

INTRODUCTION

The Pitch

At 6:20 p.m. on a warm evening in May 2008, ad executives trickled into the agency's large conference room. Open windows let in the sounds of Manhattan traffic along with a refreshing breeze. Projected on the wall was the PowerPoint presentation the Asian Ads account team had sent to the client for a new business pitch. They had worked well with this client over the years by developing and producing insurance and financial services ads for Chinese American audiences. Today they were presenting their ideas for a brand launch into markets designated as "Asian Indian" and "Korean" by the U.S. Census. Ad executives who worked on the pitch gathered around the speakerphone in the center of the conference table, speculating about the location of the client based on the unfamiliar area code the account executive was dialing. "Indiana! Wow. I didn't expect that," one creative exclaimed as she looked over the brand-awareness print creative concept. An automated voice greeted them from the pod in the center of the large conference table. "Please wait for the moderator of your conference," requested the pleasant female voice as the account executive hit "mute" and the team reviewed their plan for the presentation. The account executive began to quiet down her colleagues when the automated voice finally announced, "Your moderator has arrived. Welcome to the Allied Country conferencing center. Please enter your pin code followed by the pound key." A larger than usual group had assembled for this new business pitch, each ready to contribute if needed. Sunil, an account executive who had

already worked with this client, remained reserved and deferred to his colleague Kew to make the presentation. In past accounts Sunil had begun presentations in a lighter tone with more jovial openings, like “They are gonna sell their concept to you today, if you will buy it!” Exposing the artifice of the work being done, he delivered the line with just enough affect to draw a chuckle from his clients, warming them up so that his creatives’ work would be well received. Today, however, he remained quiet, not wanting to jeopardize the possibility of new business in a down economy. “I’m very excited about this presentation,” creative director An Rong told his team as they awaited connection to the conference call. He reminded them, “This is the first phase: branding.” The client finally arrived in the virtual conferencing center: the vice president of marketing, George, and his colleague Nadine. Turning on the charm, account executive Kew warmly welcomed them and began making small talk. Without the benefit of presenting in person and entertaining the client, their performance via speakerphone along with the visuals they had sent had to do the work of “selling it in,” as some account executives called it. Kew began, “We have two concepts for you, each that sells your brand, cultural insights, as well as incorporates your logo. How are we selling all three in one package? Let me show you with Concept One.”

Over the past century or so, the American advertising industry, like advertising globally, has undergone dramatic shifts, rifts, controversies, and reconceptualizations. It has created beloved jingles, produced deplorable caricatures, and become absolutely inescapable. It has been thoughtfully and stylishly explored through such dramatic renderings as AMC’s award-winning drama *Mad Men* and served as a more casual backdrop for other fictionalized dramas and comedies. It has even survived the dreaded digital video recorder that allows television viewers to fast-forward through commercial breaks. Indeed the cost per second for ads during the Super Bowl has steadily risen, even after the 2008 recession. And no matter how charming Don Draper can be and how much *Mad Men* fans relish his creative presentations, most of us are still annoyed at the commercial breaks during this show about advertising. Despite this, advertising is a seminal

part of our shifting media landscape. Currently, when television, radio, social media, and the Internet converge in ways that make the boundaries that separate them increasingly less important, the work of advertising is far less straightforward. Creating brand identities, generating aspirational imagery, and building a growing consumer base still remain paramount, but catchy creative alone cannot accomplish this. Multiple platforms, regional tactical events, and promotional tie-ins with other retail and media outfits make advertising today so much more than generating and executing a commissioned creative vision. Brands are managed from above, co-opted from below, and appropriated in unforeseen ways. Advertising's role is to stay ahead of consumers by creating aspirational imagery, while it also strives to be sure audiences identify with the representations they circulate. Especially as the U.S. population changes in its ethnic and racial composition and who counts as a coveted consumer, ways of staying current and relevant are sites of ongoing contest and competition.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Advertising Diversity investigates processes of racial and ethnic representation in various segments of the American advertising industry. I look at the day-to-day work of development and production, the people doing the work, the broader corporate constraints in which this work is based, and how all of these areas shape mass-mediated commercial representation. I consider the role of this work in bringing about particular representational shifts while sometimes reproducing racism and the modalities through which it does so. If we pose the question “Why does race still matter so much?” with regard to advertising, the reductive answer would be “profit.”¹ If advertising's role is to create aspirational imagery and brand identification for consumers, then people in ads should look something like their intended U.S. audience, in which one out of three people identify themselves as African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or some other nonwhite minority. Advertising reflects but also creates difference, and both these strategies are intended to further brand identities and consumer identification. *Niche advertising* does this in specialized ways, by targeting subsections of the population, creating ads that address them specifically, and placing these in media that is thought to appeal to them. *Multicultural advertising* is one type of niche advertising; it targets ethnic and racial minorities through *in-culture* and *in-language* messaging. Beginning with Jews and blacks in the 1960s—groups that were some-

times reached by departments within general market agencies — and Hispanic and Asian consumers from the 1970s onward, multicultural agencies attempted to reach audiences from these groups through strategies that differed from mainstream advertising.² Yet large, multinational *general market* agencies, as they are called in industry parlance, have also sought to reconceive of the mainstream in ways that more centrally include minorities.

Defining Normal

Consumers identify with brands on many different levels, but I argue that race and ethnicity remain central to constructions of brand identity and consumer identification in the United States. As each U.S. Census provides new data about minority populations, marketing has followed suit and attempted to reach these consumers as directly as possible. Since the 2010 Census especially, the inclusion of minorities in general market advertisements in ways that are not disparaging or mocking has increased, allowing general market advertising executives to display their expertise in reaching African American, Hispanic, and Asian audiences. Using the corporate-friendly term *diversity*, they represent what marketers call the “new normal” as marked by difference, conceived in inoffensive and sometimes ambiguous ways. Another reason why race still matters so much can be found in a consideration of the people who make ads and how their own subjectivity intersects with client expectations to shape this work. The New York City Human Rights Commission and other entities have alleged that the American advertising industry has made minimal progress in diversifying its ranks in the past forty years. If this is the case, how does this predicament bear on creative work in multicultural advertising aimed at minorities, often made by minorities who are expected to embody the differences they represent? How might it play out in general market advertising, where a broader culture of whiteness pervades agencies and creative renderings of what is normal and taken as objective fact?

Over the course of this book I will argue that the American advertising industry, like much of corporate America, has been shaped by economic and political shifts during the past several decades. These shifts, marked by the civil rights era, multiculturalism, and currently the notion of a “post-racial” United States, have led to changes in discourse about ethnic and racial difference. Capitalism and race have long been intertwined, and the current iteration of this relationship is evident in corporate America’s ver-



I.1 Best Buy Super Bowl spot starring Amy Poehler and Jake Choi (2013).

sion of diversity, a formulation that recognizes ethnic and racial difference as decoupled from inequality and prejudice. Diversity, however, is anything but apolitical; it contains tensions that arise from geopolitical concerns of U.S. militarized conflict, relies on biopolitical ways of tracking migration and counting bodies and their consumer trends through the U.S. Census, and furthers capitalist networks that link individuals and industries in different locations. Such a conception of diversity furthers the culture of whiteness that pervades corporate America and shapes its notions of normal while it also makes invisible the work that normal does to obscure racism, discrimination, and prejudice.

The highly subjective concept of normal is differently understood by those who work in the corporate world of advertising and those on the outside looking in. One thing this book will show is how different normal can look depending on where one stands within corporate America, especially when it comes to race, ethnicity, and language. Elizabeth Povinelli has provocatively suggested that “the ordinary” does not simply exist; rather it is a projection of numerous statistical ordinaries.³ In advertising the notion of normal can be considered a collection of *aspirational* norms—how diversity looks in an ideal world and how that world can be rendered without looking like an advertisement. One of the processes I investigate is how certain values come to be considered normal and what the consequences are of having that version prevail in commercial media. It remains to be seen whether multicultural agencies that render ethnicity and language in highly specific ways or general market agencies that have sought to in-

crease the overall inclusion of nonwhite actors in their ads will win out, but the competition certainly seems to be on. The stakes are clear: there are over 100 million minorities in the United States, and reaching them through advertising has become a top priority. By looking at everyday interactions among advertising executives and between them and their clients I consider how agencies full of smart, educated people, many of whom are minorities or otherwise espouse liberal, progressive politics, can still make ads that are publicly called out as racist.

A broader aim of this book is to see the potential of advertising for furthering a politics of antiracism, even while the advertising industry's goals are of course very different. Millions of people labor for corporations worldwide, and academic critiques of them fall within a double bind of ethical complexities when offering an account of the positive and negative work they do.⁴ Unlike the investment bankers and hedge fund managers who epitomize corporate America in cities like New York, most advertising executives I met saw themselves as working in a different echelon of corporate America, one premised on the unending social promise of doing good creative, of empowerment through consumption, and of bringing humor, originality, and small bursts of fleeting pleasure. Although drawn from a very different context and literature, James Ferguson's "politics of the 'anti-'" is useful here. Ferguson argues that it is somewhat predictable for anthropologists and the Left to rail against neoliberal forms of governance but not suggest any viable alternatives. He urges anthropologists to think creatively and imagine the possibilities of recent transformations in government and spatial organization, to find the contemporary possibilities of what we actually do want to see.⁵

When considering Ferguson's challenge in this light, how can we think about commercial media in ways that do not immediately condemn it for its superficiality, its reductive imagery, and its potential to reproduce stereotypes? If we could see it doing something different, what would that look like? I realize that Ferguson's discussion about governmentality, aid organizations, and pro-poor activism in Africa takes on issues of a different order and purpose, but the questions he raises can be adapted to the subject of advertising: What would we like to see advertising do, if what it is doing now is not to the liking of critical scholars and media-literate consumers alike? Barnor Hesse has written, "It is not simply the postracial horizon that confounds the theoretical critique of racism, but it is also the concept of racism itself that confounds the critique. This is now the vital phase of the so-called race question."⁶ To apply this line of questioning to



1.2 Nissan Chinese American spot featuring in-language voice-over and Chinese American family (2013).

the advertising industry, I ask, What makes commercial communication racist? Is it exclusion based on certain characteristics? Is it discrimination? Or is it the unequal reliance on certain individuals for intellectual and white-collar labor that ultimately shapes social values at a societal level? Put another way, if advertising executives do not want to be racist, and the clients who fund the advertising do not want to be racist, and the media outlets do not want to be racist, then what would need to happen in corporate America to bring an antiracist agenda to the forefront of advertising development and production? My approach is to deconstruct the idea of normal as an objective social fact in advertising and consider how naturalized versions of race and ethnicity, what might be called normal, come to be. *Normal* is a term I heard routinely among ad executives in ways that rendered subjective notions of social life and difference as commonly held beliefs shared by all. Throughout this book, and especially in the conclusion, I return to the politics of the anti- to see what can be learned from analyzing the broader dynamics of capitalism, race, and media that govern the advertising industry and how economic and political ideologies that come to bear on cultural and linguistic choices ultimately constitute diversity.

Categories and Terms

By considering the advertisement from an industry perspective—that is, a fifteen- or thirty-second film, soundscape, or work of art that strives to tell a story, be entertaining, and be authentic—I consider what culture and language mean in the context of advertising diversity. I do so by focusing on Asian American advertising as a part of broader processes of commercial media production, representational strategies, and capitalist agendas. Asian American advertising is a product of more than the advertising industry; it emerged from the “new immigration” that occurred after 1965, the postwar rise in consumer and youth culture, multicultural ideologies that celebrate heritage languages and culture, and a corporate world that welcomes racial minorities who are willing to do cultural and linguistic work for hire. That Asian Americans—especially the five largest groups, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, and, on the West Coast and Hawai‘i, Japanese and Pacific Islanders—constitute a viewing public is a claim that many general market advertising agency executives find spurious. Numbering just over 15 million (alone or in combination) in the 2010 U.S. Census, they constitute barely 5 percent of the total U.S. population. Unlike Latinos, who at 50 million constitute 17 percent of the overall U.S. population and have at least two full-time television channels that feature original content, Asian Americans have a handful of satellite television channels that pull content from Asia, weekly program blocks on local access cable, and various print media with relatively small circulations. So why bother to target them at all? If we are to believe the ad executives who pitch their services to potential clients, it is because this group is believed to have the highest purchasing power and per capita income of any group, including whites. These statistics have been qualified and even contested, as I discuss in chapter 1, but remain valid and apparently quite influential.⁷ Major challenges, however, oppose these enticing statistics. With several different languages and orthographies, not to mention nationalities, religions, and colonial pasts, the Latino advertising approach of using one variety of Spanish and downplaying ethnonational differences simply does not work for Asian American advertising. Rather, Asian American advertising continually grapples with how to create and produce messaging aimed at specific Asian ethnic groups that is broad enough to index the category of Asian American.

The ethnographic examples presented in this book are drawn from my fieldwork in advertising agencies. In most cases, unless I am describing



I.3 Mercedes-Benz in-culture and in-language print ad for Filipino American consumers (2004).

the history of a specific agency (mostly in chapter 1), and in sections of this introduction, chapter 1, and the conclusion in which I discuss the growth and development of marketing approaches to diverse audiences, I have changed the names of people, agencies, and brands. Real names generally include a surname as well as a title, to differentiate them from pseudonyms. All of the excerpts from meetings and creative conversations are from one Asian American agency based in New York City, and interviews and observations are drawn from fieldwork in Asian American agencies in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, as well as general market agencies in New York. Most of these Asian American agencies are founded, owned, or operated by individuals of Asian descent; some are currently owned by a larger media conglomerate. The individuals who develop and produce these ads are predominantly Asian American and perform this category in a variety of ways for their clients, for their colleagues in the advertising industry, and among themselves. Their performances of affect and identity offer a glimpse into the minute negotiations of creative concepts, intricate choices about language varieties and translations, and finer aspects of casting individuals and directing them in print, television, and radio ads. Taken together, the corporate work of commercial media production and the representations they yield provide a window into intersections of race, capitalism, and the products of its labor in the twenty-first-century United States.

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Before I elaborate on the theoretical concerns of the book, I offer glosses on some of my terminology. *Ethnoracial* or *ethnorace* combines the terms *ethnicity*—referring to differences of nationality, religion, language, and cultural heritage that can be defined by institutions such as the U.S. Census and put into social practice, or by communities and societies in ways that may or may not eventually get recognized by more formal entities—and *race*, referring to U.S. Census categories under which ethnicities are grouped.⁸ These are not mutually exclusive and sometimes overlap; for example, the category Hispanic can be classified as white Hispanic or non-white Hispanic. With the Asian category, there is less ambiguity about race, as Asian constitutes a single racial category with various ethnicities as well as “Other Asian” listed within it. The term *ethnorace* was not prevalent in advertising agencies; they preferred *ethnicity*, which they used to refer to specific groups, whether racial (i.e., Asian or Asian American) or ethnic (Chinese, Korean, etc.), or the term *diversity* when referring to social difference in general. Usually *diversity* indexed differences associated with race or ethnicity, but it could also be used to refer to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender) issues, differently abled individuals, and other underrepresented groups. In those contexts where ethnoracial difference was made explicit—usually in multicultural advertising—advertising executives most commonly used the terms *African American* or *black* for populations living in the United States, *African* for recent immigrants from North Africa, *Hispanic* for Latino or Chicano, and *Asian* for Asian American (a term they also used to talk about Asia the continent).

Within the category of Asian, ad executives generally dropped the “American” and simply referred to groups as Chinese, Vietnamese, and so on. They also used the U.S. Census-derived term *Asian Indian* for Indians and did not include individuals from other regions of the subcontinent in this designation. I retain their usage when quoting or paraphrasing but also use the more common academic terms in my analysis, such as *Asian American* and *South Asian American* when addressing categories broader than just Indians. Terms such as *corporate America* and *whiteness* are defined in contexts of use, and their use is not negative; rather they are intended to conjure a broader setting and collection of practices in which advertising is developed and produced. Finally, I use the term *racialization* to consider how certain social meanings become linked to particular racial categories and how these meanings are vetted and sometimes transformed in everyday encounters. I look at this process in activities such as creative brainstorming, in which ad executives conjure particular cultural attributes

of Asian Americans, as well as in interactions between ad executives and their clients in which they embody and perform this category as a marker of authenticity and legitimacy for the work they produce. Racialization in the advertising industry, as in other sectors of corporate America, operates such that individuals act as diversity experts based on their ethnic and linguistic heritage rather than formal skills or knowledge they may have acquired. This wide range of terms signals the separate but overlapping agendas of advertising executives and clients, as well as my own as an academic, of putting into words the work of advertising.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

Several literatures have influenced my cultural and linguistic anthropological conception of these ideas, including critical race theory, critical ethnic studies, Asian American studies, and media studies. One of the approaches I foreground in particular is to bring critical ethnic studies into conversation with linguistic anthropology. I am certainly not the first to do this, as Jane Hill, Michael Silverstein, Bonnie Urciuoli, and others have talked about language and racialization in U.S. media. My goal is to use these literatures to analyze the ethnographic examples that follow. There are admittedly some stumbling blocks to this approach; most apparent are method and scale. Linguistic anthropology tends to focus on microlevel interactions, while critical ethnic studies tends to apply broader theoretical claims in the analysis of texts (literature, film, television, advertisements, etc.). An ethnographically informed analysis of the development and production of ethnoracial representation is bound to be less neat and orderly than analyzing completed texts. Bridging scales of inquiry is an ongoing challenge, and the book accordingly toggles between different levels of analysis.

Assemblages of Diversity

A central concept I employ to do this bridging is “the assemblage,” beginning with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s introduction of the concept and the numerous ways it has been analyzed and applied in the years after its introduction in the mid-1990s. Deleuze and Guattari describe the assemblage as a “field of multiple maneuvers,” as temporally achieved and open to transformation as it endures and circulates. They emphasize the “expressive potential” of the assemblage in ways that can accommodate

change without structuralist causality.⁹ Assemblage is a useful analytic to understand advertising development and production as spatially and temporally delimited events. The concept allows me to illustrate the intersection of competing interests and vantage points at a particular moment in American history, global capitalism, and communication. Ben Anderson explains that assemblages are “provisional unities that may themselves have ‘emergent’ or ‘complex’ causality that is irreducible to their component parts,” while Jasbir Puar develops the Deleuzian notion of an event as “an assemblage of spatial and temporal intensities, coming together, dispersing, reconverging.”¹⁰

The assemblage has been productively used in a number of disciplines; for anthropology, George Marcus and Erkan Saka suggest that it holds great potential as well as challenges for ethnography precisely because it allows for the discussion of social formations that do not endure across time and space. Such an application is tricky for ethnography because how assemblages come into being and how they are perceived can be somewhat open-ended. Marcus and Saka write, “Assemblages are thus finite, but they have no specific or distinctive life-span; they do not have a specific temporality. Furthermore, assemblages have no essence. . . . The assemblage is productive of difference (non-repetition). It is the ground and primary expression of all qualitative difference.”¹¹ Extending this conception of assemblage, which seems quite immaterial, I am interested in the materiality of assemblages and their construction. I use the concept to consider how temporally and spatially circumscribed meanings of race and ethnicity intersect with semiotics of language use and visual culture, and the ways these are vetted between entities and produced and circulated through media. I use the concept to focus on the actual assembling that happens in the advertising process, beginning with how certain types of politically informed demographic data collected by the U.S. Census are used to justify the creation of certain types of marketing efforts, like multicultural marketing; how these inform planning and strategy of an ad campaign; and the way a particular ad looks, sounds, and feels.¹²

While most formulations of assemblage do not attend explicitly to language, at least not beyond referential meanings, I would like to extend assemblage to bring together different levels of signification. Assemblages also allow me to examine finer aspects of advertising messages vis-à-vis bodies, sound, and affect that are all carefully selected, vetted, and finalized and how ethnoracial difference is managed in media contexts toward the end of profitability. My approach is semiotic, giving attention to both

the linguistic and the material dimensions of the advertising process. Jillian Cavanaugh and I have termed this emergent field *language materiality* to draw attention to the material in linguistic signification, a dimension that had been somewhat overlooked in discussions of language and context, political economy, and language ideology.¹³ Elsewhere I have looked at the power of commodities as they interact with narrative and their shifting social meanings as they circulate, as well as at broader intersections between language and materiality, with special attention to authenticity and value.¹⁴ By *materiality* I mean the properties of ads beyond language or the commodities they may feature. I am interested in sound and substrate, in thinking how elements interact as qualities and properties to assemble into something social that would index diversity. In other words, I do not want to reduce my concern with materiality to a reification of ourselves as “subject, social relations, or society,” as Daniel Miller has cautioned.¹⁵ This will be carried out in a number of ways, including explorations of linguistic materiality, or considering language in the same frame as the material dimensions of advertising, such as how language and culture are objectified, how language takes on material qualities in advertisements, and the ways metalevel creative and production activities enable particular types of semiotic work. These concepts allow me to bring to life this material and discursive world and enable me to more fully illustrate contests of expertise, authenticity, and ethnoracial assemblages.

Thus my agenda for using the concept of assemblage is threefold: first, to demonstrate spatial, temporal, and semiotic contingency in ways that historicize and make politically relevant the cultural and linguistic ideologies that underpin advertising development and production; second, to investigate modes of production and questions of circulation, including the politics of creative concepts, trademark, ownership, and reinscription; third, because reception is not limited to any one semiotic plane, to consider the linguistic, visual, material, affective, and sensorial dimensions of developing and producing an advertisement in ways that can accommodate all these modalities. Considering diversity in advertisements as ethnoracial assemblages offers insight into why ads look and sound the way they do, how they circulate, and the intended and unexpected ways they are consumed. The creation of assemblages can be seen in the everyday work of advertising development and production, as well as in negotiations and contests about representation. These can take the form of broader cultural concepts and ideological assertions about particular ethnoracial groups, such as that Chinese Americans value kinship or that

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I.4 MassMutual Asian Indian American in-culture print ad featuring a Diwali rangoli (colored powder) design (2011).

South Asian Americans tend to rely on the recommendations of their social networks for certain goods and services. They can also be found in the minutiae of semiotic details, such as the wording of the ad, the accent in a voice-over, and the precise look of the visuals. How assemblages are interpreted temporally and spatially by different parties underscores their contingent nature and the work they do to further particular notions of racialization, antiracism, activism, and social transformation.

Diversity and Capitalism

“Diversity is not to be good, diversity is not to be fair, diversity is not to be liked by different people. Diversity is business. And if you want to conduct business with people, you can’t ignore them. You can’t insult them. You can’t talk down to them. You’ve got to talk **to** them,” Douglass Alligood, one of the first African American men to work in general market advertising, said to me.¹⁶ As Mr. Alligood’s decades of experience have shown him, the importance of diversity has steadily increased since the 1960s, and the climate of corporate America has shifted to accommodate diversity in light of economic and political shifts. Neoliberal ideologies of capitalism shape how differences of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality are given market values and have become the basis of profit-making and mass-mediated representation in the new economy.¹⁷ The theorist Michel Callon, with others, has remarked that “value” is not merely an economic fact but is also a social achievement, contingent on cultural as well as material processes.¹⁸ I extend this inquiry to look at what types of economic as well as social values are accomplished through cultural, material, and language-based processes, attending especially to the social and linguistic interactions and actors that underpin them. I build from Kris Olds and Nigel Thrift, who have identified “cultural circuits of capital” as “able to produce constant discursive-cum-practical change, with considerable power to mold the content of people’s work lives as well as produce more general cultural models” that affect society on a broader level.¹⁹ In this book I look at how cultural circuits of *capitalism*—as evident in certain profit-generating enterprises such as advertising and marketing—are involved in the production and circulation of racial and ethnic formations. In my first book, *Desi Land*, I started to look at how broader movements of capital and technology shape everyday lives, and I have since turned my attention to advertising as a different set of cultural and linguistic formations that have also emerged from new configurations of capital.

Focusing on the work of capitalist businesses rather than the movement of capital itself allows me to analyze the production of racial and ethnic meanings in a variety of commercial media projects and how they affect the lives of individuals involved in their making. Capitalism has relied on changing desires and needs as much as technology, and here we see both at work. What is useful about anthropological approaches to the new economy is that they offer counterpoints to economic analyses that naturalize the forces of the market and instead investigate the social and cultural relationships that underpin them.²⁰ As part of her ethnographic study of capitalism, Karen Ho focused on how the experiences of investment bankers are “thoroughly informed by cultural values and the social relations of race, gender, and class.” Her agenda was to “portray a Wall Street shot through with embodiment, color, and particularity.”²¹ Likewise I aim to capture how notions of diversity are gauged through a capitalist lens and how social meanings about ethnicity and race emerge from capitalism as well.

The ideology of neoliberalism has been shown to bring about numerous changes in how we assess value, accomplishment, productivity, and social meanings in corporate contexts. Neoliberalism is an economic model in which markets determine value with minimal state intervention. David Harvey has traced linkages between deregulation and loan-making practices to account for the rise of the market as a force of social power and how market forces can determine the value of individuals and their work.²² Within this realm, I am most concerned with a dynamic that Povinelli has identified as follows: “Neoliberalism works by colonizing the field of value—reducing all social values to one market value—exhausting alternative social projects by denying them sustenance.”²³ If diversity has a market value, as Mr. Allgood and numerous others in advertising suggested, then representing it becomes a competitive arena. The notion that the “best” approaches will be rewarded by market forces underscores that “neoliberalism is not a thing but a pragmatic concept—a tool—in a field of multiple maneuvers among those who support and benefit from it, those who support and suffer from it, and those who oppose it and benefit from it nevertheless.”²⁴

Race is instrumental to capitalism, as Manning Marable and others have argued, such that “racialized capitalism” draws attention to the specific ways that labor is parsed according to racial difference.²⁵ Neoliberalism and racialized capitalism shape not only financial decisions but also how people talk about and represent race. Neoliberal ideologies are evident in

how diversity is conceived and operationalized in corporate work environments and in creative work about ethnoracial difference. Here assemblage illustrates how diversity is created, circulated, and reformulated for commercial purposes, but it alone does not tell the story. Affect is very important as well, and the affective labor of talk and embodiment are integral to how certain agendas get accomplished while others are not as easily executed. Bonnie McElhinny elaborates on “the new regimes of self associated with neoliberalism,” including adults being responsible, autonomous, self-sufficient, and entrepreneurial.²⁶ Such processes are “multimodal” and span different domains of interaction;²⁷ they affect how people are expected to communicate, the stances they take, and how they challenge or accommodate one another communicatively. I am interested in the “soft” or “people” skills that are conveyed through affective performance and participation in shared modalities of interaction.²⁸

Diversity as Qualisign

Ethnoracial assemblages and performances of affect shape diversity in corporate America, but diversity remains elusive as a concept. Sara Ahmed has written that diversity is difficult to pin down because it has no clear referent; it does not point us to “a shared object that exists outside of speech or even necessarily create something that can be shared.”²⁹ Urciuoli rightly observes that people mean different things when they use the terms *diversity* and *culture* and that the same words have been recruited into different registers that each glosses differently.³⁰ Her point is that they may seem interchangeable but actually can index different meanings and histories. Given this elusiveness, I find qualisigns helpful in understanding how referents are defined and meanings are generated in ways that take on normative values. In her widely cited work on the Gawa society, Nancy Munn conceives of value making in terms of qualisigns of value. Building on the semiotic approach of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, Munn identifies qualisigns as useful because “they exhibit something other than themselves *in* themselves.”³¹ Qualisigns are iconic signs, in that they bear a resemblance to that which they represent, yet they only signify when “bundled” with material forms to convey socially relevant meanings. Munn masterfully illustrates how the Gawa community “creates itself as the *agent of its own value creation*.”³² Her analysis relies on both material and linguistic elements to illustrate qualisigns, and in this book I consider how diversity can act as a qualisign of linguistic materiality. Di-

versity is bundled with other qualisigns of race, ethnicity, or simply non-whiteness, as well as with certain uses of language varieties, accents, and other signs, to make meaning in specific ways. Indeed even individuals can be regarded as qualisigns of diversity, embodying the ethnoracial difference for which they are valued.

What constitutes diversity in corporate America, who embodies it, and what work it is imagined to do among ad executives and in advertisements draw attention to the complexity of this concept as well as how this complexity can be reduced to better fit corporate ideals and norms. Analogous to Ahmed's observation that nonwhite individuals in university settings are told, "You *already* embody diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with color," I found a similar management of ethnoracial difference in ad agencies.³³ Corporate America is a rarified world with numerous barriers to access. Physically protected and ideologically guarded, it discloses little about its composition or practices unless required by regulatory agencies. It offers an illustration of George Lipsitz's insightful argument about how meanings of race are "enacted physically in actual places . . . [and how] race is produced by space, that it takes places of racism to take place."³⁴ By equating what is normal to whiteness, advertising worlds remain a largely white space in which diversity must conform to those norms of whiteness.

When marked ethnoracial difference is acknowledged and represented in advertising, it is done in consultation with a minority voice, either by someone compelled to serve as an expert on that group or with the assistance of a multicultural agency. At some agencies there was an individual "in charge of Diversity and Inclusion,"³⁵ while at others there were "Diversity Councils." Diversity was formalized to the extent that I was often told to contact certain individuals—the head of a diversity council, the head of a unit responsible for diversity research—to learn more about a new division explicitly focused on culture. In this marked form, diversity was rarely thought to be something the average ad executive could address. Rarely was it thought to simply be part of the everyday fabric of the agency as an institution; no one ever suggested that I contact "anyone" about diversity, because it lay outside the normal activities and environment of the agency. Such a conception keeps in place a "white spatial imaginary," to use Lipsitz's term, and diversity exists outside of it. The way token minorities factor into creative work is very important, something I discuss in chapter 3, regarding how claims of expertise are made and challenged about creative strategy. Often one or two minority individuals were assembled as ad hoc

focus groups or asked to comment outside of their areas of training and expertise, solely on the grounds of their race and ethnicity.

These token few notwithstanding, whiteness thrives in American advertising in large part because it is embedded in the notion of a “color-blind” or “postracial” America. Evelyn Alsultany notes that the postrace idea began after the Civil War, as a way of marking progress since the times of slavery. Some mark the election of Barack Obama as America’s first black president as the ascension of postrace, but arguably multiculturalism did some of this work as well, as Jodi Melamed has outlined in her concept of “neoliberal multiculturalism.”³⁶ These are admittedly different terms, but they seem to accomplish similar ends. In studying the production and circulation of marketable images of Latinos, Arlene Davila identifies the importance of color blindness to the rise of neoliberalism and its role in constricting dialogues about inequality.³⁷ Instead there is a greater emphasis on marketability and which aspects of diversity may prove to be profitable. Indeed, as Davila argues, “the use of sympathetic representations to create the illusion of a postracial era is how racism operates now, through a denial of itself.”³⁸ White characters remain at the “center of consciousness,” and minorities are respectfully included in ways that do not threaten U.S. exceptionalism.³⁹

In this sense corporate America has long been coded as a white place, one that does certain work in openly addressing racism while perpetuating it in new packaging. Similar to Daniel Hosang’s argument that whiteness stays dominant in state politics because white politicians don’t speak “as whites” but present themselves as racially unmarked, so too is whiteness in American advertising racially unmarked.⁴⁰ Critical race theorists have noted the centrality of blackness and black bodies to this ascension of whiteness as the mark of modernity.⁴¹ Stuart Hall has cautioned against such essentializing, as it “naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic.”⁴² Yet this approach actually works best in advertising because ad executives want to represent difference with as little controversy as possible. The concept of diversity here leads to a departure from more critical terms by acting as shorthand for inclusion, and confrontations about racism are avoided at all costs.⁴³ This approach is in line with what the linguistic anthropologist Jane Hill has so deftly illustrated in *The Everyday Language of White Racism* and the sociologist Edward Bonilla-Silva has contended in *Racism without Racists*. Racist ideologies and discourse are couched in the

language of joking, humor, or simply business, and because no one intends to be racist, they are absolved of any offense they may inadvertently create. Allegations of racism are downplayed as misunderstandings about good-natured fun or are counterbalanced with evidence of nonracist work and collegiality with minority coworkers. Especially because racism in ads, as well as in the advertising industry, incurs negative publicity, clients work hard to steer clear of anything that would cross the line from being “edgy” to being “controversial,” as ad executives explained it. I present evidence of these dynamics in the development and production of the creative work of ads and in interactions between Asian American ad executives and their corporate clients to illustrate how racialization happens and how norms of whiteness are maintained, despite good intentions to respect ethnoracial difference and minority individuals.

The reduction of racism to the figure of the racist allows structural and institutional forms to become obscured.⁴⁴ Having met over two hundred industry professionals during the course of this project, I did not find a single one who performed the role of racist openly. I did, however, find environments pervaded by whiteness and the use of the term *diversity* to emphasize anything outside of it. The type of political correctness that emerged alongside multicultural agendas was quickly defined as oppressive and even absurd, and color blindness was an ideology that ad executives in general market agencies seemed to embrace. In my view interrogating whiteness as economic and social advantage is quite different from condemning white people. As long as racialized spaces are maintained—in this case, diversity being treated as a special interest—single actors do not need to decide to discriminate in order for racism to persist or, as Lipsitz puts it, for “space to be racialized and race to be spatialized.”⁴⁵ In such spaces, as Hall and others point out, liberal-minded individuals may “inadvertently participate” in reproducing racism.⁴⁶ Multicultural advertising executives participated in this cheerful conception of diversity but were not always able to avoid racist unpleasantness. In chapters 1 and 3 I consider how advertising executives manage their affect to preserve the pleasant tone of diversity, regardless of racial or ethnic tension. Performing alacrity in the face of racist jokes, reframing a client’s cultural ignorance as an educational moment, and embodying the difference they are asked to produce in their ads are just a few of the affective strategies I will discuss.

Biopolitics and Racial Naturalization

Dimensions of the ethnoracial assemblage that I am especially attuned to are the geopolitics of how Asia and, by extension, Asian America has shifted and continues to change according to U.S. global policy and militarized conflicts and the biopolitics of how the U.S. population is divided and counted by a Census Bureau that redefines categories of race and ethnicity as it sees fit. The ways these processes are influenced by advertising and marketing, and the reciprocal effect the latter may have on the former, are both relevant to making sense of ethnoracial assemblages. Biopolitics, in bare terms, refers to intersections of human life and politics. Foucault's writings about biopolitics and biopower have been instrumental to understanding governance, knowledge production, new technologies, genetics, and other areas that "illuminate the relations between life and politics."⁴⁷ Census Bureau categories are deeply influenced by social and political formations, as evidenced by the fact that immigrants from Asia had lived in America for over a century before the term *Asian American* came into parlance. Biopolitics evident in the counting and categorizing of the U.S. population is the foundation for multicultural advertising, and Asian American ad executives point to census figures such as income and population concentrations to further their own work. Two loosely connected questions of biopolitics emerge from these dynamics and are considered in various portions of the book: How might the ways advertising executives conceive of groups and populations shape these categories on upcoming U.S. Census counts? How do forms of digital surveillance, enabled by smartphones and other GPS technologies, track the physical bodies of Asian American consumers as they move through space and in particular places?

Much has been written since Henri Lefebvre theorized that individuals manipulate and interact with space, represent it, and code certain spaces with socially constructed meanings.⁴⁸ Neil Smith and Setha Low discuss the restructuring of public space in the twenty-first century;⁴⁹ arguing that public space has been reprioritized, they build on Lefebvre and investigate what is currently encompassed in what he termed the "production of space" to consider how people experience spaces. In a different vein, Sharon Zukin has discussed the social spaces of shopping and how consumption opportunities transformed public space.⁵⁰ Developing strategies based on how they imagine consumers will interact with signs, digital promotions, and experiential, place-based marketing, advertising agencies stand to further transform places as well as the actual spaces through

which branded messaging can circulate. Spatial concerns of managing technologies of power and production are also important, in that they create new ways of linking space with consumption practices, ways that ultimately aid in more effective marketing strategies in areas densely populated by Asian Americans.

Contests of who is best able to represent America's diversity are evident throughout the book, especially in the interactions Asian American advertising executives have with their clients and how they defend their work in an industry that does not uniformly see the value in their targeted approach. Like Mr. Alligood, numerous ad executives were quite blunt about diversity being about money and that displaying diversity in advertisements and within agencies was about generating an awareness that is called for in the contemporary United States. Displaying expertise about diversity has accordingly become a site of intense competition. Multicultural advertising, consisting of agencies catering to Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinos, competes for clients with general market advertising. Especially since the 2010 Census, these large agencies have become far more explicit about their ability to offer clients "cross-cultural" and "total market" strategies that address diversity; I discuss their specific approaches further in chapter 4 and the conclusion.

How individuals are counted, grouped, and characterized as consumers with particular education and income levels, as well as their "purchasing power," suggests how biopolitics works in advertising and how it shapes racial and ethnic assemblages. Here my goal is consistent with the argument of Inderpal Grewal, who connects biopolitics, or ways of classifying and organizing bodies, with the geopolitics of how national boundaries are drawn.⁵¹ She and others contend that American state imperialism has been replaced by globally decentralized sources of power and that America has used international and domestic practices of exceptionalism as a way to circumvent the policies to which it holds others accountable while it continues to wield its influence through regimes and technologies. I am interested in how American advertising conceptualizes life in the United States, how that conceptualization is accounted for and tallied in the census, and how these are put together for capitalist production and consumption. Grewal shows that these configurations have a major effect on diasporas and consumer culture, and this book similarly offers analytic lenses through which to understand how ad executives invoke Asia, how Asians in America are grouped and enumerated in the census, and how these contribute to knowledge production about difference in agencies and in ad-



I.5 “SF Hep B Free,” a public health campaign aimed at Asian Americans for preventative hepatitis B screening (2010).

vertisements. While most campaigns target a single Asian ethnic group at a time, also significant are the ways individual executions are grouped together by agencies to constitute the broader category of Asian American.

I view aspects of Asian American creative work as well as professional interactions through the framework of racial naturalization. As I have explained elsewhere, racial naturalization refers to the work advertising does to transform Asian Americans from “model minorities” to “model consumers” and the use of consumerism to make claims of legitimacy and national belonging.⁵² Once existing outside the bounds of the nation-state, as Claire Jean Kim illustrates, Asian Americans are slowly and selectively being brought into the fold of U.S. citizenry as model consumers who are no longer “forever foreigners,” to use Mia Tuan’s term.⁵³ Racial naturalization involves the conversion of social and cultural capital into economic forms, a process Pnina Werbner has illustrated with Asians in the United Kingdom and Junaid Rana with Asians in the United States.⁵⁴ Devon Carbado has used the term *racial naturalization* in a legal context to identify which paths to citizenship provide the greatest chances at legal naturalization. In his exposition of this concept, he grapples with “why we might conceptualize racism as a naturalization process” and how racism is a “technology of racialization; indeed it is precisely through racism that our American racial

identities come into being . . . socially situating and defining us as *Americans*.”⁵⁵ Carbado’s conception, that we are not “overdetermined by racism” but that “racism is already a part of America’s social script, a script within which there are specific racial roles or identities for all of us,” is helpful to keep in mind inasmuch as corporate America is steeped in this ideology, especially in terms of who is an expert about diversity.⁵⁶ In Asian American advertising this is largely accomplished through the work that ad executives do as they transform Census Bureau categories into socially meaningful representations. Signifying Asian American, a category encompassing over a dozen nations whose unifying language is English, is an exercise in biopolitical and spatial labor that realizes Asian Americans as consumers with a presence in geographically precise “designated market areas.”

Still these specific racial roles or identities are open to remaking, and this sort of refashioning is precisely what advertising aims to undertake in its creative work and, to some extent, in agencies. Evidence of this contestation and shift can be found in the data I discuss that illustrate differences among ad agencies and between them and clients in interactional styles, notions of expertise, and the labor that produces capital via assemblages of ethnoracial diversity. Such conditions make the politics of the anti-, especially antiracism, so much harder to struggle against—a point that Barnor Hesse, David Goldberg, and others have noted about capital’s ability to obscure racism and in some ways subsume it.⁵⁷ Throughout the book I point out how assemblages work to illustrate both racist and antiracist positions in this struggle and leave open possibilities for change. I present numerous ethnographically illustrated discussions about how corporate America prioritizes, conceives of, and expends capital to attempt to shape assemblages of ethnoracial diversity. The work that production does in making certain imagery seem normal and natural, how abstract concepts like the post-racial are rendered in advertising, and how immigrants with particular social and cultural capital find their way into the upper echelons of corporate America connect the makers of ads with the representational work they do.

Advertising, Media, and Race

Anthropological approaches to media production and consumption have created a rich field of theoretical concepts and ethnographic particularities that dialectically link ideologies and actions of producers and the viewing practices of audiences. “Media worlds,” as Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod,

and Brian Larkin have conceptualized, underscore the dynamic possibilities of media production, among other things, in a variety of industries and locales.⁵⁸ Media worlds consist of contexts of consumption, in which audiences engage with various media in ways that affect their practices of identity making, community, and social affiliations.⁵⁹ Language ideologies, varieties, and uses, which I discuss further in chapter 2, are also central to media consumption, and may be reshaped in turn as certain mediated language circulates.⁶⁰ Studies of media consumption are certainly relevant to considerations of how audiences are imagined and how content is developed for them. Ethnographies of media production, such as Barry Dornfeld's study of public television production in the United States, Jeff Himpele's work on Bolivian television production, and Tejaswini Ganti's ethnography of the Bollywood film industry, chronicle how audiences are imagined in the quotidian rituals and practices of directors, actors, agents, and distributors.⁶¹ These and other works underscore that ethnographically examining media production is an excellent complement to media consumption studies because it brings to light processes of development and contestation that are usually obscured in the final product.

A rich body of ethnographic studies of advertising has illustrated contests between agencies, clients, and consumers. Centered on questions of globalization in China, Japan, India, and Sri Lanka, these studies provide illustrative and varied evidence of how ad executives imagine audiences in these nations, and I draw on them throughout the book.⁶² In the Western Hemisphere, Daniel Miller's analysis of advertising and globalization in Trinidad and Arlene Davila's work with Latinos in the United States and transnationally across the Americas provide the most relevant benchmarks for my study. Identifying and investigating the emergence and growth of Latinos in advertising, also called Hispanic advertising, Davila outlines the cornerstones of multicultural advertising. Her first study of advertising, *Latinos Inc.*, captured important dynamics of race and capitalism that I build on and extend. As these works illustrate, the advertising industry has a long history of creating problems that can be fixed only with a particular product or service.⁶³ And like other media, advertisements acquire a life of their own once created and put into circulation, especially when they are available for multiple viewings, comments, and discussions on YouTube and other Internet-based platforms. Anthropological approaches to commodities and consumption are also part of this broader discussion, as they are intimately linked to the development and production of brand iden-

tity that I focus on in this book.⁶⁴ This generative feedback loop includes the interactions of clients with the executives they commission to develop identities for their brands through ads, placement in media (usually a combination of broadcast, digital, and other platforms), and responses from consumers.

In an era when media has long been mobile, considering its impact in diasporas creates additional possibilities and opportunities for circulation and consumption. Diasporic media consumption, a topic I have explored in depth in another research context, is certainly important here.⁶⁵ Hamid Naficy's pathbreaking work on Iranians in Los Angeles, Louisa Schein's work among Hmong in Minneapolis, and my earlier work with South Asian American teenagers in Silicon Valley and New York City all show the generative possibilities for identity and community-making practices.⁶⁶ In discussing the imaginative potential of media in Asian diasporas, Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein draw attention to how media creates certain types of mobility. Mankekar asks how, even when people are not mobile themselves, media might be transportive and connective and engender options beyond the context of consumption.⁶⁷ This is a trope that Asian American advertising executives have employed in a number of ways by indexing homelands, suggesting possibilities of lives lived elsewhere, and using the affective force of longing for homeland and belonging. At the same time these ad executives also consider the simultaneity of media as a site of mobility and the experiential potential of goods and services to bring people together through shared media and communicative platforms. These ways of imagining Asian American consumers offer a response to Mankekar and Schein's question, quite relevant here, "How do these discontinuous histories inflect cultural productions by Asians themselves?"⁶⁸ As I discuss in chapter 1, money transfer companies, insurance, automobiles, and other products offer agentive possibilities for Asians in the United States to bring about change in Asia. They do so despite the wide-ranging national, ethnic, and linguistic heritages of their imagined audiences, by targeting ethnic groups either individually or as a collective, based on data and knowledge about economic and social trends.

In this sense, a point of exploration in this book is the way the migration experience is recast in terms of marketability and how Asian Americans' nostalgia and sentiment about the nations they have left are reflected in their lifestyle, success, and accomplishment as consumers. Mankekar and Schein complicate representations of Asian men and women in a wide range of American and transnational contexts. Their distinctly American

focus, like mine, brings to the fore central questions of what makes something “Asian” in America. Is it the rendering of Asian identities and subjectivities, consumption of culture, use of language, or something else? Advertising is explicitly created with intended audiences in mind, and advertising’s main purpose is to convey messages to consumers in ways that create identification with brands. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat remind us that media making is a social and intellectual project, but always open-ended and susceptible to alternative readings.⁶⁹ Advertisements, like documents, acquire a life of their own once created and put into circulation. Asian American advertising capitalizes on these imaginings and conceptualizes diaspora and nation, as well as the promise of movement and mobility, in its creative concepts, artwork, and advertising copy. I examine this dynamic keeping in mind Fred Myers’s approach, which draws attention to the materiality of subjects and objects “in situations in which human beings attempt to secure or stabilize—or limit—the flow of culture, to turn culture into property form.”⁷⁰ Myers describes Aboriginal painting as a material and social practice, and, with very different objectives, I consider advertising as a material, linguistic, and capitalist process with social impact and implications.

My ethnographic approach to advertising development and production allows me to examine not only representations such as advertisements but also linkages between these and the identities of the advertising executives involved in their creation. Deborah Poole identified how anthropologists’ engagements with visual technologies were largely in “the affective register of suspicion,” especially with regard to race.⁷¹ Remarking largely on early visual anthropological work and its attention to the indigenous subject, Poole’s point nonetheless resonates with my project of interrogating commercial media for reproducing certain types of racism through representational and discursive strategies. Such a critique is well established with regard to Asian Americans in a variety of media, including Hollywood, television, and advertising. For instance, regarding Asian Americans in the media, Kent Ono and Vincent Pham ask, “Why do we still see racist media in a post-race society?”⁷² They draw attention to the ways historical representations have “residual effects” still in play, a contention that others who have looked at correlations between immigration policy and public representations have also made. In a related media context, Rana has noted that the work of racializing Islam largely occurs through social identifications—bodily comportment, dress, gender, and sexuality—and that these are depicted in media.⁷³

An important body of critical work analyzing textual representations of race, as well as Asian Americans in media, underpins my observations and analyses. I have found helpful critical cultural studies and critical ethnic studies approaches, as suggested by Stam and Shohat and executed by Al-sultany and others, who have argued that whether images are “good” or “bad” matters less than the ideological work they do. For instance, Al-sultany illustrates how television dramas play an important role in post-race racism by including images that could be construed as good or bad.⁷⁴ Showing a Muslim as “good,” for instance, does not signal the end of discrimination against American Muslims. Rather, good or bad image analysis can slip into moralism and draw attention away from the complexities of the ideological work a particular representation may do. In a different media context, Judith Farquhar notes how aware media consumers are about the reductionism of images, and ad executives credit their audiences with similarly discerning abilities.⁷⁵ They think long and hard about which kind of representation and message will accomplish their desired ends and how to make Asian Americans model consumers for certain brands. Moreover their claims are carefully calibrated to match what they believe will resonate best with their consumers.⁷⁶

Textual analyses of advertising that consider racial representation, especially the prevalence of the model minority stereotype, have shown that this image continues to be relevant in American advertising in ways that can further the problematic dynamic established between Asian Americans and other minority groups in the original formulations of this stereotype.⁷⁷ What is intriguing about this current turn of racial representation is that it makes far more sense economically to depict upwardly mobile Asian Americans alongside, rather than in opposition to, Latinos and African Americans. Multicultural advertising relies on all three of these groups coexisting happily in consumer culture, and purchasing power trumps race as a measure of differentiation. In other words, good minorities are good consumers. In fact wealthy consumers of all races are valued. As I noted earlier, understanding media production is illustrative in its own right, and there is great value in understanding the process of producing something that ultimately stirs controversy, as the backstory may not be as straightforward as the end product would suggest. Foregrounding these emergent themes, *Advertising Diversity* offers a look at what commercial media production can tell us about the perpetuation of racism, the ways new immigrants create and negotiate race and ethnicity

in corporate America, and the discursive and material ways these things are accomplished.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

In what is perhaps only partially a tongue-in-cheek branding statement, Ulf Hannerz has suggested that anthropology's tagline should be "Diversity Is Our Business" and that "a study of diversity remains the best antidote to unthinking ethnocentrism."⁷⁸ Yet diversity seems to be everyone's business these days. The March 2013 issue of the *Atlantic* magazine featured a cover story that garnered much buzz among anthropologists of advertising, both inside the academy and in the industry. It featured Red, one of several prominent firms that undertake ethnographic research for hire. The article, as well as other recent accounts, suggests that it is a good time to be an anthropologist in advertising. Anthropology is having a moment in the ad industry, especially the use of ethnography as a method to collect market research data. Melissa Fisher and Greg Downey argue that "the corporate enchantment with cultural anthropology's two iconic symbols—culture and ethnography—must be understood within more widespread developments in the New Economy," including business ethnography, and an "intensified interest in branding."⁷⁹ Anthropologists are routinely hired for account planning, branding, market research, and audience testing. Recent books exploring how anthropologists engage in consumer research and what anthropology can offer advertising have attempted to bridge the two fields.⁸⁰ Generally written for corporate clients, advertising industry executives, and marketing students, these works illustrate the impact that anthropologists have had on advertising, especially in showing the value of ethnographic research and how anthropological insights on culture and language can be effectively used to create need and aspiration.

As an anthropologist, I was certainly a known entity when I approached agencies, but doing academic ethnographic research did not earn me the same welcome and status as those who worked in agencies. Douglas Holmes and George Marcus offer the concept of "para-ethnography" as both a descriptor and a methodology for fieldwork encounters such as mine. Par-ethnography refers to overlap in interests and concerns between anthropologists and their subjects. If anthropologists and advertising executives are both invested in formations of culture, language, visual representation, media production, and audience reception, how do their objectives

and agendas differ from each other? Marcus has written about the complicated nature of such fieldwork; even when the ethnographic search for the “native point of view” is welcome. He suggests that “counterparts” rather than “others” tend to “share broadly the same world of representation with us,” and that similarities between anthropologists and “managers of capitalism” may be greater than what we once thought.⁸¹ In such settings “anecdotal data” hold greater value in illustrating the interworkings of “cultures of expertise.”⁸² For Holmes and Marcus such data signal “breaches in technocratic knowledge” and offer ways of “realigning the relationship between ethnography and political economy.”⁸³ Such an approach is helpful in thinking about advertising development and production as something other than completely negative and totalizing, as earlier accounts suggested.⁸⁴ Indeed my time in corporate America was full of stories, descriptions, recollections, and certainly anecdotes that could be interpreted as parables, cautionary tales, strategic plans, or simply lunchtime banter. There was much to be drawn from these “thin” moments that at the time seemed unconnected or unimportant, but they eventually allowed me to tell a “thicker” version of an overall process, to echo Holmes and Marcus’s use of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s terms.⁸⁵

Using ethnographic observations, recorded conversations, and interviews I conducted, as well as analyses of other advertising and media representations, I present an inside look at the agendas and priorities of the corporate clients who commission this work, the ad executives who undertake it, the casting directors who find the bodies to populate the ads, and audience feedback about ads, in ways that update and raise new questions about the advertising process. Overall it was quite challenging to gain access to the American advertising industry, though being an anthropology professor probably helped. General marketing agencies were very hesitant to allow me to observe on an ongoing basis, but they did allow me to conduct interviews, observe on a limited basis, and attend industry events. I was permitted to shadow ad executives for a few days, interview people in various positions, and hear their thoughts on diversity, either when asked or as volunteered, at the New York offices of three large, multinational agencies: BBDO, Ogilvy, and Young and Rubicam. I was able to visit two of these agencies in 2008 and again in 2011. Additionally, through an Advertising Education Foundation Visiting Professor Program Fellowship, I spent two weeks at Euro RSCG in Chicago in July 2010. To locate Asian American agencies, I used the Asian American Advertising Federation’s (3AF) website to arrange visits to eight agencies between 2008 and 2012:

in New York, Ad Asia, A Partnership, Admerasia, ASB Communications, and Kang & Lee; in Los Angeles, InterTrend and IW Group; and in San Francisco, Dae Advertising. In New York I also visited the umbrella organization Multicultural Marketing Resources, which creates a sourcebook for clients wishing to reach multicultural markets, as well as the Advertising Education Foundation and the Association of American Advertising Agencies. I additionally attended numerous industry events that these entities held during Ad Week and at other times of the year.

I conducted, audio-recorded, and selectively transcribed interviews with advertising executives at both general market and Asian American advertising agencies. The interview format was open-ended but tailored to the person's title and position in the agency. In general market agencies I asked ad executives to describe their work, recall details of accounts that went well and those that garnered controversy, and relate their thoughts on diversity in their work and in their agency. In two of these agencies I spent several days observing meetings and client calls. In some Asian American agencies I was granted greater access. The independently owned and operated agencies were, by and large, more responsive and open to speaking to me than those held by larger media conglomerates. In one, which I call Asian Ads, I spent several months, four of them continuous, observing the day-to-day activities of ad executives and following several accounts. I was present but silent for these recordings, and all names of advertising executives, clients, and brands have been changed. All recordings have been selectively transcribed, and numerous excerpts, along with contextual information I observed in situ or at a different point in time, have been included in this ethnography. I present transcripts using a simplified format, featuring line numbers in the left margin to call out specific utterances for analysis and limited notations (including those for overlap, pauses, quoted speech, and emphasis) that can be found in a transcription key in appendix 1.

Focusing primarily on my ethnographic research, I limit my textual analysis to ads whose production I did not observe but that executives discussed with me, as when an account executive or creative showed me his or her past work and imparted otherwise invisible details about the conception, copywriting, casting, shooting, and postproduction of the ad. Here I employ what Mankekar and Schein call "ethnotextual" analysis to offer historically contingent and contextually driven readings of these ads. My ongoing ethnographic involvement in these agencies contributes to my textual readings of these ads as a way to more fully understand them. Un-

able to collect actual audience feedback, I relied on what ad executives told me about how certain ads tested with focus groups, the broader public response to a campaign, notable comments posted on YouTube for certain ads, and how their client regarded the work.

I have taken several steps to comply with the stipulations of my Institutional Review Board agreement as well as the nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) I signed in agencies, to protect individuals who were candid about their opinions, and to avoid exposing sensitive information about clients that could indemnify agency executives. In chapter 1 I selectively use the real names of agencies and some individuals to trace the emergence of this industry, but I use pseudonyms for agencies and individuals throughout the remainder of the book. For those accounts that I observed in pitch, development, production, or postproduction stages, I have created pseudonyms for the agencies, clients, brands, advertising executives, and production people. For completed work that ad executives discussed in interviews with me and among themselves, I have left the brand name intact and included images and links when available, but I use pseudonyms for agencies and personnel. I have modified small identifying details to provide additional safeguards against violating any agency NDAs, such as which DMA the campaign targeted, a television station it was intended to air on, the outfits worn by certain characters, and so on. I have left the cultural and linguistic details intact, as they form the primary basis of my analysis. Since this is not a journalistic or industry report, I believe these small changes to hide the identities of individuals, agencies, clients, and brands ultimately allow for greater flexibility in discussing the details of what I observed.

As an anthropologist who finds the linguistic and the cultural equally fascinating and ultimately inseparable, I am drawn to the minutiae of what is said and not said in a single, routine creative meeting as much as to what has happened in advertising over the past century. As I completed this research in 2012, the ads I observed in production have already been completed and released. Still, the process of advertising development and production can be contentious, both within an agency and between agencies and clients. Observations of what ad executives say about their clients behind closed doors and how they speak among themselves when outside the public eye are wonderfully insightful but quite sensitive, in that this information could paint a negative picture of these executives and their views on their clients. That is certainly not my aim here. Most executives I met held their clients in very high esteem, bought and used their clients'

products in their personal lives, and displayed brand loyalty in their offices and elsewhere. Of course there was joking and gossip about clients and other ad executives, but this seemed to me, as an outsider, to be akin to the type of talk that happens in all workplaces. The agencies I observed hadn't adopted the free-flowing, Ping-Pong-table work environment of Google, Yahoo, and other tech companies, but they had a more casual atmosphere than law and finance offices. Freedom of sexual orientation, bilingualism, shared workspaces, casual dress codes (unless there was a client meeting), and free tea, coffee, and soda created a relaxed, open work environment filled with social media updates, discussions about what was trending, and finding amusement and satisfaction in everyday work.

Even in agencies that were very open, there were limits to what I was allowed to observe. I was occasionally asked to turn off my recorder but was permitted to continue to take notes on my laptop. There were some meetings above my security grade and others that I was asked to leave midway. I was successful in meeting one client during an agency visit, but by and large I only heard voices of clients through a speakerphone and spoke to them at industry events. Occasionally things got tense in meetings, and people got angry, shouted, blamed, and gave orders. Such was the culture of nearly all of the agencies I visited, in that people raised their voice when they were angry. However, most days passed without such incidents, and overall my time was pleasant, if a bit strange. Visiting a workplace where I was not an employee never felt entirely normal. For the most part I brought my small laptop to meetings and stared at it when things were quiet, awkward, or tense. I brought my smartphone everywhere else so that I could productively use my thumbs when everyone else did. During my long stint of fieldwork at Asian Ads, I had the good fortune of being seated at a workstation next to the agency copywriter, who was very friendly and forthcoming. I was privy to his routine work of creating and translating general market slogans, generating content in English and Filipino, in which he was fluent. The office was composed primarily of Chinese Americans whose lunchtime chatter was in Cantonese or Mandarin, and I did not develop any mealtime rapport with them. I often ate lunch at the same time as the copywriter and chatted in English, or ate with the South Asian American ad executives who invited me to join in their "Hinglish" banter, and thus got to know them better.

There were few instances in which I was able to reciprocate the kind welcome Asian Ads and other agencies extended to me, including buying lunch, allowing people to run ideas by me as an Asian Indian and a Hindi

speaker, and helping when asked. Regardless of being transparent about my nonexistent business and marketing background, I was occasionally put to work. I was once asked to do market research about automobile purchasing, but was not asked again once they saw my results. I was occasionally asked to help with pitch presentations, and in one instance had the pleasure of scanning through about a dozen Bollywood films to locate scenes and dialogue requested by an account executive. My most public contribution was during the 2011 3AF Marketing Summit (their annual meeting) in Las Vegas. One of the speakers on a panel about Asian American stereotypes in advertising canceled at the last minute, and I was asked to fill in. On stage with three creative directors and a member of an Asian American NGO, I was happy to make a modest contribution to what was already a very intelligent and politically progressive session—somewhat of a departure from the rest of the conference but certainly revealing of the multiple ways ad executives were thinking about Asian Americans. That panel, as well as sentiments expressed in interviews and observed in everyday conversations, reiterated 3AF's broader commitment to combating anti-Asian prejudice and to being less marginal in this industry and society at large.

COMING UP

The chapters that follow loosely mirror the stages of the advertising process but also serve as a broader framework in which I present the theory, history, and ethnography of Asian Americans and diversity in advertising. Like other agencies, ad agencies act on behalf of others, and in so doing may seem at the mercy of opinionated clients, the caprice of audiences, and the ire of consumer watchdog groups. Under such scrutiny it is no surprise that the ad would take on a life of its own. From the moment it becomes an object of agency attention, to the numerous stages of development and production through which it is vetted, the advertisement takes on an animate, material quality well before it is recognizable as a print ad, a “spot” or television commercial, an Internet sidebar, or a radio message. Executives talk about what the ad “requires,” what the creative “calls for,” the type of characters the script “dictates,” and so on. With so many in charge but the ad itself calling the shots, it seemed only appropriate that the advertising development and production process serve as the organizational rubric of this book and the central current of every chapter. Advertising and marketing experts may find this quaint and somewhat dated, as this

model is being eroded in different ways by an increased reliance on social media, guerrilla marketing, promotional events, direct marketing, and public relations that extend beyond the process of making ads for print, radio, television, and the Internet. Nonetheless accounts still begin with The Pitch—the compelling ideas and narratives that advertising executives perform to win a client’s business—and unfold in a certain sequence. I focus primarily on Asian American advertising but do discuss general market advertising quite extensively in some areas, including general market treatment of minorities in chapter 1 and the conclusion, approaches to creative in chapter 2, and the politics of casting talent in chapter 4.

Once an agency has won an account, the paid work begins. Account planning is a stage that allows for gathering the relevant marketing data that informs the creative work, which is overseen and presented to the client through account services. Chapter 1 provides a historical discussion of representations of Asian Americans in select media from the late nineteenth century to the present. I explore key points when minorities became targets of advertising and how the Asian American advertising industry emerged. I discuss the ways this niche grew in the footsteps of Latino and African American advertising, how they together compose “multicultural” marketing, and the ways they create and delineate ethnic categories within the broader umbrella of Asian American. Chapter 2, “Creative,” is an in-depth exploration of brand and message construction. How creatives develop “in-culture” concepts, write “in-language content,” and make choices about language variety, regard humor and affect, and construct narratives for what many regard as fifteen- and thirty-second films are my points of focus. The work of *indexicality* and *iconicity*, terms that advertising executives used routinely, are also useful in signaling how meaning is conveyed through visual and linguistic elements. I attend to materiality in intertextuality and interdiscursivity to understand how brand identities are transformed from general market to Asian American audiences while still remaining consistent with the former. Intertextuality is especially useful in considering issues of translation and what executives I worked with called “transcreation,” an agency term that refers to the creative process of crafting messages for select Asian audiences. As they construct brand identities, the prevalence of language ideologies that signal prestige and value can be found in details such as language variety, accent, and “back-translations” (English translations of in-language elements) and augur broader trends of language use in diasporas, including how certain language varieties are held up as standards while others fall out of fashion.

Chapter 3, “Account Services,” foregrounds what Myers has called “intercultural spaces,” in which meanings about creative work push up against questions of value, as mediated by individuals. Expertise is demonstrated through the process of enregisterment, that is, how multicultural advertising executives develop a specialized lexicon and use other linguistic features to create a vision of ethnic and racial difference on which they construct knowledge about difference. Performances of affect and stance are integral to how ad executives negotiate what *Asian American* means among themselves, to clients, and to others in this industry. Account executives, those who interface with clients and their own creative and production teams, manage conflict and create humor to make the category of Asian American meaningful among themselves and perform their expertise to clients and colleagues.

Once the client approves the creative, it moves into the production process. Chapter 4, “Production and Media,” investigates contentious issues of representation through casting and how a changing media landscape is leading executives to rethink audiences. Digital platforms, guerrilla marketing, and neighborhood-specific promotions come to the fore as agencies attempt to track the efficacy of their work and reach broader audiences. Finally, audience testing may be employed to understand the broader reception of ads. While I did not conduct audience reception research, the conclusion does provide a useful space in which to examine the convergence of a number of theoretical and ethnographic issues. It considers contests of authenticity and expertise about whether multicultural or general marketing advertising is best positioned to reach minority audiences in the United States. Taken together the chapters illustrate contemporary versions of diversity, racism, whiteness, and racial naturalization in commercial media production as well as connections between the message and those in corporate America who produce it.