also suggests the possibility that August was an

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<sup>111</sup> See Footnote 74, page 49.



**Figure 11.** Double-page spread of trade cards. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.11. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

important month to at least one member of the Grant family, possibly marking a birthday for Ellen or Willie.

The calendar for August of 1885 is also an advertisement for Smith's Confectionery and is reminiscent of the image of the two young men stealing watermelons in Morgan's scrapbook. The African American man shown on this calendar also wears ill-fitting tattered clothes, is pictured with a small farmhouse in the background, and has a watermelon with him. The history of assumptions about African Americans and watermelon implies that the members of the Grant family may have suspected that this man acquired his watermelon through criminal means. Adding to the felonious portrayal of this stereotypical "coon," and in spite of the

man's wide smile, he holds a straight razor in his left hand. The caption at the bottom of the calendar reads: "I'll cut you Deep."<sup>112</sup>

Whether the man's threat is intended for the card collector or the watermelon itself is at the discretion of the reader. However, one almost cannot help but feel a pang of fear when digesting the words of this razor-wielding man with his wide eyes and broad smile. In essence, a young child received this frightening giveaway from a candy store and viewed it frequently as a timepiece, but also quite possibly as a reminder of an important event occurring that month, maybe the child's birthday. For youngsters like Ellen and Willie, who hailed from small towns like White River Junction, Vermont (where almost no African Americans made their homes in 1885) the imprint left by such an image would be racial indoctrination of the worst sort; the association of black men with crazed violence.<sup>113</sup>

Above the August 1885 calendar is an advertising trade card featuring an aged African American woman candidly caught while performing her domestic chores. Interestingly, the product she is advertising is one familiar to the American consumer today – Arm & Hammer [Baking] Soda. The elderly woman, likely a former slave and

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<sup>112</sup> Trade card advertising Smith's Confectionery. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.11. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Census data for 1880 shows 63 African American residents in Rutland, VT (or 0.5 percent of the city's population of over 12,000). White River Junction was a much smaller town and is less than fifty miles east of Rutland. See "Table 46. Vermont - Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990, Last accessed April 19, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/VTtab.pdf>.

current domestic servant, is shown struggling to contain her concoction, possibly bread dough, as she is quoted as saying: “Fo de Lord, what am de matter, spec ise



**Figure 12.** Page of trade cards. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.11. Courtesy, The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

done gone used too much of de Arm & Hammer Soda.”<sup>114</sup> The juxtaposition between the dutiful African American woman speaking in supposed black vernacular and the criminal African American man’s near-perfect English is striking, especially since chromolithographed images of black people almost never failed in also delivering absurd renditions of English.

However, the cultural logic behind the choices made by the designers of these two images becomes clear in a speech presented by *Atlanta Constitution* editor John Temple Graves at the University of Chicago. Graves’ speech, “The Problem of the Races,” was delivered on September 3, 1903; sufficiently long enough after August 1885 for the innuendo of the man on the calendar to become fully concrete in the white imagination. Leon F. Litwack’s coverage of Graves’ commentary in this regard is worth quoting at length:

No matter what was taught in the classroom, education fed the propensity of blacks to think themselves the equals of whites, potentially if not now, and such perceptions, warned John Temple Graves... inflicted serious damage on the black psyche, with far-reaching consequences for the entire society. ‘[T]he negro’s criminality has increased as his illiteracy has decreased, and his race antagonism has grown with his intelligence.’ And Graves suggested the reasons were sufficiently obvious.

‘Education brings light, and light perception, and with quickened faculties the negro sees the difference between his real and his constitutional status in the republic. He sees that neither worth nor merit nor attainment can overcome the world-wide repulsion of type and color; and, seeing this, he is moved to rebellious protest and sometimes to violent revenge.’<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Trade card advertising Arm & Hammer Soda. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.11. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

<sup>115</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 99.

It was commonly believed, apparently in Vermont and Chicago just as much as in Atlanta and the rest of the former-Confederate South, that the scariest black man was the one who obtained an education. By associating intelligent speech with violence and criminality, the Smith's Confectionery advertisement offered the Grant family and other Gilded Age collectors an alternative to ideas of black ignorance. However, this alternative was equally false and similarly damaging in the creation of white imaginings of blackness and black people. As a result of images like these, if the white collecting child was ever to meet a well-spoken African American the stranger would likely be viewed as someone for the child to fear.

Alternatively, the Grant family had nothing to fear of the woman in the Arm & Hammer Soda advertisement. This woman is seen adjusting to the new line of products available to the American consumer as all Americans would have had to. However, the implication is that this woman's position as an African American freedwoman makes this transition difficult and humorous. Images like this one are quite commonly found in Gilded Age scrapbooks; former female house-slaves, quite possibly still domestic servants, failing to fully enjoy the new and improved wares of American manufacturers as a result of their abiding connection to the past and possibly their ignorance.

More often though it was white Americans who refused to forget the past, as Lost Cause ideologies became prevalent among whites following the nation's collective retreat from the principles of Reconstruction. According to this revision of history, slavery had not been the cause of the Civil War and instead southern

benevolence had been the institution the North fought to defeat.<sup>116</sup> Known interchangeably as Mammy, Dinah, Aunt, or Auntie, the imaginary black women on these advertising trade cards represented nostalgia for the days of slavery when they, in the Lost Cause myth, were only too happy to serve their master or mistress and to rear the young white children in their care. In essence, these women were the female equivalent to Sambo. In Gilded Age advertising trade cards Dinah is the most commonly used name given to these often overweight, head-scarf bedecked, black women portrayed in an act of domestic labor and lacking the delicate and demure features commonly associated with nineteenth century womanhood.

While it may seem unlikely that a family in Vermont would have bought into the Lost Cause myth furthered by images like the one on their Arm & Hammer Soda trade card, a scrap included on another page of their album makes location less important in matters of race. Surrounded by chromolithographed images of white women, children, and babies as well as flowers, birds, and cattle being led to a bubbling creek, is a reproduction of twenty dollars of the Confederate States of America. According to two insignias at the top left and right of the scrap, this reproduction was released “Two years after the ratification of a treaty of peace between the Confederate States and the United States of America.”<sup>117</sup> Clearly, the Civil War was an event that the Grant family maintained at the forefront of their

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<sup>116</sup> Foner and Brown, *Forever Free*, 216.

<sup>117</sup> Reproduction of Twenty Confederate Dollars. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.11. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

memories. But it is the Grant family's choice to include Confederate dollars in their album and not Union Greenbacks that suggests a belief in the Lost Cause myth in spite of their Vermont residence.

For some white Americans, it was not enough to say that Reconstruction had failed as a result of the shortcomings of newly freedpeople. Instead, slavery was remembered fondly by some as a time when everyone was content because the supposedly-proper stations of life were being performed by blacks and whites alike. Prolific images of Dinahs may have reinforced such thinking for the Grant family and others like them. Furthermore, the successes of African Americans who were fortunate enough to have access to educations were easily dismissed by the common association by white people of black intelligence with black violence. In this way, Lost Cause myths worked to not only justify slavery, but to justify white supremacy following Emancipation. And the advertising trade cards seen in the Grant family scrapbook worked to further these ideologies.

### **Gilded Age Distortions of Blackness**

In 1954, historian Rayford W. Logan labeled the period of American history between 1877 and 1901 “the nadir” for black Americans, an idea counterintuitive to a more obvious conclusion that slavery was in fact the low point for African Americans historically.<sup>118</sup> At first, Logan's thesis may seem to make sense only when the period is viewed relative to Reconstruction; hitting rock-bottom would, of course, be more

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<sup>118</sup> Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought*.

painful and devastating when falling from the height of political and economic power experienced by some black Americans in the decade following the Civil War.

But as Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. explains in his work on black cultural resistance in the aftermath of Reconstruction, the nadir may, in fact, be more than appropriate for describing this period of African American history: “Excluded, with increasing vehemence, from social and economic institutions, black Americans also had to live within a society in which the majority was convinced that black people were inferior to whites and should therefore be consigned to a place of permanent social, economic, and political subordination.” Bruce goes on to conclude that “what made those years so crucial – what makes labeling them as the nadir so apt – was that they were the setting for a visible deterioration in the position of black people in American society... the years after 1877 witnessed a snowballing of racist ideas and practices, both of which reached unprecedented vehemence in the 1890s.”<sup>119</sup>

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that distorted ideas of blackness would be reproduced in color by those who gained the most from white privilege in America during the Gilded Age. As bell hooks explains:

There is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people... From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control

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<sup>119</sup> Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 1-2.

over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination...<sup>120</sup>

Advertising trade cards were the products of capitalists and industrialists who, even if by accident, benefitted from the lack of interracial unity the cards coached during the Gilded Age. As Wiebe has said of the era and the various ethnic and racial groups that contended for industrial jobs: “Fearful of each other’s competition and ignorant of each other’s ways, they lived in mutual suspicion, as separated into groups of their own kind as they could manage.”<sup>121</sup> Thus, proletariat unity against the moneyed class was not easily achieved.

Images that may have been employed by magnates simply for their “entertainment” value worked also to create a “common sense” about race in relation to late-nineteenth century class wars. This was a direct consequence of the propagation of value-laden images incessantly reproduced. In this sense, chromolithographed images of African Americans had disastrous implications for American society broadly since, as tools of white supremacy, advertising trade cards taught the supposed reasons behind concentrated economic and political power.

Near the end of the 1890s, this decade that Bruce refers to as being so important to understanding the nadir, the United States witnessed institutionalized segregation (whether legal in the South or merely practiced in the North), increased racial violence (especially lynchings but also race riots in cities north and south),

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<sup>120</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 2.

<sup>121</sup> Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 14.

institutional barriers that restricted black access to both financial gain and the vote, and a Supreme Court that failed to live up to the ideals of the post-bellum amendments written only three decades earlier. Importantly, the Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* buttressed the popular discourse of white Americans seen in scrapbooks created during the nadir when the Court said that "if one race be inferior to the other socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane."<sup>122</sup> A lone dissenter, Justice John Marshall Harlan spoke for an increasingly small minority of Americans.

In trying to make sense of this drastic departure from the principles of Reconstruction, sociologist and legal historian John R. Howard surmises: "The abolitionist generation had largely passed from the scene. There were few in the new, postwar generation of whites willing to speak for equal rights..."<sup>123</sup> It may be more than merely coincidence that W. E. B. Du Bois, Helen C. Snyder, and Morgan A. McLean all turned thirty during the 1890s. As members of the generation born after the Civil War, these three Gilded Age youths ultimately became either accomplices in or resisters to the blatant rejection of Reconstruction amendments and ideals vigorously occurring around them. Importantly, the decisions made by these and other Gilded Age advertising trade card collectors as adults ultimately had influence over some realm of African American life. And as we have seen through the scrapbooks of Gilded Age children and the memoir of W. E. B. Du Bois, advertising

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<sup>122</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, 551-52 (1896) quoted in John R. Howard, *The Shifting Wind: The Supreme Court and Civil Right from Reconstruction to Brown* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 148.

<sup>123</sup> Howard, *The Shifting Wind*, 159.

trade cards themselves played a *direct and abiding* role in teaching both white and black children that African Americans were inferior to their white counterparts.

## Conclusion

### Playtime as History

Many of the children who grew up during the Gilded Age inherited their generation's *structure of feeling* through much more than shared participation in mandatory coeducational schooling, failed Reconstruction, Social Darwinism, and the completed development of industrial capitalism. In their day-to-day, the activities of collecting advertising trade cards and creating scrapbooks out of them occurred among friends who shared in this culture of play. Furthermore, the children who learned the lessons their trade cards instilled grew up to possibly become mothers or fathers, teachers or artists, and advertisers or lawmakers themselves. While these Americans' individual values, beliefs, and ideologies may have diverged from certain peers whose own adult worlds took opposing paths, the shared *structure of feeling*, created in large part by their childhood playtime, remained.

It cannot be overstated how significant the fact is that Gilded Age scrapbooks were souvenirs that followed once-young creators through the course of their lifetimes and were often revisited, whether alone or in company. As we have seen, these albums are true representatives of late-nineteenth century youth culture. And unlike a published work created for the masses, scrapbooks exist as both extensions of selfhood and as unique artifacts unable to be reproduced. For many, they are also constant reminders of a youthful past. As one woman's group wrote in 1860 about their personal mementos, "although... it may be difficult for you to discover anything

very remarkable in these ephemeral productions, some of them have, to us, a real value. They are the offspring of the heart – incidents which, in other days, we shall remember with a smile and a tear, possibly with both.”<sup>124</sup> Susan Stewart explains the effect ownership of such books with “interior significance” has on those who make them: “Because of its connection to biography and its place in constituting the notion of the individual life, the memento becomes emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self’s capacity to generate worthiness.”<sup>125</sup>

As a result of the collection of advertising trade cards and the subsequent creation of scrapbooks using the material, Gilded Age children were able to generate their individual worthiness through the principles of consumerism and white supremacy. Certainly, the constant repetition of specific visual pedagogies worked through the advertisements themselves in ways suggested by Marchand. Moreover, young people of the Gilded Age forged unique identities within a new *structure of feeling* that borrowed the discourse of their advertising trade cards and transposed it onto their peer interactions. The scrapbook itself then worked to reinforce as well as to validate the resultant youth culture, one predicated on the acquisition of goods and the dominance of the white race.

These seemingly disparate values may have had more in common than at first glance. Many scholars have attempted to locate the intersection of the economy and

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<sup>124</sup> *The Souvenir: By the Ladies Literary Union of Hillsdale College, Hillsdale Michigan*, August 1860 quoted in Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1984), 189.

<sup>125</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 139.

race historically, but children rarely enter into these conversations.<sup>126</sup> One thing is clear, during the Gilded Age consumerism and whiteness would have been inexorably linked. Expendable income was not a luxury for the recently-freed and newly-disenfranchised African American population, 90.5 percent of whom resided in the pre-industrial South in 1880.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, Southern and Eastern Europeans newly emigrating to the United States during the Gilded Age were just as likely to find themselves excluded from both consumerism and whiteness, since at the time these groups were considered non-white while their consumer spending power would have been negligible.<sup>128</sup>

It is also possible that in the white imagination, the new technologies of Gilded Age industry and consumerism were associated with whiteness while non-whites were ideologically relegated to a place of perpetual pre-industry. As we saw in Chapter Four with the Grant family's Arm & Hammer Soda card, African Americans were certainly viewed as not having the knowledge necessary to reap the benefits of emergent technology. When considered from the perspective of Social Darwinism

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<sup>126</sup> Important examples include Winthrop D. Jordan, *American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Verso, 2007), and Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990).

<sup>127</sup> "Table A-17. Race for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States: 1880," accessed March 18, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tabA-17.pdf>. By 1880, industry had developed in the South but only in a few, mostly "extractive enterprises," and the standard use of convict labor made it so southern industry had little impact on the economy of the region. As a result, the South remained dependent on the North for goods and capital during the Gilded Age. See Foner, *Reconstruction*, 596-7.

<sup>128</sup> James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "How White People Became White," in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 402-6; Roger Daniels, "The Immigrant Experience in the Gilded Age," in *The Gilded Age*, Carles W. Calhoun, ed., 84.

and Gilded Age popular culture, it seems plausible that many white Americans, including Helen C. Snyder as we saw in the previous chapter, perceived African Americans as existing in a pre-evolutionary state. Hence, they existed outside of the very possibility of consumerism.

And yet, regardless of these many intersections between consumerism and race, what advertising trade cards as historical documents ultimately demand is a reimagining of these separate concepts historically. The uniqueness of the Gilded Age offers compelling evidence for shifts in both ideologies. This was a time when the novelty of colorful images made advertising trade cards much more captivating to contemporaries than do the vibrant images that saturate the world today. And the popular use of *object lesson* pedagogies during the Gilded Age further amplified the reach advertising trade cards had over individual understandings of the world. Further complicating our understanding of consumerism and racial practice is how they existed within a Gilded Age framework of ideological contestations of modernity.

Importantly, the scrapbooks left behind by Gilded Age youths urge historians that children's play should be taken seriously. Potential certainly exists for much more scholarship in this regard. All too commonly, histories fail to speak to the child's experience while those that do frequently perpetuate notions of youthful innocence. Arguably, these are sometimes necessary consequences of the silence of children in the archives. However, as this study has shown, a careful reading of often-overlooked archives can sometimes overcome both of these scholarly

shortcomings; they offer the opportunity to study the lives of real children who transcend the myth of childhood innocence. Perhaps the problem is not that archives of children do not exist but that notions of childhood purity have persisted to the present, leaving many to question if any real value exists in digging up a child's past. But for as long as children have been forming peer cultures, their playtime, in combination with the adult world, has worked to subvert that innocence.

As we have seen, the Gilded Age scrapbook represents the place where the life-cycle of the acquired, exchanged, and collected trade card most often ended, and as personal history it was revered. The advertising trade cards contained within these albums instructed Gilded Age youths to be sure and, in turn, the adult world was impacted. The perhaps unplanned consumerist indoctrination caused by the cards later guided the work of future advertisers, who have continued to reach out to and mold child consumers ever since. After the turn of the century, the notion that autonomy was experienced vis-à-vis consumer power captured labor's rhetoric. And the nadir, a time when racist views against African Americans led to incredibly oppressive political, economic, and social policies, began after Reconstruction and arguably lasted until the 1960s (and in many ways to the present).

Knowing the however small but certainly significant role advertising trade cards had in producing these outcomes suggests that the question historians should be asking is not how useful can archival ephemera really be in providing a rich understanding the past. Nor should they wonder if playtime affects history or if children can even be considered historical actors. Studies like this one as well as

others that tackle the history of children's culture collectively resound: children grow up to create history, their *structures of feeling* are created in part through their playtime, and the enduring material culture of that play provide academia with unique primary sources that provide wide-ranging knowledge of the past.

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## Archives

Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, The Winterthur Library, Delaware

Thelma Seeds Mendsen Collection

Maxine Maxson Waldron Collection

## Appendix A

### Helen C. Snyder's Scrapbook

When Maxine Maxson Waldron gave her personal collection of ephemera to Winterthur Library in the 1970s and 1980s, included within the paper dolls, games, and cards she had accumulated over her lifetime were also fifteen Gilded Age scrapbooks. Born in 1898, Mrs. Waldron was an artist and teacher whose fascination with paper collections led her to amass thousands of ephemera dating from the colonial period through the twentieth century. The Gilded Age albums of her collection are filled with chromolithographed cards and the autobiographies of now long-forgotten young people who placed them there.<sup>129</sup>

An inscription on the inside cover of Winterthur's Waldron 91x126.11 ("Helen C. Snyder's scrapbook") clearly reads:

This book belonged to  
Helen C Snyder  
March 14, 1867 – 1960 March 1st<sup>130</sup>

A second scrapbook in the Waldron collection at Winterthur has the same inscription with one exception – it dates Helen's death as March 1, 1963.<sup>131</sup> This inconsistency,

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<sup>129</sup> "Maxine Waldron Collection of Children's Books and Paper Toys," The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Last accessed April 15, 2013, <http://www.winterthur.org/?p=738>.

<sup>130</sup> Inside Cover. Waldron, Maxine Maxson. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 121 91x126.11. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

<sup>131</sup> Inside Cover. Waldron, Maxine Maxson. *Scrapbook*. Col. 121 91x126.12. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

along with the fact that the pens used to create the passages are clearly of the twentieth century, leave some doubt as to the specific details of the scrapbook's ownership and owner. However, the ephemeral content of the scrapbook is without doubt of the Gilded Age, as evidenced by an 1880 souvenir and an 1881 Christmas card located among the many advertising trade cards and other chromos within.

## Appendix B

### The Grant Family Scrapbook

Several decades after Gilded Age youths put down their scissors and paste, Thelma Seeds Mendsen was visiting a friend and noticed two scrapbooks in her friend's home, albums similar to those once belonging to Helen and Morgan. Mrs. Mendsen became instantly entranced. It was the 1930s and having been born in 1905, Mrs. Mendsen had never before been exposed to this product of a generation of youth's playtime. Mrs. Mendsen herself caught the collecting bug and she began searching out Gilded Age scrapbooks of her own from her home in New York City. Her generous donation of fifty-one Gilded Age scrapbooks to Winterthur Library in the early 1970s now allows others to appreciate the various levels of collecting her scrapbooks represent.<sup>132</sup>

The scrapbook housed at Winterthur as Mendsen 70x1.11 ("the Grant family scrapbook") represents this complicated life-cycle and the inherent dangers of almost any primary source. The first thing one notices when opening the cover of this scrapbook gilded in silver is a small white card carefully placed inside that reads, in typewriter print: "Several years ago I reinforced this book and pasted cards over a few 'vandalized' spots;" the message is signed in pen "TSM."<sup>133</sup> In spite of the message,

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<sup>132</sup> "Thelma Seeds Mendsen Collection Finding Aid," The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, 1.

<sup>133</sup> Notecard Inside Front Cover. Mendsen, Thelma Seeds. *Scrapbook*, ca. 1885. Col. 669 70x1.11. The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

the cards placed into the book by Mrs. Mendsen in the mid-twentieth century are definitely of Gilded Age origin, as nothing in the scrapbook dates from after the turn of the century.

In this instance, it is fortunate that the scrapbook shows signs of water damage and that the original paste has browned in many spots. The resultant discoloration is sometimes seen through the cards that were secured by a youngster over one hundred years ago. The clean cards in this scrapbook that do not show signs of mold or acid damage will therefore not be discussed here, since they may have been placed in the scrapbook by Mrs. Mendsen and not by Gilded Age children themselves.

## Appendix C

### Winterthur Library Letter of Permission



April 17, 2013

Jaelyn Schulz

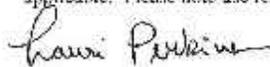
Permission is granted to include the images listed below in *Discriminating Tastes: How Advertisements Taught Consumerism and Race to Gilded Age Youth* by Jaelyn Schulz to be submitted to the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee as a 2013 thesis.

Accession or Call Number	Book or Object	Reproduction to be made from
Col. 669 70x130.24.66a	Trade card for Arbuckles' Arizona Coffee, ca.1890.	Digital scan Order# 13L021
Col. 127 93x126.11	Waldron, Maxine Maxson. <i>Scrapbook</i> , ca.1885 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page with four trade cards for Clarence Brooks &amp; Co.'s couch varnishes</li> <li>• Page with 4 cards by Jno. Haddock, Philadelphia.</li> </ul>	Digital scan Order# 13L022
Col. 669 70x1.8	Meadsen, Thelma Seeds. <i>Scrapbook</i> , ca.1885. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade card for New York Observer</li> </ul>	Digital scan Order# 13L023
Col. 669 70x1.33	Meadsen, Thelma Seeds. <i>Scrapbook</i> , ca.1885. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two trade cards for Hirus' Root Beer</li> <li>• Trade card for Hecker's Buckwheat</li> </ul>	Digital scan Order# 13L024
Col. 669 70x1.11	Meadsen, Thelma Seeds. <i>Scrapbook</i> , ca.1885. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double-page spread of trade cards</li> </ul>	Digital scan Order# 13L025
Fol. 314	Hughes, K. J. <i>Scrapbook</i> , ca.1876-1881. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertisement "The New Primer"</li> </ul>	Digital scan Order# 13L026
Fol. 290	<i>Scrapbook</i> , ca.1870. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double page spread of trade cards and calling cards</li> <li>• Double-page spread of Higgins' German Laundry Soap trade cards</li> </ul>	Digital scan Order# 13L027

The credit line to be used with each picture is:

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