Chapter One

The Precocious Prodigy, 1946–1952

Why don't you pick me up and smoke me sometime?

Muriel the talking cigar, 1951

This is the story of the birth of the most powerful advertising medium in history, a story that has never been fully told. In the seven or so years following the end of World War II, the fledgling upstart medium of television advertising would irrevocably alter the social, economic, and political landscape of the United States. Over the course of the latter 1940s and early 1950s, television advertising emerged as a lightning rod of passion and conflict, electrifying politics, the legal system, and of course, everyday life in America. Like the beginnings of most new technologies, the first era of commercial television was a wild and wooly period fueled by an entrepreneurial spirit, gold rush mentality, and corporate interests. Its frontier orientation recast the trajectory of advertising, broadcasting, and marketing, and the careers of those working in those fields. Within this relatively short period of time, a new, original culture would form and be canonized in literature, film, and television itself. Most important, television advertising emerged as a loud, and I believe the loudest, voice of the American Dream, promoting the values of consumption and leisure grounded in a domestic, family-oriented lifestyle. After the Depression and the war, television advertising took on the important responsibility of assuring Americans that it was acceptable, even beneficial to be consumers. A vigorous consumer culture, largely suspended for the previous decade and a half, was about to be primed by the biggest thing to hit advertising since the commercialization of radio in the 1920s.

As in the case of many key sites of twentieth-century American social history, the creation of television advertising was dependent upon a series of technological advances and regulatory decisions. Commercial television began in earnest in the mid-1930s when RCA, Philco, Allen B. Du Mont, and others started testing the medium. NBC and CBS began broadcasting in 1939, with RCA offering sets for $200–$600. Television made its grand debut at the 1939 World's Fair, and by May 1940, twenty-three stations had begun telecasting in the United States. As America shifted to a wartime economy, however, the FCC soon put limits on commercial operations, which slowed growth of the new medium and made new sets impossible to find in the marketplace. No sets were allowed to be manufactured or stations to be licensed during World War II, postponing commercial television despite technological readiness.[1]

Months before America's entry into the war, however, a handful of brave advertisers gained their first experience with the medium. The first television commercial was for Bulova watches, aired during a July 1, 1941, broadcast of a Brooklyn Dodgers versus Philadelphia Phillies baseball game. The history-making event was inauspicious at best, made possible when the FCC authorized WNBT, the New York City NBC affiliate later called WNBC, to allow its broadcasts to be sponsored by advertisers. At precisely 2:29:50 P.M., a Bulova clock showing the time replaced a test pattern, while an announcer told baseball fans it was three o'clock. Bulova paid a total of $9 for the twenty-second spot—$4 for the time and $5 for "facilities and handling." Later that same day, Sunoco Oil, Lever Brothers, and Procter and Gamble sponsored broadcasts on the station, each paying $100 to reach what was estimated as 4,500 viewers. WNBT's rate card (the price list given to advertising agencies and sponsors) was, from today's standards, ridiculously basic, offering media buyers the simple choice of "night" or "day" rates.[2]

Despite the wartime moratorium on new stations, some existing ones were permitted to test the waters of commercial television. In March 1943, for example, WABD, the New York television station owned by Du Mont Laboratories, offered free time to advertising agencies to experiment with the medium. Ruthrauff & Ryan was the first agency to take Du Mont up on its offer, producing a weekly half-hour show called *Wednesdays at Nine Is Lever Brothers Time.* The variety show was a vehicle to promote three Lever brands—Rinso detergent, Spry baking ingredients, and Lifebuoy soap and shaving cream. Lever's commercials were surprisingly sophisticated, using dissolves, superimposed images, and even identical twins to create special effects. Most impressive, however, were commercials that were integrated within the program itself. In one skit, for example, the master of ceremonies led a game of charades, with the correct answer one of the sponsor's slogans, "A daily bath with Lifebuoy stops B.O." In another show, a lost puppet character is found in a giant Rinso box, and told he will win over a girl puppet by offering her

A 1944 commercial for Chesterfield cigarettes on the Du Mont network not surprisingly depicted a military scene. (NMAH Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution)

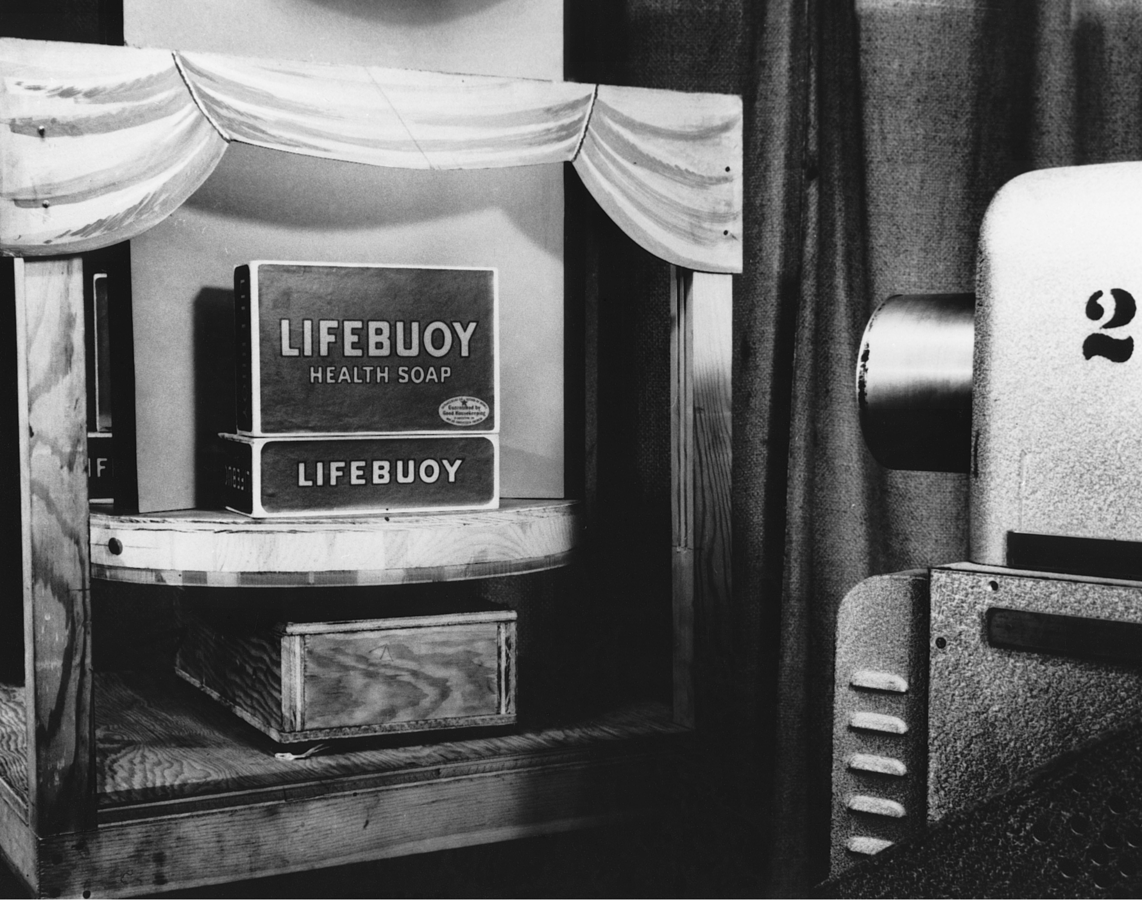
"a life free of household drudgery" by using Rinso. These early commercials laid the groundwork for advertisers' use of television to sell products under the guise of entertainment, a strategy advertisers had used since the early days of radio and before in newspapers and magazines.[3]

Radio Days

Indeed, much of the unapologetic commercialism of early television was predicated on the structural familiarity of radio. Karen S. Buzzard has noted that radio shows were "conceived, more or less, as one continuous commercial," best evidenced by the fact that the shows often carried the sponsor's name, for example, "Lux Radio Theater." In her book *Selling Radio,* Susan Smulyan wrote that sponsors' ultimate goal in radio was to create a "program [which] personifies the product." Clicquot Club was perhaps the best example of this pursuit, as the beverage marketer and its agency designed their radio program around the physical attributes of the product, specifically peppiness and effervescence. With snappy music and lively chatter, Clicquot Club's radio program was an audible metaphor for the bubbly tonic. J. Walter Thompson was recognized as the master of the radio program as advertisement, its goal to, in one advertising executive's words, "get radio shows that would work as advertising."[4]

In his definitive book on advertising in the 1920s and 1930s, *Advertising the American Dream,* Roland Marchand too has noted radio's "dovetailing of entertainment with advertisement." Radio commercials often resembled the tone, locale, and pace of their host programs or, better yet, used the programs themselves as the advertising delivery vehicle. A barber on the Chesebrough "Real Folks" radio show was known to casually praise the value of Vaseline while shaving a customer, while characters on the Maxwell House Program chatted up the merits of the coffee. This interweaving of entertainment and

Another 1944 commercial on Du Mont for Rinso White detergent featured this scene right out of a Norman Rockwell painting. *(NMAH Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution)*



State-of the-art production techniques in the 1940s by the Du Mont network included this lazy Susan turntable which was swiveled around to reveal an oversized box of Lifebuoy soap and other products. (*NMAH Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution*)

advertising, Marchand points out, was in fact not original to broadcasting but had its origins in print. Advertising agencies had long practiced the art of "editorial copy," in which newspaper and magazine ads were blended into articles through similar type fonts and writing style. With their presentation of entertainment-as-advertising (or advertisement-as-entertainment), television advertisers were carrying on an established industry tradition known to be an effective technique to sell products and services. Advertisers and their agencies exploited this successful formula in television by producing most of the programs and simply buying blocks of airtime from the networks. This system would serve the advertising community well during this first decade of commercial television, until a series of events irrevocably altered the industry's underpinnings.[5]

The Race Is On

With the invention of the Image Orthicon tube during the war, making possible a cheaper yet better product, television was now ready to be much more than what Miller and Nowak called a "clumsy and expensive toy." Television began to earn true legitimacy in 1945 when an allied victory in World War II seemed assured, part of the "guns-to-butter" transition from a military-based economy to a consumer-based one. As factories retooled in the months following the end of the war, advertising agencies and their sponsors moved quickly. Immediately after the FCC announced in June 1945 that prewar spectrum standards would be resumed, in fact, many advertising agencies rushed to create television departments, just as they had quickly created radio departments a generation earlier when they saw opportunity. Marchand has observed that once advertisers fully realized the power of radio shows to function as extended commercials, radio departments within ad agencies grew significantly in both number and importance. In mid-1945, about thirty ad agencies already had television departments, although "department" perhaps overstates the resources agencies were allocating to the new medium. Many of these departments consisted of a single person or were small groups within existing radio departments (not unlike the interactive or "new media" departments of agencies circa mid-1990s). Some departments were assigned the exclusive task of monitoring industry events, while others were given the charge to jump into the cutting edge technology. In addition to Ruthrauff & Ryan, the first agencies to make a commitment to television included Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborne (BBDO), J. Walter Thompson, Young & Rubicam, N. W. Ayer, Compton Advertising, and Kenyon & Eckhardt.[6]

Given the extremely limited size and scope of television immediately after the war, the advertising business was already taking the medium fairly seriously. According to the Television Broadcasters Association, in the summer of 1945 the country's nine television transmitters were reaching a total of fewer than 10,000 sets, all of course in large cities. Of these 5,000–6,000 sets were located in the New York City-New Jersey-Philadelphia area, 800 to 1,000 in the Chicago area, and 500–700 in or around Los Angeles. Set ownership in the early years of television was generally limited to the wealthy, what one publication termed "the mink coat and luxury car class." Most agencies active in television were producing their own shows (commercials as we know them were still about a year away), although a handful of independent production companies had already sprung up. Despite the rumblings in the advertising world and interest among the more curious to own a television set, few people in 1945 recognized the potential commercial applications of the medium. Some believed that television would be most effective as an internal selling device within department stores. In October and November 1945, Gimbel's in Philadelphia tested the effectiveness of "intrastore" (what would be later called closed-circuit) advertising, telecasting sales pitches shot live from the central auditorium to twenty receivers scattered around the store. The telecasts did prove to boost sales, although the cost of such a project on a large-scale basis would have been prohibitive.[7]

On the basis of Gimbel's test and other localized efforts, it soon became apparent that advertising on a mass scale represented the greatest chances of making television a viable medium. In 1945, $3 billion in advertising was spent in the United States, and the neophyte television industry firmly believed it could grab a share of these dollars. At its annual convention, held in Washington, D.C. on January 29, 1946, the Television Institute trade group focused on the looming opportunity of advertising, addressing questions such as, how much would the process cost the industry? How fast would the audience develop? What technical improvements were necessary? What role would the FCC play? The group boldly assumed that even with production and media costs three to ten times those of radio, television could effectively compete for advertisers' money. The Institute's research had indicated that television could "pull" (generate sales) ten times that of radio, a function of the former's ability to offer both sight and sound. "Action plus animation," the Institute argued, "create a stepped-up emotional drive lacking in all other forms of advertising art." Television programming, and its advertising stepchild, were envisioned as drawing from a variety of arts, a powerful fusion of movies, radio, music, writing, and theater. Experts, however, advised sponsors-to-be to purchase a television set so "you can really see whether your program is laying eggs."[8]

By the spring of 1946, industry experts were predicting that television advertising would take the form of commercials, or what was described by *Sales Management* as "one-minute movie shorts." "Video sales messages," the trade publication forecast, "are going to be something new in advertising and selling, because television commercials are pretty certain to be 16 mm. film episodes, one minute in length, or less." Believing commercials would be much like movie trailers (or perhaps bad lovers), the magazine accurately predicted that they would be "something that moves fast, with abundant noise, holds your attention for two or three minutes . . . , and leaves you [with a] promis[e]." Suggestions regarding the kind of commercials current print and radio advertisers should make were even made. For Campbell Soup, advice was offered that "stress [be] laid on quickness of preparation"; for Arrow shirts, that "comic misfits" and "hints to the bachelor" be employed; and for Mennen, the casting of "a girl say[ing] 'I like smooth men.'"[9]

Despite a few naysayers, such as E. F. McDonald, president of the Zenith Radio Corporation, who stated in February 1947 that "advertising will *never* support large-scale television," most agency, corporate, and broadcast executives believed that the television advertising train had by then already left the station. Agencies were holding symposiums to learn more about the medium, continuing to build television departments, and urging clients to experiment with commercials while it was inexpensive. With a vested interest in a full revival of a consumer-driven economy, companies such as U.S. Rubber, General Mills, Chevrolet, Ford, Standard Brands, and Standard Oil had all invested in television advertising by the beginning of 1947. These were, not coincidentally, some of the flagship accounts of ad agencies blazing the televisual trail. Helping the industry's confidence were the long lines of shoppers at Macy's, pushing and shoving to purchase one of the limited number of ten-inch screen television sets selling for $350. Long lines also formed at retail stores in Chicago, with thousands of customers put on waiting lists to purchase a set when more came in. The frenzy over television was even more remarkable given the fact that most Americans wanting to own a television set had actually never seen one in use. A study completed in summer 1946 by Sylvania Electric Products found that less than one in six consumers who were in the market for a set had ever watched a television show. "Television is going to move very soon and very fast," *Printer's Ink* accurately forecasted in March 1947. Even before most Americans had personally experienced the medium, television was being considered an integral part of postwar domestic life.[10]

General Foods, an avid radio advertiser, was particularly eager to get in on the ground floor of commercial television. The company set up an advertising committee in 1946 to provide reports of industry goings-on and recommend what steps to take. By May 1947, Howard M. Chapin, sales and advertising manager of the company's Jell-O division and chair of the committee, was able to report that General Foods was at the "'getting our feet wet' stage." The company was actively purchasing time on all three New York City area stations, including co-sponsorship (with Ford Motor Company) of the Brooklyn Dodgers' seventy-seven home games to be aired on WCBS-TV. Television advertising was viewed, over the long term, as an ideal means to efficiently promote the company's national brands. To reach a mass audience, General Foods and other big marketers had to advertise on many radio stations and in many magazines and newspapers, a cost- and time-intensive way to do business. Television advertising was the stuff of dreams for companies like General Foods, offering potential unprecedented economies of scale and, ultimately, tremendous profits. Beyond its role as an advertising medium, television advertising could and would act as a catalyst for selling the idea of consumption in general, a critical function in the first years after the war. As Lipsitz described it, television "irreparably inscribe[d] consumer desire and commercialism into the fabric of entertainment, news, and sports."[11]

The Medium of Mediums

By late 1947, the cultural implications of the new medium were becoming quite clear, given the way that television was impacting Americans' relationship to sports. Television was turning out to be as communitarian a broadcasting medium as radio, with family members routinely watching sports broadcasts together. When it came to advertising on sports broadcasts, early research was suggesting that TV also had tremendous "recall" potential. Three out of four viewers could name Ford as one of the sponsors of the Brooklyn Dodgers games, for example, as high a percentage as any advertiser could hope for. As important if not more important was the effect the new medium was having on who watched sports broadcasts. Many women who had never attended a major sports event in person in their entire life were now watching and enjoying baseball and basketball games, horse races, and tennis matches on television. Excited about the recall levels and new audiences that television appeared to be responsible for, sponsors of sports broadcasts quickly found opportunities to raise the level of corporate or brand identification among viewers. One strategy was for commentators to make "ad-lib" comments referring to sponsors and their products. "When the comment is clever and correctly timed," Donald Horton and Halsey V. Barrett of CBS Television advised, "it serves not only as an advertisement but as supplementary entertainment." Advertisers also integrated their products into televised sporting events, such as when the presentation of a pair of silver spurs to the winner of a rodeo contest was made from a Ford station wagon. Placing billboards with the sponsor's name in full view of the television camera, of course, became standard operating procedure for advertisers wanting to get the most for their media buck.[12]

Years later, television advertising would also be responsible for the "television time-out" in sports, although initially commercials were run only when the teams themselves called the time-out. During football games, teams had the option of not using the full two minutes per time-out allowed, a complicating factor in a business where time was of the essence. Television advertising executives, however, were somehow able to solve the problem by pressuring game referees to delay starting the game even though the teams were ready to play. "The officials," one network football game announcer stated, "have been most cooperative in inducing team captains to take the full two minutes." Television advertising was well on the way toward assuming control of the "natural" pace of professional sports, in effect dictating the ground rules of one of America's central institutions.[13]

More important than attracting viewers, television advertising appeared to be motivating consumers to take action. When makers of Bab-O, a surface cleanser, offered a premium during its commercial, 6 percent of the total viewing audience responded to the offer. This was, according to the Bab-O account executive, "an unheard-of thing in ordinary radio." Mueller Macaroni generated 642 telephone calls in the first forty-five minutes by offering $25 for the best name for a salad featured in its commercial. (The prize was won by a Mr. Reubens with his entry, Mueller's Pin Money Salad.) And, $800 worth of silverware and pillows were reportedly sold by one $65 commercial announcement, and 265 toy trains by a single demonstration. "This thing is so big we don't know what do with it," one executive gleefully declared. Despite their enthusiasm, advertising executives were generally confused as to the role television would or should play within their clients' marketing plans. "Television provides advertising with a new tool," declared Kenneth W. Hinks of J. Walter Thompson at the 1948 American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) convention, but neither he nor other industry experts could say exactly how the tool should be used. Between October 1947 and April 1948, according to Young & Rubicam research, the number of television advertisers grew from 89 to 211, but this was still a fraction of radio's 1,150 national advertisers. Sixty percent of television's 1 million viewers in the U.S. (and thus the world) were concentrated in the New York City metropolitan area, deterring advertisers in other parts of the country to invest in the medium. A lack of understanding about the effects of television upon the viewer also contributed to the reluctance among some advertisers to jump into the new medium. Television "induces fatigue at a much greater rate than . . . radio, and possibly encourages sly drooping of the eyelids during the duller portions of a program," claimed Peter Langhoff, research chief of Young & Rubicam.[14]

Perhaps to avoid viewer "fatigue," early television advertisers often made full use of the medium's visual power, particularly when it came to the long, intimate relationship between advertising and sex. Sweetheart Soap, for example, employed women models in commercials for its bathing suits in 1947 because, as a company executive described it, "the women like the fashions but the men look because it's cheesecake." With few regulations or standards, early television advertisers also took full advantage of the deception inherent in the medium, if only to eliminate as much risk as possible from airing live commercials. In a 1947 dog food commercial, for example, a dog galloped toward a bowl of the competitor's brand, sniffed and shuddered, and made a beeline for the sponsor's bowl, which he happily gobbled down. "It went over beautifully," claimed the producer, admitting that "we filled the competitor's bowl with ammonia." Because of the visual nature of the medium delivered to viewers in real time, advertisers were quickly recognizing the perceived need to adjust reality to their advantage. Selling the American Dream to viewers simply could not accommodate advertisers' products coming off as less than wonderful, even if dogs were the ultimate consumers.[15]

It is difficult now to appreciate how bizarre the new world of television advertising seemed to viewers and critics in the late 1940s. No amount of print or radio advertising or moviegoing had prepared audiences for such images as square dancing Lucky Strike cigarettes and marching Rheingold beer bottles. Advertising of this era was truly a theater of the absurd, as when New York's Chevrolet dealers cast six dwarves as garage repairmen, naming them Howdy, Quickie, Tidy, Thrifty, Brainy, and Brawny. Observers found disembodied hands in commercials particularly disturbing, snapping on Ronson lighters or pouring Ivory Snow detergent independently from the remainder of the human body. The types of commercial vignettes or dramas that are so familiar to us now were often perceived as having little or nothing to do with the product being advertised because the genres were new, at least in a visual sense. The length of television commercials was an especially sore issue, with some spots (such as those run by Kelvinator kitchen appliances) running for a full fifteen minutes. Americans were being introduced to, perhaps indoctrinated in, a new language of consumerism, a language which was increasingly becoming a form of public discourse.[16]

In addition to television being the least proven advertising medium, it was also the most expensive. The cost of producing a television show was, by radio standards, enormous. Five times as many technicians were needed in television than in radio, with a high-budget show costing a sponsor $15,000

A home economist for Kraft making sandwiches with Miracle Whip on live television for station WRCA. (NMAH Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution)

a week to produce and air. Maxwell House paid this much money to sponsor *The Lambs Gambol,* a variety program that reached an audience of about a million people in 1949. With the "cost per viewer" estimated as one and a half cents, only sponsors with deep pockets could afford to create programs on a weekly basis. Top radio shows reached about 20 million people at less expense, with the cost per listener as low as one-fifth of a cent. Despite the higher cost, almost all large agencies had or were creating television departments in the late 1940s in order to retain existing and attract new clients. Rather than representing a new profit center, however, television was proving to be a necessary evil for many agencies. "When we get into television," one advertising executive complained in 1948, "we lose our shirts." Television stations were also losing money, luring advertisers with cut rates just to fill air time. Attracted by discounted media time and the occasional success story (such as Kraft Foods causing a run on a previously little known brand of cheese in Philadelphia), however, the number of television advertisers continued to rise. Between June and October 1948, the total number of television advertisers increased from 243 to 495. Many advertisers were "investment spending," building equity with viewers as the number of television sets in households and number of stations gradually grew. Larger advertisers were in television for the long run, willing to take short-term losses for the future dividends that they correctly believed lay around the corner.[17]

Some advertisers found ways to justify the high price of television through alternative measures of return on investment. General Foods, which soon became one of the heaviest advertisers of the late 1940s, adopted this philosophy on the basis of research published in January 1948. The report revealed that most television viewers had higher-than-average-incomes, could identify program sponsors, and remembered commercial selling points. The study also showed that the average evening audience per television set was 3.54 persons versus 2.37 per radio set, further adding to the attractiveness of the new medium. The fact that television combined sight with sound would, as the Television Institute predicted, prove to be a compelling factor in convincing large advertisers like General Foods to devote dollars to the medium despite its high cost and lack of a track record.[18]

Even with its relative higher cost, television advertising grew over the course of the late 1940s at a truly staggering rate, helped along by the growing number of broadcasting hours in a day. From 1947 to 1948, total expenditures on television advertising skyrocketed from $1 million to $10 million. Sixty advertisers sponsored network television shows in 1949, three times the number of the previous year. The number of national and regional advertisers increased from 119 in 1948 to 337 in 1949, while the number of local retailers using television jumped from 236 to 1,141 (virtually all of the latter in major cities where set ownership was still concentrated). About 200 advertising agencies across the country had television departments by February 1949. "Television is developing with such atomic fury that what is written today is likely to be outdated tomorrow," *Printer's Ink* declared, interestingly using the metaphor of atomic energy to describe another of postwar America's cultural icons. The changes in the geographic landscape of America backed up all the hype in the trade media. Many landlords were backing down from their original stance that they would not allow television antennae to clutter the rooftops of their apartment buildings, for example, a crucial step in the popularization of the medium. With costs still exceeding income resulting from television advertising, however, marketers with large promotion budgets were aggressively securing the best time, talent, and programs before their competitors could do so. Not surprisingly, the largest radio advertisers were also the largest television advertisers in the late 1940s, with marketers of standardized products intended for mass consumption leading the way. Food and beverage marketers accounted for the largest share of television spot (regional) advertising in 1949, while drug and toiletries, food, and tobacco marketers were most likely to be network sponsors. Seventy-four percent of all television advertisers used spot commercials, with the remaining 26 percent using network alone.[19]

Although many large advertisers were committed to television by 1949, a good share of those began to look for ways to lower the enormous costs associated with the medium. There were various ways advertisers could do this. First, being the producers of television shows, network sponsors had the power and ability to change program format. Maxwell House did just that in November 1949, dropping its $15,000 a week *The Lambs Gambol* in exchange for a less expensive dramatic show retrofitted from radio, *Mama.* A second way was for network sponsors to pull out of the production end of the business and simply run filmed commercials, an idea that would take an entire decade to fully develop. A third, rather clever, option was termed "simulcasting," airing the audio portion of a network television show (live or taped) over the radio. Through simulcasting, large advertisers using both media would save on virtually all radio production costs, lowering total expenditures. Yet another way to lower costs was for multiple advertisers, often competitors in the same business but located in different geographical markets, to share a sponsorship. Fourteen drug store chains, in fact, each based in a different city, sponsored the *Cavalcade of Stars* show over the Du Mont television network during the 1949–1950 season, although a viewer would think that the chain in his or her local market was the sole sponsor.[20]

Even without cost-cutting measures, television advertising was proving to be a smart, if not necessary, investment for leading marketers of consumer goods. Big advertisers were, in fact, essentially forced to add television to their media mix as it eroded the listening base of radio. In April 1950, A. C. Nielsen research showed that night-time radio listenership dropped from 1 hour, 39 minutes to 27 minutes after a household purchased a television set. Although daytime radio listening fell off only 20 minutes, advertisers still had to add television to their media schedules to reach the same number of listeners with the same frequency. Because television was still in its formative period, however, it could not by itself offer advertisers the reach and frequency levels that radio used to. Thus advertisers found themselves in the sometimes uncomfortable position of having to be a television advertiser and enduring the financial and technical headaches of the new medium until it achieved its full potential.[21]

Gray Flannel Suits

As more marketers included television in their media mix, television advertising naturally increased its presence within the discourse of everyday life in America. The culture of television advertising had, in fact, already become an archetype by the early 1950s, well-documented in films, literature, and even television advertising itself. On a June 1950 episode of *Cavalcade of Stars,* for example, a pompous man in a tuxedo identified only as a "representative of the sponsor" bossily demanded that host Jerry Lester sing the "Quality Drug Stores" song at the party after the broadcast. As the payer of the bills, the sponsor or corporate executive was unarguably on the top rung of the television advertising ladder. Next in the hierarchy were the network and agency account executives, the latter characterized by Gilbert Millstein of *The New York Times* as "a thin, dynamic man in the middle forties with a deceptive boyish complexion, an ulcer, hypertension, and a palpitating heart." He unfailingly had a crew cut and wore gray flannel suits. Last in the pecking order were actors and writers, although there was some dispute regarding which of these professions was the bottom rung of the ladder. The relationship between the television industry and the advertising business was a symbiotic one, reflected by their physical closeness in New York City. CBS was headquartered at Madison Avenue and 52nd Street, within the very epicenter of the advertising agency world, with NBC and ABC located a block and a half away at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. "The proximity of the agencies to the networks," Millstein observed, "deeply affects the folkways of both."[22]

Television, like radio in the past and the Internet in the future, had a major impact on the advertising business by being a revolutionary medium in which many of the old rules no longer applied. An escalated amount of account switching occurred in the industry in the early 1950s, a function in large part of the relative willingness among agencies to confront the challenges of creating television commercials. When the Gruen Watch Company announced it wanted to spend 90 percent of its advertising budget on television, for example, many agencies declined to bid for the account, believing the company's plan too ambitious (and unprofitable). Advertisers naturally expected a return on their costly investment, pressuring agencies to provide unusual levels of service to television-based accounts. With the opportunities for production errors great, advertising agencies ran the fair chance of exceeding their clients' budgets and appearing incompetent with each television commercial venture. The dynamics of television had the net effect of significantly improving the reputation of some agencies and destroying that of some others, not unlike that which occurred a generation earlier when advertising agencies either dipped their toes in radio or stayed close to the tried-and-true tradition of print.[23]

Until television networks took control over programming in the latter half of the 1950s, advertising agencies continued to create shows for their clients through on-staff directors and producers, or else farmed them out through independent production companies. After the war, executives at the television networks saw a window of opportunity for their industry, rather than advertising agencies, to take control of the new broadcasting medium by producing and owning programming. It soon became clear, however, that the same pattern would emerge as in radio, where ad agencies retained primary power by producing shows on behalf of their clients. Advertising agency culture thrived in the postwar years largely because of its being in the televisual catbird's seat, and as many of the so-called best and brightest opted to get on the ground floor of a new, mushrooming industry. "Everything you do in television is new," exclaimed one agency executive. "No matter what you try, it's never been done before."[24]

With television now an important component of large advertisers' media plans, many ad agencies seized the opportunity with zeal. After the hard times of the Depression and four war years of "investing in the future while the present was out of stock," advertising executives looked at the new medium as a problematic but vital vehicle by which to deliver the American Dream literally door to door. By June 1950, BBDO had put forty of its clients into television and was turning out commercials at the rate of one a day. Half of BBDO's commercials were presented live, half on film. A one-minute live commercial typically cost about $750 to produce, not including talent, while a one-minute filmed commercial cost about $1,000. Many advertising people felt the extra cost of film was well worth it. "If an actor makes a fluff, you can reshoot the scene," stated Jack Denove, account executive at BBDO. "If he makes a boner on a live commercial, there's nothing you can do about it."[25]

BBDO was agency of record for Lucky Strike cigarettes, and helped produce *Your Lucky Strike Theater,* a one-hour drama in which six minutes of commercial time were devoted to promoting the sponsor's brand. The show generated a 35 audience rating (meaning 35 out of every hundred people viewing television watched the show), an unheard of share in today's 100-plus channel world. "Smoking looks wonderful on television," exclaimed Denove, believing that "smoking is an instantaneous act." A key criterion for being an announcer on this show was being an "inveterate" smoker, evidenced by the ability to simultaneously talk and exhale. Aptitude in producing multiple smoke rings was a particularly valuable skill, although studio lights and air conditioning played havoc with "ring integrity." Cigarette companies were of course avid television advertisers in these days, with Chesterfield sponsoring *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends* and the *Chesterfield Supper Club,* with Perry Como. Camel sponsored the *Camel News Caravan, The Ed Wynn Show,* and a drama, *Man against Crime.* Old Gold sponsored the popular *Original Amateur Hour* and half of *Stop the Music,* while Pall Mall sponsored *The Big Story,* and Philip Morris sponsored *Candid Camera.* As a basic commodity relying on the creation of a compelling brand identity, cigarettes had by necessity become an immediate staple of television advertising's diet. For ad agencies, having a tobacco client on its client roster was a key signifier of industry status and a vital source of revenue and profits.[26]

Technical Difficulties

Although concerns such as "ring integrity" might seem trivial, technical issues such as this one were hardly insignificant matters to producers of commercials at mid-century. Filmmakers had successfully brought sight and sound together for a generation, but a variety of problems plagued television advertising throughout its early years. Commercials, *Time* reported in February 1948, were "causing deep furrows in admen's brows," as the industry struggled with the peculiarities of the new medium and its often live nature. Cameras often dwelled seemingly interminably on static objects like a bar of soap, or bloopers would occur as when an electric razor refused to turn off or the cover of a manual one wouldn't budge. The human factor was always an unknown variable in live television advertising, as when a model mistakenly lauded the praises of Lipton Tea while brewing a pot of the clearly labeled sponsor's brand, Tender Leaf. The opportunities for bungles were many and, from our vantage point today when everything on television is carefully planned, predictable. Praising the reliability of a sponsor's lighters, for example, a spokesperson futilely flicked the lighter with no response. Proudly holding a sponsor's loaf of bread aloft, another announcer urged viewers to buy a competitor's brand. Immediately after saying "Never an irritation," a cigarette pitchman coughed apoplectically. In a live beer commercial, the camera was supposed to momentarily break away from a shot of the drinker bringing a beer to his lips to his smile of satisfaction. In a less than perfectly choreographed instance of this technique, however, the camera returned not to a smile but to the drinker sloshing the beer into a pail at his side. Early commercial television was, as Halberstam put it, "all on the job training and, at first, almost everyone was getting it wrong."[27]

A single evening of television watching could reveal any number of the technical nightmares that pioneering producers of television commercials faced. Shiny surfaces and the color white caused "halation" on television screens, a technical term for glare. Advertisers found white cows to be not at all fit for broadcast, as the medium had the unpleasant effect of turning the creatures into supernatural masses of bright light. Orthicon pickup tubes in some early television cameras were also red sensitive, turning all things crimson into unrecognizable blurs of white. Visual problems were often complemented by awkward, unnatural copy created by writers struggling within the unknown territory of television. Copywriters of radio commercials often suddenly found themselves writers of television spots, and typically had difficulty adapting to the new medium. The phenomenon was similar to what occurred in the film industry with the introduction of sound, when scenes were "overwritten" to feature the new technology. Actors in commercials unnecessarily indicated numbers with their fingers, or spelled out words agonizingly slowly, a habit inherited from radio. Writers imported from the film industry also overestimated the capabilities of the medium, such as by calling for crowd scenes of a dozen or more people, not realizing that on television just four or five people would constitute a crowd. Refugees from the movie business, who were attracted to advertising by its frontier orientation as the studio system fell apart, would also call for long camera shots to depict huge props, making people appear Lilliputian. Television writers quickly learned to focus action in the center of the screen, away from the periphery where images got fuzzy. (It was normal to lose 8 percent of the vertical image and 13 percent of the horizontal in any shot.) Writers previously employed at Walt Disney Studios were also startled by the pace of television, no longer afforded the luxury of having three months or so to write and produce a scene.[28]

Additional, nontechnical concerns plagued advertising executives and their clients during the nascent years of commercial television. Broadcast-

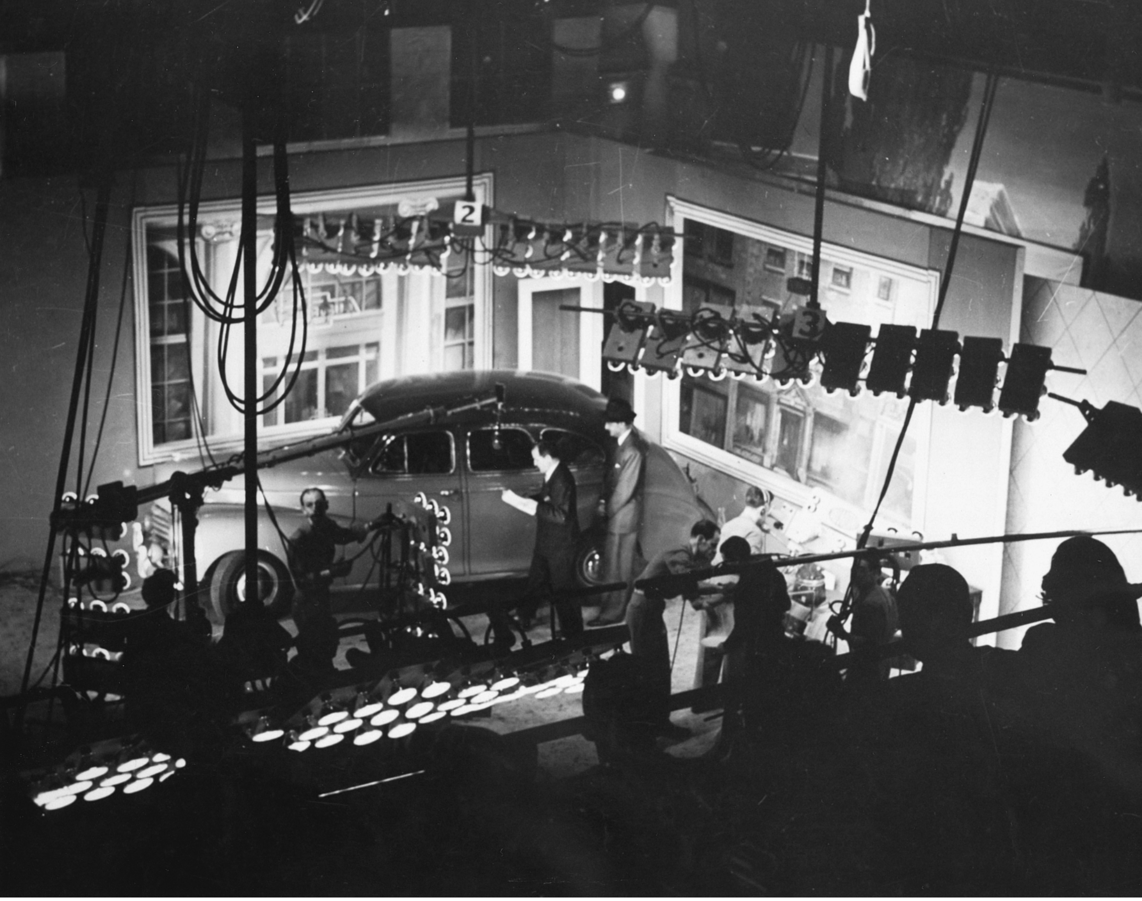
Early television advertising snafus, such as when the cover of a razor stuck during a live spot, were considered newsworthy events. "It took a display of brute strength to get the thing to work," observed one reporter. (Library of Congress)

ing baseball games, for example, as done by Chesterfield in its sponsorship of New York Giants home games over the 1948 season, brought unanticipated risks. Crowd shots occasionally caught married men at the games accompanied by women other than their wives, eventually forcing advertisers to avoid televising scenes of fans over which they would superimpose their logo. Music was an especially tricky area. In 1944, James C. Petrillo, head of the American Federation of Musicians, forbade all members of the union to record music on film for television, afraid perhaps of what effects the unknown medium might have on live music performance. Most early television jingles were thus sung a cappella or accompanied by a musical instrument not officially recognized by the union. An inordinate amount of ukulele music was thus recorded under television commercials of this era, as were the sounds of other "non-official" instruments such as tipples (a steel-stringed ukulele), Jew's harps, kazoos, children's xylophones, toy pianos, and sand blocks. Human voices were also used to simulate the sounds produced by standard musical instruments, creating a cottage industry consisting of people able to replicate bass fiddles, snare drums, trumpets, and saxophones through their mouths and noses.[29]

Not surprisingly, higher brow critics were generally appalled by the sights and sounds of television advertising at mid-century, offended by the medium's clumsiness and carnivalesque qualities. Compared to some other art forms of the era—abstract expressionism in painting, bebop in music, the International Style in architecture—television advertising did indeed seem downright prehistoric. Evangeline Davis, a freelance writer, considered it to be "the spectacle of the crack-up of the Atomic Age," another journalistic coupling of television advertising and atomic energy.[30] In September 1950, Charles W. Morton, a writer for *Atlantic* magazine, attacked the medium for its overt crudity:

> Radio's ten-word advertising vocabulary (richer, bigger, easier, finer, newer, smoother, better, milder, safer, brighter) still bounds the chatter of TV's spellbinders, while the accompanying pictorial techniques are largely based on the kind of trick photography that once animated cartoon advertising in the old-time movie house. . . . Messages by smoke signals are about the only stunt that TV has not carried over from more primitive days.[31]

Critics such as Morton were also amazed by television advertisers' penchant for condescending to viewers and overstating the obvious. A commercial for the Lincoln Cosmopolitan, for example, featured a woman pushing a button to lower a window and closing a door, as if these acts in themselves were new and impressive to viewers. Overcome with the ability to show moving pictures of a product, advertisers were acting as if viewers had never seen an automobile, sometimes believing they had to offer proof that the car would actually run. After deconstructing commercials for Chevrolet and Oldsmobile, Morton concluded his critique of the state of automobile television advertising by stating that "most of the motor makers had incomparably better exhibits at the New York World's Fair in 1939 than anything they have shown the growing millions of TV customers."[32]



A stage set for a commercial for Chevrolet in the late 1940s. The studio audience can be seen in the foreground.

By drawing upon scientific and technological themes, however, some automobile manufacturers were able to position their products as symbols of the future versus remnants of the past. Oldsmobile, in fact, advertised its 1949 88 model as "futuramic through and through," the least expensive automobile to have a "high compression rocket engine." (The "Rocket 88" would indeed point the way to the future, becoming the subject for what many argue is the first rock'n'roll song.) Commercials for Studebaker's 1950 Champion emphasized the car's progressive marriage of form and function, referring to the automobile as a "melody in metal" and "symphony in steel." Through such commercials, television advertising shared and promulgated the forward-looking, utopian vision of the postwar years, portraying the American Dream as a technological wonderland.[33]

Arts and Crafts

Postwar themes such as the future, outer space, or industrial design illustrated the range of conceptual elements advertisers had at their disposal. In addition to having a palette of culturally charged references to draw from, advertisers had an array of different creative genres to choose from, resulting in some commercials which could be considered excellent even by today's standards. The musical extravaganza was by and large considered the most popular, with singers, dancers, clowns, and announcers collaborating to create a Broadway-like production number. Commercial presentations on *Lucky Strike Theater* best exemplified this approach, as some 150 people performed 214 separate jobs to present Luckies as Cecil B. DeMille might have. Cartoons or animated commercials were a second major genre, allowing advertisers to enter the realm of fantasy and imagination. Documentaries were another form of presentation, applied most effectively when advertisers showed consumers the makings of their product in a factory or on an assembly line. The slice-of-

A commercial for Shell gasoline from the late 1940s, complete with a mock service station in a television studio.

life drama or morality play borrowed from radio was, of course, a common genre, with advertisers featuring their products as the solution to everyday problems. Hair tonic became the key to instant popularity, breakfast cereal the deliverer of superhuman energy. All of these genres had deep roots in American popular culture, which helped cloak television commercials as a form of entertainment. There was no doubt that early television advertising had some very rough edges, but its appropriation of popular culture was as powerful a propaganda technique as any.[34]

At the local level, the production of commercials was a significantly less sophisticated affair. In fact, sponsors were known to tell television station owners "not to worry about talent," that is, professional announcers or actors, with many owners agreeing to sponsors' requests that the former personally deliver the commercials. Likewise, it was not unusual for station owners to encourage sponsors to act as commercial talent, believing that the medium was too new for viewers to tell a good spokesperson from a bad one. Sponsors sometimes wanted to appear in their own ads on the premise that a professional announcer's lack of knowledge and sincerity about the product being sold would not come across visually. At the network level, many sponsors believed that they knew more about the formula for a winning television show than the writers and directors. Sponsors with their wives and friends were known to watch "their" show at dinner parties, often leading to suggestions on how to improve it. After a sponsor insisted on tinkering with the production elements, however, the show's ratings almost always fell, puzzling the sponsor but not at all the show's producers.[35]

Despite sponsors' misguided leanings toward the creative side of the business, television was immeasurably advancing the evolution of advertising, making possible a quantum leap in the industry's development. As unidimensional media, both radio and print placed severe constraints on advertising technique. As a bi-dimensional medium, television exponentially added to the ways in which advertising could be presented to the consumer. After initially borrowing radio's format of simply reading a sales message into a microphone, television advertisers quickly incorporated visual devices—demonstrations, optical slides, flap cards—into commercials. Filmmaking techniques were next applied to television advertising, as alumni from cinema brought animation, stop motion, and live action to the medium. Afforded the ability to make their products march, skip, and jump, advertisers were now pressuring directors to pack every technique of a Hollywood film into a one-minute commercial. When professional actors were not cast as talent, advertisers looked to the infinite possibilities of animation and special effects to make their products seem truly fantastic. A menagerie of waddling polar bears, skating penguins, magic rabbits, and talking dogs, for example, populated television screens at mid-century, descendents of the workings of Walt Disney's and the Warner Brothers' imagination. Dazzled or perhaps dazed by the creative possibilities in television advertising, *Time* magazine viewed the medium in June 1951 as "a precocious prodigy," with "a dozen different ways of huckstering its products and dizzying its audience."[36]

One of the more popular special effects advertisers used to "huckster" was combining animation with live action. Young & Rubicam, for example, used the technique notably well in a 1952 spot called "Swinging Apples" for Mott's Apple Cider, also suggesting that craft-obsessed 1950s homemakers save the jug and make a lamp out of it by using a "handy converter kit available from Mott's." Through the wonders of technology, agencies also had the ability to ensure their clients' products would be in fashion months after a commercial was shot. For a commercial for a home permanent kit called Shadow Wave, made by the Pepsodent Company, for example, McCann-Erickson styled and filmed model Barbara Britton's hair seven different ways. With the commercial scheduled to air six months after the shooting, the agency planned to air the version with the most up-to-date hair style.[37]

Dodge was an avid supporter of the fauna-inspired school of television advertising, in one spot using a family of talking rabbits as a metaphor for the viewing audience (many of whom were breeding just as prolifically). The company's new 1951 model was filled entirely with real rabbits to illustrate how much room the new car held. "If you're a big family man like me," the daddy bunny advised via a human voice-over, "better get a Dodge." The automobile maker's penchant for using vocally gifted animals was apparent in another commercial for the 1951 model. After an announcer wondered aloud what could be more beautiful than a peacock, such a bird miraculously appeared to suggest that he "step inside a new Dodge" to find out. Viewers were then treated to the "pleasing color combinations and new ideas in fabric and design" which made up the car's interior, a legitimate reference to the amazing advances being made at the time in synthetic textiles. Dodge's emphasis on the roominess and aesthetics of its 1951 model was complemented by commercials featuring the car's safety features. In yet another talking animal spot for Dodge which employed a "wise old owl," viewers were encouraged to "play it safe and buy a Dodge." The bird proceeded to list the many safety features of the 1951 model, which included rugged all-steel body construction, wraparound windshields for greater visibility, wider rearview mirrors, improved handling, "safety rim" wheels, and "safe-guard" brakes. Although Americans in fact put style over safety when it came to automobile priorities, Dodge's owl hootingly concluded that "for safety first, it's Dodge." Dodge's commercials clearly borrowed from Hollywood's anthropomorphic animals so pervasive in family entertainment, a smart co-opting of popular culture.[38]

In addition to special effects, testimonials from celebrities represented a tried-and-true means of attracting viewer attention. Themselves new to the medium, stars almost always tempered their fame by speaking with unusual sincerity and conviction. Stars also began to incorporate plugs into their acts, regularly pitching products for sponsors before, in between, or after their television performances. In 1949, Gertrude Berg, star of the popular situation comedy *The Goldbergs,* stayed in character on behalf of Sanka decaffeinated coffee. "You can drink as much as you want, as often as you want," she explained, "because the sleep is left in." Lipsitz has acutely noted the semiotics of coffee in *Mama,* arguing that the integration of Maxwell House into the narrative of that show linked the powerful concept of family to "an entire attitude about consumption." Other stars used their talent to deliver advertising as entertainment. Television's first big star, Milton Berle, bravely sang the "Pepsi-Cola Hits the Spot" jingle on a June 1949 episode of *The Texaco Star Theater,* while Dinah Shore, of course, regularly sang "See the U.S.A. in Your Chevrolet" on her own NBC show. Such techniques, what Marchand called "dramatized commercials," were lifted from radio days when, in the early 1930s, radio talent were known to pitch sponsors' products while in character in a separate segment of the program. Although some in the radio industry believed this sort of advertising strayed too far into commercial crassness, it soon became standard practice, and ultimately applied to and expanded in the new medium of television.[39]

Advertainment

The most effective kind of commercials, however, were those which did not appear to be commercials at all, a tenet that stemmed from radio. Most advertisers rightfully believed that any form of overt selling caused a certain level of skepticism among consumers, the underlying premise being to disguise advertising as entertainment. The "pitchman" on *The Texaco Star Theater,* for example, was presented as simply one of the show's characters. Studio audiences actually applauded his readings of Havoline oil and gas commercials, considering the ads just another part of the show. For the millions viewing at home, commercials were designed to act as surrogate personal salespeople, able to make more calls than an army of Willy Lomans. Communicating with viewers was most effectively achieved, advertising theory went, when commercials were perceived as an integral part of shows. "A truly good commercial is the well integrated one," said Norman Nash, assistant copy chief of the Kudner Agency, "one that does not break the mood of the entertainment vehicle." On *Private Eye,* a detective drama sponsored by U.S. Tobacco, commercials were regularly woven into shows. The hero of the series regularly "dropped in" on his favorite smoke shop, bantering with other characters about the merits of different types of tobacco. Counter and shelf displays of the sponsor's brands visually complemented the audio, multiplying the number of advertising impressions or exposures.[40] Scripted commercials often ran as long as six minutes, the same amount of time the industry code allowed for advertising in an hour. Because integrated commercials were "off the clock," however, sponsors theoretically had unlimited time in which to sell their products. Hal Humphrey, noted television and radio critic for the Los Angeles *Mirror,* half-seriously feared that

> some sponsor will come up with the brainy idea that he can build an entire thirty-minute plot around his product. The hero will be floundering around in the Sahara Desert, ready to die of hunger, exposure and thirst, when suddenly he will come upon a cache of food, clothing and beer upon which will be the brand names of all the participating sponsors.[41]

Integrated advertising was also used to counter sponsors' and ad agencies' worst fear—that viewers were using commercial breaks to prepare snacks or visit the restroom. In order to avoid spending good money on temporarily absent viewers, sponsors had performers extol the wonders of their product as part of the program. One of the better interpretations of integrated television advertising took place during *The Burns and Allen Show,* when Bill Goodwin, the announcer, would chat with Gracie about the joys of Carnation Milk. The technique was successful in holding onto viewers, as it was unclear when the interchange would segue back into the main part of the show. In radio, Jack Benny, Arthur Godfrey, and others had proved that commercials could be made entertaining, perhaps as much so as the rest of the program. In their radio careers, Marchand has noted, Benny, Godfrey, and other stars such as Ed Wynn were encouraged by sponsors to mention ("kid" in showbiz lingo) brand names into their skits and routines as a means to link the star's personality to the product. When these stars entered tele-

Paul M. Hahn, president of the American Tobacco Company, accepting TV Guide*'s Gold Medal from publisher Lee Wagner, as A. R. Stevens, American Tobacco's advertising manager, looks on in January 1951. The company received the award for its "Be Happy, Go Lucky" campaign, which the magazine cited for "delivering the sales message in the most beguiling and painless way, with deftness, freshness and originality that make it a fine little entertainment on its own."* *(Library of Congress)*

vision, they continued to personalize commercials by blending them into their schtick, often to critical acclaim. "Some of [Benny's] 'Be Happy, Go Lucky' plugs [for Lucky Strike]," Humphrey, wrote, "are more entertaining than the programs."[42]

Over the course of *The Jack Benny Program*'s long history, advertising was woven into sketches and character personalities to the point where it could hardly be distinguished from other elements of the show. Both regular cast members and guest stars sang commercial jingles and endorsed products for the show's principal sponsors, Lucky Strike, Lux, State Farm Insurance, and Jell-O, a direct lift from radio days. As announcer, Don Wilson usually delivered the commercial, but was often joined by Benny, Dennis Day, Rochester (played by Eddie Anderson), and Harlow, Don's teenage son. The Sportmen

Quartet regularly sang the sponsor's jingle in a style accordant with a particular show's theme, occasionally joined or replaced by a guest singer. Made perfectly clear by the opening words "brought to you by," *The Jack Benny Program* was as pure a commercial vehicle as television could possibly get. In 1952, for example, plugs for Lucky Strike were directly integrated into the scripts of shows, a practice that continued through the life of the program. In a January episode, Don refused to read the Lucky Strike commercial, believing it too silly, but Jack forced him to do it. In a March show, the Sportmen Quartet performed the sponsor's jingle ("Any Time You Light a Lucky") in Benny's crowded dressing room, while in June they sang "Bye Bye Benny" as part of the Lucky commercial (Benny was purportedly off to England for a concert tour). In an October show, Don read the Lucky Strike spot while new cast member Bob Crosby and Benny discussed contract terms, while four weeks later, Dinah Shore joined the Sportmen Quartet for the Lucky jingle. The product and jingle appeared to be infinitely malleable, able to fit into virtually any scenario or plotline.[43]

Like *The Jack Benny Program,* Arthur Godfrey's show represented state-of-the-art integrated advertising and raised the bar of "commercialness" in commercial broadcasting. Godfrey was a master at the "impromptu" commercial, weaving announcements for Lipton, Pillsbury, and Chesterfield products into his *Talent Scouts* show. Godfrey effortlessly transferred his relaxed, folksy style from radio to television, furthering his reputation as a master in subtle persuasion (Godfrey is credited with popularizing air travel because the star said it was safe). On his radio show, Godfrey was known to surprise both listener and sponsor, as in the time he audibly ate Peter Pan peanut butter on the air. On television, Godfrey came off as equally spontaneous, although his pitches were in fact more carefully orchestrated. In a classic 1950 plug, Godfrey said he wished that all the seats in the theater were equipped with fountains flowing with Lipton tea. With observations like these, Godfrey defied another staple of postwar advertising, the rational approach calling for facts, figures, and diagrams.[44]

Stars were not also above shameless self-promotion, using television guest spots as vehicles to advertise their own "products." On a May 1950 episode of NBC's *Star-Spangled Revue,* for example, Bob Hope cleverly substituted the name of the show's sponsor to spoof (and promote) his road movies. In the sketch called "The Road to Frigidaire," Hope played himself opposite Frank Sinatra (in his television debut), the latter playing Bing Crosby's role in "The Road to" film series. Milton Berle appeared briefly at the end of the sketch, adding to the mayhem. The idea was a win-win situation for both Hope, who received free (actually paid) publicity for his movies, and Frigidaire, which gained significantly greater brand recognition than via the General Motors division's regular commercials for automatic washers running during the show. On *The Jack Benny Program* in January 1951, Sinatra conveniently dropped the name of his own music and variety show (also on CBS), as well as the show's sponsor (Timex). The next month on *The Colgate Comedy Hour,* Jerry Lewis somehow managed to plug not only the sponsor but also a number of his friends in a single, frenetic outburst. Literally combining the language of entertainment with that of commerce created a powerful synergy of "advertainment," endorsed by the biggest stars of the day.[45]

In its earliest, most innocent incarnation, which also dated back to radio, plugging a sponsor's product (referred to in slang as "plugola," after "payola," paying disk jockeys to play a record company's songs) typically involved rewarding a comic or writer with a free product sample for a mention during an act. Entrepreneurs in plugola, known as "schlockmeisters" in the trade, facilitated the process by sending requests to writing teams for product plugs. Although some writers and producers objected to the practice, others believed that brand names were a legitimate part of the vernacular, thus warranting inclusion in entertainment programs. Receiving some sort of gift, ranging from a case of scotch to a lifetime supply of fertilizer, was viewed simply as fair compensation, an expression of American free enterprise.[46]

Although plugola certainly gave the appearance of excessive greed among stars, some hosts of popular shows used their fame to also plug their favorite charities on air. On the *Cavalcade of Stars* in December 1951, for example, Jackie Gleason solicited viewers' contributions to the National Amputation Foundation. In April 1952 on *The Colgate Comedy Hour,* Jerry Lewis requested donations to the Muscular Dystrophy Association, a foreshadowing of his later telethon work. Such appeals—half genuine goodwill and half smart public relations—were not unusual. Critics such as Humphrey nonetheless believed that it was a mistake for stars to be television spokespeople, accusing Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, and Danny Thomas of pure greed for endorsing Bulova watches. "Our admiration for the talents of many video names drops sharply as soon as they shed their role as actor to give a sales talk on soap or automobiles," he thought. By September 1952, Humphrey had completely tired of any form of celebrity endorsements on television, believing them to "smack of the old carnival practice which lured the hicks into the tent with dancing girls, but you didn't get to see them until you shelled out another 50 cents."[47]

Undaunted by such criticism, sponsors continued the practices of integrated advertising, testimonials, and plugola. Additionally, advertisers who could not afford expensive sponsorships found other ways to get their products seen on national television. "Hidden" commercials were those in which an advertiser's product was inserted into a scene of a television program. On an episode of *Philco Television Playhouse* in June 1951, for example, a bottle of Johnson's Baby Oil was shown on a night table as a mother was about to change her baby. On a *Garroway at Large* program that same month, Connie Russell poured herself a cup of coffee with a can of Pet Milk in full view. In each case, the marketer of the product shown was not a sponsor of the program; the placement was simply an arrangement made with a propmaster or producer in exchange for an under-the-table payment of some kind. This form of visual, silent plugola had been common in films before the industry temporarily banned it. A more legitimate form of placement was that in which sponsors' products were given away as prizes on shows. On *This Is Your Life,* for example, honored guests received not only a movie camera, television, and range, but also some of sponsor Hazel Bishop's Lipstick as well. The gift-awarding portion of shows was, of course, free incremental advertising, a means to extend sponsors' product exposure and time on the air.[48]

Kid Stuff

Disturbingly, advertisers had no qualms about using such techniques to promote products to children, drawn to the huge and still growing target market of "junior consumers." Ellen Seiter has observed that marketers of children's products have always relied on television advertising simply because younger kids cannot read, which automatically eliminates newspapers, magazines, outdoor, and direct marketing as media options. This fact was not lost on radio advertisers either, who recognized that kids could listen to shows (and commercials) without adult supervision. Early television advertisers exploited this advantage by creating programs that were essentially extended commercials. On NBC's *The Magic Clown* in 1951, for example, sponsor Bonomo Turkish Taffy made the confectionery product a major component of the show's plots. On one such program, a particularly excited harlequin (in the title role) performed magic while passing out the taffy to the studio audience of children (who, strangely, happen to be wearing fezzes). The sponsor found another way to blend the show with its product, employing another character, Laffy the puppet, to cast a spell that dissolved into a commercial for the taffy. After urging viewers to buy all three flavors of Bonomo Turkish Taffy, Laffy recited a poem that segued into a commercial for yet another sponsor product, Bonomo's Peanut Brittle. At the end of the show, The Magic Clown fittingly returned to remind viewers to buy lots of taffy. Since its premier in late 1947, the NBC children's show *Howdy Doody* had also been used as a platform for sponsors to sell products to kids. By using the show's characters to endorse products, sponsors were exploiting children's relative inability to distinguish commercials from entertainment. On a July 1952 show, Buffalo Bob, Clarabell, and Oil Well Willie pitched Kellogg's Rice Krispies and Colgate's Toothpaste, while the very next day Howdy Doody and Buffalo Bob conversed about the wonders of Wonder Bread. Buffalo Bob and his wooden friend also occasionally made appeals for products targeted to adults, as when they used the Doodyville Clubhouse to do a commercial spot for *TV Guide.* Because both moms and kids often watched children's television shows together, they were an ideal means of selling the American Dream to the entire family.[49]

As Lynn Spigel discussed extensively in *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America,* children were also considered an important target audience by the television manufacturing industry itself. Late in 1950, television manufacturers led a newspaper and radio advertising campaign in the attempt to sell more sets, focusing on the kid market. The industry's campaign used scare tactics, telling parents that their children would become social misfits if they didn't have television sets at home. "Your daughter won't ever tell you the humiliation she's felt in begging those precious hours of television from a neighbor," one ad read, while another claimed that "it is practically impossible for boys and girls to 'hold their own' with friends and schoolmates unless television is available to them." Hal Humphrey noted that marketers of consumer goods were also targeting children through questionable advertising techniques, reprising some less than proud moments of radio's past. More advertisers are "borrow[ing] a page from radio and direct[ing] their sales pitches at the small fry, asking them to 'tell your daddy and mommy to buy you one, like all the rest of the children have,'" Humphrey observed. A survey conducted by Advertest Research of New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1951 confirmed Humphrey's observation that advertisers were aggressively targeting kids, finding that 60 percent of mothers said their children asked for products they saw advertised on television. Humphrey believed that it was not children who were at emotional risk but rather "the parents who will have to look up a psychiatrist" if kids continued to be targeted as consumers.[50]

As marketers flocked to television to reach a mass audience of all family members, other interesting ethical issues arose. One particularly interesting site of commercial television's intersection with ethics took place in November 1951 when executives at KSL-TV, a station owned by the Mormon church in Salt Lake City, decided to put aside their religious scruples to run beer-sponsored shows on CBS. Although the station claimed that "the audience building motivation rather than money" was the deciding factor, the network was likely pressuring KSL to carry the programs, losing patience with having to divert the shows to competing stations. Beer ads thus joined the cigarette-sponsored programs and commercials the station was already airing to a largely Mormon audience. Church officials, however, quickly found a way to ease their lingering guilty consciences. The station developed a series of shorts depicting the evils associated with smoking, sometimes airing them shortly after the cigarette-sponsored shows. In one such short, a policeman examining a car wreck somehow determined that the motorist had taken his eyes off the road to light a cigarette. Such counterproductive, schizophrenic efforts could be expected in those pockets of the country not quite ready to embrace unrequited consumerism involving the vices of tobacco and alcohol.[51]

Public Affairs

As television advertising became a louder voice in the public arena, it was inevitable that politics would soon cross its path, creating quite a stir in journalistic circles. The 1948 political conventions were televised, but the 1952 conventions were the first to be sponsored by advertisers. As a public service, Westinghouse offered to sponsor the Republican convention on CBS while Philco offered to sponsor the Democratic convention on NBC. Newspaper editors were suspicious of the plan, believing that corporate sponsorship and politics did not mix, and that such an approach would somehow affect the objectivity of the telecasts. Their wariness toward television, and particularly television advertising, was in part being driven by the realities of competition. With advertising dollars (and perhaps their jobs) at stake, newspaper publishers and editors had been openly critical of the television industry for running too many commercials. The subtext of these claims was, of course, that the precocious prodigy of television advertising represented a real threat to the fiscal health of newspapers across the country. The claims of television

This ad for Du Mont television sets, which ran in Look *and* Collier's *magazines in October 1950, positioned the medium as an agent of family togetherness and home sweet home. With its own network, Du Mont (like NBC with its parent RCA) delivered the American Dream through both consumerism (TV sets) and entertainment (TV shows). (NMAH Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution)* being overcommercialized relative to newspapers were, in fact, unwarranted. One independent analysis revealed that an average newspaper contained far more column inches of advertising than news, a proportion much greater than the commercial-to-program ratio in television.[52]

Presidential candidates themselves used television advertising for the 1952 campaign, perhaps the first real packaging of political figures for American consumption. With Cold War paranoia running rampant, candidate Dwight Eisenhower adeptly used television commercials to tap into Americans' fears of a Russian attack. The visual portion of his campaign, themed "Eisenhower Answers America," employed a montage of photographs of the general in military action, World War II film footage, and Ike answering questions from "ordinary" Americans. The spots were created by Rosser Reeves of the Ted Bates Agency, which filmed Eisenhower giving answers to a set of preset questions that were only later posed by "ordinary" people such as a housewife and veteran. In one spot, Eisenhower (billed as "the man from Abilene") was asked, "General, if war comes, is this country ready?" Eisenhower's rehearsed answer:

> It is not. The administration has spent many billions of dollars for national defense, yet today we haven't enough tanks for the fighting in Korea. It is time for a change.[53]

Viewers were then ordered to "put out a sturdy lifeboat in November" by making the war hero president. Ike's boat did indeed come in to shore, despite the fact that agency executives thought their client consistently came off on television as rather clumsy.[54]

Betty Furness, an ex-screen actress, played a prominent role during the 1952 political convention telecast, actually getting more screen time (four and a half hours) than any of the candidates or reporters. Equipped with a wardrobe of twenty dresses, Ms. Furness went on the air on behalf of Westinghouse appliances a total of 158 times. By the end of the conventions, she had opened 49 refrigerator doors, looked into 12 ovens, demonstrated 23 washing machines and dishwashers, and turned on 42 television sets. Furness's career was rejuvenated by commercial work, as she became more famous than ever by demonstrating Westinghouse products on the show *Studio One.* Westinghouse chose Ms. Furness not only because she was "an excellent actress who didn't look as if she was acting," but also because she "looks a little older than a woman who will steal your husband." (Betty was a ripe old thirty-six.) Furness was a perfect choice for Westinghouse, as was the company's sponsorship of the political convention. It would be a full decade, in fact, before most advertisers recognized the prestige to be gained by sponsoring public affairs programming.[55]

Television advertising's venture into the political arena was just one way civic events were becoming, literally, commercial affairs. Many viewers were surprised if not shocked by the encroachment of advertising into broadcasts considered to be "public service." In the spring of 1952, blouse and hat manufacturers sponsored the national broadcast of the Fifth Avenue Easter Parade, considered by some to be an inappropriate coupling of public and private interests. In fall 1952, NBC sold the upcoming broadcast of the Eisenhower inauguration to General Motors, while the Du Mont network sold a series of Bishop Fulton Sheen sermons to the Admiral Corporation for $1 million. These too were interpreted by some to be signs that the American broadcasting system had become overcommercialized, and that television stations were no longer dedicated to serving the public's interest as stated in their license agreements. Further blurring the lines between information and commercialism were the first "advertorials," termed "educational films" when they first appeared in the early 1950. The Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) was one of the initial advocates of this form of television advertising, recognizing its power to influence public opinion in a subtle manner. Alcoa sponsored Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now,* a good fit for public relations-style advertising given the show's journalistic bent. On an April 1952 show, Murrow discussed fan mail about an Alcoa advertorial concerning an aluminum PT boat, thereby effectively promoting his sponsor during the "news" part of the show. The lines between journalism and commerce would become increasingly fuzzy in the years ahead as corporate interests looked to the public domain as advertising fodder, extending the reach and hegemony of consumer capitalism.[56]

Growing Pains

Via its gradual appropriation of public events and its consistently increasing number of viewers, television advertising's status as a media vehicle continued to grow. With the rush to television advertising on, and the cost of producing shows still rising, network sponsorship fees reached all-time highs. For the 1952 television season beginning in the fall, CBS priced sponsorship of *The Jackie Gleason Show* at $90,000 a week, considered a huge amount of money at the time. A seasonal contract for the show, which consisted of thirty-nine weeks, was available for the startling figure of $3,510,000. For its ninety-minute *Your Show of Shows* starring Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, NBC priced a half-hour sponsorship somewhat more reasonably at $55,000. One-minute commercials placed after each half-hour segment of the show were priced at $17,600, or a cool $1 million for the full fifty-two-week season. Holding basically all the cards for companies wishing to tell their message to a national audience in a single evening, networks knew they could command such prices. The Sunday night *Colgate Comedy Hour,* which cost a sponsor $60,000 for the hour, was sold out, as was the Saturday night *All-Star Revue,* the most expensive of television shows at $110,000 for the hour.[57]

Despite the rising cost of television, marketers continued to allocate more of their advertising dollars to the medium and less to radio. According to *Advertising Age,* in 1951 radio advertising billings were down 5 percent from 1950 and down over 12 percent from 1948, with most of this money shifted into television advertising. For the first time in their history, networks were beginning to make more money from their television operations than from radio. Recognizing an opportunity to save some money, Procter and Gamble, radio's largest advertiser, told CBS it would cancel some of its programs unless the network dropped radio advertising rates (which CBS and the three other radio networks promptly did). Even with these lower rates, Procter and Gamble and other big marketers began a major defection from radio advertising in 1952, putting more and more money into television. As Lynn Spigel found in her research, daytime television, often a test pattern in the late 1940s, became a hot commodity during the 1950–1951 season, as "A" (later, prime) time sold out.[58]

Because of its high cost, however, the traditional single sponsorship (which had also been standard in radio) was showing the first real signs of breaking down in commercial television. The number of single sponsorship shows was beginning to fall as networks began to offer alternate or shared sponsorships as a means for advertisers to cover production costs. According to Edward Madden, sales and operations vice president at NBC, splitting costs was the only way that many advertisers could afford network television. During the 1952 season, in fact, *Your Show of Shows* had six sponsors, while *All-Star Revue* had three. For marketers who could afford it, however, television advertising was clearly worth the price. Half of the nation's 16 million television sets were usually tuned to the most popular show at any given time, with an average of about three viewers per set. How else could advertisers literally speak to 24 million Americans scattered across the country at once?[59]

The huge profit to be made in television broadcasting was reflected by the temptation among both network and local television stations to crowd more commercials into their shows. In June 1952, the National Association of Educational Broadcasters found that 19 percent of the total content on New York and Los Angeles television consisted of advertising. It was not unusual for nine minutes of a half-hour show to be devoted to commercials, with another twelve minutes of the show prominently featuring the name of the sponsor on a backdrop during the program itself (meaning some shows were 70 percent advertising!). Although the FCC had no jurisdiction over the length or number of commercials, the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (NARTB) employed a voluntary code or set of standards to which all four networks subscribed. For "A," or prime viewing periods, a maximum of three minutes of commercial time was recommended for a half-hour show. It was clear that television broadcasters were regularly exceeding the code's guidelines regarding the amount of commercial time, as they were with respect to sponsor backdrops; the NARTB code stated that "stationary backdrops or properties in television presentations showing the sponsor's name or product . . . may be used only incidentally." The NARTB was more firm regarding what could or should be depicted in commercials, apparently more concerned with the content of advertising than its quantity. "Profanity, obscenity, smut, and vulgarity are forbidden," the code stated, adding that "suicide as an acceptable solution for human problems is prohibited." The industry association's priorities were not surprising given that more advertising meant happier members with fatter wallets from higher sales.[60]

George Washington Hill's Ghost

Operating with a set of purely voluntary guidelines, the NARTB could and would do little to stop broadcasters choosing to look the other way when it came to infraction. Some advertisers, such as Charles Antell Inc., a maker of hair tonic, completely violated the NARTB's suggestions, producing and airing fifteen-minute—and sometimes half-hour—commercials not unlike today's infomercials. Radio networks and stations refused to air Antell's commercials, but some local profit-hungry television stations willingly took the business. Although Charles Kasher, the president of the company, positioned his commercials as a form of education and entertainment, viewers did not mistake the voice and gestures of the spots' carnival barker-like spokesperson as anything but an extended advertising pitch. Additionally, with no enforcement of the sound volume of commercials, many advertisers turned up their audio to obnoxiously high levels. Some advertisers appeared to be heeding the famous advice of the late George Washington Hill, founder of American Tobacco, who believed that the most effective advertising was that which irritated people into buying products through insistent, unrelenting clamor.[61]

With their hard-sell approach, marketers of beauty aids and over-the-counter health remedies were considered by most critics and lay people alike to be carrying on the tradition of George Washington Hill. Manufacturers in these product categories were almost always firm believers that when it came to television advertising, more was definitely more. For a 1952 commercial for Bufferin, "The A & B Race," for example, Young & Rubicam used a combination of sound effects, visual aids, and an authoritative voice-over to get and keep viewers' attention. The mnemonic device of a beating drum was used to represent the pain associated with a headache, supported by an equally disturbing diagram simulating the condition. Against this "scientific" audio-visual backdrop, viewers were told that Bufferin was "the modern way to get fast relief from headaches, neuralgia, or ordinary muscle aches and pains." With the combination of music, art, and rational argument, popular advertising theory went, all dimensions of viewers' thinking processes were activated, the key to effective persuasion. Despite or perhaps because the commercial is a masterpiece in annoyance, it is enshrined in the Clio Hall of Fame, the industry's central repository of what it has deemed the greatest commercials of all time.[62]

With scientific research a ubiquitous presence in postwar America, all things scientific invaded television advertising with a vengeance. Actors playing doctors or researchers, almost always in white laboratory jackets, routinely provided facts and figures definitively "proving" their sponsor's product was superior to the competition, at least until a competitor's commercial would offer directly opposite "proof." More critical viewers quickly tired of the contradictory tests, charts, and graphs, recognizing that the offered evidence was generated by a distant cousin of science created especially for the medium. Both the *Southern California Dental Association's Journal* and the *Los Angeles County Medical Association Bulletin* took issue with such science for advertising's sake, calling for the banning of doctor and dentist "imposters" in television commercials. Not only did those in the health care field believe that their professional reputations could be damaged by such representations, but they feared that the public's health was endangered by such advertising. "Medical analysis of the 'T-zone,' physiological effectiveness of deodorants, means of ending vitamin deficiencies and causes of hair disorders belong in the competent hands of an authorized doctor," wrote Dr. Paul D. Foster of the County Medical Association, "not in the hands of an advertising agency searching for the most effective method of bringing the public into their client's fold."[63]

Largely because of health and beauty aid and some other marketers' reliance on the hard-sell approach, television advertising's public image was already suffering. A study completed by Social Research found in May 1951 that it was "very common in our society to dislike [television] advertising" and that viewers generally regarded commercials with "the stoical air appropriate to a necessary evil." More specifically, viewers disliked noisy and clichéd commercials, when too many spots were stacked together, and when commercials suddenly interrupted programs. Viewers considered the best commercials those in which a star (such as Benny, Godfrey, or Dennis James of *Stop the Music*) inspired or amused them and those in which they learned something through a demonstration. Interestingly, opinions in this study differed significantly by class. The upper middle class (12 percent of viewers) was most critical of commercials, the middle class (65 percent of viewers) somewhat tolerant, and the lower middle class (23 percent of viewers) generally receptive, the latter feeling a sense of duty to pay attention to the sales message "because the advertiser pays for the program." This class dynamic seemed to reflect the economics of early television ownership, when a set was considered a relative luxury. Less affluent viewers were likely more tolerant of commercials because they were more likely to consider watching television a privilege, and to appreciate being invited by advertisers to the American Dream party.[64]

Other research studies confirmed that many if not most viewers found the number, length, and some techniques of television advertising to be irritating. In a joint NBC-Hofstra College study, researcher Horace Schwerin found that disliked messages were remembered better and longer than "neutral" ones, but well-liked commercials sold twice as many products as hated ones. This fortunate finding was perhaps the only thing preventing more advertisers to adopt the George Washington Hill school of advertising by intentionally and continually annoying viewers. Findings published by Daniel Starch, a leading audience research firm, also indicated that "attention-getting devices are usually a waste of time (and money)" and that "admen must learn that attracting attention is in itself not essential." Television advertising would have to get better not for viewers' sake, but for the marketers' own.[65]

A People's Art

Well-liked commercials not only translated into higher sales, but offered the possibility of bridging social classes and thereby broadening a brand's appeal. Johnny, the diminutive Philip Morris advertising icon, moved effortlessly into television from his previous incarnations in print, radio, and outdoor. Within his persona as a bellhop of a high-class, mythical hotel, Johnny's televisual mission at mid-century was to convince non-Philip Morris smokers that the brand offered "milder, fresher smoke." In one commercial, two construction workers sitting on a skyscraper's steel beam are about to light up a competitive brand when Johnny suddenly appears. "Did I hear a call for Philip Morris?" he famously asks, subsequently persuading the working-class men to come to their senses by becoming loyal Philip Morris smokers. Although a symbol of the elite, the character was intended to transcend class in order to maximize Philip Morris's potential market. "Johnny operates in all levels of society," *Sales Management* succinctly concluded. Lucky Strike also appealed to popular tastes through a series of animated commercials produced by N. W. Ayer. In "Acrobats," a troupe of circus acrobats delivered the brand's slogan of "L.S./M.F.T." (Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco), while in "General Leaf," a squad of tobacco leaf soldiers lined up for inspection delivered the slogan. In a third spot of the campaign, an animated Swiss man smoking on a mountaintop served as protagonist. With television no longer an appliance for the wealthy, marketers were using the medium to appeal to the large and still expanding middle class.[66]

There were, indeed, clear signs that television was now one of the most populist of mediums, such as when viewers responded favorably, even passionately, to television commercials by mail. Letters of support poured in to the Schlitz company, for example, after the brewer aired a commercial in complete silence by using pantomime. "Other beer programs usually come out blasting your head off," one viewer wrote. "People will someday wise up and refuse the junky TV advertising, but your type will last." Spokespeople and even fictitious characters were at times similarly praised. Sid Stone, a pitchman for Texaco on *The Milton Berle Show,* reportedly received more fan mail than the star of the show for a period of time. Muriel, the animated lady cigar, was a particularly celebrated icon of television culture throughout the 1950s. In "Sexy Cigar," a 1951 spot produced by Lennen & Newell, the ad agency for Consolidated Cigar, a male and female cigar song-and-dance team performed a "soft-shoe" routine. The spot ended with Muriel asking viewers the famous question, "Why don't you pick me up and smoke me sometime?" which was a somewhat daring double entendre at the time. Not only did Muriel boost sales, but the character entered the vernacular of everyday life by serving as a popular costume for masquerade parties. The cigar company annually received hundreds of requests for the commercial's music and lyrics from viewers wanting to dress up as the sexy cigar. Likewise, the Chiquita Banana was an unusually popular anthropomorphic piece of fruit that served as inspiration for more festive postwar partyers. Perhaps the most memorable and loved symbol of postwar television advertising, however, was the dancing package of Old Gold cigarettes. By June 1952, Floria Vestoff had been dancing inside a large cardboard pack of Old Golds for three years, in the process wearing out twelve of the gray-and-white boxes.[67]

With television advertising now entrenched in postwar American culture, critics argued over whether commercials, as a form of creative expression, qualified as "art." Gilbert Seldes, a renowned journalist now writing for *The Saturday Review,* opined that television advertising represented a unique morphing of art and business, that

> the commercial cannot be a pure work of art because it is also a piece of propaganda; it lives in no tower of Ivory Soap; it comes down into the marketplace and fights. Suppose we call it a highly developed, but mixed, form of people's art.[68]

Whether or not it was a true "people's art," it was obvious by the end of 1952 that television advertising had graduated from its initial experimental phase and was well on the way to becoming the most important and influential commercial medium in history. "On the whole," *Newsweek* wrote, "advertisers are learning how to use TV more effectively than they did four years ago, when many of them either went 'motion-happy' with their messages or put a camera on unphotogenic radio announcers."[69] What began as a trickle of interest soon became a flood, as savvier ad agencies and marketers recognized that television was the ideal promotional medium for the times. Commercial television tapped into many Americans' desire to sit down, settle in, and enjoy the fruits of victory over our foreign enemies and economic woes of the recent past. Because they had literally never seen or heard anything quite like it, critics and laypeople alike reacted emotionally and viscerally to the language and images that sprang out of and danced across their small, black-and-white televisions. Most believed that television advertising would improve even more

A trio of anonymous dancers, each an Old Gold dancing cigarette pack, rehearsing in October 1955. Despite Floria Vestoff's fame, company executives went to extreme measures to try to keep the dancers' names and faces a secret, ushering them to and from a special wing of television studios. The company claimed that from 1948 to 1955 more than a quarter-million viewers had written letters begging for a look at the faces inside the Old Gold dancing packs. It may well have been true that the dancers' legs were, as the company boasted, "probably seen more than any others on television." (Library of Congress) in the years ahead, a reflection of the era's deterministic belief in progress. With the possible exception of the rocket, television was postwar America's proudest symbol of technology, and advertising the clearest expression of a consumption-based way of life. As its newest, loudest voice of the American Dream, television advertising was being counted on to make the promise of prosperity and abundance for all a reality.