

**Reading Guide - Week 6 Day 1**  
**Consumerism and Rebellion**  
**Consuming Anti-consumption During and After the 1960s**

Today we are reading parts of *The Conquest of Cool* (1997), in which Thomas Frank analyzes the relationship between the advertising industry and the counterculture of that decade. Hopefully, by the time you have finished reading through this page, you will have a good understanding of Frank's argument about the relationship between the counterculture of the 1960s and the advertising industry.

In addition to exploring the rise of hip consumerism, as exemplified by Volkswagen and Avis Rent-a-Car ads and changes in cola advertising, we will also look at Madison Avenue's engagement with the feminist and Black pride movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But before we begin to think about the 1960s, I want you to watch the following iconic advertisement for Apple's first Macintosh personal computer, which aired during the Super Bowl in 1984.

LINK: <https://youtu.be/2zfqw8nhUwA>

While produced nearly a decade and a half after the 1960s came to a close, Apple's "1984" commercial was so successful because it spoke to consumers' "fantasies of rebellion, liberation, and outright 'revolution' against the stultifying demands of mass society" ([Frank, online excerpt](#)). Frank notes that, since the 1960s, such fantasies have become "commonplace almost to the point of invisibility in advertising, movies, and television programming."

The question Frank ponders in his book is, how did this emphasis on rebellion, which is at the heart of so much present-day "hip consumerism," come about?



Scene from the Woodstock Music  
Festival, 1969.

Many scholars have celebrated the 1960s counterculture as "a joyous and even a glorious cultural flowering," which "constituted a radical break... with existing American mores." According to such scholars, the youth of the counterculture rejected the consensus politics, materialism, and cultural conformity of their parents, advocating peace, enjoying alternative music, and experimenting with communal living. Events like the Woodstock Music Festival of 1969, pictured to the right, are often held up as examples of the utopian possibilities of the counterculture.



But as Frank notes, such stories of utopian possibility generally end with the counterculture selling out to Hollywood and the television networks, as exemplified by this 1968 advertisement for Columbia and CBS Records.

Commercializing the message of the counterculture, the ad reads: "The Establishment's against adventure. And the amazing experience that comes with listening to today's music." Fortunately for the youthful consumer, "the Man can't stop you from listening" to the albums pictured in the ad.

Through ads like this, many scholars have suggested, the radical potential of the counterculture was coopted and put to work on behalf of the dominant consumer culture.

Frank disagrees with this narrative of the counterculture's commercial cooptation. For one thing, he argues, the counterculture was never as opposed to commercial culture as historians portray it to be. He writes, "The counterculture... was triggered at least as much by developments in mass culture (particularly the arrival of The Beatles in 1964) as changes at the grass roots. Its heroes were rock stars and rebel celebrities, millionaire performers and employees of the culture industry; its greatest moments occurred on television, on the radio, at rock concerts, and in movies" (Frank, 8).

Frank also points out that "cultural changes ... identified as 'counterculture' began well before 1960" and "the world of business and of middle-class mores—was itself changing during the 1960s" (*Conquest of Cool*, 6).

## Section Title: Bill Bernbach and the Anti-Advertising

In arguing that "the world of business... was itself changing in the 1960s," Frank highlights the leadership of advertising genius Bill Bernbach of Dale Doyle Bernbach in New York. In 1999, *Advertising Age* rated Bill Bernbach "the single most influential creative force in advertising's history."

Of Bernbach's impact on advertising in the 1960s, Frank writes:

Bernbach was the first adman to embrace the mass society critique, to appeal directly to the powerful but unmentionable public fears of conformity, of manipulation, of fraud, and of powerlessness, and to sell products by so doing. He invented what we might call anti-advertising: a style which harnessed public mistrust of consumerism — perhaps the most powerful cultural tendency of the age — to consumerism itself. (*Conquest of Cool*, 55).

Bucking the conventional wisdom that effective advertising could be achieved through the science of market research, Bernbach argued that "Research can trap you into the past." For Bernbach, effective advertising required creativity and a willingness to take risks. He stated, "Rules are what the artist breaks; the memorable never emerged from a formula."



Bill Bernbach

In *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank devotes considerable attention to Bernbach's career, and particularly his success in making the Volkswagen brand palatable to American consumers. Beginning in 1959, Bernbach's Volkswagen transgressed "nearly every convention of auto advertising," as evident in the following examples (60).



Exemplifying Bernbach's anti-advertising approach, this 1963 Volkswagen advertisement exhorts the consumer to "Live Below Your Means." The small print cleverly elaborates: "If you'd like to get around the high cost of living . . . cut down on the high cost of getting around. And buy a Volkswagen." Because of Volkswagen's fuel efficiency, the ad promises, "the more you drive, the more you save." It continues, "And chances are, you'll drive it for years and years. (Since we never change the style, a VW never goes out of style.)"

The ad concludes by poking fun at image-conscious consumers: "Of course, a VW's not much to look at. So a lot of people buy a big flashy car just to save face. Try putting that in the bank."

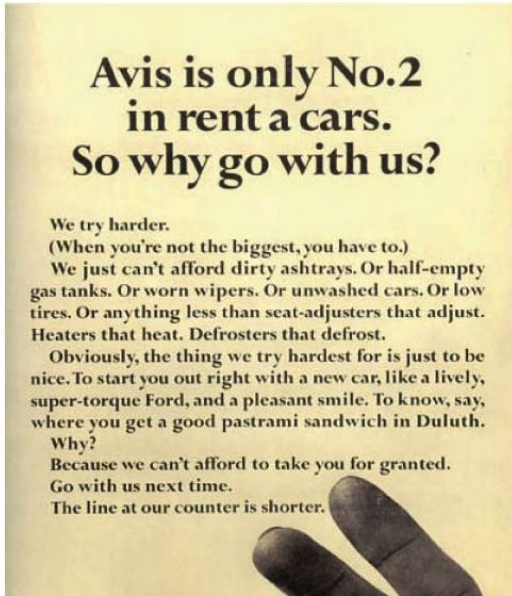
An anti-consumerist message is thus embedded in the VW ad, which appeals to the "hip" consumer who is wise to the superficiality and material excess of consumer society, but who is nevertheless persuadable that the best way to signal their hipness is by buying the right car.



1971 VW "Funeral" commercial:  
<https://youtu.be/xKheglz0KPM>

How does the linked 1971 commercial echo the anti-advertising message of the 1963 print advertisement above? (Go to <https://youtu.be/xKheglz0KPM>)





Bernbach is also credited with the famous campaign for Avis rental cars, which admits that "Avis is only No. 2" (behind unnamed industry leader Hertz), but then goes on to explain why that is an advantage. For example, as the text of this 1963 print ad reads, "We try harder... Because we can't afford to take you for granted . . . [and] the line at our counter is shorter."

The surprising and humorous tone of ads such as this was characteristic of anti-advertising in the 1960s.

## Section Title: Creativity Merges with the Counterculture

As the examples above illustrate, advertising underwent its own creative transformation in the 1960s -- one that began before and developed alongside the counterculture. By the late 1960s, Frank observes, "Mass society was . . . the target of a generalized revolt" as the counterculture and "the critical-creative style" in advertising converged to celebrate the "Now Generation" (*Conquest of Cool*, 118). The characteristics of the "Now Generation" included: (1) a "desire for immediate gratification"; (2) a "craving for the new"; and (3) "intolerance for the slow-moving, the penurious, the thrifty" (Frank, 121).



1969 print advertisement

In an extremely effective campaign to unseat Coca Cola as America's number-one cola brand, Pepsi declared itself "the official drink of today's generation!" The models in the ad are young, joyful, and in motion. The beverage they are enjoying is "clean," "bold," and "lively." Consider what the following series of print ads and commercials reveal about how soft drink companies worked to court the "Now Generation."

THE SOCIABLES prefer Pepsi

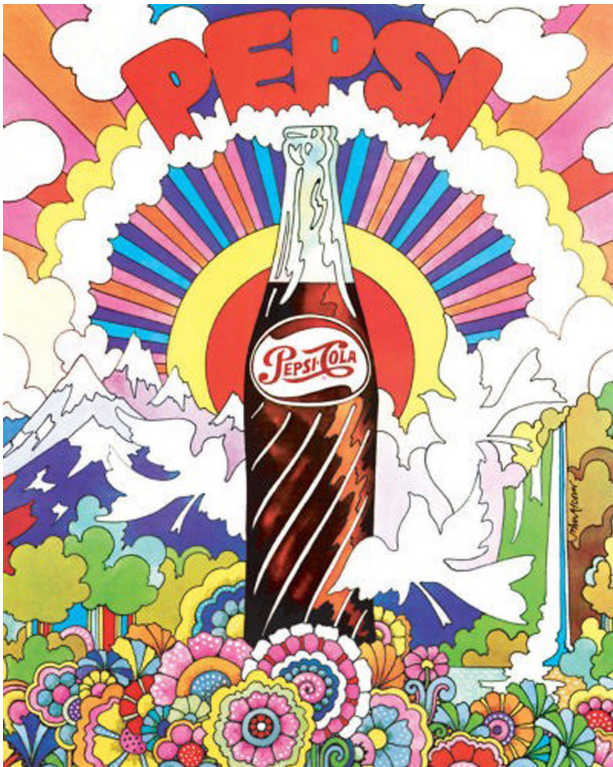


They entertain the modern way and they serve the modern refreshment: Pepsi-Cola. It refreshes without filling. You're one of The Sociables. Have a Pepsi anywhere — at play, at home or at your favorite soda fountain.



Be Sociable,  
Have a Pepsi  
*Refresh without filling*

I offer this 1959 "Be Sociable" ad as a point of contrast to later Pepsi advertising. Here, we see a staid, well-dressed group of white suburbanites. A prominent figure in the ad is older, with graying temples. How does this ad compare to the next one?



Contrasting sharply with the "Be Sociable" campaign, this 1969 Pepsi ad (artist: John Alcorn) evokes the bright colors and psychedelic imagery of the counterculture.

Consider, as well, the following 1971 commercials for Pepsi and Coke. trying to court the young and "young-at-heart" with television commercials that invoke elements of the counterculture.



Link to the commercial here: <https://youtu.be/1WPYDZHE2K4>

How does the commercial above exemplify the Now Generation's "desire for immediate gratification," "craving for the new," and "intolerance for the slow-moving"?





Coca-Cola, 1971 - 'Hilltop' | "I'd like to buy the world a Coke"

<https://youtu.be/1VM2eLhvsSM>

How does the commercial above harness anti-commercialism to drinking Coca Cola?

Some scholars would look at the commercials above and argue that ad makers on Madison Avenue co-opted the youthful idealism of the counterculture.

Thomas Frank disagrees. First, he points out that the counterculture was never as unadulterated by commercial culture as some like to imagine. Second, he points out that the advertising industry underwent its own revolution in the 1960s, adopting a "creative-critical style" that was responsive to broader cultural trends. By the beginning of the 1970s, as the contrast between Pepsi's 1959 "Be Sociable" and 1969 "Pepsi Generation" ads exemplifies, Madison Avenue had changed its approach dramatically.

The last two sections of this presentation briefly consider how the advertising industry engaged with the feminist and Black pride movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

### **Section Title: Advertising Feminism**

The 1960s was a transformative decade for women's rights, and ad makers capitalized on this in their address to female consumers. An obvious example of the ad industry's pseudo-feminism is Virginia Slim's "You've Come a Long Way, Baby" campaign. At a time when feminists sought meaningful changes ranging from wage equity to reproductive rights, Virginia Slims celebrated women's right to have their own, "slimmer" cigarette brand, as evident in the following advertisements from 1969 and 1974.



In this 1969 print ad, the fact that women now have "a cigarette all their own" is presented as an accomplishment comparable to winning the vote.

"The woman is neither sufficiently sensible nor sufficiently responsible to vote. Of politics and issues, she is, by nature, ignorant. Give a woman the right to vote and, by heavens, next thing you know, she'll want to smoke like a man." —Robert D. Nolan

By heavens, Nolan was right. First, you got the vote, and now you've got a cigarette all your own.



## Virginia Slims.

Slimmer than the fat cigarettes men smoke. They're tailored slim to fit your hands, your lips, your purse. And blended with the full, mild Virginia flavor women like. Extra long. Light one up. Regular or Menthol.



You've come  
a long way, baby.



Found in Mom's Basement

## The Virginia Slims Tool Kit. Because you've got more to fix than your face.

When something goes wrong, you can fix it yourself with your own professional quality Virginia Slims Tool Kit.

The Tool Kit comes in its own enameled steel case with handy lift-out tray, and includes a hammer, pliers, 2 regular screwdrivers, 1 Phillips screwdriver, tape measure, adjustable wrench, putty knife, safety cutter, and loads of assorted nails, tacks, screws, and picture hangers.

Not only do you get almost every tool you'll ever need, you'll also get "The You Don't Need a Man to Fix It Book," a hardbound, diagrammed explanation of what goes where and how.

And you can get the entire kit for just \$20.00 and two pack bottoms from Virginia Slims, regular or menthol.

You've come  
a long way, baby.



Mail to: Virginia Slims Tool Kit Offer,  
P.O. Box 25038, Cincinnati, Ohio 45225 GL  
Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ tool kits. For each tool kit ordered, I enclose  
\$20.00 (check or money order payable to Virginia Slims) and 2 pack  
bottoms from Virginia Slims, regular or menthol.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Offer valid to persons under 21 years of age. Offer good in U.S. only, except where prohibited, licensed or taxed. Offer expires September 27, 1974. Offer good while supply lasts. Allow approximately 6 to 8 weeks for delivery. Hammer made in Japan.

17 mg. "tar," 1.2 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report Sept. '73

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined  
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

For "just \$20.00. and two pack bottoms from Virginia Slims," this 1974 ad offers readers "The Virginia Slims Tool Kit." Additionally, the ad promises to send along "The You Don't Need a Man to Fix It Book," curiously described as "a hardbound, diagrammed explanation of what goes where and how." The ad also features model Cheryl Tiegs, later of "Charlie's Angels" fame.



"With the creation of FDS, a whole new era of feminine confidence began," according to the ad below, published in 1970. Even as the ad industry transformed, it continued to deploy threats of social embarrassment. Ostensibly an ad celebrating women's (and men's) increasing sexual freedom, the ad below also raises "a girl's most personal deodorant problem, that of vaginal odor."



The advertisement is a full-page spread. The top half shows a social scene in a living room. A man in a dark suit is leaning over a woman in a blue dress, who is sitting on a sofa. Another woman in a pink dress is standing in the background. The text "Being close was never nicer ...now is The Age of FDS." is overlaid on the scene. The bottom half features a product shot of the FDS spray bottle and box. The text "The age of FDS began with understanding. Understanding you...today's young woman...committed to total femininity...entitled to total confidence. Until FDS, a girl's most personal deodorant problem, that of vaginal odor, had no satisfactory solution. With the creation of FDS, a whole new era of feminine confidence began. FDS is gentle and effective enough to protect you every single day of your beautiful life. Being a girl was never nicer...than now...in the Age of FDS." is printed below the product shot. At the bottom right, it says "FDS ... the first feminine hygiene deodorant spray."

Being close was never nicer  
...now is The Age of FDS.

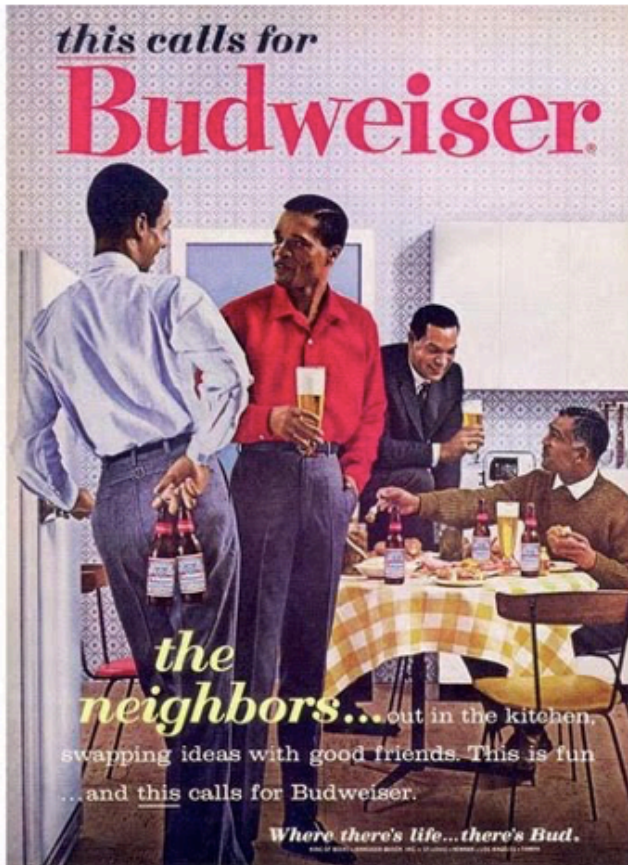
FDS

The age of FDS began with understanding. Understanding you...today's young woman...committed to total femininity...entitled to total confidence. Until FDS, a girl's most personal deodorant problem, that of vaginal odor, had no satisfactory solution. With the creation of FDS, a whole new era of feminine confidence began. FDS is gentle and effective enough to protect you every single day of your beautiful life. Being a girl was never nicer...than now...in the Age of FDS.

FDS ... the first feminine hygiene deodorant spray.

## Section Title: "The Revolution Will Be Marketed"

As we discussed last class, the 1960s was a transformative time in Black politics and for Black Americans' relationship to consumer culture. During the era of the integrationist civil rights movement, Madison Avenue only minimally adapted campaign messages targeted at white, middle-class consumers in their efforts to reach the black market. For example, the main difference between the two Budweiser ads below (one from 1962, the other from 1963) is the race of the figures depicted.



How might the ads above be said to mirror each other?

In "The Revolution Will Be Marketed," Robert Weems writes that early 1960s ad campaigns like "This calls for Budweiser" were later "replaced with attempts to exploit blacks' growing sense of racial pride." Weems elaborates:

The development of the "soul market" illustrates corporate America's attempt to adapt to African-American consumers' political and cultural reorientation. Corporate marketers co-opted growing black pride by extolling the virtues of African-American life and culture. (Weems, 103)

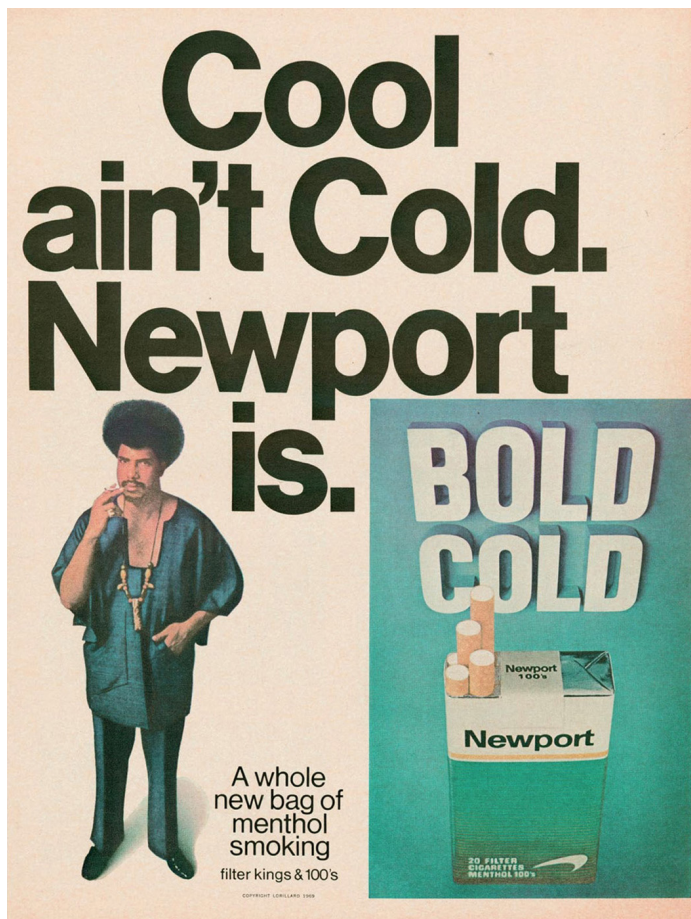


Consider the following ads. How do they reflect Weems' insight that advertisers sought to "co-opt growing black pride" in the late 1960s and early 1970s?



This 1970 advertisement for Kent cigarettes features a glamorous black model with natural hair, along with the vernacular expression, "that's where it's at."





This 1969 advertisement for Newport Menthol 100's features the vernacular expressions "Cool ain't cold" and "A whole new bag." In the ad, a black model sports an Afro and wears African-inspired clothing and jewelry.

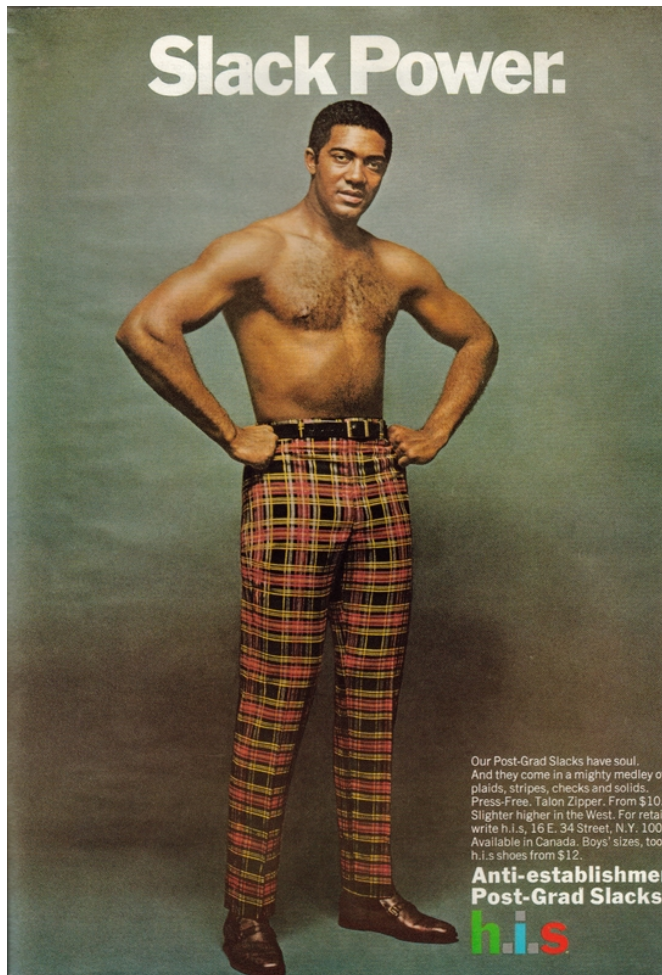
[Lenika Cruz](#) highlights the "casual racism" of much of the advertising that targeted African Americans in the 1970s. Not only did advertisers exaggerate black dialect; by concentrating tobacco and alcohol advertising in black publications and in black neighborhoods, advertisers stereotyped black consumers as vice-prone in ways that were harmful to black communities. Cruz writes,

As middle-class white consumers began kicking their smoking habits in the 70s, agencies began advertising for cigarettes in predominantly black communities at 2.6 times the rate of white communities.

Likewise, blacks were targeted in ads for products like cheap sparkling wine and malt liquor, as we see in the ad below:



While not focused on vice advertising, the following ads also exemplify how advertisers co-opted African-American politics and culture in ads targeting black consumers in the late 1960s and 70s.



## Section Title: Conclusion- Convergence, Co-optation, or Both?

Today's materials on the advertising revolution of the 1960s and 70s are wide-ranging. We considered Thomas Frank's discussion of anti-advertising, as exemplified by Bill Bernbach's Volkswagen campaign. Frank persuasively points to Bernbach's work as evidence that Madison Avenue was undergoing its own cultural transformation beginning in the 1950s, even before the counterculture's rise in the 1960s.

Drawing on Frank's example of the Cola Wars, we considered how advertising *converged with* - rather than *co-opted* - the counterculture in the late 1960s as both celebrated what Frank terms the "Now Generation."

Next, we looked at how advertising in the late 1960s and early 1970s clearly worked to co-opt two other social movements: feminism and black nationalism.

Recall that we began with Apple's 1984 Super Bowl commercial for the Macintosh personal computer. If hip consumerism -- or what Frank terms "anti-advertising" -- began around 1960,



it continued long after the 1960s came to a close. Frank persuasively writes that "commercial fantasies of rebellion, liberation, and outright 'revolution' against the stultifying demands of mass society are commonplace" in today's media. Consider [Nike's "Dream Crazy" ad](#), featuring Colin Kaepernick. How might we place ads like "Dream Crazy" on a trajectory with Volkswagen ads, Pepsi ads, and Macintosh computer ads of years past?

**Sources:**

["William Bernbach," \*Advertising Age\*, March 29, 1999.](#)

Lenika Cruz, "'Dinnertimin' and 'No Tipping': How Advertisers Targeted Black Consumers in the 1970s," *The Atlantic*, June 7, 2015.

Thomas Frank, *Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (1997).

Robert Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar* (1998), 56-79.