

What You See and What You Get: Doll Advertisements in Urban Newspapers, 1860-1900

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You would be hard pressed to find a girl in America who never owned a doll. As portraits of the human form, they are in many ways the most essential expression of toys and play. From the simplest popsicle-stick smiley faces to the elaborately painted and costumed works of art created by Madame Alexander, modern dolls exist for every age and every price. However, dolls are also a highly gendered toy. When boys play with dolls, they have to be rebranded as “action figures,” lest they fall victim to the dread disease of girliness. The abundance of dolls meant for children and the strictly gendered lines along which they fall have origins in the late nineteenth century.

Children are nexuses of culture. They are where the hopes and fears of a culture emerge more clearly than almost anywhere else. The toys of children are therefore deeply steeped in social context and the anxieties of the adults who made them, and the material that advertises them speaks to this. Despite a great deal of research on doll manufacturing and literature in the past two hundred years, there is a general lack of research on how those dolls were advertised to consumers and/or retailers. Advertisements provide a key bridge between producer, distributor, and consumer. In the early age of advertising of the nineteenth century, the techniques and technology of marketing changed rapidly. Because of their responsiveness, advertisements can us give a picture of what the culture around dolls was like at this time. What is clear from a systematic analysis of American newspaper advertisements in the second half of the nineteenth century is a pattern of increasingly sophisticated marketing that played into the social norms and socioeconomic tensions of the time.

This research is in enormous debt to the work of Miriam Formanek-Brunell, whose book *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930* is an essential work on dolls in America. Formanek-Brunell’s approaches American doll culture

through the lens of manufacturing, play, and literature. She firmly refutes the idea that dolls are a tool of enforcing gender expectations, instead arguing that there were very real “struggles between women and men for the cultural control of dolls” (1). Robin Bernstein’s *Racial Innocence* deals with the complicated racial history of how dolls were situated in an ongoing dialogue about the nature of childhood, and her work is especially important given the absence of copious primary source advertisements from African-American sources during this period.

While both Bernstein and Formanek-Brunell work closely with dolls and the meaning that they held in literature and the lives of individual girls, the wealth of information contained in nineteenth century doll advertisements has remained relatively untapped. This paper seeks to exploit this heretofore relatively unexplored resource of American culture. Although most Americans lived in rural areas, the nature of advertising required a focus on manufactured and commercially produced dolls. Such manufacturing was much more common in urban areas. Most of the advertising surveyed in this paper is from Chicago, specifically the *Chicago Tribune*. Chicago in the latter half of the 1800s exemplified America’s changing cultural landscape, particularly in its ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Its population increased from 112,172 in 1860 to 1,698,575 in 1900 (US Census Bureau). Chicago also embodied some of the most key aspects of interactions between urban and rural. The city took in much of the commercial production of Midwestern and Plains farmers, as well as masses of livestock to support its meatpacking industry. Industrialization enabled the city to become an exporter of luxury goods to rural populations. This business model was most thoroughly exploited by Richard W. Sears towards the end of the century. The tragedy of Great Chicago Fire, which occurred about midway through the period of study, provided an opportunity for a comprehensive redesign of the city that allowed the incorporation of modern urban planning techniques. Chicago was also

an early developer of department stores, many of whom advertised heavily in the *Chicago Tribune*.

African American sources were also pulled because of an interest in the changes in the communities they represented. As stated above, African Americans in this period were experiencing a great deal of social change, and it is important to understand how huge shifts in manufacturing and cultural expectations affected those who in many ways were on the margins. While many marginalized groups have limited records, the tradition of black newspapers means that there are at least somewhat regular records of black communities at this time. These newspapers would naturally have been bought by literate African Americans with the time and money to spend reading a newspaper—and, presumably, these people would have been invested enough in their communities to seek out a paper tailored specifically to their community, rather than the more general interest papers that existed in most major cities.

Methods

The data in this project was collected from newspapers sampled from the years 1860-1900. Newspapers were chosen based on their role in the landscape of American culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. As larger newspapers reached a wider audience, data collection focused on those papers. Most of the data used in this project are taken from advertisements in the *Chicago Tribune*. The *Tribune* was well-established by the beginning of the surveyed period and remains a significant American newspaper to this day. In 1861, the newspaper had a circulation of 18,000, and by 1900 its Sunday editions had reached a circulation of 179,144 (Chicago Tribune 1997). The *Chicago Tribune*'s archives were retrieved through the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database. In order to find information relevant to my work, I

performed a Boolean search for “dolls” or “toys”, using the plural to reduce the number of false positives. Searches were limited to advertisements run in the month of December in five-year increments between 1860 and 1900.

African-American newspapers were also surveyed in order to address issues of how minorities and marginalized groups may have participated in the cultural dialogue of this period. I was particularly interested in whether dolls received the same emphasis in African American papers as they did in mainstream papers, and if these smaller newspapers employed the same advertising techniques. Because of the small-scale nature of these newspapers, performing an in-depth long-term survey of a single newspaper was an unrealistic model. The African American newspapers surveyed passed in and out of relevance and were especially scarce in early years, as those that existed were understandably consumed with issues of slavery and emancipation, rather than commercial trade. I searched the Readex African American Newspapers Series 1 database, which includes newspaper archives compiled from a number of sources, including the Library of Congress and multiple state historical societies. It also has an interface that allows for the filtration of article types, something not present in other databases. My search here had parameters that were identical to those in the *Chicago Tribune*, except that advertisements were sampled from the entire year, rather than just December. The following African American papers were eventually included in my results: *The Huntsville Gazette* (Alabama) with 12 results, the *Cleveland Gazette* (Ohio) with one result, the *Iowa State Bystander* with six results, the *Leavenworth Advocate* (Kansas) with five results, the *Paul Quinn Weekly* with one result, the *Recorder* (Indianapolis) with two results, the *Savannah Tribune* (Georgia) with one result, the *State Ledger* (Topeka, Kansas) with two results, *The Freeman* (Indianapolis) with 12 results, *The Plaindealer* (Detroit) with three results, the *Torchlight Appeal* (Fort Worth) with two results, the

Washington Bee (Washington D.C.) with four results, and the *Wichita Searchlight* (Kansas) with one result.

Results from all sources were individually examined for relevance, which was defined as an explicit reference to the sale of either toys generally or dolls in particular. Advertisements that promoted toys that were clearly not dolls were not considered relevant, but a considerable amount of leeway was given in this area. If an advertisement had an image of a doll, even if it was not mentioned in text, the result was considered relevant—although the number of this type of result was limited by the textual nature of the search. After relevance was determined, results were coded for various factors. These included date, whether or not dolls or toys were mentioned explicitly, what the toys or dolls were grouped with on the page, if the advertisement contained images, what materials dolls were made of, target audience, whether or not the toys or dolls were part of some sort of promotion, and price. When an advertisement listed multiple prices or significantly different dolls, I recorded each variant in sub-entries and then took the average of the listed prices. Particular attention was also paid to the layout and general design of advertisements, although this generally was not coded for given its complex nature.

Results

My results told a clear story about how dolls and toys in general were viewed and sold in the second half of the nineteenth century. Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the surveyed African American newspapers follow a pattern of increasingly sophisticated advertisements and increasingly aggressive marketing by a growing toy industry.

Figure 1: Doll and Toy Advertisements in *The Chicago Tribune* and a Number of African American Newspapers

Year	Total number of advertisements	Number of advertisements with pictures	Dolls specifically mentioned (as opposed to just toys)	Percentage of advertisements targeted to merchants (as opposed to consumers)
1860	21	0	1	81%
1865	11	0	0	82%
1870	9	0	3	44%
1875	24	0	7	58%
1880	30	0	16	10%
1885	69	10	60	14%
1890	54	16	40	16%
1895	64	36	52	11%
1900	52	30	52	0%

Between 1860 and 1875, toys and dolls are rarely advertised, with an average of only 16.25 advertisements run in the December of each year surveyed. Dolls are even rarer, with an average of only three appearances per year. The primary target of these advertisements were merchants stocking up on goods to sell in their rural home communities. Before 1880, toys were advertised to country merchants or other retailers more than twice as much as they were marketed to local consumers. In some cases they were the main attraction. An 1860 *Tribune* advertisement to “country merchants” for Peugeot’s Store features the word “toys” in large letters just below “Christmas! Christmas!!” However, in other cases toys were simply one more commodity available for sale in the city, and they were often buried deep in lists of other more practical items. In December of 1860, the New York Belting and Packing Co., which specialized in rubber goods, ran five advertisements giving notice that their agents sold toys, along with fire hoses, buckets, and belting. While the word “toys” is written relatively large, it appears well below listings for rubber clothing and belt hooks. There are no advertisements for dolls or toys in African American newspapers at all before 1880.

The year 1880 marks a turning point for the presence of toys and dolls in advertising material. There is a general transition from advertising to the retailer to advertising directly to the consumer. Between 1880 and 1900, the average number of doll and toy advertisements more than doubles, reaching an average of 44 per year. Dolls also become more prevalent in this marketing. Dolls are only mentioned in 17% of advertisements before 1880, but that statistic increases to 81% between 1880 and 1900. This correlates roughly with the birth of large-scale doll manufacturing in the United States during the 1870s. Throughout the entire period of study, dolls made of specified materials are almost always listed as being made from wax, bisque, or rubber, all of which are materials that would have been difficult if not impossible to use in the creation of a homemade doll. Only in the last year surveyed, 1900, does the commercial doll industry begin to advertise rag dolls, something that was reasonably easy to make at home.

Advertising techniques also change as the century drew to a close. The visual aspects of advertisements became increasingly appealing, especially in terms of images. In the *Tribune*, advertisements are entirely devoid of pictures before 1885, but the number of pictures used in advertisements increased steadily from 1885 to 1900. Images accompany 17% of the 1885 publications, 34% of the 1890 advertisements, and accompany a majority of advertisements in 1895 and 1900 (69% and 72% respectively). These images are usually well-designed and featured prominently. In later years, dolls and toys are no longer buried beneath a pile of other products. Toys and dolls migrated from the edges or bottom of the advertisement to the center of a two-page spread, drawing the reader's eye with their placement and increasingly elaborate illustrations. These images of dolls are typically of the more elaborate variety, as can be seen in Fig. 2, and almost solely depict dolls representing white girls. There is only one fine black doll depicted in all of these newspapers, which appears in a 1900 Chicago Tribune advertisement.

Advertisements for rubber dolls, which were typically black in color, do make more regular appearances, but are never depicted as explicitly black.

If You Want to Buy Toys for the Children

The easiest way is to come to The Big Store, there are so many new and Toys from the greatest toy centers of the world and from the best makers of America that are new and old-fashioned, intricate and simple, marvelous and commonplace. Reached by nine spacious elevators, is one of the largest and most comprehensive in which you will converse with them and ascertain their wants.

11.18 for large and well constructed Block and Ladder, made of wood, painted, and up to \$14.00.

10c for penny Toy Revolver, and others up to \$2.50.

48c for Children's Hardware, Folded Tin Toys and others up to \$2.50.

20c for Iron Knight and Foregone Toy, and others up to \$2.50.

25c for Toy Revolver, and others up to \$1.50.

38c for finely painted and decorated Toy Revolver, and others up to \$1.50.

90c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

75c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

25c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

18c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

1.10 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

90c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

75c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

25c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

18c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

1.10 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

Toys here that cannot all be seen later, when the store is more crowded.

In greater quantities and greater assortment than in any other house in Chicago. Toys prices are an attraction in themselves, and our Toy Store, covering the entire third floor, We shall be pleased to have you bring the children for a look at a five Saas Glass,

85c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

18c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

25c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

45c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

10c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

75c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

20c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

\$3.95 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

\$2.25 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

18c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

15c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

15c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

\$1.48 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

10c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

25c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

55c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

18c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

25c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

45c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

10c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

75c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

20c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

\$3.95 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

\$2.25 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

18c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

15c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

15c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

\$1.48 for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

10c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

25c for Toy Boat, and others up to \$2.50.

Umbre

A handsome umbrella for a rainy day. It is a real find. It is made of the best material and is very durable. It is also very light and easy to carry. It is a real find. It is made of the best material and is very durable. It is also very light and easy to carry. It is a real find. It is made of the best material and is very durable. It is also very light and easy to carry.

Presents for

A beautiful arrangement of Toys and Toys. It is a real find. It is made of the best material and is very durable. It is also very light and easy to carry. It is a real find. It is made of the best material and is very durable. It is also very light and easy to carry.

Figure 2: A Siegel and Cooper advertisement from 1900. Toys are at the center of the page spread, with particularly large and numerous pictures of dolls

The placement of dolls in advertisements could vary significantly, even within the same year. Dolls were not always at home among model trains and sleds. They were often listed next to display and luxury goods, such as glassware, toilet sets, and even jewelry. In 1890, only 26%

of dolls were actually advertised alongside other toys. The vast majority of dolls were listed alongside fine gift items or even dress goods.

Advertisements also changed how they displayed the costs of dolls. Before 1880, it was rare to see the prices of advertised products. By 1900, however, only 3 out of 36 advertisements neglected to list at least one price. Often, stores chose to list prices for a number of products—including one extreme example from the Boston Store in 1900, where the company packed 24 price listings and a picture into a space smaller than a playing card. Dolls could be priced from one penny up to \$75.00, or over \$2,000 in today's money. In most cases, however, stores were less interested in showcasing their most extravagant items than they were in emphasizing their bargains.

Discussion

The data collected from the *Tribune* tells a very particular story about the evolution of consumer tastes and the changing relationships that children had with the American marketplace during the second half of the nineteenth century. After the Civil War, toy consumption changed significantly. Industrial productivity flourished, and manufacturers branched out into more obscure industries, such as toy making.

According to Gary Cross in *Kids' Stuff*, much of the early diversification into toy making was simply a way to use up scraps of material (21), and remained “an afterthought” (Cross 22). My data corroborates this, especially in the case of 1860 advertisements for the New York Belting and Packing Company. This company sold a variety of rubber goods, and toys were only one small part of their business.

In the earliest years, dolls, and toys in general, simply do not have much of a spotlight in newspaper advertisements. Few have their own sections or even general descriptors, and most are advertised to merchants visiting Chicago as Christmas stock for their country stores. We can therefore conclude that rural Americans did produce some demand for toys. However, the lack of descriptors in advertised toys suggests that there was either not much demand for specific toys, or that the toys offered did not significantly change from year to year. Of course, this leaves the reader with the question of how city-dwellers knew where to acquire their toys. At this point, it is certainly not through newspaper advertisements. In these years, other methods of advertising would have been employed to get customers to purchase toys. The complete lack of toy advertising in African American newspapers before 1880 also supports the idea that toy stores would have built their reputations on personal relationships or other, less recordable forms of advertising. Parents in this era certainly visited stores and purchased toys, but they did not do so based on what they read in the paper.

Additionally, at this point manufactured toys were still a luxury that only the middle class and above could afford. The working class would in all likelihood have neither the money nor the time to spend on playthings for their children. Working-class children were occupied with earning enough to scrape by or with attending school after the first Chicago truancy laws went into effect in the 1880s.

However, even for middle-class children, homemade toys could provide important opportunities to develop skills. Children could participate in the creation of their toys and learn something thereby. Given the absolute necessity of proficient needlework in the nineteenth century household, dolls were a highly practical toy for young girls. Women's magazines in the mid-1800s often contained patterns for dolls who were to be used as pen-wipers or other

practical gadgets, and parenting manuals suggested using doll clothing as an incentive to teach young girls to sew. Formanek-Brunell cites one passage from an 1869 book by Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, wherein the authors give suggestions on how to motivate young seamstresses. A mother could give a her daughter gifts to complete a doll's set as her daughter completed small linens and clothing, "till the whole contents of the baby house are earned by the needle and skill of its little owner...and every new toy will be earned by useful exertion" (11). In this way the creation of a doll and its accessories acted as a teaching tool, as a mediator that carried critical lessons from mother to daughter. Ultimately, a girl could sew her own soft doll and symbolically create her own child—although the toy might well be passed on to a younger sibling rather than kept. Given that the data from the *Tribune* and the surveyed African American newspapers rarely advertise rag dolls, we can conclude that they were more likely to be objects created in the home. Even many bisque and kid dolls are sold in parts or undressed, providing their young owners an opportunity to assemble them and sew clothes. Dolls prepared growing girls to perform the essential functions of wife and mother. They also provided a locus for the exchange of gifts of the sort that Brian Sutton-Smith talks about in his book on toys and the relationships embedded in their exchange, titled *Toys as Culture*. Toys, he argues, provide a method of bonding and reciprocal exchange. In the case of nineteenth century doll clothing exchange, the mother would give to her daughter, and the daughter gives to her doll, but also gives to her mother the prestige of successfully raising a young woman. Such prestige was paramount in an era of great emphasis on motherhood and the home, and constituted the second half of the gift exchange.

Given the well-established tradition of in-home dollmaking, the rise in popularity of fine dolls among the middle class may be an early example of an industry creating a need for a

product, rather than simply satisfying an existing need. Most of the new technologies of the late 1800s were applicable to playthings, which could be cheap to produce. But companies had to use a different model than bulk shipments to general store owners. As the population of Chicago grew and the circulation of newspapers increased, it only made sense to start advertising to adults. Families did give gifts to one another, after all—newspapers provided a vehicle to satisfy that need directly.

The explosion of advertisement in the 1880s seen in the data coincides almost perfectly with the shift towards manufactured toys that Bernard Mergen describes in his article “Made, Bought, and Stolen.” The new abundance in choice had to be both exhilarating and overwhelming for child and parent. Of course, not everyone could actually buy the toys that they saw in the cuts of the newspaper and Sears catalog. Those children living in rural America that Elliot West described in “Children on the Plains Frontier” were lucky to have access to a general store, let alone a doll. More important things were needed, like wheels and ploughs and fabric. However, even those lucky enough to be able to purchase these new dolls still carried a practical mindset. Although fine dolls, made of kid, wax, bisque, and a number of other materials, were not bought to teach girls to sew, they still served a purpose in a middle class family.

Miriam Formanek-Brunell talks about this purpose in *Made to Play House*. Toys, but especially dolls, played a crucial role in bridging the gap between father and daughter, between adult and child, between masculine and feminine. Fathers would make use of the power of gifts and buy their daughters presents in order to bridge the ever-increasing divide between fathers and daughters. Unlike their mothers, who could at least instruct their daughters in proper etiquette and in other important skills for daily life, fathers dealt with a separation by gender and the overwhelming view that they did not possess the natural aptitude for childrearing.

Fathers and mothers alike could take some comfort in the knowledge that the dolls that they gave their daughter would at least help them learn about their future responsibilities. When used as a pedagogical tool, fine dolls taught very different lessons than their soft counterparts. Fine dolls and their myriad accessories could teach girls about social expectations for young women, and could be used to rehearse essential rituals of the woman's sphere in the Gilded Age. Social etiquette was the key to a successful life. Girls were encouraged to enact tea parties, visiting, and even funerals. Those funerals in particular existed in a liminal space. While certainly many parents were initially alarmed, the manuals of the day often lauded the moments. Some saw these as moments of precious childhood, where children dealt with the issues of death, compassion, and decorum.

An entire genre of literature was devoted to instructing girls (and occasionally boys) in morality through doll play. These stories could even represent dolls as surrogate parents. As Eugenia Gonzalez explained in her article "'I Sometimes Think She Is a Spy on All My Actions': Dolls, Girls, and Disciplinary Surveillance," doll literature was heavy with stories of conscious but paralyzed dolls who watched and often judged their young mistresses. Gonzalez places this in the eighteenth century tradition of "It" narratives, but more importantly connects these to the new philosophies of parenting that were emerging in this period. Rather than corporal punishment, parents were "encouraged to use psychological methods of discipline." Generally, fell in line with the era's sentimentality towards children and push towards raising children on maternal love. Surveillance, in the form of dolls, allowed parents to be symbolically present to their children even as they traveled in separate spheres.

Dolls also played an important role as a status symbol. A doll could be as expensive or as cheap as people could afford, as evidenced by later price listings that ranged from a penny to

seventy-five dollars. Formanek-Brunell writes that girls generally preferred to play with soft rag dolls (12, 24), which could withstand rough play in a way that delicate bisque could not. The china dolls that were given as gifts were often not really given because children wanted to play with them—rather, they were for the parents.

Violence towards dolls existed was very well present in the literature of the time—however, it was usually assigned to boys. It is a common trope that boys steal their sisters' dolls and torment the helpless things. This even appears in T.S. Arthur's 1861 book of short stories, *Stories for Good Girls*. In "The Broken Doll," a boy breaks his sister's "new doll, that her father had bought for her" (6) in a moment of selfishness. He eventually pays to have it fixed. In the story of *The Nutcracker*, originally published in 1816, the protagonist's brother breaks her nutcracker, leading the heroine to play the role of nurse to the broken toy. It was assumed that boys would display such violent behavior, and were encouraged to moderate their behavior out of love and respect for their sisters. Girls in literature also displayed violent behavior—but they were taught to end this violence for very different reasons. In literature girls were often disciplined for violence by the dolls themselves, rather than by a parent or another authority figure. In one story that Eugenia Gonzalez explores in great detail called *Ethel's Adventures in the Doll Country*, a misbehaving young girl is transported to the land of dolls, where she is subjected to their punishments. Although the young Ethel remains unreformed, she is almost unique in that experience.

Of course, certain material were more conducive to violent play than others, both in their intrinsic qualities and in their financial value. Soon enough, another kind of value emerged that was layered in racial meaning and social needs. Durable dolls were typically black. Beloved black cloth dolls were often named "Dinah" and given to very young children (Formanek-

Brunell 29). The other durable doll material was rubber, which was naturally black. Obviously these dolls could withstand abuse that bisque and wax could not. Robin Bernstein explores this issue thoroughly in *Racial Innocence*. Through analysis of these soft and durable dolls as “scriptive objects,” she argues that the very nature of the toys invited violence and perpetuated deeply felt racial divides. She draws a connection between the soft, durable nature of rubber and rag dolls, both of which were often black, and the violent play that they were subjected to. The nature of this violence as reported in children’s literature could have disturbing undertones. Frances Hodges Burnett, for example, recalls whipping a black rubber doll in imitation of a scene from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (70). However, Bernstein also argues that dolls made by black women could subvert the racial expectations and pressures of the era. She describes in particular how African American women created the topsy-turvy doll, which was black on one end and white on the other, as a reaction to the sexual exploitation that black women faced.

In my own data explicit references to black dolls were rare. Rubber dolls were mentioned occasionally, usually lower on the page and in a far from eye-catching places. They were rarely pictured. There was, in fact, only one surveyed advertisement that contained an image of a black doll, and in this she was present within a frame of dolls meant to signify abundance. Another advertisement from and 1896 issue of *The Youth’s Companion* has a similar layout.

Our Doll section displays the greatest collection of Dolls and Dolls' belongings ever brought together under one roof. Kid Dolls, Jointed Papier Mache Dolls, Patent Unbreakable Dolls, Minerva Metal Dolls, Celluloid Dolls, Rag Dolls, Rubber Dolls, dressed or undressed, bisque heads with human and other hair, patent heads, celluloid heads, Minerva metal heads—full line of kid and cloth bodies, and, in fact, everything that belongs to doll land.

5 for China-
trique
sized, hand-
decorated &
with more-
ere from \$6.00

1 for Wooden
p r i e t
bras or abed
guaranteed
ally perfect
ere from \$6.00

1 complete
sitting set—
ere up to \$1.

1 Willow
doll (China-
p to \$6.00.

25c for Hook and Ladder,
horses and driver—and out-
ere up to \$6.00.

9c for
up to \$1

\$2.25
beautiful
others, up

19c for
specially
made and
up to \$60

58c for the celebrated D. P.
Dressed Dolls, 15 in. Jointed
bodies, beautiful bisque
heads, naturally dressed, sailor hats and
other fancy costumes—choice of
40 styles.

98c for 17-inch Dressed Dolls,
bisque heads, pretty faces, naturally
dressed in silk, satin, sequined,
lace and ribbons—large trimmed hats
to match—48 styles to select from.

\$1.48 for the famous Mole
Doll, 18-inch, jointed
papier mache body, large
bisque head, pretty face, naturally
dressed in silk, satin, sequined,
lace and ribbons—large trimmed hats
to match—48 styles to choose from.

Figure 2 A Siegel and Cooper advertisement from 1900, featuring a fine doll portraying the "mammy" stereotype


Advertised fine dolls, meaning bisque, wax, or other high-end materials, rarely represented people of color. Although the French dollmaker Jumeau and the German dollmaker Kestner both manufactured dark-skinned dolls at this time, American businesses seemed to think the public was uninterested in their products. When they did, it was often as a set. Black dolls were rarely advertised at all, let alone as a lone product. While this cannot have been good for the psychological health of black girls, there is reason to believe that, even if they had access to fine black dolls, their parents may not have bought them. While evidence from African American Newspapers of the time is scanty, not one of the advertisements in them features a black doll. If stores were going to advertise, this would be the market to do so in.

Here again, however, we see the power of class. The African-American consumers that these doll ads were targeted at may not have wanted to advertise their blackness more than

The "Happy Family."

Our great offer for 1897 consists of five Dolls having bisque heads and jointed arms and legs. The Dolls range from 7 to 11 inches in height and are typical beauties of their race.

The "Happy Family," consisting of the five Dolls shown in the cut, given only to Companion subscribers for one new subscriber and 40 cents for postage and packing. See Conditions, page 534. The five Dolls sold for \$2.00, postage and packing 40 cents extra; or sent by express, charges paid by receiver.



The "Happy Family."

Figure 1 An Advertisement from The Youth's Companion, 1896, featuring dolls of many races

necessary. Like the rising classes of African Americans, fine black dolls occupied a strange space. They had to be dressed according to conventions of characters, such as Mammy dolls or tribal Africans. To find a representation of an average African-American girl in stores would be a real challenge. Given that a mark of being middle class was having a fine china doll for a girl to practice rituals with, it would make sense that a relatively well-off family would purchase a symbol of belonging rather than one that occupied a liminal space. For black girls, at least, these dolls were not meant to be representational. They served an entirely different purpose—one that was far more about the social status of their parents than the children's desires. In this, middle-class black children would have felt a more extreme version of the discomfort that many white girls experienced with their dolls. The newspaper advertisers of this time knew well the significance of a white doll and a black doll, and one can observe from the absence of black dolls the signs of a self-perpetuating culture of exclusion. Ironically, the difficulty of finding fine black dolls would have meant that they were objects available only to those of significant means. African American mothers and children would have had to rely on their own skills to create representational dolls, and would once again subvert the prescribed social valuation of whiteness through their own creation.

Throughout the nineteenth century there was a serious disconnection between class, gender, and race, and dolls frequently were an expression of these struggles. The increasing sophistication of advertisements in this period serves to expose these struggles as they were played out both in public and in private. Through the lens of marketing, the historian may see how Americans made to wrestle with deeply troubling questions surrounding race, status, and the reproduction of culture.

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