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The Truth is in the Lye: Soap, Beauty, and Ethnicity in British Soap Advertisements.

Michelle I. Parker

University of Washington - Tacoma Campus, parker13@uw.edu

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The Truth is in the Lye
Soap, Beauty, and Ethnicity in British Soap Advertisements

Michelle Parker
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March 14, 2014

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Introduction

“Those concerned are black from head to toe, and they have such a flat nose, that it is almost impossible to feel sorry for them...It is so natural to think that colour constitutes the essence of humanity... It is impossible for us to assume that these people are men.”¹

Eighteenth and nineteenth century attitudes such as the one represented by the quotation above have helped shaped the Western world’s cultural perception of race. They have had profound influence on consumer culture and cultural views of beauty. These views are linked to the history of advertising and the growth of advertising alongside the Industrial Revolution, in Britain, during the late nineteenth century.

The civilizing mission of the British, in mid-to-late nineteenth century, sought to bring Western views of civilization to what the British believed were the uncivilized corners of the world. These areas included Africa and Australia, as well as parts of Asia and the Americas. The civilizing mission is often held to be synonymous with the “White Man’s Burden.” The White Man’s Burden was the idea that in order for the world to progress the white man had to carry the uncivilized, darker skinned races into the modern era.² The idea was a way in which merchants, governments, and settlers could garner the support of populations in their home countries. It was a time of expansion, education, and atrocities. The civilizing mission and the White Man’s Burden went hand in hand. The ideas that they promoted were supported and justified by the images used in advertising that portrayed native people in Africa, Asia, and Australia, as savage and uncivilized. The impact of these advertisements contributed to the inequality of non-whites

1. Montesquieu, *De le’esprit des loix*, 1: 343. The translation is from Spirit of the Laws, trans. Cohler, Miller and Stone, 250. Quoted in Paul Stock. “‘almost a Separate Race’: Racial Thought and the Idea of Europe in British Encyclopedias and Histories, 1771-1830.” *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2011): 3-29, 7.

2. Rudyard Kipling and Thomas James Wise, *The White Man's Burden*, London: [s.n.], 1899.

in Britain, and worldwide, during the late nineteenth century and they still impact ideas of beauty in the early twenty-first century.

This paper will discuss the formation of the idea of a superior white race and the civilizing mission of the British through the exploration of the history of advertising as it developed alongside the advances during the Industrial Revolution in Britain. The paper will specifically focus will be on the soap industry in Britain during the late nineteenth century. The advertisements that will be analyzed in this paper are from Pears soap and Dove soap.

Pears soap and Dove soap are produced by the same company in the twenty-first century. The company Unilever was created through a variety of mergers and acquisitions over the last century.³ Pears soap is produced and marketed by Hindustan Unilever, a subsidiary of the parent company Unilever that operates out of Mumbai India. Dove soap is manufactured by the parent company Unilever. Pears and Dove are just two brands that are produced by Unilever, which in the modern world has a global reach and manufactures produces not just in the soap industry but also in food, hygiene, beauty, and healthcare.⁴

The link between the rise of a culture of consumption and imperialism will be examined through the dissection and discussion of the advertisements analyzed later in this paper. They also will allow for the study of the justification for the civilizing mission through the use of soap advertisements as well as the messages the advertisements contain about the racial superiority of whiteness. The clear message put forth is that white skin is more beautiful, superior, and considered to be the primary marker of belonging to the civilized race. This theme is more

3. Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever; a Study in Economic Growth and Social Change*, New York: Praeger, 1968.

4. "Unilever's Annual Report & Accounts 2013," Unilever global company website, <http://www.unilever.com/> (accessed January 8, 2014).

obvious in earlier advertisements, from brands such as Pears. However, this thread is also found in the advertisements of the contemporary world, for example in the advertisement this paper examines from Dove soap.

In 2011 Dove soap (a Unilever brand), for example, was criticized for the unintentional depiction of dark skin as being damaged skin.⁵ This theme may be more obvious form in old advertisements from Brooke's Monkey Brand and Pears, yet this thread of whiter is more beautiful and superior although subtler in the contemporary world is found throughout beauty product advertisements over the last one hundred or so years.

The advertisements that are examined in the case study portion of this paper are ones that were produced by advertising companies in Britain to sell products both at home and abroad. They also were instrumental in gaining support for the efforts abroad to bring Western civilization to the far reaches of the globe. The advertisements have two primary goals. The first is to sell products. The second is to reinforce ideas of civilization and racial superiority.

The first advertisement examined is from the 1890s and is a Pears soap advertisement. It has been examined by a variety of scholars including Anne McClintock and Anandi Ramamurthy. The second advertisement examined is from 1887 and features a character known as Admiral Dewy using Pears soap with the text "The White Man's Burden" prominently in the lower part of the picture. The third advertisement is also from 1887 and shows an Australian Native as he dies with text along the bottom that alludes to the desire to return as part of the

5. Daily Mail Reporter, "In hot water again, Dove? Soap giant accused of racism over body wash advert," *Daily Mail* (London), May 25, 2011. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1390312/Soap-giant-Dove-accused-racism-body-wash-advert.html>.

white race.⁶ The final advertisement examined is one from the brand Dove. Dove makes a series of skin care products including soap. This advertisement is from 2011 and sparked outrage in Britain as being racists as it implies that black skin is damaged and white skin is not damaged.⁷

There are a variety of theories and methods that could be used to examine the soap advertisements in this paper. This paper will use semiotic analysis paired with synchronic analysis. A more complex argument could be made using other theories, in this paper for the sake of space and clarity the analysis in this paper will be focused on these two basic analysis techniques.

Methodology

In the study of media systems developing an understanding of semiotic analysis is a crucial skill. The ability to recognize the signs and codes that are present in historical advertisements will provide insight in understanding how advertisements shape ideology in the history of Western society and how these ideologies influence modern day views of race. The discussion of how these advertisements fit into the larger context of world history is essential in understanding how they have and continue to influence ideas in the twenty-first century.

Semiotics is a term that is used to describe the study of signs and their meanings.⁸ It is a powerful tool in discovering and critiquing messages contained in advertising. Semiotics takes the elements of the advertisement and pulls them apart which allows for an individual critique of

6. "Soap Advertising," Soap Advertising,
<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jshoaf/Jdolls/jdollwestern/Ads/japrose.html>.

7. Daily Mail Reporter. "In hot water again, Dove? Soap giant accused of racism over body wash advert." *Daily Mail* (London), May 25, 2011.
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1390312/Soap-giant-Dove-accused-racism-body-wash-advert.html>.

8. Arthur Asa Berger, *Media analysis techniques*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982.

each element. When the elements are examined in this way messages become apparent. When Semiotic analysis is paired with synchronic analysis the correlating messages across advertisements and even time becomes more apparent.

Synchronic analysis is a method that explores the messages contained in advertisements by revealing the patterns buried in the symbols and codes contained in a media text. “A synchronic study of a text looks at the relationships that exist among its elements.”⁹ By pairing synchronic analysis and pairing it with denotative and connotative analysis the literal meaning of a text is discovered and the underlying meaning of the same text can be discussed.

Advertising sells consumers a bit more than a product. It sells ideas about ethnicity class, and gender, as well as beauty. Cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall defines ideology as a belief system that is set forth by those in power about how the world is, or how the world should be.¹⁰ They are under the radar messages that influence society. The influence can be seen in relation to what is acceptable behavior, and most pertinent to this paper what is defined as beautiful.

Similar to most media products, advertising can be used to educate and improve, by changing the way that people view certain topics; such as the definition of what is civilized and beautiful. Soap advertisements are just one genre of advertisements that have been used to justify inequality and oppression. In the history of the Western world, never before have images had such power as they gain during the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. The power of advertising has grown since the late nineteenth century to what it is today. In the modern twenty-first century advertising is everywhere and the messages that these advertisements claim have changed little over the last century. The last advertisement analyzed by this paper is from 2011

9. *Ibid.*, 20.

10. Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes," In *Gender, race, and class in media: a critical reader*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2011. 81-84.

and proves how the racial message in advertising has shifted from being overt to a pernicious that is more harmful because it is under the radar.

Literature Review

The study of advertisements and racism has produced a lot of literature on both subjects. The list of sources that could be reviewed in relation to these two topics is immense. The focus of this section of the paper will be to examine some of the key works that have helped develop and provide support for the arguments made by this paper. These sources have either had a profound impact on the study of racism, advertisement, or British History.

Antoinette Burton's "Tongues Untied: Lord Salisbury's 'Black Man' and the Boundaries of Imperial Democracy." provides the reader with insights into how non-white imperial politicians were viewed in the 1886 general election. The article examines the remarks made by Lord Salisbury about one of the individuals running for office, Dadhabai Naoroji, who ran on the Liberal ticket for office. While not focused on advertising, Burton's article is useful in that it echo's the racist thoughts and beliefs that are commonly seen during this time in soap advertisements.¹¹

The *History of Beauty*, by Umberto Eco and Alastair McEwen, has profoundly influenced the way in which beauty is discussed. They explore in depth the Western world's perceptions of beauty. It traces ideologies relating to beauty from Ancient Greece to the twentieth century. It examines a wide variety of primary source examples that have helped to shape these perceptions of beauty.¹²

11. Antoinette Burton, "Tongues Untied: Lord Salisbury's 'Black Man' and the Boundaries of Imperial Democracy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (2000): 632-661. <http://www.jstor.org>. (accessed October 03, 2012).

12. Umberto Eco and Alastair McEwen, *History of Beauty*, New York: Rizzoli, 2004.

Another book that provides a great overview of the history of racism is George Fredrickson's *Racism: A Short History*. This book makes the argument that racism is directly connected to religious intolerance. It provides an evaluation of social thoughts on the subject of race. It gives a quick overview of the history of racism but also stresses the differences between racism and xenophobia.¹³

In Gustav Jahoda's article the argument is made that modern nationalism can be traced to the time of the French Revolution. In the article an examination of scientific papers is used to trace the rise of racism in Europe in the Nineteenth century. It gives an overview of the development of a more modern form of racism and the idea of racial superiority and beauty.¹⁴

Hye Ryoung Kil's "Soap Advertisements and Ulysses: The Brooke's Monkey Brand Ad and the Capital Couple," the argument is made through an examination of Brooke's Monkey Brand soap and Pears soap advertisements that the role of soap is that of a weapon in the ideological struggle on defining beauty and racial superiority. This article uses the historical role of soap advertisements and how they helped to shape and influence Victorian culture in Britain. It provides a series of examples in chronological order that support the author's argument and further examines the role of soap advertisements on Victorian culture.¹⁵

In *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, Zine Magubane argues that the treatment of blacks echoed the treatment of women and

13. George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002.

14. Gustav Jahoda, "Intra-European Racism in Nineteenth-Century Anthropology," *History & Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2009). doi:10.1080/02757200802654258 (accessed October 15, 2012).

15. Hye Ryoung Kil, "Soap Advertisements and Ulysses: The Brooke's Monkey Brand Ad and the Capital Couple," *James Joyce Quarterly*, 47 (3): 417-426. (accessed October 27, 2012).

non-British whites. It examines images and the role they played in the making of the relationships between Britain and South Africa. The author focuses on examples that were used to dehumanize non-whites, non-British whites, and women. It also discusses how these images were used to justify the inequalities that these groups endured.¹⁶

Unilever Company History

The company Unilever was not always Unilever, before a merger in the early twentieth century the company sprung out of the roots of a small grocery business in Britain. In the 1880s the brothers William and James Lever formed the company.¹⁷ The company quickly grew and reaped the benefits of being formed in Britain, enabling the company to expand and sell the products in British colonies, such as Africa and Australia.¹⁸

The company Unilever was formed during the early part of the twentieth century. It was created from two companies that sold different products that used the same primary ingredient, palm oil. Those two companies were the Lever Brothers, a British soap company, and Margarine Unie, a Dutch margarine maker. Over the next century the company Unilever would add diverse lines of products to the company's portfolio. At the turn of the twenty-first century Unilever was the parent company to multimillion dollar child companies such as: Pears, Dove, Axe, Lux, Suave, and Degree to name a few. The ability of Unilever to horizontally as well as vertically integrate their business has led them to be a multi-billion dollar company with their fingers in the proverbial pie of many different market sectors. The company has subsidiaries around the globe,

16. Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

17. BBC. "Unilever: A company history ." BBC News.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/651938.stm>.

18. Ibid.

including Hindustan Unilever, which produces Pears soap.¹⁹

A Brief History of British Advertising

Advertising is something that is studied in a variety of ways. Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Sociology, History and more are all fields that examine the world of the media and advertising in order to garner a better understanding of past and modern societies. Advertising however does more than mirror the beliefs of a society; it also has the power to help shape societies.

Advertising had existed before the late nineteenth century and the industrial revolution. However advertising had for the most part target a limited audience. The issue to tackle was how to convince the lower classes to spend hard earned money on goods they could make themselves in their homes. Advertisers, for example, began to equate the use of store bought soap with a sense of status, class, and being part of the civilized ethnicity.

Scholar Anandi Ramamurthy argues in her book *Imperial Persuaders*, “Advertising is a form of cultural production that permeates every aspect of our lives.”²⁰ It was during the Industrial Revolution in Britain and Europe that advertising begins to have a significant influence in British culture. This time period is one that is the beginnings of a shift in culture from a society of producers to a society of consumers.

In Naomi Klien’s *No Logo*, she discusses the evolution of the advertising industry. She argues that advertising started off selling a product, but not a brand, and has evolved to selling a

19. "Unilever's Annual Report & Accounts 2013." Unilever global company website. <http://www.unilever.com/>.

20. Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*, Manchester, UK; New York; New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2003, 1.

brand that represents a lifestyle, not necessarily a product: “The first mass-marketing campaigns, starting the second half of the nineteenth century, had more to do with advertising than with branding as we understand it today.”²¹ She puts forth the idea that advertising rose forth out of the invention of new products. Advertising was a way to convince people that they needed the products being invented to make their lives more comfortable and easier.²²

The rise of advertising and the rise of racial ideology parallel each other in Britain. As the advertising industry started to take flight so did the racial ideologies of the time. Advertisements were designed and still are today, to show what is desirable, beautiful and the preferred physical attributes. From examining the impact of a range of publications such as National Geographic to soap advertisements in Britain, a common theme develops.²³ The depictions of non-whites in both advertisements and magazines that circulated around the globe popular thought is formed. By looking at primary sources, such as soap advertisements, popular magazines and analyzing them a deeper understanding of what shapes popular thought is unveiled.

During the Industrial Revolution technological advances gave rise to mass-produced consumer products. The mass production of these goods fueled the shift from country life to a more urbanized existence. Populations shifted to the cities as the demand for factory workers increased. Inventions such as the assembly line and the electric loom caused products to be made quicker and for less cost. This enabled companies to offer their products at a more affordable selling price however people had to be taught how to consume.

21. Naomi Klein, *No Space, no Choice, no Jobs, no Logo*, New York: Picador: Distributed by Holtzbrinck Publishers, 2002, 5.

22. Ibid.

23. Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*.

In the nineteenth century working class and middle class people were used to having very few, if any, goods that were disposable. Most individuals had two maybe three sets of cloths and were used to practices such as making their own soap, clothing, furniture and other necessities.²⁴ The question for producers then became how to get people to buy more stuff? The answer was an expanded world of advertising.

As British society came to buy more mass produced goods and were taught by advertising to consume they increasingly became alienated from the process that produced these goods. As the twentieth century progressed consumers would come to discard items more often and replace them with the newest fashions, models, and formulas. There came to be more of a focus on what a person had as being a way to define the individual.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century advertising evolved and in the globalized economy has immense influence on societies. Advertising is used to sell products and not only the products but also ideas. It is used to sell a lifestyle through the messages that it puts forth about what consuming the product will get the consumer. This technique is used to convince the customer that by consuming more, or using certain brands, the consumer will achieve a higher status and possibly social station.²⁵

During the start of the twenty-first century advertising is almost everywhere, from the moment a person wakes up in the morning and steps outside they are surrounded by messages. These messages that over the last century Western society has been taught to read on a level that is in some cases unnoticed. The advertisements are on the sides of busses, billboards, on the jerseys of sports teams, and can even be found as part of the clothing that a person wears on a

24. Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990.

25. Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*.

day-to-day basis. Logo t-shirts are one way that companies are able to convince people to spread their brands message without realizing or caring they are walking advertisements. While soap advertisements are rarely found on t-shirts they are found in popular magazines, newspapers, billboards, and of course television.

The models in advertisements are often modified to look thinner, have clearer skin, blemishes are removed to smooth and lighten skin tone, and the words, which sometimes seem to be secondary, tell the consumer what the product will do for them. These messages are often times unrealistic and sell the user a lifestyle, or at least a slice of it, that the advertisers say can be obtained by using their product. Soaps promise smoother, firmer, lighter, clearer, and healthier skin. Dove in particular states that their soap will give you all of these things. In reality there are a lot of factors that define beauty, beyond the color, tone, or firmness of a person's skin.

The evolution of advertising has a direct link to the evolution of ideas of beauty in the Western world. The multitude of soaps, deodorants, and skin creams on the market in the early twenty-first century is nothing short of astonishing. The local retail center has isles devoted to personal hygiene products. There are an almost bewildering number of choices available. This is where advertising has its role. It tells the consumer what product to use to be beautiful.

The evolution of Beauty in Brief

Ideas of beauty in British culture have been shaped by those in power: royalty and aristocrats, and later by those with wealth and power: advertisers. The ideas of beauty while having changed considerably in the last century they have in one aspect remained the same. That aspect is about the dominant idea of light skin as being beautiful and superior.

In *The History of White People* by Nell Painter, she discusses the history of European civilization going as far back as the times of the Greeks. She reveals that the idea of white skin as

being beautiful has evolved over time. The idea of pale, unblemished skin is associated with pleasure slaves, courtesans, and aristocrats. This is in part because performing physical work can cause skin's appearance to be weathered, rough, and tanned. It is not until the nineteenth century, however, that whiter skin is associated more with being cleaner, superior and civilized.

British soap advertisements of the late-nineteenth century were used, in part, to develop the idea that Britain was bringing civilization to the occupants of colonized countries and in exchange they were repaid in the raw goods of the jungles, deserts, and coasts of the untamed wild lands. The advertisements also were used to sale the products associated with civilization to the savages, with the promises of a better life. There had been an established precedent of trade with various tribes of Africa but there had not been colonization on this scale. During what is now called the Scramble for Africa by scholars, European powers divided and claimed large areas of Africa and Asia.²⁶

The Scramble for Africa brought the British civilizing mission to Africa. The 'superiority' of the 'white' British citizen was made explicit and one way the message was sent was through soap advertisements. An advertisement from Pears provides a clear example. The ad, "Pears Soap is The Best"²⁷ shows . . . carved onto the side of a large rock. Printed in the *Illustrated London News* on August 27, 1887 the advertisement shows how the natives were portrayed as worshiping the message as being from a higher deity. This advertisement equates the use of the product Pears Soap with being, to the natives, superior and godlike. It implies that the savages of colonialized lines are primitive and see the white man and the products he brings

26. Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

27. See Figure 8 in Appendix A: Illustrations.

with him as being superior and therefore a person to be worshiped and revered.²⁸ Sometimes the messages are more difficult to spot in the modern media landscape. However the racism and the ideal of whiteness being superior and more beautiful are still found in the late twentieth and twenty-first century.

Section III: Racism in the early twenty-first century.

Advertising has come a long way from its roots in the late nineteenth century. In the media sphere of the twenty-first century advertising is literally everywhere. From the moment a person wakes up in the morning until the time they go to sleep they are bombarded with some form of media advertising.²⁹ The evolution of the advertising landscape has lagged in its post-racial sensibilities, however, because the same themes that can be seen throughout the centuries. Racism in the media has gone from being obvious to more subtle forms. In Saki Knafo's article "Dove Ad Casts Spotlight On Madison Avenue Racism" the argument is made that the parent company of Dove, Unilever, has a homogenous advertising staff. The advertising staff has very few minorities employed in its ranks.³⁰ This can lead to unintentional racist advertisements making it to production. This article is a call for action and a call for a more diverse hiring practice by advertising companies.

In the article "In hot water again, Dove? Soap giant accused of racism over body wash advert" that appeared in *The Daily Mail Reporter* on May 25th 2011 the unknown author criticizes a soap advertisement that was put into production worldwide by Dove that implies that

28. Richards, Thomas. *The commodity culture of Victorian England: advertising and spectacle, 1851-1914*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990. 122.

29. Robert McChesney, Mark Crispin Miller, Loretta Alper, and Margo Robb. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. DVD. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2003.

30. Knafo, "Dove Ad Casts Spotlight on Madison Avenue Racism."

darker skin is damaged skin and that lighter skin is preferable. The parent company of Dove, Unilever, defended the advertisement stating that it was not meant to imply that darker skin was damaged.

These two articles provide insight on how a new form of racism has developed in the media landscape. This form of racism is subtle and tenacious. It comes through in underlying messages through placement of models in advertisements and the exclusion of positive depictions of minorities in advertisements. It is further emphasized in the boardrooms of big business and the staffrooms of those few companies that control the media landscape of the world.³¹

The media landscape in the early twenty-first century still reflects the civilizing mission seen in the advertisements of the late nineteenth century. There are a variety of ways in which the message in early soap advertisements have shifted, but the core message remains one of white superiority. One key thing to note is that the messages have shifted from being blatant and easy to spot, to ones that are hidden or below the level of conscious thought.

Case Studies

During the Victorian age in Britain, soap transitioned from being a luxury item to one that was perceived as a necessary commodity.³² The association with using soap, cleanliness, and being civilized developed. This development implies those who do not use soap are savage and uncivilized. A Pears Soap advertisement from the late nineteenth century used as the first case study in this paper reflects these trends.

31. Ibid.

32. Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Advertisements were one way in which ideas were presented to a populace that had seen very few, if any Africans. The motive this is to support imperialism and the civilizing efforts in Africa through the use of soap. The British promoted the idea that the use of British-made soap will make the native Africans' lives better by transforming them into civilized imperial subjects.

The advertisements were focused primarily on British citizens. They were used to bring in a taste of the exotic to those who were at home. The portrayal of the Africans as savage and also of welcoming the lessons brought to them by colonizers. This form of justification was one way that the Africans were portrayed as being inferior to the colonizers and in need of the guidance provided by them.

The following four case studies explore a small sampling of British soap advertisements. The first three are advertisements from the late nineteenth century and the final advertisement jumps forward approximately a hundred years to the early twenty-first century. The narratives contained in these advertisements have a similar thread. That thread emphasizes and reinforces the idea that having white skin makes a person part of a superior race. The message itself changes only in that it becomes subtler, but the same message is still present in the final advertisement.

Case Study 1

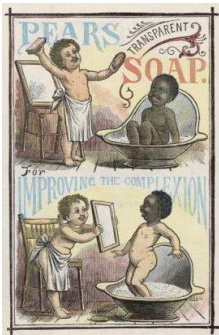


Figure 1. Pears Transparent Soap, Pears Soap Advertisement, 1884, website, <http://lexiebrown.wordpress.com/2011/04/28/commodity-racism-and-imperial-advertising/>

Signifier

The 1884 advertisement by Pears Soap [Figure 1] has two distinct panels that are organized vertically. Both panels feature two young children - one White and one Black - in a room that is used for bathing. At the top of the picture are the words “Pears Transparent Soap.” Dividing the two panels are the words “For Improving The Complexion.”

In the top panel there is a mirror on a chair in the background. In front of the mirror and chair the white child is standing up, looking determined, dressed in an apron, and holding soap and a scrub brush in his hands. In the bathing tub sits the black child. He is naked and smiling.

The bottom panel of the advertisement is set in the same room. The white child however no longer holds the soap and scrub brush, these items are now on the floor near his feet. He is now holding in both of his hands the mirror up for the black child. He is leaning forward and smiling. The black child is now standing up in the bathing tub. His body is now white. However, his head is not. He is leaning back and his expression is one of surprise and happiness.

Signified

The two panels of this advertisement are set up as a before and after picture. The prominent text across the top advertises the produce and the panels display the cleaning power of Pears’ Soap. The text “For Improving The Complexion,” implies that by using this soap your skin will be better.

The top panel shows the white child in his apron is standing in front of the chair and mirror. He is also standing over the black child and looking determined to show him the power of Pears’ Soap. The soap and scrub brush are his tools for improving the world. The black child sits in the bathing tub smiling in anticipation. He appears to be welcoming the lesson he is about

to receive from the white child. This shows that he is ready for his lesson on how to improve himself.

The bottom panel of the advertisement is similar to the top. There are a few notable changes. The white child in his apron has dropped the soap and scrub brush. They are at his feet near the side of the bathing tub. In his hands he now holds the mirror from off the chair behind him up to show the black child the transformation that has been achieved by the use of Pears Soap and a scrub brush. He is leaning forward and is happy with the results of his lesson, as per the happy expression on his face. The black child now stands in the bathing tub. He is smiling widely and looks surprised and pleased by the change in his appearance. The use of Pears' Soap and a scrub brush has washed his body white. Both children appear to be satisfied with the lesson however the lesson is not complete as the black child's head is still Black. This indicates that he has not fully been cleaned of his blackness.

Discussion

How does this soap advertisement convey the message of white superiority? The narrative clearly promotes the idea that you can wash most of the blackness away using Pears Soap. This is seen in the transformation of the black child to being mostly white. What this says is that Pear's soap will civilize and wash away the savage blackness of Africans and make the savages closer to being civilized and British subjects.

Case Study 2

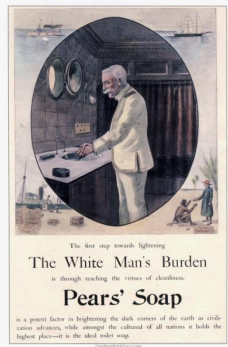


Figure 2. Pears' Soap advertisement, "The White Man's Burden" (1899). First appeared in *McClure's Magazine* (October 1899). Retrieved from: <http://www.wipwapweb.com/media/show/instance/White-man-burden-soap-1099?category=Vintage-3>

The next advertisement [Figure 2] was published in 1899 and is another example of how advertising is used to reinforce ideologies. The White Man's Burden is a term that came from a poem written by the British novelist Robert Kipling.³³ The advertisement [Figure 2] uses the same phrase. This phrase is commonly associated with American Imperialism but was also used in British advertisements. The White Man's Burden is described as Kipling urging the United States to step in where the Europeans left off and bring civilization to the uncivilized parts of the world. It has become synonymous with imperialism. The White Man's Burden is to carry the "lesser races" into the ways of capitalism and civilization.³⁴

Signifier

The advertisement is designed as if you are peering into the stateroom on a ship. The picture is centered around a White man who is wearing a white suit with black bars on his

33. Kipling, *The white man's burden*, London: [s.n.], 1899.

34. "The White Man's Burden": Kipling's Hymn to U.S. Imperialism," "The White Man's Burden": Kipling's Hymn to U.S. Imperialism, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5478/> (accessed February 13, 2014).

shoulders. His hair is white as is his moustache. He is standing in the center of an oval and in front of a sink. He is washing his hands. There is a bar of soap on the counter to his left.

The picture in the oval is framed on each side by mini-pictures. In the upper left and right hand corners there are two ships in open water. In the lower left hand corner there is a ship on the sand of a beach in the foreground are cases of cargo with the stamp "Pears" on each of them. In the lower right hand corner is a White figure in a blue long coat with a red hat. In front of this figure is a kneeling Black male. The Black male is looking up at the White figure and is wearing a loincloth.

Along the bottom of the advertisement is the text "The first step towards lightening The White Man's Burden is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness. Pears Soap is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the brightest place --- it is the ideal toilet soap." The text is of varying sizes. The words "Pears' Soap" are the largest and are also bolded. The phrase "The White Man's Burden" is the next in prominence.

Signified

The man in the advertisement is dressed in what appears to be a uniform on a ship. The uniform conveys the idea that he is civilized and the bars on the shoulders indicate that he is an officer. The two main focal points of the picture are the uniformed figure and the text that runs along the bottom. His use of Pears Soap to wash his hands, as indicated by the bar of soap on the counter, link the idea of being civilized and the use of Pears Soap. The position of the man in the center of the oval frame that is created reinforces the idea that being civilized is a central aspect of the White man.

The pictures along the outside of the oval that frame the man are used to indicate his journey across the seas, carrying a precious cargo, and bringing this cargo to the Black savages in the corners of the earth. This same message is also reinforced by the text that states, "Pears Soap is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances." The idea that using Pears Soap indicates being civilized is reinforced by the phrase, "while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the brightest place --- it is the ideal toilet soap."

The idea that those that are being civilized by the White man are grateful for the lesson is seen in the pictures around the edge of the main image. The lower right hand corner of the main picture, above the text there is a small picture of a merchant handing a tin of soap to a native. The individual who is being handed the soap is kneeling to the white man. This represents his submission to the white man, his dark skin and lack of Western clothing marks him as being "savage."

Discussion

This advertisement is clearly meant to sell more than a product to the consumer. It is also selling a set of ideas. There are three main ideas that are being sold in this advertisement. They are that the white race has a duty to civilize the "lesser races," by purchasing Pears Soap the consumer is helping to bring civilization across the globe, and the "lesser races" are grateful to the white man for bringing them civilization. The White Man's Burden was seen as a way to justify the taking of raw natural resources in exchange for the civilizing of the "lesser" races in Africa and other British Colonies.

The white man's burden was this idea that it was the responsibility of the white races to carry the non-white races forward into a more civilized world. The civilizing mission was the currency that the white races used as a way to excuse the atrocities of the past, the stealing of

natural resources in the colonies, and the exploitation of the darker races. The superiority of the white man over all other races of man is seen in the placement and prominence of the white man in the advertisement. The man is central to all else in the illustration. He is pristine in his whiteness even to the degree of his uniform is pristine white.

The overall narrative of this advertisement connects Pears Soap to the civilizing mission. The text of the advertisement uses powerful words to state that Pears Soap is making this mission easier on the white man signified with the words “the first step . . . “. The words “brightening the dark corners of the earth” emphasizes that Pears Soap is travelling the world with the British merchant and bringing civilization and culture to the worlds “dark” corners. This is further emphasized by phrase “while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the brightest place.” The narrative implies that in order to make the world a better place that which is dirty must be cleansed. In the case of Pears Soap, that which is dirty is the Black ethnicities.

Case Study 3

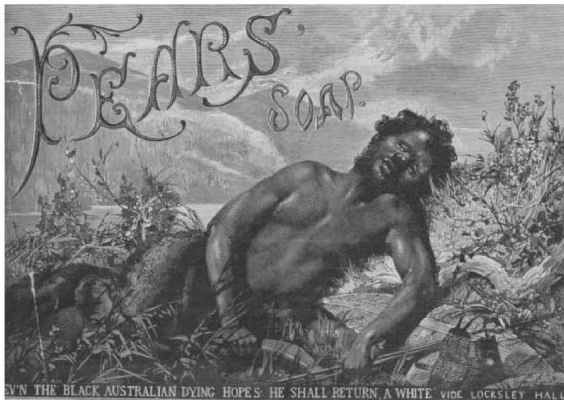


Figure 3. Pears Soap Advertisement, “EV’N THE BLACK AUSTRALIAN,” 1880s retrieved from:

http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sozialoekonomie/hund/sonst_bilder/Pears_Australian.jpg

Figure 3, which is an advertisement for Pears Soap, was published in the 1880's. This example was one that focuses on the natives of Australia. It further emphasizes the racist thoughts that were held toward indigenous people in lands that were colonized by the British Empire.

Signifier

This Pears Soap advertisement shows an aboriginal male in the final moments of his life. He appears to be lying down on his left side among wild vegetation and rocks. In the background hills can be seen. The native's legs appear to be furry. In his hands he loosely grips what appear to be weapons. His left arm rests on his shield. His face is unshaven while his eyes are closed. His black hair is tangled, curly, and uncombed. The slope of the hill props him up slightly even as he slumps back onto it. His hands loosely grip native weapons, and he rests on his shield. The words along the bottom of the advertisement read "Ev'n the black Australian dying hopes he shall return a white, vide Locksley Hall."

Signified

The posture of the black male indicates his resignation to his fate. He looks as if he is laying down for death. His body is resting in the wild vegetation and on the slope of a hill, cradling him and almost as if welcoming him in his return to nature. His eyes are closed furthering the implication that he accepts his death willingly. His savage nature is seen in his unshaven face, tangled hair, and his legs, which are portrayed as animal like.

The text along the bottom of the advertisement further reinforces the idea that he accepts his death willingly. It also states his desire to be reincarnated as a white man. It gives the viewer the idea that the Black man recognizes his inferiority and wishes he was part of the more "civilized" race.

Discussion

The ideology put forth by this advertisement reinforces the idea that being white means being part of a superior race. It also reinforces this by indicating that the black man when he dies wishes to be reincarnated as the “superior” and more civilized race. The portrayal of the man as being half animal and half human emphasizes the idea that he, because of his ethnicity and skin tone, is a “lesser” being.

Case Study 4



Figure 4. Dove, “Dove Visible Care,” 2011 retrieved from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1390312/Soap-giant-Dove-accused-racism-body-wash-advert.html>

Although the advertising in the nineteenth century Pears ads is openly racist, the current media landscape runs rampant with subtle messages about what is beautiful, what is normal, and what is considered to be acceptable by societal norms—including white skin. These views are clearly read in a racist advertisements put out by Dove soap. This advertisement, which first appeared in May 2011, implies that darker skin is dirty. This message, although a more subtle form has roots in the history of racism and racial ideology.

Signifier

In this 2011 widely published advertisement from Dove [Figure 4] a Unilever subsidiary

three women are pictured standing in front of what appear to be skin swatches. The skin swatches are labeled “before” and “after.” The “before” swatch appears to be cracked, damaged, and dirty. The “after” swatch has no cracks or lines, and has an even looking skin tone.

The women are standing in the following order from left to right. The woman on the left side, under the “before” swatch is a black woman. In between both swatches stands a woman with a lighter skin tone, perhaps Asian. The woman on the right hand side under the “after” swatch is a white woman.

The woman are wrapped in towels and standing barefoot on a hardwood floor. The text “Visibly more beautiful skin from the most unexpected of places-your shower,” is displayed along the bottom of the advertisement. In the lower right-hand corner are two bottles of Dove liquid shower soap. The bottle to the left is a light purple color and the bottle that is in front and to the right is a light blue color.

Signified

The advertisement is problematical in how it has the models arranged in relation to the skin swatches behind them. It implies through the placement of the darker skinned model that dark skin is flawed and dirty. As the advertisement moves through the skin tones to the fairest skinned model being placed in correlation to the clean and undamaged skin swatch. The advertisement also implies that by using the product your skin will become more like the fair skinned model, unflawed and beautiful. This implies that not only will Dove moisturize your skin but it will also help you physically become more desirable by making you whiter and thus more civilized.

Discussion

Articles that appeared in the British publication, *The Daily Mail Reporter*, "In hot water again, Dove? Soap giant accused of racism over body wash advert," and Saki Knafo's "Dove Ad Casts Spotlight on Madison Avenue Racism" also argue that the echoes of past racial ideology is shown to be present in the advertising of the twenty-first century.³⁵ The Dove advertisement implies through the placement of the models that darker skin is considered to be dirty and in need of being cleansed. While the text of this advertisement does not say outright that darker skin is dirty it does promise "visibly more beautiful skin."

The representation of the women in this particular advertisement echo the messages found in earlier soap advertisements. The women are arranged in an order that implies that dark skin is inferior. The placement of the black woman under the damaged swatch reinforces the idea that is found in advertisements of the late nineteenth century that black skin is damaged and in need of cleansing. The three models arrangement causes the skin tones of the models to go from dark to light and this transition correlates with the change from damaged skin to undamaged skin. The message is the same, although it is in a subtler, potentially more insidious, form.

Conclusion

The four advertisements examined all have a similar message. All say that being white is better than being anything else. The messages put forth all revolve around this same thread. The Pears Soap advertisement [Figure 1] clearly shows a black child using Pears Soap to wash his perceived dirty, savage, and uncivilized skin and transformation, at least partially, into the more desirable, civilized, and cleaner white skin. The next soap advertisement [Figure 2] is a bit subtler in its message of white superiority. In this image the most prominent character is a white ship's officer. He is dressed in a pristine white suit of clothing and is using the product to maintain his civilized appearance. The message of white superiority is in the words on the

35. Knafo, "Dove Ad Casts Spotlight on Madison Avenue Racism."

advertisement. It clearly states that by using this product white consumers are cementing their superiority and helping the spread of civilization, while black consumers, who use this product, are becoming more civilized. The third advertisement examined [Figure 3] shows a black man dying and it states in the text that he wishes to come back as part of the white race. This implies that being of the white race is better and more desirable than any other race. The fourth advertisement [Figure 4] is one that was produced a bit over a century after the other images and it too contains this same message. It conveys this message in the way the models are lined up under the skin swatches.

The analysis provided in this paper show that while the delivery of the message that being a part of the white race is more preferable than being a part of any of the lesser races has changed in the last one hundred or so years, the implicit message is still the same. The reinforcement of this message has gone from an action that is overt to one that is under the radar. Marketing campaigns have been selling ideas about race and beauty since they gained ground during the industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century. The reach of brands such as the ones owned by Unilever is global, as are the messages that are put forth by the company's advertisements.

Race and beauty ideology can be said to have been an excuse in the history of mankind for some of the most horrid atrocities in history. The atrocities include the enslavement of millions of non-whites by European nations settling in Africa, India, and the Americas. This settlement at the time is justified by the idea that darker skinned individuals were less than human. This justification is reinforced by the portrayals of natives as one step up from being animals.

This thought process is seen in the continued struggle of minorities. The fight for equality is far from over and it is hindered by the messages contained in advertising campaigns.

Advertising is used to tell us what is superior and inferior, what is desirable and undesirable, but lastly and most importantly what civilization and success look like. The portrayals of non-whites in advertisements has changed only in that they are no longer outright racist in nature, but they still put forth the idea that non-whites are inferior.

The Pears Soap and Dove advertisements analyzed in this paper shows the view held at the turn of the century in Britain of blacks as being dirty and in need of improvement. This improvement comes in the form of the idea of forcing the colonized to conform to Western ideas about civilization, beauty, and religions. The analysis also has proved that white was at the time seen as beautiful, superior, and more civilized in Europe and the European colonies. While racism as argued by Painter has a much longer history than that of the nineteenth century British Empire advertising,³⁶ the rise of industrialized consumer society and its links the British Empire specifically, publicized and globalized ideas of whiteness as desirable and superior in new ways

The historical precedence, in regards to beauty, is still in place in the Western World. In British culture the stereotypical definition of beauty is white, young, and thin. Those who are perceived as not fitting this idea are treated not necessarily as second-class citizens but as being inherently flawed. These perceived flaws, and the fear of them, are what marketers pick up on, magnify, and use to sell billions of dollars worth of beauty products each year. While we do not have imperialism in the same historical form, advertising continues to try and persuade us about what is beautiful, civilized, and superior in a more subtle form of cultural imperialism.

36. George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002.

This cultural imperialism shapes our perceptions on ethnicity, class, beauty, and gender without us even realizing that it is doing so, in order for the marketing to be the most effective it is now under the radar. We consume hundreds of advertisements a day and whether or not it is realized on a conscious level these advertisements are one way in which we define ourselves. The messages put forth about ethnicity and beauty extols the virtues of being thin, young, and white. These same messages are present in advertisements in the late nineteenth century and persist into the twenty-first century. The key to resolving and eliminating these harmful ideologies is to first be aware of them. This can be achieved through education, increasing diversity in marketing, and learning from our collective human history.

Appendix A: Illustrations

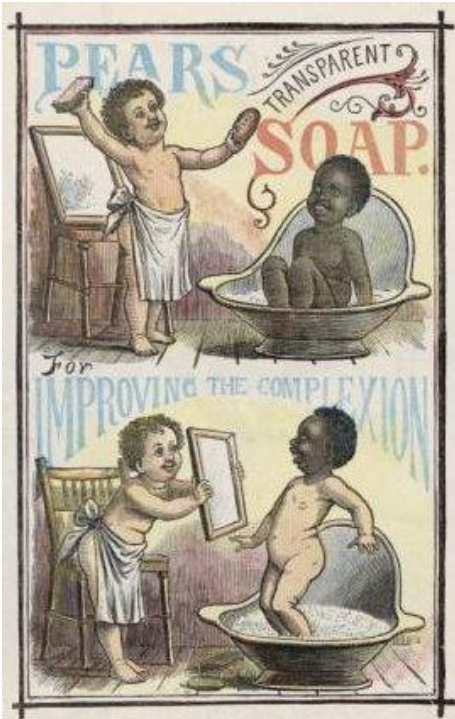


Figure 1. Pears Soap Advertisement, “Pears Transparent Soap,” 1884, retrieved from: <http://lexiebrown.wordpress.com/2011/04/28/commodity-racism-and-imperial-advertising/>

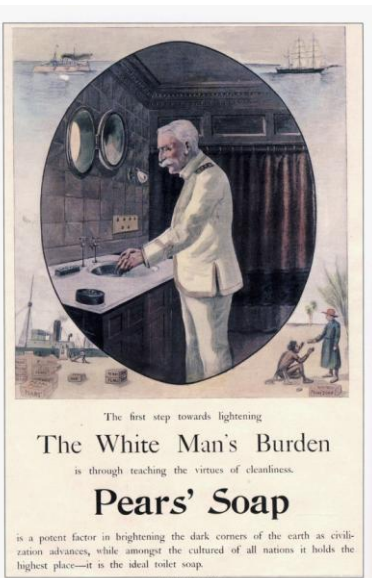


Figure 2. Pears' Soap advertisement, "The White Man's Burden" (1899). First appeared in *McClure's Magazine* (October 1899). Retrieved from: <http://www.wipwapweb.com/media/show/instance/White-man-burden-soap-1099?category=Vintage-3>

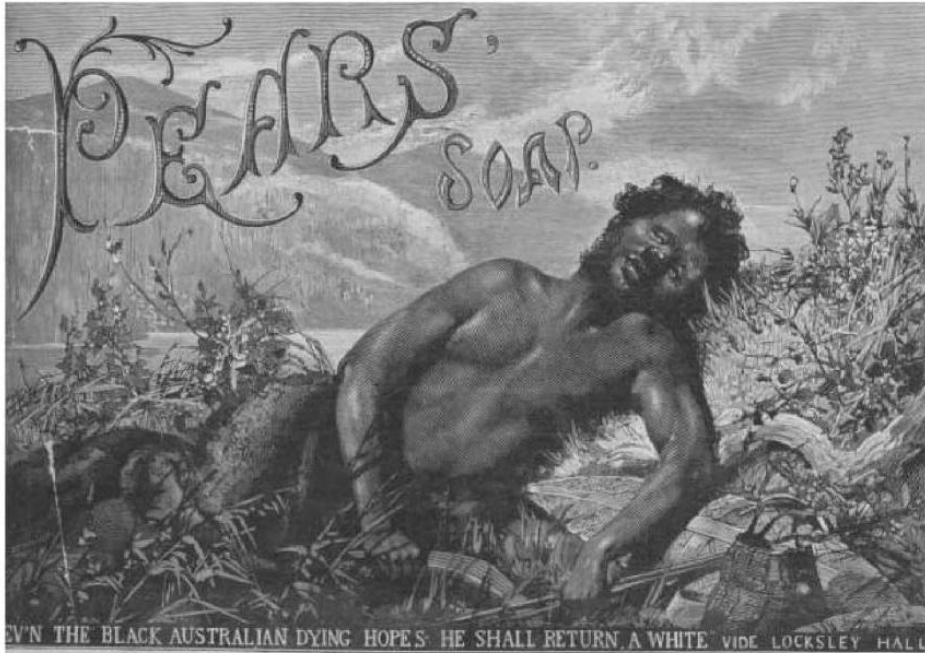


Figure 3. Pears Soap Advertisement, “EV’N THE BLACK AUSTRALIAN,” 1880’s retrieved from:

http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sozialoekonomie/hund/sonst_bilder/Pears_Australian.jpg



Figure 4. Dove, “Dove Visible Care,” 2011 retrieved from:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1390312/Soap-giant-Dove-accused-racism-body-wash-advert.html>



Figure 5. Pears' Soap advertisement, *The Graphic Stanley*, 30 April 1890. Cited in Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*, UK; New York; New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2003. 47.

Image retrieved from: <http://www.sil.si.edu/PAID/fullsize/AAE/SIL28-299-04.jpg>

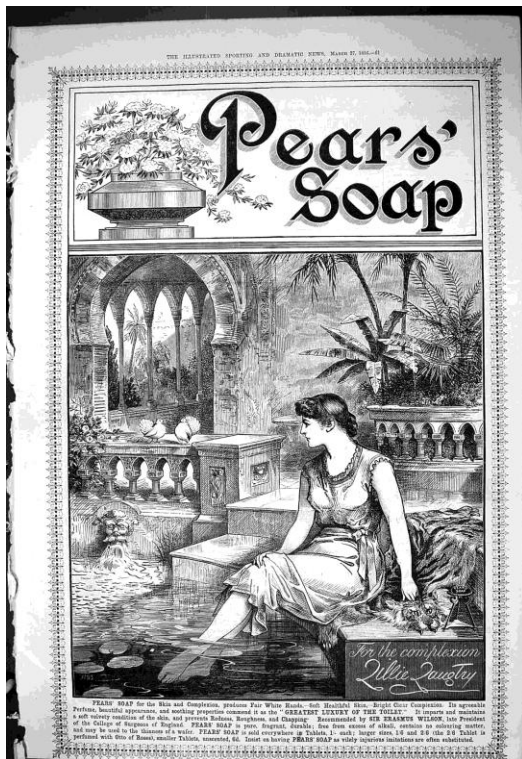


Figure 6. Pears Soap advertisement, “For the Complexion, Zillie Zaugtry,” published in *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*. March 27, 1886. Retrieved from:

http://www.old-print.com/mas_assets/full3/J4251886/J4251886061.jpg



Figure 7. Pears Soap Advertisement, "Girl with Bubbles," 1888 retrieved from: http://www.atticpaper.com/prodimages/092009/pears_bubble.jpg



Figure 8. 'Pears' Soap in the Soudan,' Pears' Soap advertisement, *The Graphic*, 30 July 1887. Cited in Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*, UK; New York; New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2003. 38.

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