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# On Patrons and Shoppers: Representations of Consumer Culture in the Black Press from 1890 to 1920

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## Abstract

This article traces the early origins of Black consumer culture as it was portrayed in the Black press from the late 1800s to the early 1920s. It argues that Black newspapers were important agents in shaping how African Americans conceived of and interacted with the evolving commercial sphere around the turn of the century. Papers such as the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Broad Ax*, the *Tulsa Star*, and many others celebrated participation in the consumer arena as a respectable and desired practice. They also distinguished between shopping, as a social feminine pursuit, and patronizing Black-owned businesses, which was perceived as a gender-neutral, or even manly, racial duty. Espousing African American elite ideologies such as racial uplift and self-help, Black editors presented any purchasing of goods as an upright activity, which adorned its performer with affluence, respect, and power. Such portrayal encouraged the participation of African Americans in the consumer sphere and implied that it was an arena of similarity rather than difference.

**Keywords:** African American; Black press; consumer culture; race; gender

In a 1942 conference on “the Negro in Business” organized by the Department of Commerce, Roscoe W. Dunjee, editor of the Oklahoma newspaper the *Black Dispatch* and the recently appointed President of the National Negro Business League, commented on the status of the Black consumer. He claimed that for the African American businessman, “the trouble has hitherto been with his destitute customer, the Negro worker, who had nothing to spend when he arrived at the store.” Luckily, by the 1940s, the times had changed. Dunjee repeated a much-touted recent statistic, determining that “the Negro’s annual spending power in the United States is seven billion dollars. That is the amount 13,000,000 Black people spend each year for food, clothing, and shelter.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, through the 1930s, the Black consumer became a significant economic and political agent. The Great Migration and the New Deal, which resulted in expanded employment opportunities, transformed the Black population from a southern, rural, and relatively impoverished demographic to one more concentrated in cities across the country. African Americans were now better educated, with higher incomes and more money to spend.

Consequently, Black consumers were increasingly courted by advertisers and vendors, while, at the same time, they developed methods to utilize their buying power to fight for more opportunities and rights.

Like Dunjee and his contemporaries, historians have paid much attention to the expansion of African American consumer power in the decades leading up to the Civil Rights Movement. Since Lizabeth Cohen described how Black Chicagoans encountered mass culture and mass consumption during the New Deal era, many scholars have documented how Black Americans shaped and interacted with various elements of consumer culture.<sup>2</sup> As Susannah Walker has remarked, most of this literature focuses on how racism and racial discrimination shaped the development of consumer society in the United States and how these two factors affected African American participation in consumer society.<sup>3</sup> As such, the existing scholarship tends to emphasize the transitory period between the 1930s and the 1960s – an era of intensifying mass protest that culminated with the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Current scholarship details the discriminatory practices Black Americans encountered as shoppers, while accentuating their escalating struggle to become equal participants in a consumer arena that was both orchestrated for and dominated by white people. Yet, given that, until the 1930s, economic discrimination placed most Black consumers in the “destitute customer” category, only a handful of studies examine African American consumer desires and ideologies that predate the midcentury rise of “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns and Black consumer boycotts.<sup>4</sup> In other words, there remains little scholarship on the emergence of the African American as a consumer.<sup>5</sup>

This article traces the early origins of Black consumer culture as it was portrayed in the Black Press from the late 1800s to the early 1920s, the era during which American capitalism became dependent on commercial consumption and the pursuit of goods turned into an engine of economic growth. In their pioneering history of mass consumption, T. J. Jackson Lears and Richard Wightman Fox note that, in order to “discover how consumption became a cultural ideal, a hegemonic ‘way of seeing’ in twentieth-century America,” it is essential to look at “the powerful individuals and institutions who conceived, formulated, and preached that ideal or way of seeing.” For African Americans, much of this endeavor was taken up by the Black press. From the 1890s to the First World War, several hundred Black newspapers were published in the United States. Most of these publications were short-lived concerns due to the fact that they had to rely on a very small subscriber base consisting of the urban, literate, and financially stable minority of Black Americans. Written and read by the Black aspiring classes, the consumerist discourse presented in such papers provides an excellent and previously unexamined window to the ways the African American elite imagined, conceived, and delineated a Black culture of consumption.<sup>6</sup>

Specifically, I argue that, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Black papers helped establish what other historians have referred to as the “Black commercial public sphere.” Scholars such as Quincy T. Mills and Davarian L. Baldwin show how the waves of Black migrants arriving at urban centers in the Northeast and Midwest “transformed the marketplace,” whether in barbershops, beauty salons, movie theaters, or sports stadiums, into “a public sphere of dialog.”<sup>7</sup> Their studies also emphasize how members of the Black elite, particularly businesspeople, cultural producers, and intellectuals, “engaged the arena of commercial exchange” that formed in the new Black urban enclaves “to rethink the established parameters of community, progress, and freedom.” However, before the Great Migration began in earnest, this flourishing Black metropolis was still in the making, as more than 70 percent of African Americans lived in the rural South.

Nevertheless, as this article will show, even though, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the vast majority of Black shoppers could not enjoy the full benefits offered by the emerging consumer society, African American newspapers already engaged an imagined Black arena of commercial exchange.<sup>8</sup> A survey of African American newspapers from the Progressive Era shows that consumption was significant to the Black elite's schemes for racial uplift and the effort to develop a positive Black identity. Therefore, by consistently encouraging their readers to participate in commercial activity, Black newspapers at the turn of the century were already setting the stage for what would become, by the 1920s, a vibrant African American marketplace filled with public discourse.

The commercial sphere envisaged by the Black press was gendered. It assigned different consumer roles for men and women, suggesting that everyone had to buy goods, but each gender needed to do so in a specific way. According to Black editors, participation in consumer society would assist the advancement of the race, providing that Black men and women abide by their respective appropriate behaviors. The discussion revolving around the purchase of consumer goods distinguished between two modes of consumption: one reserved for women and the other neutral, if not manly. The distinction was verbal. Women were *shoppers*; they *shopped*. Men and everyone else who considered themselves proud members of the race were *patrons*; they *patronized* Black-owned stores. In her important study of sexuality in the Black press, Kim Gallon argued that "the expression of sexual values within [these papers] helped to modify dominant notions of what it meant to be 'race' men and women."<sup>9</sup> Drawing on her claims, this article demonstrates that the conversation about consumption in African American newspapers was part of the same endeavor. Within this context, the act of shopping was conceived as a feminine social pastime. Shopping advice, propagations about shopping etiquette, and jokes about stereotypical shoppers were, for the most part, directed at women. The written mentions of shopping marked it as a desired and respectable activity for women and, in that sense, attached this activity to the mission of racial uplift that had dominated African American thought since the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Black women were encouraged to mimic the behavior of white women of leisure: to frequent stores, to browse without necessarily making a purchase, but to be frugal and savvy about the goods they did buy. The implicit message was that by shopping properly, Black women would become part of the "leisure class" and help the race transcend the status of a poor, subordinate class.<sup>11</sup>

Patronage, on the other hand, signified a different endeavor, one that invoked racial solidarity and more formal political activism. From the late 1880s to the early 1920s, Black editors were indisposed to acknowledge the discrimination and maltreatment experienced by Black buyers and rarely discussed consumption in relation to interracial politics. However, consumption did play a role in intracommunity politics. In line with the ideology of self-help, opinion columns in Black papers often encouraged their readers to support Black-owned businesses not as shoppers but as patrons. Patronage was discussed as a gender-neutral activity but it carried masculine undertones. Within the broader conversation about racial uplift, self-help was particularly associated with the male-dominated business sphere and the assumption that, with the acquisition of wealth, African Americans would secure civil rights. Thus, patronizing was an economically empowering activity, led by men, who lent their financial support to other members of the race. Unlike shopping, patronage did not designate a code of conduct. It referred to one action only – spending money in Black-owned establishments. Patronizing and shopping were certainly related, but each verb carried a different emphasis. Both promoted racial uplift in a different way; "patronizing" stressed the political economy while "shopping"

highlighted what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham refers to as “the politics of respectability.”<sup>12</sup> However, by classifying commercial activity according to these two categories, the Black press carved out clear gender roles within the emerging Black consumer society.

In a broader context, the Black press echoed the language of mainstream white papers, advertisers, and industrialists at the turn of the century by celebrating consumption as a desirable civic mission. Charles McGovern claimed that from the late nineteenth century to the Great Depression, the mainstream press “created an enduring vision of citizenship based on purchasing, ownership, and display” of goods while imparting “an aura of democracy to the distribution of goods.” Though the African American press did not draw any direct association between consumption and democracy, it did suggest that the ability to shop was “an important element of American public life.”<sup>13</sup> The purchasing of goods was presented as an upright activity, one that adorned its performer with affluence, respect, and, to some degree, power. Moreover, a deliberate separation between the shopping experience and the socioeconomic trials faced by the Black race, combined with the assertion that Black patronage held the key to racial advancement, insinuated that these activities reflected an unblemished, shared American experience. It implied that the consumer arena, if not wholly democratic, was an arena of similarity rather than difference. By presenting consumption and particularly shopping the same way it was presented in the white press, African American editors created an expectation of sameness.

Finally, by outlining its role in shaping early African American conceptions of consumerism, this article also expands the study of the Black press. Much like the literature on African American consumer culture, the existing scholarship tends to focus almost exclusively on the ways African American newspapers helped spearhead the struggle for civil rights.<sup>14</sup> Recently, scholars such as Adam Green have argued that beyond their political activism, Black media structures served as “agents of modernity” and “proved as important as civil institutions in codifying norms of collective identity.”<sup>15</sup> The efforts of the Black press to define its readers’ relationship with an evolving consumer arena suggests that Black media was codifying behavior and not just identity, that it was engaged in such codification at least since the late nineteenth century, and that it prioritized the codification of the commercial sphere. As a wide-ranging, keywords-guided search in over twenty newspapers confirms, such codification was an African American journalistic practice all across the United States. It can be detected in long running weeklies, such as the *Washington Bee* and in short-lived ones like Washington, D.C.’s *Colored American*. Preoccupation with the African American culture of consumption is apparent in more broadly circulated publications like the *Chicago Defender*; in ones that serviced smaller communities, including the *Iowa Bystander*; in Republican-leaning papers; independent newspapers; as well as in the occasional Democratic paper, such as the *Tulsa Star*.<sup>16</sup> North, south, east, and west, African American newspapers suggested to their readers that consumption would manifest their suitability for modernity.<sup>17</sup>

## Newspapers

Before the 1920s, publishing a newspaper catered to African American readers was not a financially lucrative business. Low literacy rates and poor economic conditions resulted in a compact subscriber base. Additionally, the poverty of many Black Americans placed most of them outside the “Able-to-Buy class,” as it was defined by the advertising industry.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, Black newspapers could not benefit from the commercial

capital injected into the white publishing industry by the advertising business. For the white mainstream press, advertisement revenue increased from 44 percent of total newspaper income in 1880 to 60 percent in 1909.<sup>19</sup> Black-owned papers, by comparison, featured few ads from local Black businesses. This fact adversely affected their size and longevity. The typical African American-owned paper was a four- to eight-page weekly and most papers did not survive more than a couple of years. Black publishers were often called “sundown editors,” working at nights while holding other daytime jobs. Still, a relatively large number of people chose this career path. According to one estimate, there were ten African American papers in existence in 1870, thirty in 1880, and 154 in 1890. A different approximation suggests 1,200 Black newspapers were founded between 1866 and 1905. And a third survey found that, by 1910, the number of Black papers increased to 288, with a combined circulation of 500,000.<sup>20</sup>

The limited number of pages in these newspapers was largely dedicated to racial advancement. Black papers were not admitted to the Associated Press and therefore could not enjoy the discounted telegraph rates and the shared content available to members of this professional organization. Hence, news was often local, concerning churches, fraternal organizations, and members of the community. The editorial tone was moderate; it combined elements of self-help ideology with a philosophy of individual success inspired by industrial capitalism. Stories reinforced racial pride by offering triumphant profiles of African Americans who succeeded in business, arts, sports, and politics. However, in his study of Black newspapers, William G. Jordan explains that the success model embraced by African American editors “contained a germ of collectivism,” stressing that individuals should also aspire to elevate the Black community with their actions. As the *Savannah Tribune* professed on January 1, 1876, every African American ought to “love his race and do his part to advance its interests.”<sup>21</sup>

Politically, at least until World War I, most papers shied away from militancy. Echoing Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist approach to civil rights, Black editors rarely encouraged political protest. In the South, personal conservative tendencies were exacerbated by the threat of violence as white supremacists aimed to harm the few Black newsmen and newswomen who raised their voices against racial discrimination. The list of threatened individuals included the editors of the *Montgomery Baptist Leader*, the *Selma Independent*, the *Wilmington Daily Reader*, and, most famously, Ida B. Wells, who wrote for the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*. Beyond the South, Black papers did report on segregation, disenfranchisement, anti-miscegenation laws, and lynching, albeit cautiously and with restraint. Some editors, including T. Thomas Fortune of the *New York Age* and Julius F. Taylor of the *Broad Ax*, adopted a militant and uncompromising line, consistently calling for assimilation and equality. However, the vast majority of Black papers looked inward, focusing instead on intracommunity affairs and racial uplift. Black publishers utilized their limited means to print materials that, as the *Indianapolis World* put it in 1888, could serve “to build up our people – to refine their manners and improve their morals – to inspire race pride – to develop race enterprise, [and] to include a higher conception of duty and citizenship.” Buying consumer goods proved useful to all of these endeavors.<sup>22</sup>

## Shoppers

Shopping was presented as a respectable pastime, practiced by honorable members of the community. The Black press regularly reported on the doings of local dignitaries who were visiting relatives, conducting business, attending local club meetings, fulfilling

church functions, falling ill, recovering, and shopping. “Rev. and Mrs. S. E. Williams of Mt. Carbon, were shopping here Wednesday,” reported the West Virginia *Advocate* on December 17, 1908.<sup>23</sup> “While here on a shopping tour from LaPorte, Ind[iana], Mrs. Maude Ralston Banks spent a portion of her time as a guest of Mrs. Clara Belle Barley,” divulged the Chicago-based *Broad Ax* on May 5, 1906.<sup>24</sup> The inclusion of shoppers in these society pages labeled their action as a worthy leisure activity, a decent amusement in which distinguished members of the community took part. Such reports were also characteristic of local white-owned papers.<sup>25</sup> Among the Black press they were featured in papers that served smaller African American communities, like the *Denver Star*, as well as larger and broadly distributed papers, such as the *Chicago Defender*. In all of them, shopping, a relatively new pastime of the Black elite, was presented side by side with more traditional respectable acts, and thus legitimized as an equally wholesome pursuit. “Mrs. M. Henderson of Morgan Park, Ill[inois], who was in the city shopping during the week, remained over and attended the regular meeting of Ruth temple, of which she is a member,” the *Defender* made known in 1920, binding the sacred and the commercial.<sup>26</sup>

The vast majority of those spotted shopping were women. This phenomenon was not unique to African Americans. With the rise of consumer society and the growing reliance on industrial commodities, women’s responsibilities as homemakers expanded to include spending on all forms of household goods. Indeed, women constituted the lion’s share of the consuming public. New consumer institutions, led by department stores, identified women as their primary clientele and devised various tactics to encourage their patronage. Consequently, monied women frequented new urban districts dedicated to consumption and related amusements.<sup>27</sup> Though the growing presence of women in the public sphere often provoked opposition, the Black press seems to have embraced this new phenomenon approvingly. Shopping was consistently framed as a respectable feminine behavior and not only in the society pages. For example, in 1904, the *Baltimore Afro-American* chose a reprinted bit from the *Pictorial Review* about the shopping habits of a Russian countess to open its Women’s World section. “The daughter of the Russian Ambassador, the Countess Cassini, is an indefatigable shopper and is well known in all the stores in Washington,” the segment reported, adding that “she delights in matching silks, selecting trimmings and looking for bargains.” Tellingly, a following section in the same column, picked up from the *Ladies Pictorial*, celebrated the charitable work of Florence Nightingale, suggesting at least a hint of equivalence between the shopper and the nurse – both engaged in noteworthy activities.<sup>28</sup>

The comparison between shopping and charity or churchwork is especially intriguing when one considers the non-practical nature affixed to the first by the press. Society pages never detailed the items purchased by local members of the community and seldom mentioned the specific stores they visited. The verb itself packed all the purpose; it needed no direct object. In fact, the implied interpretation of this concept excluded the utilitarian purchasing of goods. Take for example the joke printed by the *Tulsa Star* in 1915: “I am going down town this morning,” said Mrs. Ex. “Shopping, my dear?” asked her husband. “No,” she replied, “I haven’t time for that; just to buy some things that I need.”<sup>29</sup> Shopping was a privilege reserved for the ladies of luxury; enjoyable only if inefficient. In a segment titled “The Art of Shopping” that appeared in the *Broad Ax*, one woman sets out “to buy [her]self a box of face powder.” She asks her friend if she could help select it. “Certainly,” assents the friend; “suppose we begin by looking at refrigerators and lace curtains.”<sup>30</sup> Efficiency was a hindrance. “You can’t tell till you look around,” explains Ellen to her friend Isabel, who dared suggest it is best to plan your purchases beforehand and arrive at the store with a clear idea of what you desire. “That’s absurd,” claims Ellen, “I know you



save your time your way ... But if I sat down and thought it all out at once ... I shouldn't feel as if I was buying clothes at all."<sup>31</sup>

Such bits were meant to poke fun at female shoppers. At first glance, the criticism directed at their "conspicuous consumption" appears to mimic the satire of Thorstein Veblen and the worries of other critics, who looked down upon the social and behavioral effects of the new consumer culture. However, one could argue that this particular form of humor served to encourage rather than discourage consumption. The butt of the joke is always a respectable and enviable woman; she is married, monied, and often quite clever. "What a comfort the exchange system is," exclaimed a woman shopper in a joke printed by the *Broad Ax* in 1905. "Yesterday I bought a hat which I didn't like ... so, to-day I brought it back and got three pounds of butter and a mousetrap for it."<sup>32</sup> Even more, these jokes laughed at a conduct that was, in actuality, beneficial to the socioeconomic vision of vendors, admen, and industrialists. In her historical account of American department stores, Vicki Howard explains that modern selling, as it was developed in the last decades of the nineteenth century, relied on the idea of "free access," according to which the store became a new kind of place where middle-class women could shop, but also relax, browse, and socialize.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, for African Americans, association with the new leisure class, despite its implied frivolousness and extravagance, signified a break from the white portrayal of Black people as a poor underclass.

Therefore, while teasing women for participating in the new culture of consumption, jokes printed by the press never really ridiculed them for it. On the contrary, by printing so many jokes about female shoppers, newspapers normalized and enforced the idea that consuming was an essential part of a woman's role. Furthermore, if going shopping was a woman's task, then avoiding it was a male tendency and it was equally funny. "You look exhausted," says a man to his friend in a joke printed by the *New York Age*. "Been shopping with your wife?" he asks. "No," replies the friend, "I've been trying to get out of going."<sup>34</sup> In 1907, the Minnesota-based *Appeal* simply stated, "if there is one thing a man would rather not do than another is to accompany his wife on a shopping tour."<sup>35</sup> This wisdom was offered out of context, as a stand-alone maxim. Shopping was an acceptable feminine behavior. A man was supposed to complain while enabling it.

Humoristic bits about shopping appeared in all newspapers of the era. In fact, most of the jokes published by Black papers were copied from white-owned papers. Copying and reprinting was a common and standard practice in American journalism throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> Short bits and jokes rarely included a source, and so readers of Black papers could have encountered some of the same content in other publications. For example, a joke titled "Sympathy," printed by the *Broad Ax* on February 5, 1916, poked fun at a disappointed wife whose husband's burst of rheumatism meant she could not go shopping. The same joke appeared in over fifteen other papers that same month.<sup>37</sup> Even if the content was not original, to reprint was a choice as was the decision to mimic journalistic trends, like the inclusion of shoppers in society pages. With relation to shopping, Black editors intentionally duplicated the language of the white press. They welcomed elements of the dominant consumer ideology, hence signaling to their upper-class readers that they should do the same.

Another element replicated by African American editors was a journalistic commitment to the dissemination of a bourgeois consumerist etiquette. The novelty of shopping as a social phenomenon inspired many newsmen to serve as arbiters of good consumer manners. Newspapers were filled with advice to shoppers about what, where, and, most importantly, how to shop. The fact that this consumerist activity was mostly associated with women only heightened the need to regulate behavior. As several scholars have

shown, members of the Black aspiring classes, like many of their white contemporaries, saw it as their responsibility and racial duty to educate and, thus, protect the young Black girls and women who migrated to urban centers in growing numbers.<sup>38</sup> “There is no work more nerve trying than shopping, and a good, substantial luncheon will help much,” explained the *Montana Plaindealer* in 1908. “Take an hour to rest and eat,” suggested the paper, “thinking as little as possible of the tasks yet to be accomplished, and there will not be such a splitting headache to take home on the train in the evening.”<sup>39</sup> “Cheap things are not just as good except to the seller, who always makes more money on such articles than on good, straight, honest goods,” declared the *Broad Ax* as early as 1897.<sup>40</sup> The *Ax*, which relocated from Salt Lake City to Chicago in 1899, was particularly attuned to the hazards of modern shopping and frequently reprinted advice columns aimed to help its readers make wise choices. “When bargain hunting it is a good plan to find out just what grade of goods you are paying for,” recommended a segment from 1904, explaining that bargains are “made out of the second choice of material.”<sup>41</sup> By 1919, general warnings turned into detailed guidelines on “how to detect impure material,” including tips such as “hold the fabric up to the light” in order to discern between cotton and linen, or, “burn a bit” to detect pure silk.<sup>42</sup> Often, the *Ax* would print lists of “Don’ts for Buyers,” ensuring best practice in shopping for various articles.<sup>43</sup>

Conforming to the dominant consumerist norms was so important that some Black papers penned original articles on this topic. In 1894, in a segment titled “Side Talk to All,” the *Washington Bee* made sure to discuss the consumer arena among a long list of propagations concerning manners and morals. “It is certainly improper for a younger man and woman to go shopping together before they are married even though they may be engaged,” warned the paper. This notice immediately followed an affirmation that “the best way for a man to show his sincere love for a woman is to ask her to become his wife,” in addition to more general aphorisms, such as, “be what you are and nothing more.”<sup>44</sup>

Nearly twenty years later, the *Pittsburgh Courier* published a lengthy and detailed treatise on proper consumer behavior. “There is an enormous number of women with so little to do in life that they can spend hours in the stores and never make a single purchase,” observed the paper. Such behavior was unwelcome: “shopping as a diversion or as a means of killing time is a form of bad manners.” The reason, explained the *Courier*, was that “people employed to sell goods are judged by the amount they sell”; therefore, “if you take a needless amount of their time ... when you do not intend to buy, you are keeping them from making money.” However, the *Courier* made sure to distinguish between discourtesy and savviness. “On the other hand,” the article made clear, “you need never feel embarrassment on leaving a store without making a purchase if you have actually gone in to buy and have not found just what you want,” since “sometimes it happens that you honestly want to compare prices and do not wish to buy at the first place you go. This is a reasonable enough attitude to take.” While most of this promulgation was aimed at women, the *Courier* did not miss the opportunity to contemplate about masculine consumer behavior, commenting that “men who spend so much time shopping are of course in the minority,” because “there are a few men with leisure,” and “very few who would find this shop visiting a diversion.”<sup>45</sup> (Figure 1)

Finally, a respectable shopping excursion also supposed a suitable destination. Black papers often featured articles celebrating the opening of a new business establishment. Such stories were advertisements masked as news items and, it is reasonable to assume, they were paid for by the featured business.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the list of superlatives deployed to aggrandize the new store in town also served to signify the ideal shopping experience. These promotional pieces implicitly informed Black shoppers about what





**Figure 1.** Interior of “Negro” store, Buffalo, New York, circa 1899. African American Photographs Assembled for 1900 Paris Exposition, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

they could hope to encounter and how they should expect to be treated in any business they chose to enter. For example, in April 1907, the *Colorado Statesman* published a two-page article about the facilities of the Denver Dry Goods Company. The reopening of the city’s celebrated department store was announced in many Colorado newspapers earlier that year, but this particularly long piece appears to be unique to the *Statesman*.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the white owners of the “largest department store and mail order business west of Chicago” wished to attract African American clientele and decided to appeal to them directly.

Whoever penned this advertisement certainly raised the expectations of any prospective Black shopper. It promised a sales force that is “selected with great care,” comprising of “ladies and gentlemen ... familiar with all those polite little amenities of social intercourse.” Within the store’s many halls, “almost every desirable thing in the way of merchandise ... can be found displayed,” and “every need is promptly met,” while “the customer ... finds all the conditions incident to his purchase scrupulously complied with.” For ladies, the Dry Goods Company reserved a balcony as well as “a large general reception and rest room [including] upholstered chairs and couches, writing desks, stationery, [and] toilet rooms.” Additionally, the store promised the African American readers of the *Statesman* “a new tea room, up to the hour in every detail of equipment and service,” and “a modern soda water fountain,” accompanied by “courteous and attentive attaches.”<sup>48</sup>

It is not entirely clear whether Black customers of the Denver Dry Goods Company were indeed able to enjoy all the “little amenities” promised by this story. The *Statesman* often encouraged African Americans to migrate to Colorado in order to escape the

“untold barbarities” and “unspeakable treatment” of the Jim Crow South. However, racial discrimination was not absent from the Centennial State. In Denver, for example, residential segregation confined the Black population to a few designated areas, such as the Five Points District.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, as historian Traci Parker explains, even though department stores across the United States welcomed African American customers, they also “restricted their movement and participation” and “rarely extended [them] the same customer service they did to whites.” Black shoppers were often refused service at the store’s dining facilities, not permitted to try on clothes, denied store credit, and rarely addressed with the courtesy and respect reserved for white patrons.<sup>50</sup> If Black shoppers at the Denver Dry Goods Company encountered such maltreatment, the *Statesman* did not prepare them for it. On the contrary, the paper fostered a fantasy of the shopping experience by helping its readers envision a “paradise for shoppers” for themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Generally, despite the fact that African American shoppers often faced discriminatory practices in commercial spaces, segregation and discrimination with regard to shopping were seldom discussed by the Black press.<sup>52</sup> Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale has demonstrated how, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, southern spaces of consumption “became key sites for the white southern middle class’s creation of ... the culture of segregation.”<sup>53</sup> At the same time, in urban centers outside the South, such as New York and Chicago, stores mounted various racial boundaries that denied Black Americans equal access. In her book, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement*, Parker documents countless testimonies of prejudice and discrimination experienced by Black customers, recounted in oral histories, interviews, and memoirs. However, this lived experience was rarely echoed by the Black press in real time.<sup>54</sup> It is not entirely clear why the *Statesman* and other African American papers downplayed the discrimination of Black consumers in white-owned stores. One possible explanation is that publishers wished to encourage local businesses to advertise in their papers and, therefore, circumvented any bad publicity to these stores. Such an attitude fits within the moderate political tone embraced by most Black publishers at the time.

Furthermore, a rosy consumerist fantasy completed the vision of shopping as something worth doing. By depicting shopping as a respectable pastime performed in benign, if not luxurious, surroundings, Black editors encouraged their readers, particularly the female ones, to shop. As scholars such as Lears have shown, “fables of abundance” were an integral component of consumer society.<sup>55</sup> In the case of Black consumers, tales of courteous customer service were perhaps necessary to overcome anxieties and venture into a reality that was suffused with discrimination.

## Patrons

The consumer arena was not wholly devoid of racial and political connotations. Most Black editors subscribed to the ideology of self-help. Though it originated before the Civil War, in its late nineteenth-century iteration, self-help philosophy was based on the assumption that “by the acquisition of wealth and morality – attained largely by their own efforts – [Black Americans] would gain the respect of white men and thus be accorded their rights as citizens.” The attainment of wealth depended to a great extent on the establishment of Black-owned businesses and on the racial solidarity of Black consumers, who would support those businesses and help them thrive. African American leaders such as Booker T. Washington, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, and even W. E. B. Du Bois echoed the cry of “negro money for negro merchants.”<sup>56</sup> Papers catering to African

American readers, which were themselves Black-owned businesses, also promoted this line. However, calls for racial solidarity in the consumer arena remained detached from the discourse on shopping. This disconnect was manifested lexically. Items about shopping that utilized the verb “to shop” seldom, if ever, mentioned any commitment to Black enterprise. At the same time, many editorials urged their readers to support Black-owned stores not as shoppers but as patrons – i.e., to patronize Black businesses.

“It is high time that our people were learning to patronize their own color instead of those of the other race,” declared the *Richmond Planet* in 1897. “Take a view at our people’s stores, see their beautiful and gorgeous stock of goods, then ask yourself the question do I patronize them?” This question was followed by another: “Would you with your common sense and sound reasoning fail to push them onward by giving them your liberal support?” The paper also determined that once Black customers “cease to slander and learn to encourage” Black merchants, then “success is [theirs].”<sup>57</sup> To patronize, according to the *Planet*, was to encourage and to facilitate success. It was also rational. Therefore, by implication, not to patronize Black stores was irrational. Or, in other words, as the *Broad Ax* stated three years later, “the negro who thinks he is ‘actin’ like de white fo’ks’ and who refuses to patronize Negro establishments, is a fool.”<sup>58</sup> The *Tulsa Star* confirmed the link between patronage and rationality, claiming, in 1916 that “it seems strange to us why our people do not patronize their own businesses like other people. This is nothing but practical common sense ... Every other race has learned it, and to argue that we have not learned it is equivalent to admitting a lack of race pride and appreciation.”<sup>59</sup> Unlike shopping, which was portrayed as an inefficient, albeit respectable pastime, patronizing was practical and it had many utilitarian benefits. Indeed, the verb “to shop” did not appear in any of these articles.

Of course, patronize and shop are not synonyms. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the commercial meaning of shopping, as “the action of visiting a shop or shops to buy or view goods,” dates back to the mid-eighteenth century. The noun was complemented with a verb, “to shop,” in the early nineteenth century, signaling the growing prevalence of an activity that included examining, searching for, and buying goods. The etymological history of “patronize” is longer and carries a more extensive list of connotations. The word patron, the origins of which are ecclesiastical, was adopted into English from French, around the fourteenth century, to signify anyone “standing in a role of oversight, protection, or sponsorship to another.” Early in the nineteenth century, the intensifying commercial activity that produced the verb “to shop” also birthed a new kind of patron, the one who favors or supports a business with one’s custom.<sup>60</sup> Thus, semantically, “to patronize” carries a heavier responsibility than “to shop.” While shopping denotes a set of simple actions, patronizing signifies a position of power. It is exactly this supposed power African American editors were appealing to when they chose to utilize the verb “to patronize” for explicit political purposes.

Furthermore, “to patronize” lacked the gendered connotation associated with shopping, thus signaling that men as well as women were expected to partake in this racial commercial endeavor. Historian D’Weston Haywood argues that “black people’s ideas, rhetoric, and strategies for black protest and racial advancement ... grew out of a quest for proper black manhood led by black newspapers.” Focusing on the struggle for civil rights in the twentieth century, Haywood determines that Black editors and publishers interpreted and presented key moments in the freedom struggle through a gendered lens and, thus, signaled to their male readers that they “should stand up and be ‘men.’”<sup>61</sup> The insistence to delineate a difference between patronage and shopping marks an early example of these tendencies. If shopping was commonly understood as feminine, then

any act of buying that relied on the participation of men had to be framed differently. Mixing the terminology might imply that support of Black businesses and, by implication, the economic uplift of the community, was a woman's work. By using the verb "to patronize," Black editors carved out an enclave within the consumer arena that was not exclusively feminine and boosted male participation or even leadership. (Figure 2)

Patronizing Black businesses was at the core of self-help philosophy. Theoretically, this act had the power to uplift the race. The responsibility was not just implied by the verb choice; it was stated explicitly. "Very often, too, the colored patron or rather ought-to-be patron, loses sight of everything about the enterprise of a member of his race," professed the *Denver Star* in an essay from 1915, originally published by the *Dallas Express*. "He should remember," the unsigned op-ed continued, that "when he refuses to patronize a Negro place of business, the very first effect is to lessen the employing capacity of the concern, thereby lessening the number of colored boys and girls who might be given work."<sup>62</sup> A similar message was delivered by the *Advocate* in 1909:

What follows is written solely for the benefit of those of our local readers ... in quest of a way to add their mite to the advancement of the race ... There are in Charleston, conducted by Negroes, a number of businesses ... The Negro population of Charleston is about five thousand. Suppose one-tenth of those would spend two dollars each week for necessities at the [Black] grocery and fifty cents at the [Black] drug store ... Is it not clear that additional help would be required to accommodate the increased patronage? Would places not be open for the ambitious boys and girls of the race, who now, perforce, can secure only the most menial employment?<sup>63</sup>



**Figure 2.** Only "Negro" store of its kind in the United States, at 2933 State Street, Chicago, Illinois, circa 1899. African American Photographs Assembled for 1900 Paris Exposition, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

While the racial liability is obvious, other lessons are implied. Notice the choice of words: the Black patron spends money, has expenditures, receive credit. Later on in the same text, he “pays for wares,” and also “takes his trade elsewhere.” He does not shop. Shopping is a different activity, whose essence is unrelated to the political message delivered by this piece and others like it.

Despite the lexical difference embraced by the Black press on a day-to-day basis, the verbs “to shop” and “to patronize” denoted the same commercial action that ultimately bounded both verbs, as well as the meanings assigned to them by editors, to the consumer arena. While newspapers chose to distinguish between a leisurely shopping stroll and purposeful patronage, readers did not necessarily absorb this separation. In a letter to the editor of the *Afro-American*, written in 1915, reader Amelia Johnson wished to express her frustration. She was “stunned” to read an editorial, admonishing members of the race who prefer to spend their money in white-owned businesses. According to Johnson, “a little consideration on the part of the Editor will show him that he is unmistakably wrong.” She explained that “the colored people are not shopping with the white man’s stores because of any idea of superiority of the white man, but because of the goods he offers for sale. They patronize his stores only because they get there the wares they need, and at the prices they are able to pay.”<sup>64</sup> To Johnson, shopping and patronizing were interchangeable. Unintentionally, she was critiquing the editor’s semantic choices in addition to his moral point of view. Her own choice of words makes sense not only because of the colloquial use of the two verbs. Even though editors of Black newspapers rarely included both words in the same item, they too could not suspend the common commercial mission behind shopping and patronizing. Almost every week in most Black papers, one page was dedicated to advertisements alerting “city-shoppers” or “holiday shoppers” to “shop here” at “our shop.” The same page usually featured an accompanying message, printed in bold letters, calling readers to “patronize the firms that patronize us.”

The percentage of Black Americans living in cities grew from 27 percent in 1916 to 35 percent in 1920 to 44 percent by 1930. The urban surroundings, as well as the fact many of these migrants were wage earners, increased their exposure to and engagement with consumer culture.<sup>65</sup> With time, the politicization of the consumer arena only intensified. Indeed, organizations such as the National Negro Business League and, particularly, Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, amplified calls for a separate Black economy. Additionally, the growing presence of Black Americans in consumer spaces also amplified racial tensions and expressions of white racist hostility. These developments were manifested on the pages of the Black press. To begin with, the massive influx of African Americans into cities also entailed more potential readers. Indeed, following World War I, urban-based papers such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* increased their circulation and began printing weekly issues of twenty pages or more.<sup>66</sup> The space dedicated to consumption also grew – there were more jokes, more consumer etiquette pieces, more advice to shoppers, more reports on new businesses either owned by Black people or welcoming them, and many more calls for consumer activism. For Black consumers, the ubiquitous discourse about patronizing, shopping, buying, or not buying signaled that “the commercial realm was a viable battleground to fight for rights.”<sup>67</sup> By the classic era of the Civil Rights Movement, boycotts and department store sit-ins became rudimentary tools for struggle, alongside marches and rallies.

In his book about Black Americans in the advertising industry, Jason Chambers argues that, during the twentieth century, “African American advocates of the Black consumer



market gradually shifted from emphasizing the *presence* of Black consumers to white business leaders,” in the 1920s and 1930s, “to stressing the *pressure* those consumers could create on a company or industry when they acted as a cohesive force,” from the 1940s onward.<sup>68</sup> However, before such emphasis and pressure could be put or applied, there had to be enough Black consumers to present a significant economic force. Surveying the conversation surrounding African American consumption within the Progressive Era, it becomes apparent there was an earlier, preliminary process that predated Chambers’s timeline. Before the 1920s, African American advocates of the Black consumer market were busy imagining and encouraging the formation of such a market.

The origins of this preliminary process trace back to the turn of the century, when a budding Black upper class marked participation in the consumer arena as desirable. In the Black press, which was written for and read by the Black aspiring classes, shopping, or patronizing Black-owned stores, was presented as a foundational activity for racial advancement. These practices were associated with respectable conduct, normative gender behavior, and good taste, as well as self-help, solidarity, and the accumulation of racial capital. During those years, the nascent African American discourse was embedded within a broader national conversation that similarly encouraged engagement with the consumer arena. Together, these conversations helped push more and more Black people into consumer spaces, while nurturing an expectation for luxurious, courteous, or at least fair service. As many studies have shown, unlike the fables produced by the press, out in the real world, the consumer arena was not particularly welcoming to Black shoppers. Therefore, paying attention to the early African American consumption discourse might also explain how, in later decades, the gap between the expectations fostered by the press and reality served as an effective catalyst for political consciousness.

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## Notes

1 Roscoe W. Dunjee, “The Negro in Business,” in Official Proceedings of the Second Conference on the Negro in Business, Oct. 1947, box 15, Department of Commerce, Records of the Office of the Secretary, Records of the Advisor on Negro Affairs, 1940–1963, NC 54/Entry 9, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

2 See, in particular, Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Robert E. Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Ronny Regev, “We Want No More Economic Islands: The Mobilization of the Black Consumer Market in Post War U.S.,” *History of Retailing and Consumption* 6 (Jan. 2020): 45–69; Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994); Brenna Wynn Greer, *Represented: The Black Imagemakers Who Reimagined African American Citizenship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021); Keith Wailoo, *Pushing Cool: Big Tobacco, Racial Marketing, and the Untold Story of*



the *Menthol Cigarette* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021). On African Americans and the beauty industry, see Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920–1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

3 Susannah Walker, “Black Dollar Power: Assessing African American Consumerism since 1945,” in *African American Urban History since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe William Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 377.

4 For more on Black consumer boycotts in the twentieth century, see Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Michele F. Pacifico, “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work: The New Negro Alliance of Washington,” *Washington History* 6 (Spring–Summer 1994): 66–88; Andor Skotnes, “Buy Where You Can Work: Boycotting for Jobs in African-American Baltimore, 1933–1934,” *Journal of Social History* 27 (Summer 1994): 735–61; Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, “The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900–1906,” *Journal of American History* 55 (Mar. 1969): 756–75.

5 The handful of works that provide an extensive discussion of African American consumer culture in the early twentieth century include James C. Davis, *Commerce in Color: Race, Consumer Culture, and American Literature, 1893–1933* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Jason P. Chambers, “Equal in Every Way: African Americans, Consumption and Materialism from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement,” *Advertising and Society Review* 7, no. 1 (2006); Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women’s Magazines and the Culture That Made Them* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Paul R. Mullins, *Race and Affluence: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002); Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty and Culture, 1830–1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Paul K. Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1932).

6 Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), x; Michele Mitchell defines the Black aspiring class as “workers able to save a little money as well as those who worked multiple jobs to attain class mobility ... self-educated women and men as well as those who attended normal school or college.” See Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xx.

7 Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5–9; Quincy T. Mills, *Cutting along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 4–5. Mills uses the term “Black commercial public sphere,” while Baldwin defines a similar concept, which he terms “marketplace intellectual life.”

8 Up to the 1920s, an overwhelming majority of African Americans lived in the South. In his study of southern Black consumers, Paul K. Edwards found that a majority of “common and semi-skilled labor families” shopped at small, independent stores, which sold medium or cheap quality goods. See Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, 84–85; In his book about Mississippi consumer culture, Ted Ownby explains that, even with the expansion of the state’s consumer sphere, beginning around 1900, “the most significant continuity,” was that “African Americans still had not become significant figures in the stores.” See Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi*, 95.

9 Kim T. Gallon, *Pleasure in the News: African American Readership and Sexuality in the Black Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 11.

10 For more on the concept of racial uplift, see Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

11 The concept of the leisure class was developed by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

**12** For more on the politics of respectability, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Another useful way to think about the politics of consumption practiced by Black women is that of “small rights”; see Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 205–10; For seminal works that discuss the political dimensions of women shoppers, see, for example, Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Joanna Cohen, *Luxurious Citizens: The Politics of Consumption in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

**13** Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 62–65.

**14** The leading studies of the Black press include Eurie Dahn, *Jim Crow Networks: African American Periodical Cultures* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021); Patrick Scott Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006); Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Armistead Scott Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997); Roland Edgar Walseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971); Emma Lou Thornbrough, “American Negro Newspapers, 1880–1914,” *Business History Review* 40 (Winter 1966): 467–90. For studies dedicated to specific editors and their careers, see Roi Ottley, *The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955); Andrew Bunie, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974); Gerald Horne, *The Rise and Fall of the Associated Negro Press: Claude Barnett's Pan-African News and the Jim Crow Paradox* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017). For studies dedicated to the Black press's role in the struggle for civil rights, see Fred Carroll, *Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War for Democracy, 1914–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001); Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage during National Crises, with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827–1965* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998); Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press during World War II* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975).

**15** Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 108. For other works that examine the Black press beyond the fight for civil rights, see Gallon, *Pleasure in the News*; Kim Gallon, “Silences Kept: The Absence of Gender and Sexuality in Black Press Historiography,” *History Compass* 10 (Feb. 2012): 207–18; D'Weston Haywood, *Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth-Century Black Press and a Manly Vision for Racial Advancement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

**16** In order to ascertain the full contours of the discourse surrounding consumption in the Black press, I performed a vast keyword search in twenty-one newspapers published during the period and available online. The search resulted in hundreds of hits. The analysis in this article is based on a close reading of the results. The newspapers surveyed were all weeklies published between the 1890s and the late 1920s. They include the *Baltimore Afro American*, *Chicago Defender*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*, available via ProQuest Historical Newspapers. The *West Virginia Advocate*, *Appeal* (St. Paul, Minnesota), *Black Dispatch* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), *Broad Ax* (Salt Lake City, Utah, from 1895 to 1899, then Chicago), *Bystander* (Des Moines, Iowa), *California Eagle* (Los Angeles), *Colored American* (Washington, D.C.), *Denver Star* and its predecessor *Franklin's Paper*, *Montana Plaindealer* (Helena), *Nashville Globe*, *New York Age*, *Richmond Planet*, *Seattle Republican*, *Tulsa Star*, and *Washington Bee*, available via Newspapers.com or the Library of Congress.

**17** Paul R. Mullins explains that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, many Black Americans welcomed “genteel materialism” as a way to demonstrate their “suitability for civil and consumer citizenship.” See Mullins, *Race and Affluence*, 118.

**18** Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 64.

**19** Julia Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis: City Papers and the Making of Modern Americans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 20.

- 20 It is hard to determine the exact number of Black papers or their circulation since N. W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory listed them only occasionally. See Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 48–49, 83; Thornbrough, "American Negro Newspapers, 1880–1914."
- 21 Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War*, 19.
- 22 Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War*, 20–25. The editorial from the *Indianapolis World* is quoted in Thornbrough, "American Negro Newspapers, 1880–1914," 487.
- 23 "Montgomery," *Advocate*, Dec. 17, 1908.
- 24 *Broad Ax*, May 5, 1906.
- 25 These early versions of society columns were a feature of most Black newspapers as well as local white papers. For example, in the state of Oklahoma, such columns appeared in African American papers such as the *Tulsa Star* and the *Black Dispatch*, as well as in small-town papers like the *Muldrow Sun* and the *Claremore Progress*. They were not featured in widely distributed papers like the *Oklahoma Daily*.
- 26 "Mrs. M. Henderson Shopping," *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 25, 1920, 9.
- 27 For more on the role of women in the emergence of consumer society and the remaking of modern urban spaces, see, for example, McGovern, *Sold American*, 36–48; Emily Remus, *A Shoppers' Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021). For studies that examine Black women's experience in turn-of-the-century urban spaces, see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019); LaShawn Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 28 "Women's World," *Afro-American*, Aug. 6, 1904.
- 29 "A Distinction," *Tulsa Star*, Aug. 8, 1914.
- 30 "Art of Shopping," *Broad Ax*, July 10, 1915.
- 31 "Shopping and Buying," *Chicago Defender*, Mar. 6, 1915.
- 32 "Shopper's Comfort," *Broad Ax*, Sept. 16, 1905.
- 33 Vicki Howard, *From Main Street to Mall: The Rise and Fall of the American Department Store* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 14.
- 34 "Just as Bad," *New York Age*, Nov. 2, 1916.
- 35 *The Appeal*, June 15, 1907.
- 36 For more on this practice and on American journalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Menahem Blondheim, *News over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844–1897* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 42.
- 37 "Sympathy," *Broad Ax*, Feb. 5, 1916. The same piece was published by the paper also on Feb. 12 and Feb. 16 as well as in the *Pioneer Express* (Pembina, North Dakota), the *Daily Alaskan* (Skagway, Alaska), the *Bridgeton* (New Jersey) *Express*, and the *Lovington* (New Mexico) *Leader*, among several additional papers.
- 38 For more on the education of young Black women in cities, see, for example, Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners*; Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*; Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
- 39 "Shoppers' Headache," *Montana Plaindealer*, Feb. 14, 1908.
- 40 *Broad Ax*, Dec. 25, 1897.
- 41 "How Shoppers Are Sold," *Broad Ax*, Aug. 6, 1904.
- 42 "To Detect Impure Material," *Broad Ax*, Jan. 18, 1919.
- 43 See, for example, "Don'ts for Buyers," *Broad Ax*, May 6, 1916; "When Buying Furs," *Broad Ax*, Jan. 9, 1915.
- 44 "Side Talk to All," *Washington Bee*, Nov. 3, 1894.
- 45 "Do You Shop All Day and Then Purchase Nothing?" *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 2, 1923. I suggest this article is original since an extensive search did not locate it in any other publication available online.
- 46 See, for example, "A Remarkable New Departure in the Business Life of Nashville," *Nashville Globe*, Sept. 13, 1907; "Anderson Has Large Furniture Business," *New York Age*, Oct. 14, 1922.
- 47 The opening of the store was reported on by the *Delta Independent*, the *Gilpin Observer*, the *Lamar Register*, and the *Springfield Herald*.

- 48 “Denver’s Big Building,” *Franklin’s Paper the Statesman*, Apr. 5, 1907.
- 49 On race relations in Colorado and the role of the *Statesmen* in African American migration, see Ronald J. Stephens, “The Influence of Marcus Mosiah and Amy Jacques Garvey: On the Rise of Garveyism in Colorado,” in *Enduring Legacies: Ethnic Histories and Cultures of the Colorado Borderlands*, ed. Arturo J. Altama, et al. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2011), 139–58.
- 50 Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement*, 41–42.
- 51 “Denver’s Big Building.”
- 52 A notable exception comprises the reports on African American boycotts of Jim Crow cars that featured in the Black press around 1900. For more on this topic, see Kelley, *Right to Ride*; Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- 53 Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 123.
- 54 The choice not to report on racial discrimination in consumer spaces is especially surprising since Black editors and publishers, like many affluent African Americans, exerted efforts in order to avoid discourtesy and maltreatment. As Parker documents, The *Afro-American* publisher Carl Murphy and his family refused to shop at Baltimore department stores and preferred to travel great distances in order to receive decent customer service. See Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement*, 51.
- 55 See T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
- 56 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro in Business; Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University, together with the Proceedings of the Fourth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 30–31, 1899* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1899), 12, 50.
- 57 “Manchester Letter,” *Richmond Planet*, Mar. 6, 1897.
- 58 *Broad Ax*, Feb. 3, 1900.
- 59 *Tulsa Star*, Aug. 8, 1916.
- 60 See “shop, v. 1”; “shopping, n.2”; “patron, n.”; “patronize, v.”; *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed Dec. 2022: <https://www.oed.com/?tl=true>.
- 61 Haywood, *Let Us Make Men*, 2–3.
- 62 “Deceive Not Yourself,” *Denver Star*, Dec. 11, 1915.
- 63 “Self-Help,” *Advocate*, Dec. 16, 1909.
- 64 Amelia Johnson, “Letter to the Editor,” *Afro-American*, May 29, 1915.
- 65 For more on this process and African American consumer citizenship in the 1920s and 1930s, see Walker, *Style and Status*, 15.
- 66 The *Pittsburgh Courier*, for example, increased its circulation from 7,920 in 1917 to 50,523 in 1930. See N. W. Ayer and Son’s *Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer, 1917); N. W. Ayer and Son’s *Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer, 1931).
- 67 Regev, “We Want No More Economic Islands,” 4.
- 68 Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*, 3.

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