



A New Profession

Large-scale production opens new field for university men in advertising agencies

IN 1869 the volume of business in watches was \$2,800,000; in 1914 it was five times as great—over \$14,000,000. But in this period, the number of firms making watches decreased from 37 to 15.

And to-day 11 makers of watches are advertising in the national magazines.

Tremendous growth in volume—sharp decrease in the number of manufacturers

how the new product gave longer wear, looked better and saved money. Through carefully selected magazines and newspapers, the manufacturer's story was taken direct to the American people.



But this study and the actual building of advertisements, is only one phase of the profession of large-scale selling, as it is practiced by the J. Walter Thomson Company.

Solving the problems of large-scale selling,

Which of our 103,000,000 Americans

YALE MAD MEN THE ROLE OF THE ELI IN THE CURATION OF AMERICAN CONSUMERISM

Besides being deeply embedded in American culture, what do Kellogg's "Snap, Crackle and Pop," the Oscar Meyer jingle, and "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" all have in common? Adam Williams '15 answers this question, among numerous others, in his examination of the role Yalies played in shaping the advertizing industry. Williams posits that through organizations such as the Association of Yale Men in Advertising, geographical proximity to New York City, and networking, Yalies came to be at the forefront of determining how a variety of notable products – ranging from Old Spice to Wrigley – would be marketed to consumers.

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If one visits the Wikipedia page of “The History of Advertising” and conducts a page search for the word “Yale,” only a single hit is produced — a citation of a book published at the Yale University Press. Yet, as should be universally understood, Wikipedia rarely tells the full story. From the smoky back rooms of J. Walter Thompson in the early 20th century to the transparent glass front rooms of today’s digital media providers, Yalies have always been at the forefront of creating and distributing culture. Advertising, at least as it is conventionally understood today, is a development that changed the way people judge and measure themselves and others — for better or worse. Some might argue that motivating people to dress presentably constitutes a positive good; others perhaps contend that a preoccupation with appearances inspires vanity and shallowness. Comparing one’s car to his or her neighbors’ can be seen as either stimulating the economy and promoting friendly rivalry, or fostering a negative culture of consumerism. No matter what side of the fence one comes down on, it is perilously high, and difficult to straddle. By tracing the development of Madison Avenue’s most prominent agencies and practices, it becomes clear that Yale and its alumni were inextricably linked with the establishment of an industry that propagated collective American values and identity.

Since even the most primitive barter economies, man has been consistently trying to peddle his goods as widely and profitably as possible. Modern conceptions of advertising, however, appear to be exactly that: modern. Ancient Egyptian and Roman shopkeepers used wall posters and engraved signs to indicate the wares available inside their stores, but it was not until the Industrial Revolution that something resembling the ad world of today emerged.¹ As economies transitioned from rural and agrarian to centralized and industrial, a higher concentration of consumers and sellers placed a premium on product differentiation. Still, most efforts by the middle of the 19th century — both in Europe and, more pertinently, in the blossoming United States — were locally aimed. The vision of marketing individual products to national or global audiences did not yet exist.

Over the course of the next fifty years, New York would become the undeniable epicenter of a transition towards this idea. In particular, one North-South street in Manhattan would become metonymous for an entire industry in the same way Hollywood and film are inseparable today. Madison Avenue, named after the fourth president, was not a part of the Commissioners’ Plan of 1811 for the city layout of Manhattan.² It was squeezed in between Fourth (now Park Avenue) and Fifth Avenues, resulting in the renaming of the former. This served as a precursor of things to come, as the commercials and slogans created by the ad firms on Madison would forcibly embed themselves into American and eventually global culture. In 1861, there were 20 advertising agencies in New York primarily spread across the eastern half of Manhattan but without any particular pattern of geographical distribution.³ As firms got larger towards the end of the 19th century, there was a natural magnetism towards a central locale. The corporate headquarters of the na-

tion's largest companies were almost exclusively in New York at the turn of the century, and in an age before Skype and conference calls, firms sought to situate themselves as close as possible to existing and prospective clients. As urban studies scholar Paul Knox wrote in 1995, global cities are "able to generate and disseminate discourses and collective beliefs, develop, test, and track innovations, and offer sociable settings for the gathering of high level information."⁴ As with other contemporary industries like automobiles in Detroit, advertising responded to limitations on travel and convenience of discourse by coalescing around Madison Avenue in New York.

Having offices in the center of the action drew both the highest quality clients and highest quality talent - much of which was coming from Yale. Plenty has been written about the relationship between Yale and New York.⁵ Of all the explanations for their symbiotic relationship, perhaps the most obvious stems from simple geography. Indeed, the proximity of New Haven to New York City cannot be understated when assessing the frequency of Yalies to populate the upper echelons of "The City's" elite professions. Since the connection of Grand Central Terminal to the New Haven Railroad in 1871, Yale students have regularly taken the Metro North train to Manhattan to attend concerts, parties, and, for some, even family dinner. In a certain sense, New York's accessibility by rail makes the city an effective extension of Yale's campus.

Advertising is also unique with respect to university recruitment. Unlike finance or law, the industry does not necessarily have any prerequisites for entry. Hustle and creativity are as valued as math skills or pure intellect. Conveniently, the Metro North lines run both ways. In the early 20th century, recruiters from New York's top advertising firms visited Yale to convince the best and brightest Humanities students to embark on a career they might not have previously considered. President Madison might have been a Princeton man, but the men that bustled about the street that bore his name were Yalies above all else.

To be sure, the leading agencies sent men to scout out talent at many elite universities, but there were also significant efforts made within the Yale community itself to field men for these positions. One aspect of Yale alumni that made them unique was their direct involvement in the affairs of undergraduate students. Again, Madison Avenue's proximity to New Haven enabled Yale to connect with its New York alumni network more thoroughly than either Harvard or Dartmouth could. In 1916, 52 alumni at a dinner in New York founded the Association of Yale Men in Advertising (AYMA).⁶ The goals of the Association were simple: educate the undergraduate population on the particulars of a career in the field, and find them placement at the top firms in New York. According to one issue of the *Yale Alumni Weekly*, the group put together a book entitled, "Advertising as a Business Career," which outlined the branches of advertising and its operations. It was a manual for life on Madison Avenue, describing, "each branch of the business - its object, its operation, the day's work, the pay that can be expected at the start."⁷ This served the dual purpose of

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attracting top men to the field and weeding out those who might not be qualified.

An issue of *Printers' Ink*, a trade journal for advertisers, published on March 23, 1916, preceded the information in the *Yale Alumni Weekly*—a reflection of how quickly word of the new organization spread. In its section on groups and clubs, *Printer's Ink* noted that while the AYMA had been formed in New York, it intended to have a nation-wide impact. Significantly, *Printer's Ink* noted that the newly created organization's "objects are primarily not to further the interests of its members, but decidedly altruistic."⁸ The tone of genuine surprise that the Association could have such noble intentions is an indicator that it was one of the first of its kind. It is at this moment that the system of favoritism and the "old boys club" mentality truly took root in the advertising industry, with Yale establishing itself as one of the early practitioners. An economy of convenience and conservatism took root with respect to recruitment, as firms became willing to accept average candidates and ignore perhaps more promising talents from lesser schools out of a desire for the status quo. Such recruiting practices, particularly in a period before they were widely implemented at other universities, were enough to give Yale the advantage it needed operating behind the scenes. Tellingly, *Printers' Ink* appeared to be caught off guard by the extent to which Yale had permeated the industry, acknowledging that, "there is a far larger body of Yale men prominent in advertising circles than is generally known," at more than 200 recorded alumni.⁹

A few years later, at the end of World War I, the Association would take on a far more serious role. According to Judith Ann Schiff, the chief research archivist at the Yale University Library, more than 10,000 Yale men served during the war in some capacity, 225 of whom ultimately lost their lives during the conflict.¹⁰ While the tragedy of those who perished was commemorated at the memorial in Woolsey Hall in 1920, a report from the office of President Arthur Hadley the year prior indicates that efforts to aid the thousands of Yalies fortunate enough to return were well underway at that point.¹¹ Under University President Arthur Hadley, a Department of Demobilization Employment was established, which attempted to find placement for graduates who no longer had jobs waiting for them back on native soil. AYMA president Robert Cory — class of 1902 — was thanked individually in the report for working to explore opportunities on Madison Avenue for these veterans, indicating the organization's involvement in the process¹² Of the 122 men that found employment through the program, 12 of them entered advertising.¹³ While objectively not an overwhelming percentage, this trailed only finance, engineering, and manufacturing by number, exceeding fields that had historically been more popular among graduates like accounting, sales, publishing and social service. The overtures made by AYMA helped bring about this dramatic shift.

Though the Yale men placed by AYMA and Department of Demobilization Em-

ployment found work at a number of the preeminent New York agencies, no firm was more heavily influenced by Yalies in the early 20th century than J. Walter Thompson (JWT). James Walter Thompson began his advertising career in 1868 as a bookkeeper for Carlton & Smith, a small advertising agency founded just four years earlier, and quickly rose as one of the most talented and profitable salesmen at the young firm.¹⁴ In 1877, he decided to buy out his partner and founder William Carlton for \$500. At this time, advertising agencies served a singular purpose; they took existing creative work from a company and “placed” it in a newspaper, magazine, or other publication. They simply acted as the middlemen between small businesses and the media sources in which they sought to advertise. Yet Thompson had a much grander vision of what an advertising agency could become; after eponymously renaming the firm, Thompson converted it to a unique, full-service agency. Not only did JWT place advertisements, they created them in-house themselves. Armed with this new leverage, he convinced popular contemporary magazines like *The Century Illustrated* and *Scribner’s* to include advertisements in their pages and attracted some of America’s largest companies as clients.¹⁵ One of the firm’s most celebrated early efforts was the use the Rock of Gibraltar as a branding logo for Prudential Insurance, an image still used to this day.¹⁶ JWT’s rise was meteoric, to the point where an 1889 internal publication of the firm claimed that an astounding 80% of the advertising in the United States was placed through the agency.¹⁷

If James Walter Thompson can be considered the father of modern advertising, Stanley B. Resor is the son who picked up the mantle and raised it to new heights. Born in 1879, Resor hailed from Cincinnati and graduated from Yale in 1901 with a degree in classics. During an era still predominately dominated by young men from Northeast prep schools, Resor would have stood out as a Midwesterner, cutting a similar figure to Tom Regan in Owen Johnson’s *Stover at Yale*. In 1904 he began working at the in-house advertising branch of Procter & Gamble, demonstrating a talent for both creative and administrative work.¹⁸ At the ripe age of 29, Resor was contracted by J. Walter Thompson to open a Cincinnati branch. Such was his success that he was brought to the main offices in New York and made Vice President in 1912, all before the age of 33.¹⁹

JWT was not the first advertising firm in the U.S., but it was the first one with a truly global vision and reach. Before the turn of the 20th century, fewer than thirty years after Thompson purchased the firm outright, offices were open in Chicago, Boston, and London.²⁰ By 1916, however, the firm’s growth had begun to stagnate, and with Thompson reaching old age, Resor bought the firm with a group of fellow investors. He was made president and was understood to be the first major agency leader to boast a college degree. Advertising thus transitioned from a game run by hustlers and scrappy businessmen to some of the greatest intellectual minds of the 20th century. It was at this juncture that the

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relationship between Yale and JWT truly flourished.

It did not take long after the acquisition for Resor to mold JWT into the structure that became an industry standard in the ensuing decades. In 1917, Resor married Helen Lansdowne, a brilliant copywriter with whom he had worked in JWT's Cincinnati office. Considered one of the greatest creative advertisers of the twentieth century, Lansdowne moved to New York and became JWT's Creative Director, allowing Resor to focus on the administrative side of the firm. He consolidated the client list and kept only the most profitable ones, one key respect in which he differed from Thompson, who obsessed over bringing in as many accounts as possible. Resor was more interested in picking winning companies and keeping them happy. As large companies leveraged their industrial might and became more global, they became disproportionately important in an ad firm's portfolio - a trend that Resor recognized.²¹ One Coca-Cola was worth a hundred smaller retailers, even if they had profitable ventures of their own.

With a Yale man at the head, JWT became the most successful firm in the industry by billings, a title it would retain for more than fifty years. The beginning of Resor's tenure coincided with the formation of AYMA, and an increasing number of Yale men were drawn to the glamour of Madison Avenue. On May 26, 1919, JWT paid for a full-page advertisement in the *Yale Daily News*, outlining the benefits of a career in the industry and what made their firm unique. The posting reads:

To study the laws of human action and to create advertisements that will guide the decisions of millions of people, is one function of the advertising agency. In the J. Walter Thompson Company, a large staff of college-trained men have made it their profession to study the laws of decision.²²

JWT prudently appealed to the intellectual side of the Yale student body, emphasizing the "study" of human behavior rather than the sales aspect of the job. The article goes on to stress relevant ties to economics, history, social conditions, English composition, and literature.²³ By casting a wide net, JWT recruiters attracted creative and account-side talent to the firm. In the bottom right corner of the page is a box listing the Yale men currently working at the firm, and their respective positions. It paints a picture of an agency run almost exclusively - at least at the top level - by Yalies. The list is obviously headlined by Stanley Resor '01 who had been named president three years earlier. Walter G. Resor '97 - Stanley's brother - and Gilbert Kinney '05 - who replaced Robert Cory '02 as the President of AYMA - served as the vice presidents; three other men who graduated from 1910-1918 joined them. Stewart L. Mims '04 even turned down a history professorship at Yale to work at JWT, such was the allure of the growing community.²⁴

Thompson reportedly trumpeted that, “skilled work, when published, costs no more than the work without skill: so that the best work, such as I give, is the cheapest because it brings better results.”²⁵ In the first few decades of the 20th century, no men proved to be more skilled than those coming out of New Haven. During this period, JWT secured some of their most important accounts, including Nestlé, Kraft, and Unilever. The unrivalled success continued throughout the Resor Era, ending with his retirement in 1955. For all his individual accolades on Madison Avenue, Resor remained committed to fostering the advertising community at Yale itself. In 1928, he was the headline speaker at an event held at the Yale Club of New York, hosted by none other than AYMA.²⁶ “Snap, Crackle and Pop” of Kellogg’s, “Miracle Whip”, and the Oscar Meyer jingle are deeply embedded in the fabric of American culture, and Resor and the creatives at J. Walter Thompson were responsible for all of them.²⁷

While JWT is the appropriate centerpiece for the narrative of Yale men in advertising, there are a number of other influential firms that benefitted from either founding or leadership from Yalies over the course of the 20th century. Wilbur Ruthrauff – a rent collector – and Fritz Ryan – a real estate salesman - met in Cape Cod in the summer of 1910.²⁸ Both Yale alumni of 1909 and 1904 respectively, but lacking any advertising expertise, they decided to open a firm – Ruthrauff and Ryan – offering primarily direct-mail services.²⁹ R&R sputtered through the latter stages of the 1910s, but when the Great Depression hit, their economical and un-idealistic style of copy became increasingly popular. More traditional agencies like JWT built on flowing prose and catchy taglines saw R&R as a minor nuisance until they started attracting big-name clients such as B.F. Goodrich and Wrigley. Their bold and straightforward campaigns for Dodge in the early thirties occasioned a dramatic rise in sales, and the firm’s work largely helped to bring back Gillette razors from the brink of extinction.³⁰ As the economy recovered in the late 1940s, however, R&R’s style fell out of favor as consumers wanted to feel more sophistication from their products rather than just value and efficiency. Ruthrauff and Ryan had left the firm in the hands of their sons, who lacked their grit and determination, allowing the firm to fall apart by the late 1950s.³¹

Another pair of young alumni took a more traditional path to the major leagues of advertising. William Benton ’21 was working as a copywriter at the New York firm BBDO when he hired Chester Bowles ’24 to serve as his junior associate. The two worked together for a brief period – Benton emerging as a pioneer in the field of consumer research and Bowles establishing himself as one of the top copywriters at the firm – before breaking away to start their own practice in 1929. Their new agency burned brightly in the ensuing years and was behind a number of memorable slogans like Crest toothpaste’s, “look ma’ no cavities!” and Budweiser’s, “This Bud’s for you.”³² Both Benton and Bowles had aspirations

outside of the advertising industry, however, and sold their stakes in what had become the sixth largest firm in America in 1936 and 1941 respectively. Benton would go on to serve as vice president of the University of Chicago. He became the chairman and owner of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and eventually a US Senator.³³ Bowles – born in Massachusetts but never straying too far from his Yale roots – was elected governor of Connecticut in 1948, serving for two years before leaving the post to become the U.S. Ambassador to India. To top it all off, he returned to the states and served as a foreign policy advisor to President John F. Kennedy.³⁴ These two men are quintessential examples of mid-century Yalies who held talents in a number of fields, reached positions of significance in each of these disciplines, and most importantly, got their start in advertising.

Around the same time Resor was collecting his diploma from his college master, another soon-to-be ad man was born in New Haven: Ted Bates. Unlike Resor, Bates was very much a member of the northeastern elite. He attended Andover and graduated from Yale in 1924 in the same class as Chester Bowles. Like so many Yalies before him, Bates moved to New York City to work in finance at Chase Bank. A few years later, thoroughly disenchanted with his work, he met a man named William Johnson at the Yale Club of New York who worked at none other than Bates' old classmate's firm: Batten.³⁵ He considered his options and eventually took an enormous pay cut to switch careers and become a clerk at the firm. Bates worked alongside Chester Bowles until the latter left to form his own agency with William Benton.³⁶ Bates eventually followed him there and became one of the lead men on the enormous Colgate-Palmolive account. As Benton and Bowles stepped away from the firm in the late 1930s, the consumer goods conglomerate became dissatisfied with B&B's work. However, they offered Bates the opportunity of a lifetime – to open his own firm with Colgate-Palmolive as the lead account. Bates leapt at the offer, and Ted Bates Inc. was born in 1940. The agency became a major player in the emerging TV advertising trade of the 1950s, gaining clients like Mars candy and Dwight D. Eisenhower's successful 1952 presidential campaign.³⁷ Bates' accomplishments are indicative of just how interconnected the industry was in the mid-century, particularly for Yale alums.

Yale, like all universities, serves multiple functions. The research arm of the school was – and still is – arguably just as important as the preparation of young undergrads. As Yale men were running Madison Avenue, Yale professors were hard at work in New Haven exploring the psychology that made their work popular. Research on so-called “Message Learning Theory” began at Yale in the 1940s. Carl I. Hovland, who had received his Ph.D from Yale in 1936, was at the cutting edge of studies regarding the effectiveness of social communication.³⁸ He posited and proved that “the more people learn and remember from an advertisement, the more persuasive it will be.”³⁹ His findings contributed to a shift in the nature of advertising from a focus on evocation of emotion to simply being memorable.

As one might imagine, this had a significant influence on the advertising industry, with consumer research guru William Benton '21 particularly fascinated with his work. Modern advertisements from brands like Old Spice — a Unilever branch still serviced by JWT — are more outlandish than thoughtful, yet have still resulted in enormous sales boosts.⁴⁰ He also identified two principle criteria that determine how well an advertisement would be received: how much of an expert the spokesperson is considered on the issue, and the trustworthiness of said spokesperson.⁴¹ This finding provided empirical evidence to support Resor's introduction of the testimonial-style print advertisement in the early 1920s.

Following Hovland's work, creative directors across the board have altered their methods, and Yale advertisers in the second half of the century were no exceptions. Bill Backer '50, represents the transition from "old Yale" to "new Yale" in the world of advertising in the sense that his work still resonates today. From Charleston, South Carolina, Backer was a leader of *The Record* while in New Haven and was inspired by the countless Yalies before him that had made names for themselves in advertising.⁴² He began working as a copywriter at McCann-Erickson in 1953, and quickly rose to the rank of Creative Director at the firm. He had a supreme talent for capturing the essence of the American psyche and placing himself in the shoes of the hardworking "everyman." He wrote the jingle, "I'd like to buy the world a Coke," a commercial that has been revisited recently by its use in the finale of AMC's hit show *Mad Men* and still resonates with a large swath of the population today. Backer claims that the serial Emmy-winning program glamorized the era on Madison Avenue in some ways, and that "most of the creative directors had a little more ink stain on their hands" than the suave Don Draper played by Jon Hamm.⁴³ Backer resuscitated a flailing Campbell's soup line with the "soup is good" campaign. Perhaps his most lasting work is the creation of an entire segment of the day catering to the blue-collar American — "Millertime." Miller High Life had fallen precipitously behind Budweiser in popularity, but Backer's vision of his product as a reward for a good days work carried the brand for the next few decades, and the beer company still uses his "Great Taste, Less Filling," tagline to this day.⁴⁴

Throughout this chronicle, Yale University has been presented as a unifying force. It prepared men for a career in intellectual stimulation of the masses, and provided them with the network and structure to realize their potential on the largest stages. From a chance meeting between Ted Bates and William Johnson at the Yale Club to Stanley Resor filling his JWT staff with Bulldogs, Yale University operated as a catalyst for the production of culture. From a cynical perspective, the whole affair smacks of the boys-club mentality of Old Yale, and frankly that is an entirely legitimate viewpoint. Nepotism of the sort visible in the breakdown of R&R in the late 1950s has been tagged with a sort of odious condemnation of immorality, but the situation is not quite so black and white. Though the main-

tenance of elite New England business networks seems discriminatory by today's measure, the university and its established alumni of the early twentieth century were much more heavily invested in the futures of recent graduates than appears to be the case today. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Suggesting someone for a similar task who comes from a similar background, and helping those who one knows to have a shared past with, is part and parcel of society. There is no reason that people should refrain from helping one another within kin groups – a university alumnus being one of them.

Though there were significant female copywriters in the early 20th century, like Stanley Resor's wife Helen Lansdowne, there were far fewer women serving as account executives and agency leaders. Yale – by way of its contemptible exclusion of women until 1969 – contributed heavily to this problem. Modern advertising, like almost all professions, is at least somewhat more meritocratic today than in the period covered here. This has seen a disproportionate number of Yale men – and now women – in the industry fall over the last few decades.

Recent trends aside, the extent to which Yale influenced the growth of an industry – and in turn the way a population interacted with their products – cannot be stressed enough. Without Yalies' work in advertising, American fascination with and participation in brand culture might well not have developed as it did. And so although today's digitally focused advertising landscape would be unrecognizable to men like Robert Cory '02 and William Benton '21, the principles of creativity and ingenuity they learned at Yale and put to work on Madison Avenue remain at the heart of the advertising industry.

NOTES

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