

The Truth About Good Goods: Clothing, Advertising, and the Representation of Cultural Values at the End of the Nineteenth Century

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After the death of Joseph Schaffner, co-founder in 1887 of Hart, Schaffner & Marx clothing manufacturers, colleagues remembered two particular things about his early business success. First, Schaffner pioneered the industry's use of national advertising, which he "applied so effectively that it revolutionized the promotion side of the business." Second, he operated so respectably that he "gave to the clothing industry a dignity and standing which it did not before possess."¹ Advertising zealotry and Victorian propriety may seem like an odd couple to modern scholars, but many businessmen of the late nineteenth century did not find them contradictory. They did not confront the new culture of mass consumption as a simple displacement of old values with new, but as a more complicated reformulation of an entire set of cultural norms.

The clothing industry provides a particularly good window upon this process. By the late nineteenth century, the men's factory clothing industry was well established—some estimated that 90 percent of American men wore ready-made clothing in 1895. But having begun in lower-class markets (and having contributed the word "shoddy" to the language as a synonym for cheap goods), the industry's leaders were still struggling to constitute themselves as a respectable and progressive force in the community. Their trade journals and advertisements of the 1890s chronicle an

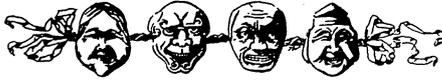
effort to serve simultaneously the emerging imperatives of mass-market capitalism and the older Victorian values that had defined respectability throughout their lives.²

This essay will examine the strategies of clothing manufacturers and merchants in the context of a transition during which “a fundamental shift in American values” seems to have occurred. This shift may be broadly characterized as a move from Victorianism to modernism, a transition described in many variations by historians and frequently ascribed to the era around the turn of the century. Although we shall clearly see some values receding (such as the stated reliance on “good character” as the prime requisite of business success) and some values ascending (such as an emphasis on aggressive salesmanship and clever merchandising as prime requisites of business success), this transition was not as neat and definitive as many scholars imply. Middle-class business people of the 1890s, at least in the clothing industry, claimed allegiance to a broad range of sometimes conflicting values and attempted to devise cultural forms that would accommodate them all.³

Part one sketches the historical background and suggests the advantages—and limits—of focusing such a study on the 1890s. Part two examines the process of self-definition that clothiers and advertising professionals undertook during this time. Using trade publications, it will show a sometimes awkward combination of emerging and declining social values in the self-images they constructed. Part three looks at clothing advertising. It will suggest that advertisements were crucial cultural markers during this period, not only for historians but for people who read them and people who wrote them.

I

The phrase “ready-to-wear” began to describe clothing in the 1890s and soon supplanted the earlier label, “ready-made.” The shift of emphasis from a “produced” item to a “consumed” item supports the idea that an American consumer culture originated in this era.⁴ Yet such a conception requires refinement. Though many historians locate the arrival of consumer culture around the turn of the twentieth century, solid claims can be made for dating it both earlier and later. Cary Carson argues that the “consumer revolution” had already occurred by 1750, when “people up and down the social order had discovered and were indulging the most extraordinary passion for consumer goods in quantities and varieties that were unknown, even unimaginable, to their fathers and grandfathers.”⁵ Alternatively, Lizabeth Cohen has demonstrated that as late as the 1920s working-class people were resisting and reformulating the “culture of consumption” in various crucial ways.⁶ One might argue that the Great Depression and



THE PUBLICITY PROFESSOR.

A Talk to the Men Who Write Ads.



WHAT the best do, ought to be good enough for your text, but I am free to say it shouldn't. There is a great deal of room for improvement in clothing

PERSONALLY, I believe that an advertisement writer should thoroughly understand the merchandise he is paid to describe to the public. He is a seller of goods, and why should he not be a thoroughly posted salesman?

advertising. The great sums of money that are now being spent are to a great extent doing work on the wrong side. The man who sits in a den and writes ads may not feel the edge of public sentiment. Many writers do not. Frankly, the clothing ad is rapidly assuming that place in the public's estimation formerly held by the circus man. The preponderously bombastic statements, the prayers to be trusted, the evident insincere figures and guarantees are evidences of rot; and I leave it to you, Mr. "Expert" writer, is not the general tone of the average clothier's ad a little below the standard you hope to attain?

It is time that every advertiser in the clothing trade turned his attention toward the saving of a channel that is fast being filled up by the mud from senseless pens. The fair ship of commerce will not be led up that narrow, tortuous channel that leads to the cash drawer unless fairness and honesty are the guiding lights. Would you send your own son to be clothed by a clothier who advertised all-wool suits at \$2.20 a suit? Do you know what an all-wool suit is? Are you aware of the fact that ninety-nine times out of every hundred that you use the term all-wool, you do so with intent to deceive, or from pure ignorance?



Little Billee, Fatty and the Laird.

Just take a glance at the models we have reproduced this month. The make up, the illustrations, and the magnitude of the space speak of generous motives. The phraseology of some of these ads. is good, the others are simply superlative aggregations of high-sounding words without sense.

From the standpoint of idea, Kaufmann, of Pittsburg, recently gave two very good examples. One was a page ad very nicely set up, with a large pen and ink drawing of Du Maurier's Little Billee, Taffy and the Laird from "Tribby." These were put forth in \$9.65 suits. Another ad on the same line showed the Pittsburg baseball team dressed up in the various styles of suits offered at the sale.

E. C. Almy & Co., of Boston, recently published an advertisement headed "A Rousing Wage-Earners' Sale." The good heading was spoiled by a sub-heading, and taste that was a little too loud to be respected.

MODERN CLOTHING ADVERTISING.

IF there is nothing new under the sun, there can surely be nothing new in advertising, and especially in clothing advertising. The style colloquial, the mode apologetic, the manner brassy, the announcements bombastic, and what not else.

The "publicity professor" may be lecturing on "Modern Clothing Advertising," but his professional-sounding nickname, properly dignified appearance, and the flowery embellishment of his opening words offer assurances that he is a man of taste and respectability. Source: *Clothing Gazette*, June 1895.

World War II delayed widespread adoption of a culture of consumption even further.⁷ But even if we find it impossible to pinpoint a decisive moment when American consumer culture emerged, several important features still distinguish the consumption patterns that began to develop in the late nineteenth century. First, there is the matter of scale: an unprecedented range of goods were mass produced in equally unprecedented volume at this time. Second, the advent of mass communications provided powerful new modes of social discourse that were closely linked to consumer culture. Third, the relationship between buyer and seller assumed a new, less personalized, less localized character.

American consumer items prior to the Civil War generally included a limited set of goods. Even if they were ready-made, they were typically not mass-produced, machine-made factory items. The main products of large-scale American manufacture during this time were items such as flour, lumber, and cloth, which were used to make other things. A purchaser of these goods remained in some sense as much a producer as a consumer. In the last half of the nineteenth century, mass production took hold at various speeds in various industries until by the end of the century consumers were confronted with what Daniel Rodgers has called “an avalanche of factory-produced goods.” He notes that between 1860 and 1920 the population of the United States increased a little more than three times, while the volume of manufactured goods increased 12 to 14 times. The rush of goods was so great, as Thomas Richards says, that “a new class of words was developed to describe things in general: gadget, dingus, thingamajig, jigger.” Recognizing that all human cultures are consumer cultures at some level, Richards argues that the distinctive characteristic of nineteenth- and twentieth-century consumer culture has been its production of “vast quantities of commodities and vast quantities of discourse about commodities.”⁸

In addition, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, “the late nineteenth century was the occasion for the greatest change ever seen in the media of cultural production.” The supply of visual images and the means to communicate them expanded dramatically. Kinetoscope galleries, comic strips, home cameras, and picture postcards appeared in the United States during this era, which also saw the emergence of halftone photo reproduction, the poster “craze,” the first million-selling daily newspaper, and enhanced appreciation of the display potential of artificial light and new kinds of color. Not only new objects but also new ways of representing them characterized this period. According to Neil Harris: “The single generation of Americans living between 1885 and 1910 went through an experience of visual reorientation that had few earlier precedents.”⁹

To handle the enormous quantity of goods, new systems of marketing had to be developed. Department stores, mail-order businesses, and advertising all became big businesses during this period. Standardization of

goods made a one-price policy possible; the scale of the urban marketplace made it necessary. This changed the context of acquisition. In earlier transactions the buyer knew the seller, negotiated the price, and sought a product that was custom-made or custom-measured. Increasingly by the 1890s, such transactions involved a payment to a stranger, a fixed price, and a pre-made product. In the old system, as Richard Sennett describes it, the bargaining process was interactive and participatory: "The stylized interplay weaves the buyer and seller together socially." Or, in the less nostalgic terms of one of John Wanamaker's biographers: "Every sale was an argument." In any case, as Susan Strasser points out, the new method of buying and selling was no longer "embedded in human relationships" in quite the same way. Instead, people became "participants in a national market composed of masses of people associated with big, centrally organized, national-level companies."¹⁰

These changes complement the sense of transition and tension that many historians have observed during these years when the combined impact of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration reached critical mass. The established social order strained as competing elites emerged and battled for power, sometimes linked only by shared ethnic and racial phobias or common anxieties about the possibility of a working-class uprising. The established economic system, attuned to small-scale manufacture and local markets, buckled under the need to accommodate mass production as well as the transportation and communications revolutions. Established categories of knowledge and aesthetics were realigned by an increased commitment to scientific secularism and specialized expertise. A similar process transformed the national political framework from a party system relying on mass participation to the "advertising campaign."¹¹ The uncertainty and hardships caused by the onset of a hard economic times in 1893 further exacerbated these concerns. That same year Frederick Jackson Turner's famous paper on the closing of the American frontier offered the further disquieting suggestion that a great source of individual opportunity had been eliminated and the wellspring of American democratic institutions had now dried up. In 1894, the violent confrontation of union railroad workers and the U.S. Army during the Pullman Strike produced what Alan Trachtenberg called "the most destructive civil violence since the Civil War" and increased fears that society was out of control. Jackson Lears called the resulting cultural unease "weightlessness," Robert Wiebe refers to it as a "society without a core." John Higham characterized it more simply—and less pejoratively—as the "reorientation of American culture in the 1890s."¹²

Warren Susman summarized this perspective when he wrote: "Whether it is a change from a producer to a consumer society, an order of economic accumulation to one of disaccumulation, industrial capitalism to finance capitalism, scarcity to abundance, disorganization to high organiza-

tion—however that change is defined, it is clear that a new social order was emerging.”¹³

Susman’s comment illustrates the extent to which many historical interpretations of this era rely on neat dichotomies: producer to consumer, character to personality, inner-directed to outer-directed, salvation to therapy, *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. They imply that an entrenched cultural consensus fell away as a new one arose to take its place.¹⁴ Such an overview is problematical. It is doubtful that the ideological currents in the United States ever flowed so smoothly between their banks. Even in relatively stable times, competing ideologies—and competing elements within an ideology—have always been at work in American society.

Daniel Howe, in describing American Victorianism as “a set of cultural motifs” which were “continually waxing and waning in importance,” has provided a more flexible model.¹⁵ Key motifs of Victorianism revolved around self-control (thrift, sobriety, dignity, order, sexual continence), moral certitude, a faith in progress, and a belief in nature’s “laws.” The middle-class emphasis on character and sincerity, as well as the ideological importance attached to the domestic sphere, reflect various combinations of these attributes. The motifs of modernism often complemented mass production technology (consumerism, mechanization, efficiency, standardization, specialization), a sense of flux and epistemological uncertainty, a concern for vitality, and a fascination with the irrational. These values were frequently mobilized by more or less aggressive revolt against some more stately worldview.¹⁶

Any ideology contains many such motifs which continually shift in relationship to one another. Additionally, individual elements may bond with elements from a competing ideology, producing a cultural system whose characteristics and ascendancy is not easily explained by reference to a single ideological framework. And even as these patterns become visible, they begin to blur as they continue to shift, sliding toward new alignments. At certain times, economic or political circumstances may shake the ideological components with exceptional violence, forcing more rapid and discontinuous rearrangements. The 1890s were such a time. The consolidation of industrial capitalism, and the attendant changes in communications, transportation, consumption, urbanization, and demographics, jolted cultural norms. In trade journals and advertisements for ready-made clothing we can glimpse how multifaceted and ragged a process this was. We will see the leaders of the ready-made clothing trade juggling old and new cultural values like balls in the air, wondering nervously if they would be able to catch them when they descended.

Chas. Green & Co.

GREAT COMBINATION CLOTHING SALE.

*Our Entire Surplus Wholesale
Stock of*

FINE READY-MADE CLOTHING,

*Amounting to Over a Quarter of
a Million Dollars, is being re-
tailed at wholesale prices.*

Bargains in Every Department.

Special for Today.

1000 Men's All-Wool Suits,
Scotch Mixtures, single and
double breasted, at

\$8.50

OPEN EVENINGS.

597, 599 & 601 Washington St.

MEN'S 748 SUITS

Notwithstanding our special sale of every \$100.00 worth of \$25.00
we wish to impress you with the fact that the goods we sell
are made of the best material and are guaranteed to give you
will fulfill your purpose, and our customers are assured of the most
thoroughness of make, style, fit and of the best workmanship.

The
H. Kleinhaus, Inc. 100
Richmond, Virginia 100
Richmond and Lumber
can select from these and other goods that we have sold at a price of
25 to 50 per cent from regular price. If you wish to see a list of our
style names, make for them on our list, and we will send you a list of
"H. Kleinhaus" in the "Looking at" column with their names and
samples.

MABLEY & COMPANY.

No other firm ever did or ever will sell perfect goods at as low prices as H. Kleinhaus & Co.

Of Interest To Men

Any day this week you can walk into H. Kleinhaus & Co's men's clothing department and take your pick and fit of men's fine tailor-made suits that we sold early in the season at \$15, \$18, \$20, \$22 and \$25

FOR



These Fine Suits

Are as near absolute perfection as art and ingenuity can ever hope to attain—Styles are cutaways, frocks and sacks—fabrics worsteds, serges, tweeds, chevits and cassimeres—all colors and sizes. We guarantee them to be as fine suits as can be bought ready made and positively worth \$15, \$18, \$20, \$22 and \$25. Take choice for \$10.

Over 300 men's all-wool suits—in light and dark colors—that sold at \$15, \$18, \$20, \$22 and \$25—on this week change for \$10.

H. KLEINHANS & CO

230 Main St., betw. Seneca and Swan.

STORE OPEN NIGHTS UNTIL 9 O'CLOCK

Most early clothing advertisers embraced the frequently stated advice to stress price in their ads, often placing it in bigger and bolder type than anything else. Though it seems straightforward enough, implicit within this strategy was a new kind of relationship between buyer and seller that replaced face-to-face haggling with an impersonal and standardized cash transaction. Source: *Clothing Gazette*, August 1894.

II

As John Wanamaker recalled it, on the day in 1861 when his men's clothing store opened, he sold \$24.67 worth of goods. "Of the \$24.67," he said, "I put 67¢ in the cash drawer to make change for the next day and took the \$24 to the *Public Ledger* where I paid for an advertisement for the new store."¹⁷

Wanamaker's commitment to advertising was characteristic of him but extremely unusual for its time. Many businessmen considered advertising a sign of weakness and unnecessary besides. Thirty years later, Wanamaker's philosophy had remained the same (although his advertising budget had grown to an estimated \$400,000 per year), and the temper of the times had caught up with him. The trade press of the 1890s insisted that advertising was crucial to business success. Between 1870 and 1900, the amount of advertising done annually in the United States jumped from \$50 million to \$542 million. Meanwhile, the men's ready-made clothing trade grew almost as dramatically. In 1850, the total value of production in the industry was \$48 million and by 1910 it was \$485 million.¹⁸ The two business booms were not unrelated. The *Clothing Gazette*, which served men's wear retailers and wholesalers, launched a series of articles called "Essays on Advertising" by confidently proclaiming that "advertising is to-day one of the great forces of business. It is the foundation stone upon which rests most of the great retail clothing houses of the day. It is the motive power that has built up many handsome fortunes." Throughout the 1890s the magazine featured articles and departments headlined "The Science of Advertising," "The Art of Publicity," "A Little Chat on Advertising," "Good Advertising," "Clever Advertising," "An Intellectual Advertiser," "The Publicity Professor," "An Interview with the Great Doctor of Publicity," and "An Artistic Doctor of Publicity."¹⁹

In addition, a number of periodicals devoted strictly to the advertising trade served to bolster this interest.²⁰ These magazines stressed to their readers that "wise advertising is a continuous performance" and "persistent and insistent advertising are the only kind that pay." Not infrequently they turned to John Wanamaker himself for corroboration, as when he reportedly said: "The men who say that advertising doesn't pay are those men who have never tried it; or who, having tried it, did not try it fairly." The content of these journals indicates they aimed both at retailers who might use advertising and those within the advertising industry who might write it. The magazines thus performed a dual function of promoting the idea of advertising to prospective clients and of establishing an intra-industry dialogue on advertising standards and practices.²¹

The philosophy of advertising promulgated in this literature can be summed up in a pitch from the Curtis Publishing Company: "Good advertising is merely telling the truth about good goods." The trade press pro-

pounded this innocuous view of the advertisers' role with great consistency.²² In reality, however, a much more complex process of self-promotion was taking place. The manufacturers and retailers in the ready-made clothing industry of the 1890s simultaneously engaged in a number of image-making projects, fashioning versions of themselves for public appreciation as well as for self-consumption. Consciously or not, the clothiers and ad agents appropriated values from their social context and projected them upon goods through the advertising medium.

Although clothing advertising in the 1890s was hardly as straightforward as its partisans proclaimed, it was a far cry from the sophisticated commercial messages that came to characterize twentieth-century advertising. The history of American advertising has followed a trajectory from "bald, dry announcements" that appeared in tiny type in daily newspapers of the 1860s and 1870s to highly complex creations which situate visual images and descriptive text in dense networks of emotional and social reference. Advertisers did not fully exploit these latter tendencies until at least the 1920s, but we shall see them marking a trail toward that point by the mid-1890s.²³

Advertisers of the day were hardly innocent of the manipulative potential of their efforts, although they rarely spoke of it. Perhaps their feelings were truly ambivalent. A magazine like *Ad Sense* published at the top of one page the blameless sentiment that "the ad should hold the mirror up to your goods" and at the top of the next promoted the more insidious notion that "the up-to-date merchant of to-day endeavors to first create the want, then to satisfy it." The lines were similarly fuzzy for Nathaniel Fowler, Jr., a Boston advertising writer credited with writing the first "how to" books in the field. One of them, published in 1893, contains an entire chapter on "Honesty in Advertising" that includes the flat injunction that "the advertiser . . . should announce in the most honest terms exactly what he has to sell." Yet the same book has another chapter (more than six times as long) on "Writing Puffs," which explains how to place advertisements in newspapers in the guise of news stories. "The use of the puff is perfectly legitimate," Fowler assured his reader, adding that the method draws its power from the fact that "the people read the item and nine-tenths of them believe it to be news, uninfluenced by the advertiser." Fowler stressed that the puff should never contain anything untrue, apparently thus abiding by his own standard of integrity while at the same time recommending a blatant deception.²⁴

These were exceptional moments in the trade literature of the day. The overwhelming predominance of advice in these journals recommended honesty and plain speaking. "On principle, *Profitable Advertising* believes that it pays, in the long run, for advertisers to tell the truth in their announcements" ran one such pronouncement. In "A Little Chat on Advertising," the *Clothing Gazette* counseled: "Advertisements can't work

miracles. They can't sell an article to a man who has no use for it. They can't sell a thing for more than the prevailing price. All that is claimed for advertising is that it will make people . . . acquainted with your business." Charles Austin Bates, who got his start doing advertising for a clothing store in Indianapolis and later ran the largest ad writing bureau in New York City, wrote in 1898 that "the advertisement that pays best is the plain, honest, forceful talk, written just as if the writer was talking to the reader face to face—a statement of facts." Bates took his argument even further in a trade journal he published. "Advertising never creates a demand," he wrote, "it supplies one that already exists." Pressed as to whether advertising hadn't created a demand for many patent medicines of dubious efficacy, he stood by his position that advertising merely filled existing needs. "As a matter of fact," he wrote, "most people are sick. . . . There are very few people who cannot with advantage use a blood medicine or a tonic."²⁵

The forceful pronouncements on the honesty of advertising highlight the continuous efforts of those involved to throw off the Barnumesque associations that had developed through the snake-oil claims of the patent medicine hawkers, who were among the first and heaviest newspaper advertisers in the United States. The call for restrained and believable advertising copy was in part an attempt to woo back a "suspicious public" that already had been made cynical by "unscrupulous advertising methods." The emphasis on sincerity and the necessary correspondence between appearance and object struck a Victorian note.²⁶

In a similar vein, the trade journal *Fame* frequently compared the rules of advertising to the rules of proper social etiquette. "Great similarities exist between proper social manners and proper advertising," went the introduction to one such article. Another suggested that the beginning advertiser model his approach to the marketplace after "the entrance of a man into society. . . . a well dressed man bearing a respectable name."²⁷

In yet another attempt to fix the mores of advertising within the bounds of Victorian propriety, some advertisers appropriated religious language. One writer argued: "Next to religion, advertising calls for faith. It is casting bread upon the waters which will not return for many days." Another suggested that "in the great temple of advertising it would befit all to be humble." A third, speaking of a popular soap product, argued: "If the Christian religion, which is the greatest boon man ever received, can't keep its people together without continual work I don't believe Pearline can, and after we have converted a woman to using it we propose to keep at her as long as she lives."²⁸ It would be a mistake to assume too quickly that these views were simply cynical. Artemas Ward, the editor of *Fame*, proudly rebutted readers who claimed he had misquoted the Bible: "If there is one thing in the doing of which *Fame* prides itself it is quoting Scripture correctly." He correspondingly chastised advertisers who made



You have learned to your sorrow that a poor ill-fitting suit is easy to get.

A suit well put together—from cloth standing the necessary test for all-wool and fast-color is not so easy to find, unless you know just where to go. We are trying every day to tell you of three good places.

One of the successes of this season is that short English walking coat with flaps.

ROGERS PEET & Co

Prince and Broadway.
Warren and Broadway.
32d and Broadway.

Even when customized drawings were used, their relationship to the text was often tenuous. In the case of Rogers Peet & Co., a prominent clothier and prodigious advertiser, the illustrations sometimes seem strikingly irrelevant. Source: *New York Tribune*, Oct. 2, 1895.

careless or irreverent use of biblical matter in their ads: "Fame always has protested, and ever will, against the careless use of scripture text in advertising."²⁹

On the other hand, the advertisers' emphasis on expertise and science is more distinctly modern in tone. As part of their drive toward credibility,

advertisers sought to establish their calling as worthy of the status and respect of a “profession.” In doing so they demonstrated that they had caught a bug that had infected everyone from morticians to private detectives during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their aspirations are apparent in the descriptions of ad writers as “attorneys,” “doctors” and “professors.” The repudiation of their snake-oil past and aspiration to a professional future is nicely encapsulated in this advice from one A. N. Observer in *Profitable Advertising*: “It doesn’t pay to *experiment* with this or that quack device when one is in need of a physician. There is no economy in it. Neither does it pay to squander time and money in the vain attempt to produce good results in the advertising world when one possesses such shallow and superficial knowledge of ways and means as does the average amateur advertiser.” That, said the writer, should be “the work of the *expert advertising man*.”³⁰

If, as sociologist Eliot Friedman believes, the key identifying factors of a profession are claims to expertise, credentialism, and autonomy, advertisers clearly aspired to professional status. Despite all the talk about advertising as merely “the public announcement of a fact,” those in the advertising business stressed repeatedly the need for a specialist to do the work properly. “You, who know all about clothing, cannot sit down at a desk and dash off a telling ad. It’s not your line,” said one writer. Rather the merchant needed to be “willing to hire [an advertising] man and give him *carte blanche*.” The full push for credentialism, including a major drive for the establishment of university programs to teach advertising, did not come until after the turn of the century.³¹

The entire concept of the “expert”—unknown before the middle decades of the nineteenth century—was socially useful in a period when the old ways of knowing were challenged on so many fronts. People came to rely on experts because they could not know everything for themselves in a fast-changing, urban-industrial world. They needed new cultural forms to supply knowledge previously available through personal experience and face-to-face encounters. This need informed the development of symbolic systems as disparate as Victorian etiquette and modern advertising.³² The affiliation of advertising with expertise, however, was not an unqualified endorsement of modern ways. David Hollinger points out that in the late nineteenth century people came to regard “the modern scientist as, in effect, the complete Victorian . . . a humble and honest man of steady habits, laboring patiently, diligently, selflessly, and without prejudice in the interest of truth.” This is an example of how newly ascendant values can be melded with older standards of conduct as a means of assimilating change. And advertisers were certainly willing to appropriate whatever prestige the glorification of science had to offer. As Nathaniel Fowler wrote in 1893: “During the last ten years, and particularly during the last five years, the quality of advertising has passed through a fiery revolution.

The brilliant minds of the country are now giving attention to the preparation of advertising. Advertising has become a science.”³³

The clothing manufacturers and merchants, as distinct from the advertising professionals, also concocted a self-image that blended a desire for respect and prestige with a drive for up-to-date business tactics.³⁴ The self-image they constructed seeks an even closer identification with bourgeois Victorianism. Still, much of their business advice and many of their advertisements clearly drew inspiration from a more modern worldview that prized boldness and change more than self-restraint and stability, that suggested nerve was as important as character in achieving success, that attempted to assimilate new norms of urban living and corporate capitalism without rejecting the “old verities” which had defined success and status for generations. This was a necessary accommodation, because conventional ways of doing business did not work without modification in a world of mass production and national markets. The values of “character”—honesty, diligence, and self-discipline—were still espoused but no longer considered sufficient to guarantee success.³⁵

In the self-characterizations of the clothiers, the key words in 1895 remained dignity, respect, elegance, and politeness. In a single issue of the *Clothing Gazette*, one could find an unscrupulous business tactic chastised as “extremely undignified,” a new store praised for its “elegance and grandeur,” and a column of short items including the homily: “A man’s true greatness lies in the consciousness of an honest purpose in life.” A wholesaler’s ad might entice buyers for suits that offer “comfort with dignity”; another would recommend its “refined, sensible styles.”³⁶

The magazine asked its readers to believe that “dignity is a component part of proper business progression,” and it took every opportunity to distance the contemporary clothing industry from its lower-class beginnings in seaport “slop shops.” William Browning, one of the most successful nineteenth-century clothiers, noted: “Though progress was slow, little by little the early prejudice, founded upon the character of the ‘slop’ clothes first introduced, was overcome.” The industry furthered this effort by frequently emphasizing that its clothing was “equal to custom made” or “better than the average custom tailor turns out.”³⁷

The clothing industry pursued its grail of respectability in numerous indirect ways as well. Throughout the 1890s the industry campaigned ceaselessly against fly-by-night merchants, who traveled from town to town advertising bogus fire or liquidation sales, often selling poorly made goods at highly profitable prices. The *Clothing Gazette* repeatedly called for legislative action to protect “legitimate dealers” from the “traveling clothing swindlers” and their “fake bankrupt sales.” The magazine documented activities of the itinerants and monitored the progress of court cases involving them. The crusades probably had multiple motivations. Simple self-interest suggests that both established retailers and the large-scale

manufacturers who sought to cultivate their business would see fly-by-night peddlers as cutting their profits as well as their respectability. Such crusades could help convince local merchants, who sometimes resisted the idea of nationally marketed goods, that their best interests lay in a united front with distant manufacturers, thus integrating their interests with those of the mass market. In addition, the call for regulation fits with a contemporary acceptance of some government oversight of industry in return for relief from the cut-throat competition that characterized many businesses of the late nineteenth century. Still, the tone of this self-described “crusade” against business fraud was so evangelical it seems to denote deeper—and perhaps more personal—motivations.³⁸

The trade press also seemed to reach out for credibility through its frequent articles on the history of clothing and the dress of famous and successful people. Readers could learn everything from the story of trousers in ancient Syria to the clothing allowance of American Pilgrims; from the history of socks back to the twelfth century to the cost of the Prince of Wales’ wardrobe. The “dress of men of genius” was analyzed, as were the “Wall Street Beau Brummels.” Some of the articles were fillers; others were illustrated feature stories. Their manifest irrelevance to the practical business advice in which the trade press specialized suggests they filled some other need. Perhaps by associating the ready-made business with established sources of tradition and prestige, the clothing industry hoped to shake off some of its parvenu aura, establishing itself instead as the latest, most highly evolved incarnation of a glorious heritage.³⁹

The genteel and staid aspects of this self-image coexisted with a somewhat contradictory spirit of aggressive modernism. The celebration of newness—an important component of a culture of consumption—was reiterated frequently in articles and advertisements. “Be on the lookout for new things,” suggested one writer. “It is by helping the manufacturer make his new ideas go, that the retailer increases his little pile in the till,” said another. In their ads to retailers, the wholesalers sought to attract the “progressive dealer” and “up-to date retailers.” Joined with a spirit of boosterism, several articles criticized British clothing advertisements for their disdain of “anything startling or new” and for having advertising standards “exasperatingly behind the standard of those we are accustomed to see and marvel at in American newspapers.”⁴⁰

It is less clear whether a drastic shift in emphasis from “character” to “personality” occurred in this period.⁴¹ Certainly, we can find great stress being laid on consumer goods and personal appearance as keys to success. In the first of a series of articles called “Friendly Chats with Clerks,” the store employee is counseled: “Appearances count for a great deal in this critical world of ours. To make a favorable impression you must be immaculate. . . . Wear a suit of a quiet dark shade. The plainer the better. Eschew loud-colored shirts and ties. There is nothing so becoming to the

average man as a spotless white shirt and a tie of dark color.” A clothing ad from E. C. Almy’s in Boston states flatly: “The well-dressed man may be no better than his opposite, but he’ll meet with more consideration every time. Therefore, if you’re looking for success, dress well.”⁴² However, similar business advice can be found at least as far back as Ben Franklin’s autobiography. Perhaps the late 19th century goes further in stressing appearance for its own sake, but what is more certainly new is the promulgation of this principle through advertising on the scale of mass communications. Nathaniel Fowler advised the merchant: “Not only should he advertise honestly, but the advertisement should have *the appearance* of that generous, openhearted truthfulness which carries with it conviction, and which makes a friend of the reader.”⁴³

This hints at the development of a new symbolic system embracing mass market goods and their mass-produced representations. This system called into question simple notions of personal identity. For instance, Charles Austin Bates, the same man who said “I think perhaps the most important feature of a good advertisement is perfect honesty,” delegated the “details of wording the ads” to assistants once he became a \$20,000-a-year ad man. At the same time he would claim that when he did a job for a client, “the ad is more John Smith’s ad than it would have been if John Smith had written it himself.”⁴⁴ In Bates’s world, the ad was in a sense John Smith’s, although he hadn’t written it, and in a sense Charles Bates’s, although he hadn’t written it either. This may amount to “false advertising” by some definition of the term, but it is also possible to think of advertising and mass media as constituting a new field of communications with new codes of referentiality. After all, there *was* a sense in which it was Charles Bates’s ad—and John Smith’s, too.

In any case, these manufacturers and merchants definitely did not rely on good character alone to bring them success. Victorian values might hold that a character defect would explain a business failing, but the *Clothing Gazette* quite explicitly rejects this when discussing the ravages of the depression: “Because a man fails it by no means follows that he does not possess valuable faculties and accomplishments in his line.” At the very least, they knew good character was no good without good advertising. The characteristic attitude was: “What good does it do you to have the very best things or the very greatest bargains on earth if people do not know it?”⁴⁵

A subtler form of this spirit appears in the tendency of wholesalers to illustrate their advertisements not with illustrations of their goods but with drawings of their warehouse and factory buildings. Perhaps this meant to convey an image of solidity and reliability in a depression-wracked economy full of failed businesses. Retailers needed assurance that their manufacturers would be able to deliver on their promises. In addition, however, the buildings themselves were part of the legacy of technological

Clark and Madison.



As We Were Saying.

We've said it so many times that we almost fear to weary you, except that it is true, and truth isn't common enough to be tiresome.

The fact is that our lines of Fall and Winter Overcoats and Suits are so exceptionally fine in finish and style—there is never any question to be raised about the quality—that we feel that we are entitled to the distinction of making the finest as well as the greatest amount of Clothing of any manufacturer in the world.

If we didn't believe this, we wouldn't say it.

Largest in the world.

Browning, King & Co

Clark and Madison Sts.

Read our ad. in tomorrow's Tribune.

Clark and Madison.



Aren't You Ready Yet?

It's time. The weather is here and the coats are here; and the handsomest coats for Fall wear that we have ever made.

Men's overcoats in black and blue beaver too, as the days grow colder.

No manufacturer of Fine Clothing has equal facilities to ours, and surely, no mere dealer can compete in qualities and prices with the garments for Fall and Winter wear that we have made in our own Factory.

Largest in the world.

Browning, King & Co

Clark and Madison Sts.

Read our ad. in tomorrow's Tribune.

Like many advertisers, Browning, King & Co. took seriously the advice to change the content of its advertisements daily. These ads, from the same week, are far more sophisticated than most contemporary efforts at manipulating a combination of visual and verbal images. Source: *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 9-10, 1895.

advance. The development of steel-frame construction and inventions such as the elevator, telephone, mimeograph, and typewriter made large commercial structures both physically and functionally feasible. The association with modernism was deliberate. In an article on Broadway renovations, a writer noted approvingly: "The work of demolishing the old buildings is going on at a merry pace, and ere another buying season comes around many old landmarks will be replaced by towers of steel and stone." These buildings manifested the sentimental glossing over of contemporary pressures, as builders sheathed their steel-framed structures in traditional masonry facades and ornamentation. Thus, the new Brokaw Brothers building was praised as a "splendid commercial edifice" with a "facade of the mixed classic school" (the entrances were surrounded by columns and capitals). This building, which included two passenger elevators, represented "the practical being combined with the beautiful" to the businessmen of the day.⁴⁶

Overall, the members of the clothing industry seemed to be trying to construct an identity poised between what Burton Bledstein characterized as the mid-Victorian and Progressive periods. On the one hand they valued "respectability, orderliness, control and discipline"; on the other, they celebrated their own energy, engaging in various forms of "booming" and "boosterism" and adopting the cause of the eternal new.⁴⁷ The sometimes uneasy mixture permeated the very design of the *Clothing Gazette* itself. The magazine, although self-consciously devoted to the practical, festooned its pages with ornamented letters and decorative motifs of the most filigreed style. It was a technique that has long associations with a tradition of fine printing that was the antithesis of the mass production future that the *Clothing Gazette* courted. The article on "The Publicity Professor" begins with a large ornamented letter filled with roses and includes an illustration of three extremely proper-looking gentlemen in cutaway coats and top hats (Figure 1). The style of dress indicates the double-edged significance of the illustration. By the 1890s, the sack suit—a garment very similar to the modern business suit—had become acceptable for all occasions, displacing an older code of etiquette which required appropriate use of the sack coat, frock coat, cutaway, and tails according to the formality and nature of the occasion. Characteristically, the "publicity professors" in this illustration stride forcefully into the professionalized future while paying stylistic deference to the social values of the past.⁴⁸

III

JACKSON—According to the evening newspapers, the fainting fit which seized Mrs. Chapard on the stage last night will not prevent her from appearing as usual this evening.

STARLEIGH—Of course not. What's the use of advertising if one doesn't reap the benefits it brings.⁴⁹

The whole notion of advertising fits somewhat uncomfortably into the Victorian ethos. If, as John Kasson says, the norms of personal deportment in the nineteenth century emphasized discretion and self-effacement, the necessity for bold display of a clothier's name in the daily news pages must have posed a dilemma for the bourgeois businessman. It is no wonder that one of the ad journals sought to assure its readers that "the man who advertises stands before the public in full, legitimate and dignified prominence." Similarly, in the opening pages of his earliest book, Nathaniel Fowler stated: "An advertisement is a public and perfectly refined and legitimate invitation from the dealer to everybody."⁵⁰

At first glance, the clothing advertisements of 1895 appear almost as straightforward as proclamations like "the truth about good goods" implied. Often ads consisted of a box of type totally devoted to product descriptions and prices. They employed few illustrations of mostly stock drawings. Daniel Pope, in *The Making of Modern Advertising*, issues a sensible caution against an interpretation of advertising that uncovers intricate networks of cultural meanings while ignoring the down-to-earth reality that advertising was first and foremost a business tool. He reminds us that any abstract view of advertising's function must be tempered with the knowledge that business people advertised first because they thought it would help them make money. In addition, other economic determinants—technological advances in communications, concentration of markets in cities, refinement of mass-production techniques—had enormous impact on the form and content of advertisements.⁵¹

But this does not mean that a business understanding of advertising is of sole importance, or even primary importance. Business interests are central to our story precisely because they were integral to a cultural transformation that brought such great changes to everyday life. Pope himself acknowledges that in the last part of the nineteenth century advertising helped mediate these changes: "As the scope of commodity production expanded, advertising sometimes stepped into the gap between production and consumption." The process parallels those involving expertise and etiquette. An individual in an urban environment could no longer have personal knowledge of every other individual he or she encountered, and so must rely on some other system of knowing (such as etiquette or experts). Likewise, by the late nineteenth century a person could no longer have "craft knowledge" of every item he or she might acquire, and so must rely on some other system of knowing (such as advertising). The advertisement became what Thomas Richards calls "a dense locus of signification." Commodities became "the centerpiece of everyday life, the focal point of all representation, the dead center of the modern world."⁵²

Advertising, according to Richards, was the way the “middle class justified the ways of capitalism to man.” In fact, it may have been the way the middle class justified capitalism to itself. Advertising, at its indirect and symbolic levels of communications, could allow merchants and manufacturers to work out an accommodation to modern values while still self-consciously espousing the adherence to Victorian ideals.⁵³

For instance, the relentless trumpeting of price in the ads—the numerals were often in especially big and bold type—registered in contemporary discussions of advertising as merely informative (Figures 2-5). The advertising journals insisted that one should always state the price of goods in an ad—“there is no advertising like the right kind of prices”—on the argument that an ad must “educate its readers in the matter of qualities and values.” One cannot overlook the practical need to emphasize low prices in the mid-90s, as the country was attempting to fight its way out of a depression. Yet clearly this efflorescence of price consciousness represents something new. In earlier times, a customer would “spend as much time haggling over the price as in selecting the suit. It was not an unusual thing to ask \$25.00 and to sell at half that price.” This relationship had become an inflexible and relatively impersonal cash transaction. The conversational tone of much advertising text, often addressing the reader in second person, attempted to obscure the impersonality and anonymity of this new relationship. As *Printers’ Ink*, the most widely circulated advertising journal, advised, “When people see your name constantly in the paper *they begin to believe they know you* and it is but a short step from acquaintance to patronage.”⁵⁴ The insistence on price information and price comparisons reminds us that even if advertising merely fills existing needs, it will do so only if the needs are commercially viable.⁵⁵

The common advice that “the bright, up-to-date advertiser changes his copy with each issue” admits of a similar, somewhat subtle deception. If good advertising amounts to nothing more than “a sentence or two of general description on each article advertised and then prices,” then frequent copy changes are difficult to justify. But advertisers were already becoming “apostles of modernity” who urged people to welcome the new and then to deal with it through consumption. Consumer goods offered people a chance to take possession of the symbols of change and so master it. At the same time, it established a framework for everyday life that took capitalist social relations for granted and thus limited the opportunity for an alternative to consumer culture to be envisioned, let alone adopted.⁵⁶

Most advertisers religiously followed the advice to change copy, sometimes at risk to their gospel of truthfulness. The Putnam in Chicago advertised the same sale two consecutive days in late 1895. Both ads bore the same headline, the same illustration and the boldface notation “\$11.50 for choice of 1,000 fine suits.” The main text changed each day, however. The

first day it emphasized that one could “search the town through and you find the same goods selling everywhere at \$18.00 and \$20.00.” The very next day the text said: “When we say that these Suits are equal to a tailor’s \$30.00 suit we mean it.”⁵⁷

Advertisers were aware such cavalier inconsistencies could undermine their credibility. In its advertising, Hackett Carhart and Company—a descendent of one of the oldest clothing firms in New York—dwelled on the issue of credibility. One ad quoted Emerson—“Every sincere man is right”—and followed with the remark that “we are sincere in our effort to make clothes of which we can truly say ‘none better.’ ” Another began: “ ‘All men are liars,’ said the Psalmist. Could he have been reading advertisements?” From its earliest days, the language of consumption was tainted with skepticism.⁵⁸

Advertisements employed illustrations, but they were mostly stock drawings of fashionable figures, posed as stiffly as paper dolls. Often the illustrations only had a very generic relationship to the products advertised (Figures 6-7); sometimes they seemed irrelevant to both text and product (Figures 8-9); only occasionally did they attempt to fit into a more sophisticated and integrated presentation (Figures 10-12). The generic illustrations—called “cuts” because the image was carved or engraved on a metal plate—are easily enough explained in practical terms. They were cheaper than custom art to obtain (one catalog offered a selection of several hundred such figures at \$1 each) and recent advances in newspaper printing technology made them cheap to reproduce. They were still something of a novelty, having not been at all common in newspaper advertising before the 1890s, and so thought to be eye-catching. Thus, *Printers’ Ink* could refer approvingly to the “widely held belief that ‘any cut was better than no cut at all.’ ” And when the *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter* added stock cuts (available for 25 cents each) to the sample ads published in each issue, it stressed that there was no necessary relationship between the illustration and the advertising pitch. “The sample ads are complete without the illustration,” it assured readers, “as the wording says nothing about the cut.”⁵⁹ At the same time, such illustrations could trace a lineage back to women’s fashion plates, which (in fashion magazines or specialty publications) had been a common way of communicating fashion information since at least the 1830s.⁶⁰ Their deeper meaning is harder to grasp. Certainly they represented some glimmering recognition of the increasing importance and complexity of “visual culture” in the United States. Additionally, perhaps advertisers were taking a rudimentary step toward the development of what Thomas Richards calls “an autonomous iconography for the manufactured object.”⁶¹

The role of advertising’s visual elements—including illustrations and trademarks—was not something that came “naturally.” Systems of repre-

sensation that seem logical today had to be worked out and conventionalized. In 1898, *Ad Sense* published the story of a person who mistook a calendar illustration for an advertisement and tried to order a spinning wheel from an insurance company. The function of advertising illustration was still up for grabs as late as 1914, as illustrated by the story of a small-town clothing merchant who told *Printers' Ink* that he would not advertise using illustrations supplied by a manufacturer who displayed his trademark too prominently. "Don't try to get your money's worth by sticking your name all over it," he said. Such ads eroded his individuality and made him look cheap:

I will not use electros, however, which advertise a manufacturer's product too obviously. I can't afford to have people think I am cheap. Rather than give that impression I would send 50 or 75 cents away to a stock cut house, whose catalogues I have, and get cuts of my own.

From one vantage point, company illustrations that depicted specific items and would build brand name loyalty for a line of goods might seem much more effective—and no more conformist—than generic illustrations that were mass-produced and sold by mail order. The clothier didn't see it that way, because for him illustrations and trademarks carried different connotations. In the ads of the 1890s, we can sense the logic of graphic communication being worked out by trial and error. The conventions of advertising illustration were under construction.⁶²

For U.S. society to move into an age of mass consumption required not only goods but also symbols that would explain the culture of consumption to people and allow them to participate in it. Advertising emerged as a new sign system, a new mode of social communication that increasingly became a dominant discourse in twentieth-century America. Like all such systems, it fixed boundaries on the available topics of discourse, encoded power relationships and ideological meaning, was subject itself to material constraints and breakthroughs. But it also showed surprising resilience and manipulability, a capacity for incorporating complex, multileveled value statements. Social communication is not a one-way, single-frequency transmission, and the transition from Victorian to modern values was not a one-way, single-frequency process.

* * *

One way to define culture is as stories a group of people "tell themselves about themselves." These conversations utilize many different chan-

nels of communication, both direct and indirect. The less direct modes—such as fashion and advertising—often reveal the most. Their superficial utility and deeper ambiguity makes them safe for ideas that would be considered awkward or even dangerous in direct discourse. Their complex and sometimes inscrutable syntax makes it possible for them symbolically to reconcile cultural contradictions and countervailing tendencies. The manner in which advertisers and clothiers worked out their identities in the 1890s represents an example of such a process.⁶³

This does not imply a static functionalism about these developments. Rather, I want to emphasize precisely their dynamism—the sense of trial and error, of cultural values under construction. It is a “view of cultural situations as *always* in flux, in a perpetual historically sensitive state of resistance and accommodation.”⁶⁴ Mass produced goods and mass media advertising brought about cultural change. To a certain degree they constituted that change. In addition, however, they also offered the tools by which the change could be negotiated (i.e., resisted and accommodated). A full analysis of this process would require further inquiry into the production of these meanings and into the implications of the new conventions of representation and communication that resulted.

The world was changing materially under the impact of an expanding capitalist system. This expansion brought with it social change as well. Among the cultural symbols available to people, clothing—and the representation of clothing in advertisements—provided a means of accommodation and resistance to this change. The transition was neither so clear-cut nor so linear as many interpretations imply. The impact of social and economic change shook a host of cultural values out of alignment. By looking at the clothing industry, we can see how people began to piece them back together, in new and sometimes tentative ways, creating a new synthesis that became a dominant form of modern American culture.

Notes

1. *Joseph Schaffner 1848-1918: Recollections and Impressions of His Associates* (Chicago, 1920), 7.

2. William C. Browning, “The Clothing and Furnishing Trade,” in Chauncey M. Depew, ed., *One Hundred Years of American Commerce* 2 (New York, 1895), 563-64; “History of the Men’s Wear Industry,” *Men’s Wear* (February 10, 1950), 204; Claudia Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington, D.C., 1974), 143-45. Shoddy originally referred to cloth combining new and waste wool fiber—it was used with embarrassing results in some Civil War uniforms.

3. David Donald, “Preface,” in Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York, 1967), vii.

4. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Winer, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 12 (Oxford, 1989), 271, lists the first usage of “ready-to-wear” in 1895, citing the Montgomery Ward catalog, but it was already appearing in newspaper ads as well; see for example, Wilde’s ad, *Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 1895, 7; F.M. Atwood ad, *Chicago Tribune*, October 4, 1895, 12; Smith Gray & Co. ad, *New York Tribune*, October 4, 1895, 10. Daniel Boorstin offered an early and influential description of this era as marking the move from

producer to consumer in *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York, 1973), 99. This periodization has found favor with many other historians in the years since. See for example, Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, "Introduction," in Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York, 1983), xi; Susan Benson Porter, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* (Urbana, 1986), 75; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, 1993), 8.

5. Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America: Why Demand?" in Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, 1994), 486. This anthology provides an excellent overview of the historiography of preindustrial consumption, as does John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds. *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993). A good review of the historical literature on consumer culture is Jean-Christophe Agnew's "Coming Up For Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective," *Intellectual History Newsletter*, 12 (1990): 3-21 (also in Brewer and Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 19-39).

6. Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 1990), 99-158.

7. For instance, W.T. Lhamon Jr. states that "the middle of the fifties was when it became clear that the problem of production, at least in the United States, was yielding to the problem of consumption." See W.T. Lhamon Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, 1990), 16.

8. Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore, 1985), xxvi; Boorstin, *The Americans*, 90; Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York, 1983), 31; Daniel Rodgers, *The Work Ethic In Industrial America 1850-1920* (Chicago, 1978), 27; Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, 1990), 2, 268. Richards prefers the term "commodity culture" to "consumer culture" precisely to differentiate this era from early and later forms of consumption.

9. Raymond Williams, "When Was Modernism?" in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London, 1989), 33; Neil Harris, "Iconography and Intellectual History: The Halftone Effect," in *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago, 1990), 307. Harris's essay discusses the significance of the halftone process. For brief descriptions of other developments see the following: on comic strips (1897) and the first million-selling daily (the *New York World* in 1897), Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History: 1690-1960*, 3rd. edition (New York, 1962), 501-502, 588, 585-586, 546; on the first Kodak (1888) and the first Kinetoscope galleries (1894), Reese Jenkins, *Technology and the American Photographic Industry 1839 to 1925* (Baltimore, 1975), 113-116, 268-275; on the poster "craze," (mid-1890s), Patricia Hills, *Turn-of-the-Century America* (New York, 1975), 58-60; on picture postcards (1893), Donald Miller and Dorothy Miller *Picture Postcards in the United States* (New York, 1976), 1-14; on light and color, William Leach, "Strategists of Display and the Production of Desire," in Simon Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920* (New York, 1989), 99-132, and Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1988), 158-190.

10. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, (New York, 1977), 142; Herbert Gibbons, *John Wanamaker 1* (New York, 1926), 87; Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York, 1989), 26, 15.

11. On competing elites, see David C. Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1982); on old and new retailing see Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*; on intellectual trends, see George Cotkin, *Reluctant Modernism: American Thought and Culture 1880-1900* (New York, 1992); on politics, see Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York, 1986).

12. Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982) 208; T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York, 1981), 32; John Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s," in John Weiss, ed., *The Origins of Modern Consciousness* (Detroit, 1965).

13. Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, (New York, 1984), 275.

14. William Leach has offered a recent illustration of this approach. Before 1880, he argues, America culture was "agrarian, republican, and religious." By 1930, however, a "capitalist concept of self" had choked off the past and rejected all that "is also 'human' about

human beings: their ability to commit themselves, to establish binding relationships, to sink permanent roots, to maintain continuity with previous generations, to remember, to make ethical judgments, to see pleasure in work, to remain steadfast on behalf of principle and loyal to community or country . . . to seek spiritual transcendence beyond the self, and to fight a cause through to the end." See *Land of Desire*, 8, 385-86.

15. Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," in Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *Victorian America*, 6. The term "ideology" in this paper refers "to that part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defense of patterns of belief and value" and which is best understood as "systems of interacting symbols, of patterns of interworking meanings." Its scope stretches beyond agendas of the political economy, and its symbolic systems capture the "interpenetration of culture, personality, and social system." See Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973)—quotations are on 231, 207, and 214; in the first instance Geertz is quoting L.A. Fallers.

16. Obviously, it is not my intention to introduce Victorian-to-modern as another simple dichotomy. Howe's "Victorian Culture in America" summarizes the problem of trying to pin a rigid, stable definition on such terms as "Victorianism." Daniel Singal highlights similar problems with the term "modernism" in "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," *American Quarterly*, 39 (Spring 1987), 7-54. In this essay I use this nomenclature not to describe fixed terms of binary opposition or universal norms of cultural identity, but in reference to rather loose and shifting amalgams of values and attitudes that constituted the dominant cultural style for the growing middle class.

17. Joseph A. Appel, *The Business Biography of John Wanamaker* (New York, 1930), 41-42. Appel believes Wanamaker's memory was faulty in some details, but he appears to document the essence of this story. This is one of the many tales about Wanamaker's life that were so often repeated in slightly different versions that they came to seem like capitalist folk tales. For other versions of this story see Russell H. Conwell, *The Romantic Rise of a Great American*, (New York, 1924), 102; *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores*, 1 (n.p., 1913), 27; and "Wanamaker Put New Ideas in Trade," *New York Times*, December 13, 1922, 12.

18. *Printers' Ink*, July 28, 1938, 72, 11; Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, 136; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910. Manufactures: 1909*, 8 (Washington, D.C., 1912-13), 398.

19. *Clothing Gazette*, June 1890, 43 (hereafter cited as *CG*); *CG*, February 1890, 61; *CG*, June 1894, 58; *CG*, January 1895, 121; *CG*, February 1895, 11; *CG*, March 1895, 61; *CG*, June 1895, 20, 59; *CG*, August 1895, 69, 50. The *Clothing Gazette* was a monthly publication of the Joseph W. Gibson Co. in New York. Devoted to the men's wear trade in ready-made clothing, it began publishing in 1881 and by 1895 an average issue was about 150 pages. Approximately two-thirds of its space was occupied by advertisements, almost exclusively those of clothing manufacturers and wholesalers attempting to attract retailers' business. The magazine clearly aimed for a national market. A selection of "retail ramblings" from January, 1895, included news notes on clothiers from Caribou, Maine, to Sioux City, Iowa. A similar column in April ranged from Worcester, Mass., to Missoula, Mont. The magazine's contents suggest that its readership was mainly clothing retailers, although presumably manufacturers also subscribed to keep up with the trade. Among trade journals of the early 1890s extant in the Library of Congress collection, it is the only publication focusing on the merchandising of ready-made clothing. The *Clothing Gazette* changed its name to *Gibson's Clothing Gazette* in December 1894. For consistency, I have referred to it throughout simply as the *Clothing Gazette*.

20. The first widely circulated advertising trade journal, *Printers' Ink*, was founded in July 1888 as a semi-monthly and became a weekly in 1890. By 1892 its editor had already identified more than a dozen trade journal competitors (see *Printers' Ink*, November 9, 1892, 604-605). By 1900, as many as 200 advertising trade journals had come and gone in the previous dozen years and at least 42 were still in existence (see Sidney A. Sherman, "Advertising in the United States," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 52 (December 1900), 29-30). These journals had relatively small circulation—early in the 1890s *Printers' Ink*, the largest among them, claimed to have an average press run of more than 50,000 (November 2, 1892, 572) although others estimated that it probably sold no more than 20,000 copies a week (Sherman, "Advertising in the United States," 29). The journals circulated very widely, however, and took pains to be inclusive. The advertising writer, merchant and manufacturer—big and small, urban and rural—could all find items addressed to their interests. Correspondence printed in *Printers' Ink* indicated the magazine had regular readers in places such as Janesville, Wis., Caney, Kan., and Marysville, Ohio, as well as in larger manufacturing and retailing centers.

21. *Ad Sense*, March 1898, 18; *The Advisor*, March 1899, 15; *Profitable Advertising*, September 1894, 111.

22. *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, February 5, 1898, 15. An overview of the role of Cyrus Curtis in developing the enduring linkage between mass consumption and mass communications can be found in Helen Damon-Moore and Carl F. Kaestle, "Gender, Advertising, and Mass-Circulation Magazines," in Carl F. Kaestle, et. al, *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880* (New Haven, 1991), 245-271.

23. *Printers' Ink*, July 28, 1938, 70; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, 1985), 11.

24. *Ad Sense*, April 1898, 42-43; Nathaniel C. Fowler, Jr., *Building Business: An Illustrated Manual for Aggressive Business Men* (Boston, 1893), 263, 265, 425. Frank Presbrey, who worked as an ad man beginning in the 1890s and later wrote a history of the field, credited Fowler with writing the first book of advertising advice. He was probably referring to Fowler's *About Advertising and Printing: A Concise, Practical, and Original Manual in the Art of Local Advertising* (Boston, 1899). See Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (1929, rpt. New York, 1968), 310.

25. *Profitable Advertising*, Oct. 15, 1893, 164; *CG*, January 1895, 122; Charles Austin Bates, *Short Talks on Advertising* (New York, 1898), 41; Charles Austin Bates *Criticisms*, May 1897, 65, 67; Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 134. Bates evidently believed in both advertising and patent medicine so strongly that he risked his considerable reputation and fortune on a nostrum called Laxacola around the turn of the century. The product failed and Bates went bankrupt and dropped from view. See Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York, 1984), 37.

26. Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 8; *Ad Sense*, March 1898, 30.

27. *Fame*, June 1894, 147; *ibid.*, March 1892, 3.

28. *Ibid.*, May 1892, 67; *ibid.*, November 1892, 259; *ibid.*, March 1892, 4-5.

29. *Ibid.*, September 1892, 208; *ibid.*, December 1895, 367.

30. Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York, 1976); *Profitable Advertising*, May 15, 1894, 373 (emphasis in original).

31. Eliot Friedman, "Are Professions Necessary?" in Thomas Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory* (Bloomington, 1984), 8-10; Fowler, *About Advertising*, 6; *CG*, March 1895, 16; Quentin J. Schultze, "'An Honorable Place': The Quest for Professional Advertising Education, 1900-1917," *Business History Review*, 56 (Spring 1982), 16-32.

32. Thomas Haskell, "Introduction" in Thomas Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts*, xi-xii; William Leach views these developments as entirely negative. He describes the creation of "a century of intermediaries" that "helped inject into American culture a new amorality essentially indifferent to virtue"; see *Land of Desire*, 15.

33. David Hollinger, "Inquiry and Uplift: Late Nineteenth-Century American Academics and the Moral Efficacy of Scientific Practice," in Thomas Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts*, 142; Fowler, *Building Business*, 14.

34. Lumping together all manufacturers and retailers—large and small, urban and rural—necessarily involves an element of historical simplification. The evidence suggests, however, that divisions between them were not significant in terms of the focus of this essay. Perhaps this was because, unlike other industries, men's ready-made clothing did not move quickly into an oligopolistic phase, where a few large manufacturers or retailers attempted unilaterally to rewrite the rules of commerce. As late as 1916, the federal government would report that "competition in the men's ready-made clothing industry is free and unobstructed and is as keen as it well could be. There are no combinations or large concerns that can be said to dominate the trade or to fix prices." In addition, the manufacturers rarely tried to bypass retailers by selling direct to consumers or through middlemen. According to the 1916 report, 98.21 percent of the studied manufacturers sold directly to retailers, with the remainder split among mail-order companies, jobbers, made-to-order concerns and exports. To be sure, there were serious tensions along the chain of distribution (especially concerning the retailers' penchant for returning and canceling orders), but they do not seem to represent an important cultural divide between branches of the industry. As already mentioned (note 19 above) the trade press attempted with apparent success to construct a single audience including all aspects of the trade. See the Department of Commerce report, *Miscellaneous Series 34, The Men's Factory-Made Clothing Industry* (Washington, D.C., 1916), 240, 242, 246-247.

35. John Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* (Chicago, 1965).

36. *CG*, January 1895, 16, 9, 94, 8, 141.

37. *CG*, November 1895, 99; William Browning, "The Clothing and Furnishing Trade," 563; *CG*, July 1894, 3; *CG*, January 1895, 8.

38. There are many examples of this "crusade" throughout the first half of the 1890s. For a collection of "abuses" around the country, see the *CG* issue of February 1890, pp. 44-45; for a call to collective action, see "The Bankrupt Stock and Fire Sale Evil" in the issue of July 1894, pp. 59-60; for a report on related legal action in which an anti-peddler ordi-

nance was declared unconstitutional ("The decision may be considered good law, but it is clearly not good common sense") see the issue of February 1895, p.16. Jackson Lears has noted the ideology of a WASPish "ethnic solidarity" embedded in these campaigns. Combining "Protestant plain speech and professional probity," they often dealt in anti-Semitic stereotypes. See Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994), 205.

39. *CG*, February 1890, 47; *CG*, January 1895, 93; *CG*, May 1895, 30, 50; *CG*, May 1890, n.p.; *CG*, August 1890, 32-34.

40. *CG*, January 1895, 122, 123, 5, 27, 35; *CG*, November 1894, 25; *CG*, March 1895, 28.

41. Warren Susman argued for a transformation from the "culture of character" to the "culture of personality" in a 1979 essay called "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture" that was reprinted in *Culture as History*, 271-285. His argument drew on earlier work by Philip Rieff and David Riesman. Another influential version of this thesis can be found in T.J. Jackson Lears's "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930" in Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880-1980*, 1-38. All claimed in one form or another that the prevailing measure of individual quality had shifted from inner virtue and moral steadfastness to the manipulation of a surface self in order to manipulate others.

42. *CG*, February 1895, 30-31; *CG*, February 1895, 30-31.

43. "In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care not only to be in reality industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances of the contrary. I dressed plainly; I was seen at no places of idle diversion . . ." in *The Autobiography of Ben Franklin* (New York, 1955), 83 (emphasis in original); *CG*, November 1895, 12; Fowler, *Building Business*, 425 (emphasis added).

44. *Printers' Ink*, Oct. 2, 1895, 44; *ibid.*, Aug. 14, 1895, 5. Another *Printers' Ink* contributor summed the situation up this way: "Home-made ads do not usually look as truthful as the ads of experts." See Addison Archer, "What an Expert Is," *Printers' Ink*, October 23, 1895, 3-4 (emphasis added).

45. *CG*, January 1895, 128; Bates, *Short Talks on Advertising*, 8.

46. James Marston Fitch, *American Building: The Historical Forces that Shaped It*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1966), 168-210; John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown, *The Architecture of America: A Social and Cultural History* (Boston, 1966), 81-84; *CG*, March 1895, 46; *CG*, January 1895, 11. The classic example whereby a modern industrial infrastructure was cloaked by a classical facade occurred at the White City at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. See Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 209-220.

47. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 53-54. Jackson Lears is among the few advertising historians to have observed and analyzed this balancing act. He describes it as a tension between a new "professional-managerial worldview" and an older "carnavalesque tradition" of "enchantment." Lears sees this dilemma as a stark dichotomy and "fundamental conflict." Rather than a genuine attempt to amalgamate old and new values, he interprets the espousal of old verities as a "vener" for a "deeper structure of belief" that is cynical and manipulative. My analysis suggests a less orderly shuffling and reshuffling of bundles of values, a deeper structure that is kaleidoscopic rather than Manichean. See Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 212, 230 and all of Part II.

48. Henry R. Plomer, *English Printers' Ornaments* (New York, 1924); *CG*, June 1895, 59; *CG*, August 1895, 69. On men's suits, see Jo Barraclough Paoletti, "Changes in the Masculine Image in the United States 1880-1910: A Content Analysis of Popular Humor About Dress" (Diss. University of Maryland, 1980).

49. *Profitable Advertising*, Sept. 15, 1893, 119.

50. John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York, 1990), 118-121; *Ad Sense* (March 1893), 5; Fowler, *About Advertising and Printing*, 8.

51. Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 7-11.

52. Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*, 36; William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction: An Essay on the Problem of Needs and Commodities*. (Toronto, 1976), 15; Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 1; on the broader cultural function of advertising as a system of symbolic communication, see Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London, 1970); Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago, 1976); Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington, 1988).

53. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 7, 251.

54. Charles Austin Bates *Criticisms*, November 1897, 170; *The Advisor*, March 1899, 7; Harvey F. Morris, *The Story of Men's Clothes* (Rochester, 1926), 23; *Printers' Ink*, Aug. 22, 1894, 294 (emphasis added).

55. Susan Strasser points out that the transition from haggling to price tags came piecemeal, and that the older form of bargaining persisted in some places well into the twentieth century (*Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 74, 230); Roland Marchand elaborates on the false note of personalism in later advertising (*Advertising the American Dream*, 9); Michael Schudson comments on the distinction advertising implicitly establishes between needs and "commercially viable needs" in *Advertising. The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York, 1984), 235.

56. *The Advisor*, March 1899, 15; *Ad Sense*, March 1898, 13; Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, uses the term and develops the idea of advertisers as "apostles of modernity"; Christopher Lasch, "The Culture of Consumption," in Mary Kupiec Clayton, Elliott J. Gorn, and Peter W. Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of American Social History*, 2 (New York, 1993), 1386-1387; Leach, *Land of Desire*, xv.

57. The Putnam ad, *Chicago Tribune*, October 3, 1895, 7; The Putnam ad, *Chicago Tribune*, October 4, 1895, 4.

58. Hackett, Carhart and Company ad, *New York Tribune*, October 3, 1895, 12; Hackett, Carhart and Company ad, *New York Tribune*, October 4, 1895, 10.

59. *CG*, September 1895, 81-113; *Printers' Ink*, July 28, 1938, 83-84; *Chicago Dry Goods Reporter*, October 3, 1897, 43.

60. When fashion photography emerged as a distinct genre in the 1920s, it represented a fusion of nineteenth-century aesthetic trends in fashion prints and photographic portraits and the newer art aesthetic of surrealism. See William Ewing, "Perfect Surface," *Aperture*, 122 (Winter 1991): 6-19.

61. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 59-60.

62. *Ad Sense*, April 1898, 35; story from *Printer's Ink*, November 26, 1914, reprinted in Paul Terry Cherington, *The First Advertising Book* (New York, 1917), 109-112; Susan Strasser offers evidence that the meaning of brand names underwent a similar process of experimentation in *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 37-43.

63. The ideas and phraseology in this section are adapted in part from Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cock Fight" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 448-453.

64. George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago, 1986), 78 (emphasis in original).