Abstract:

The early 20th century Imperial Germany were formative years for the visual advertising industry. During a time when the advertisements were an entirely new concept, visual-professionals, who were at the time 'wardens' of this new profession looked to advertisements of Britain and America for influence, as those countries represented the 'modernity' that was essential to an industrialized super power. Among many of the concepts that influenced German advertisements were the overtly racialized caricatures of Africans in product packaging and poster advertisements. While Germans did have active colonies during this time, the consumer public did not have regular contact with African people-rendering the widespread use of such imagery as counter-intuitive. Further more, products that had very little to do with the reputation of the African nevertheless included these depictions, as was the case with tobacco products. The underlying tropes of these racialized depictions changed however through a cross-cultural transition between American and German audiences. This phenomenon, under analysis, gives insights into how early precursors of mass media have shaped perceptions of race, and how advertising professionals defined and controlled the concept of 'modernity', contrasting the new expansionist age of colonialism and the establishment of the New World against an 'older' European entity.

Body Excerpt:

Germany made much progress as an industrialized consumer state. However Britain was years ahead of Germany in this regard. America had a reputation for being the 'new frontier' of commercialism. It is a well-known fact that Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted to emulate the British empire in many areas including colonialism, military expansion and in national identity. The political and economic identity of Imperial Germany was modeled after the British example in many ways. The business leaders and advertising strategists of this time followed suit in this imitation, and desired to emulate the modernity-aesthetic that was present in both America and Britain. As a result, 'modern' advertising came into existence as an actual industry in Germany during the wilhelmian era.

However, the growing usage of visual advertising strategies did not come without struggle. In the birth of advertising as an industry came a resistance to what the common German population saw as an invading 'Americanization'. In the book "Selling Modernity- Advertising in 20th Century Germany" Professor Kevin Repp talks about Ernst Growald, the director of the poster art publisher Hollerbaum und Schmidt, and his efforts to convince the German public that the German advertisement would be different than its American counterpart. The fear was, that the presence of visual print advertisements would mix the celebration of arts and culture with commercialism, which would inevitably 'corrupt' German identity. The goal was to show that what the Germans saw as "the 'bold American spirit' -was not an incurably alien Other, but instead could actually give new life to forms that expressed the cultural sensibilities of the German soul" (Swett: 36). Advertisements interact with their target audience both on the levels of visual appeal and through a cultural perspective. Thus, adaptations would have to be made in order to be culturally compatible with German society. In order to better integrate advertisements with the German public, visual advertisers and their companies used many different methods. Typography, use of color, and deliberate phrases were all purposefully planned in order to truly communicate with the German audience.

Citations in Sample:

Swett, Pamela E., S. Jonathan. Wiesen, and Jonathan R. Zatlin. *"Marketing, Modernity, and the "German People's Soul": Advertising And Its Enemies in Late Imperial Germany, 1896-1914, Kevin Repp."Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-century Germany. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. N. pag. Print.*