



Georgia Southern University
Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies, Jack N. Averitt College of

Spring 2018

Who Says Man Wasn't Meant to Fly: History of Air Jordan Advertising, Portrayal and Race from 1984-2003

David C. Rehder

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rehder, David C., "Who Says Man Wasn't Meant to Fly: History of Air Jordan Advertising, Portrayal and Race from 1984-2003" (2018). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1750. <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/1750>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies, Jack N. Averitt College of at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

WHO SAYS MAN WASN'T MEANT TO FLY:
HISTORY OF AIR JORDAN ADVERTISING, PORTRAYAL AND RACE FROM 1984-2003

by

DAVID C. REHDER

Under the Direction of Craig H. Roell

ABSTRACT

Michael Jordan became one of the most influential figures in history through his success in basketball and from his endorsements. The most significant of those endorsements was his partnership with Nike in the formation of the Air Jordan brand. During the height of his prominence and success, the United States was going through an era of racial tensions and violence. The friction allowed for the rise of many outspoken African-American figures. Other individuals of the era gained popularity through their negative press or controversy. Michael Jordan represented a different model than other African-American individuals who were prominent in the news cycle. He was apolitical and quiet on issues and in demeanor, and presented a family friendly and positive role model. Nike promoted Air Jordan by making the sneaker represent Jordan himself, meaning Michael Jordan became the product. Through the analysis of Air Jordan advertising, Nike presented Jordan as a “counter model” against many of the era’s figures and in representing Jordan and his brand in this matter they were able to allow for a wider consumption of their product.

KEY WORDS: Air Jordan, Michael Jordan, Nike, Race, Advertisements, Commercials, Spike Lee, 1980s, 1990s, Shoes

WHO SAYS MAN WASN'T MEANT TO FLY:
HISTORY OF AIR JORDAN ADVERTISING, PORTRAYAL AND RACE FROM 1984-2003

by

DAVID C. REHDER

B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2015

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

© 2018

DAVID C. REHDER

All Rights Reserved

WHO SAYS MAN WASN'T MEANT TO FLY:
HISTORY OF AIR JORDAN ADVERTISING, PORTRAYAL AND RACE FROM 1984-2003

by

DAVID C. REHDER

Major Professor: Craig H. Roell

Committee: Michelle Haberland

Brian K. Feltman

Electronic Version Approved:

May 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my family and friends for making me laugh and relieving my stress. Thanks to them, I was able to keep away from the verge of insanity. I greatly appreciate the help of Dr. Eric Hall and Dr. Christina Abreu who helped me with the initial idea of studying Air Jordan. Thank you, Dr. Alan C. Downs for helping me get my subject matter refined and improving my writing. I would like to thank Dr. Michelle Haberland and Dr. Brian K. Feltman for taking the time out to be on my committee. I would like to invoke my gratitude to Ms. Joyce Baldwin who helped me out immensely and kept me on track. Finally, I owe Dr. Craig H. Roell much gratitude without him this project would not have been completed. Thank you for being extremely patient, encouraging, putting up with my constant questions, and taking on the task of being my thesis advisor when unexpected circumstances arrived. (Also sorry for the accompanying stress that came with advising my project.) Without these people I would not have been able to complete my project so once again, thank you everyone involved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	2
LIST OF FIGURES.....	4
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	5
Historiography.....	7
Layout.....	12
2 TAKEOFF AND THE JOURNEY TO THE RED PLANET, 1984-1990.....	14
Takeoff	19
Journey to the Red Planet.....	22
Air Jordan III.....	25
Air Jordan IV.....	27
Air Jordan V.....	28
Air Jordan VI.....	31
3 INTERSTELLAR RIDE AND BACK TO EARTH, 1990-2003.....	34
Interstellar Ride.....	39
Back to Earth.....	49
4 Conclusion.....	57
Current State of Air Jordan.....	57
Scandals and Politics.....	58
Influence.....	60
REFERENCES	63

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: “Jumpman”.....	21
Figure 2: “Do You Know”	27
Figure 3: “Mars’ Room”	30
Figure 4: “Flight School”.....	32
Figure 5: “Best on Earth, Best on Mars 3; Marvin the Martian”.....	42
Figure 6: “Hare Jordan”.....	43
Figure 7: “Love is Dropping 69; Love is Your First”.....	56

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I remember sitting in front of my television as a child with my fist clinched around my Michael Jordan and Taz figures as my eyes stayed glued to the television watching *Space Jam*, while Michael Jordan stretched out his arm dragging the Monstars behind him as he slam-dunked his way into leading the Tune Squad to victory. As fond of memory as that is, I started thinking about how prevalent and omnipresent Jordan was in my childhood. Growing up with a family from Chicago, Jordan was everywhere. When I went to the fridge there was a Jordan magnet sponsored by Hanes clothing company. When I entered my brother's room there was a life-sized cardboard cutout of Jordan, and a poster of the Chicago Bulls lineup with Jordan front and center sporting his signature shoes. It was not just in my house. When I turned on the television there was his face again as my dad watched the basketball game, and when I watched it he was there in the commercials during my cartoons. When I went to school people were wearing Air Jordan sneakers.

Michael Jordan's presence was undeniable, his popularity was unfathomable, and his influence unimaginable. Jordan gained such success and recognizability by not only his dominance on the court, but his constant exposure through advertising. His role in advertising is unmatched by any athlete before or after him. Jordan became the face of some of the most prominent businesses in the world including Gatorade, McDonald's, Hanes, and most famously Nike. Jordan gained national attention with his college career at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After a successful college career, he was drafted third in the first round by the Chicago Bulls in the 1984 draft. He soon gained the attention of fans and sponsors alike with unmatched athletic prowess and gravity defying on-court antics. By the end of his career in 2003, Jordan would be widely considered not only one of the greatest basketball players of all-time but

athletes. His accolades are almost unmatched, which include six NBA (National Basketball Association) championships, five MVP (most valuable player) awards, Rookie of the Year award, fourteen-time all-star, three Athlete of the Year awards, ten scoring championships, and *Sports Illustrated* Sportsperson of the Year, just to name a few.

Jordan's fame came during a time of racial tension and violence between white and black communities throughout the United States. Out of these trying times grew outspoken African American figures including actors and musicians who gained popularity not only for their talent but for political views. Popular figures included actor and director, Spike Lee, and rap artists like the N.W.A. and Public Enemy. During this time also arose more negatively associated controversial popular figures like Dennis Rodman and Mike Tyson. The figures became synonymous with breaking the law. The rise of gangsta rap gained negative press for its association with violence and misogyny. Jordan represented a different, not right or wrong, but different personality. Jordan was a quiet off the court and on political issues, and was often presented as a role model for people. By being quiet politically he represented a different perspective of the African American community not normally heard on the news, showing that they were not a monolith. Also by being presented as a family friendly and influential figure he was a counter model for other popular figures. Nike further promoted this image of him through their advertising campaigns for Air Jordan.

This thesis will show the history and evolution of Air Jordan advertising campaigns which include the examination of print ads and commercials. The paper will analyze the themes, strategies, and techniques used by Nike in their Air Jordan advertising in relationship to consumerism and prominent figures and events of the era. In the Air Jordan advertisements, Nike promoted Jordan as an outstanding, family friendly and heroic figure, a portrayal in complete

opposition of the prominent news and figures of the 1990s. Susan Strasser in her book *Satisfaction Guaranteed* makes the statement that ads are not nearly to inform, and are an “integral part of the commodity itself.”¹ One thing is important to understand is that ads and commercials promoting Air Jordan were also promoting Michael Jordan. Jordan had become the product, and by selling him as this wholesome figure they were able to reach a wider audience beyond race, creed, and culture. Since the sneakers represented Jordan they also represented his athletic prowess and his wholesome character. I will make the argument that Air Jordan commercials portrayed Michael Jordan as an apolitical quiet figure, and positive role model that was an opposite representation of many prominent African American athletes and celebrities in the media during the 1980s and 1990s in order to reach a wider audience to sell their product.

Historiography

The analyzing of commercials and advertisements is crucial for this thesis, two books in particular helped inform this paper on how to properly analyze advertising and how advertising captures audiences. The first book is *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society* by Arthur Asa Berger. In this book Berger is trying to inform the audience of how advertising works, how advertising has affected American society and culture, and how to analyze and interpret advertisements.² Berger shows how to properly analyze ads in multiple academic approaches including psychoanalytical and Marxist. The book tells of common tropes and characters one can find when examining advertisements. The author also gives example of how to apply these ads with his analysis on the McIntosh Apple “1984” and Fidji perfume commercials. Advertising companies influence what we buy whether we know it

¹ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1989), 32.

² Arthur Asa Berger, *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2015), xviii.

or not and they invest in targeting key audiences for their products. His book helps show the reader of the constant presence and influence ads have on everyday life.

The second book is *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* by Susan Strasser. She looks into how the mass media was invented then immediately exploited by examining multiple companies including Kodak, Gillette, and Crisco. Strasser shows how important branding and advertising is for gaining consumers. The book has ads throughout showing the evolution, how they gained their audience, and how they played into stereotypes (especially targeting women).

There are other books in the topic of consumerism and advertising that deserve acknowledgment. *Shiny Objects: Why We Spend Money We Don't Have in Search of Happiness We Can't Buy* by James A. Roberts looks into the effects of consumerism on American society. The book discusses the obsession of the United States with buying products, and Roberts makes the argument through statistical and psychological experiments that people who buy and consume more are not happier. He also provides tests to see the reader's purchasing habits and how they can fix them. The next book is *Lead Us into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism* by James B. Twitchell. This book takes an opposing argument than most other books about consumerism. He believes that consumerism is actually a good thing. He says the need to consume things is a close second to other needs like sex, shelter, and food.³ The last book is *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* by Gary Cross. He makes the argument that out of every "-ism" in the world consumerism won out, beating liberalism and democracy. The case is further backed when he discusses how even in times of depression and economic suffering purchases still continued and in some cases rose.

³ James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 11.

The topic of this thesis also crosses over into visual culture. Visual culture examines the relationship between images and society, which can include advertisements and commercials. In the book, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* by Margaret Dikovitskaya, she gives an all encompassing look into visual culture. Through interviews with professionals in the fields of art history and visual culture she examines prominent questions and problems facing visual culture. She tries to give the audience an understanding of what visual culture is, its history, and what is the subject matter. The book also provides a historiography of works in the field of study. Her book proves significant by giving a great basis and background into the field of visual culture.

The primary focus of this thesis is on Air Jordan and Michael Jordan. The books on Jordan focus on his race, economic impact, relationship with capitalism, and sexuality. *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* by William LaFeber discusses the effects of capitalism on the world by using the example of Michael Jordan. Jordan is a symbol of American capitalism. LaFeber focuses on Jordan and his multiple endorsements primarily on his deal with Nike which he describes as a “Faustian deal.” Through his success on the basketball court and constant presence through endorsements Jordan soon gained global fame. By using Jordan he shows the impact America has had on the globe with influencing other countries’ cultures, and the exploitation of labor in sections of the world primarily Asia. He argues that capitalism is taking over the world and is exploiting and ridding the world of differing cultures.

Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America is a volume of multiple essays viewing the effects of Michael Jordan and his endorsements edited by David L. Andrews. The book is divided into five sections, each focusing on a specific theme such as “Part IV: Jordan and the Global Marketplace.” Entries into this book include

“Representing Michael” by Norman K. Denzin in which he argues Jordan embodies cultural logic and transnational capitalism. He believes that the way Jordan is represented allows for global capitalism to overcome its last obstacle culture differences.⁴ Another interesting entry is “The Global Jordanscape,” by Ben Carrington, David L. Andrews, Steven J. Jackson, and Zbidniew Mazur. The authors examine the global impact Jordan has had on three regions New Zealand, Great Britain, and Poland. They want to see how other place see Jordan, how it affects their views on America, and how the views on Jordan can play into racial history in those regions.

Examination of Jordan can be further seen in a 1996 special edition of the *Sociology of Sports Journal* where a plethora of scholars discuss Michael Jordan’s impact and some articles focusing on his race. This edition of the journal shares some of the same authors and a few articles as *Michael Jordan, Inc.* David L. Andrews in his article argues that Jordan is an example of the fluid interpretations of race.⁵ Douglas Kellner in his article argues that Jordan is a perfect representation of the commoditization of sports.⁶ Also in that special edition, Mary G. McDonald argues that “Jordan’s body is a culturally significant site for commodification and subsequent consumption of black masculinity.”⁷ McDonald focuses on Jordan’s body and sexuality and how his family values are a direct response to the Reagan-era politics. “It’s Gotta Be the Shoes: Youth, Race, and Sneaker Commercials,” Brian Wilson and Robert Sparks discuss the effects that celebrity endorsements and commercials can have on the youth. In their article, they are

⁴ Norman K. Denzin, *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*, ed. David L. Andrews (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 11.

⁵ David L. Andrews, “The Fact(s) of Michael Jordan’s Blackness: Excavating a Floating Racial Signifier,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 126.

⁶ Douglas Kellner, “Sports, Media Culture, and Race- Some Reflections on Michael Jordan,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no.2 (1996): 460.

⁷ Mary G. McDonald, “Michael Jordan’s Family Values: Marketing, Meaning, and Post-Reagan America,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 344-345.

looking at the negative effects these commercials have including violence and instilling aspirations that are difficult to achieve. Wilson and Sparks are concerned about the power that these commercials can have on forming youth culture.⁸ They examine the effect Jordan has on youth culture by conducting an experiment with showing advertisements to two groups of kids from Toronto and Vancouver.

In order to better understand race and racial tensions throughout the time of Jordan's playing career, I familiarized myself with the historiography. *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander discusses the War on Drugs and how it led to racial discrimination and an increase in African American arrests. Alexander argues that, "Like Jim Crow (slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to assure the subordination status of a group defied largely by race."⁹ *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* by Michael Omi and Howard Winant discuss their racial formation theory. They argue that the concept of race is social construct and it is fluid and always changing.¹⁰ *America in the Nineties* by Nina Esperanza Serrienne discusses the history of the 1990s. She wants the book to give a voice to historically marginalized communities in the United States.¹¹ In *Chicago Hustle and Flow* by Geoffrey Victor Harkness examines hip-hop culture and the rap scene of Chicago. Harkness argues that

⁸ Brian Wilson and Robert Sparks, "It's Gotta Be the Shoes: Youth, Race, and Sneaker Commercials," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 400.

⁹ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: New Press, 2012), 13.

¹⁰ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 1994), 71.

¹¹ Nina Esperanza Serrienne, *America in the Nineties* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), XI.

gangsta rap has a direct relationship with gang members in Chicago.¹² These books discuss different subject matter but all focus on race in the timeframe of when Jordan played.

My work is unique because most research done on Jordan does not focus enough on the Air Jordan brand and their advertisements. No one has tracked the history and evolution of Air Jordan advertising. The era's racial tensions are widely ignored when discussing Jordan, especially the 1980s. This research is important for multiple reasons. First, advertisements are significant because of the sheer exposure on the masses and influence they can have on people. Second, analyzing ads can reflect the current events and popular opinions of the time. This can be seen by considering how characters are portrayed. Finally, it will give insight to one of the most profitable and influential companies in the world. This work hopes to add a different perspective and unique addition to the multiple historiographies.

Layout

The layout of this thesis will be into four chapters and will take a chronological thematic approach. The first has already been presented and introduces the topic and argument. Chapter two, "Takeoff and the Journey to the Red Planet, 1984-1990," will look into the beginning of the Nike Jordan partnership. It will give a brief history of how Nike landed Jordan, and examine the first two campaigns of Air Jordan while examining key events of the 1980s that cause the era to be one of great racial tension. The first campaign was simplistic in approach and was prone to having Jordan fairly quiet and accentuated Jordan's athleticism. Following the first campaign introduced the world to the partnership between Spike Lee and Jordan and examines their unique dynamic and differing personalities.

¹² Geoffrey Victor Harkness, *Chicago Hustle and Flow: Gangs, Gangsta Rap, and Social Class*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 23.

Chapter three, “Interstellar Ride and Back to Earth, 1990-2003,” looks at the progression of Air Jordan advertising, and gives a history of the prominent African American figures in popular culture, and top stories and events in the news. The section, “Interstellar Ride,” will discuss how Jordan was portrayed in his advertisements and commercials as a family friendly figure. This image was created with his partnership with certain celebrities and most importantly his relationship between Air Jordan and Warner Brothers. “Back to Earth” will discuss his second and his third (and final) retirement from the sport. During his times of retirement the advertising campaigns for Air Jordan changed and focused much more on Jordan being an inspirational and stoic figure but whom at the same time had faults and was not immaculate. During his final retirement Nike really honed in on nostalgia to get their product selling. In this nostalgic feeling they were able to incorporate many of the previous techniques used.

The final chapter will look into the Air Jordan brand and Michael Jordan after his retirement from the game in 2003. This will examine the current state of the Air Jordan brand and the differing portrayal of Jordan after his playing career. It will look at his views on racial issues. Finally, it examines the impact and influence of the Air Jordan partnership has had on athletes and athletic sponsorship today by looking at how many athletes have athletic sponsorship deals and examining their commercials.

CHAPTER 2

TAKEOFF AND THE JOURNEY TO THE RED PLANET, 1984-1990

The first five years of Michael Jordan's career occurred in an era filled with racial tensions that could be seen in the daily news and popular culture. The 1980s featured many racially motivated crimes and protests, and the rise of rap music. Musicians, especially rap artists, were now gaining popularity and allowed for the realities of African American life including drugs, violence, racism, and police brutality in the inner city to be heard.

The two major hotbeds for racial tensions and violence were New York and California. One of the most controversial events of the early 1980s was the Bernhard Goetz shootings. On December 22, 1984, Goetz entered the No. 2 train on the New York subway where four young African-American males were seated near him. Allegedly, the four African Americans moved in and surrounded Goetz, when one of them, Troy Canty, asked for or demanded (depending on which story) five dollars.¹³ Goetz, feeling threatened pulled a .38 caliber revolver from his waist and shot all four men. Goetz had been mugged three years earlier and felt like they were going to harm him; was his reasoning.¹⁴ Conflicting reports are unsure what happened that day, but it sparked immediate discussions on race relations in America.¹⁵

Two years later, racial tensions in New York would continue. Four African Americans were driving their car in Howard Beach, Brooklyn on December 20, 1986. When their car broke down, one of them stayed behind, while the other three men went looking for help when they ran into a mob of white youth who began shouting racial slurs and attacked the group. The three

¹³ David E. Sanger, "The Little-Known World of the Vigilante," *New York Times*, December 30, 1984, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/30/weekinreview/the-little-known-world-of-the-vigilante.html>.

¹⁴ "Jury Selection Begins in Trial of Bernhard Goetz," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1987, accessed April 1, 2017, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-03-24/news/mn-279_1_jury-selection.

¹⁵ David E. Sanger, "Callers Support Subway Gunman," *New York Times*, December 25, 1984, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/25/nyregion/callers-support-subway-gunman.html>.

men, Timothy Grimes, Cedric Sandiford, and Michael Griffith, were chased and beaten until Griffith, trying to escape, was hit and killed by a car.¹⁶ This event would become known as the Howard Beach Racial Incident. It sparked protests in New York immediately resulting in over three thousand people marching in awareness of racial violence.¹⁷ The result of the incident led to the mayor to instill stiffer penalties for racially fueled crimes.¹⁸

On August 25, 1989 Yusef Hawkins, a sixteen-year-old African-American male, was shot to death in a predominately white neighborhood in New York. Hawkins and two of his friends entered a neighborhood of Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn to look into a used car. When they arrived at the location they were met by ten to thirty white men wielding baseball bats and one carrying a gun.¹⁹ The mob was waiting for an African American or Latino male who had supposedly been dating a local woman. Hawkins and his friends, who were not involved with the girl and unaware of the situation, were attacked, resulting in Hawkins getting shot to death.²⁰ When protesters arrived shortly after Hawkins' death, they were met by residents of the neighborhood who yelled racial slurs and taunted them with watermelons.²¹

The 1980s also saw the rise of the “crack epidemic” in the inner cities, especially Los Angeles. The “War on Drugs” led to disproportionate numbers of African Americans being imprisoned. In July 1986, a passing of a new law allowed for a mandatory minimum sentencing

¹⁶ “Howard Beach; Not so Simple as a Lynching,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1986, accessed March 29, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/12/28/weekinreview/howard-beach-not-so-simple-as-a-lynching.html>.

¹⁷ Ronald Smothers, “Racial Violence Focus of Blacks n Day of Protests,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1987, accessed March 29, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/22/nyregion/racial-violence-focus-of-blacks-in-day-of-protest.html>.

¹⁸ “Lessons of Howard Beach,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1987, accessed April 1, 2017, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-12-23/local/me-20470_1_howard-beach.

¹⁹ Ralph Blumenthal, “Police Search for 18-Year old in Killing of Brooklyn Youth,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1989, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/26/nyregion/police-search-for-18-year-old-killing-of-brooklyn-youth.html>.

²⁰ Blumenthal.

²¹ Frank Trippet, and Priscilla Painton, “Death on a Mean Street: A Murder in a White Section of Brooklyn ignites Racial Discord,” *Time*, September 11, 1989, 28.

for crack possession which led to an explosion in African American prison population.²² In 1988 California passed the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act, which was passed to further punish arrested gang members.²³ The increased legislature and use of S.W.A.T teams increased punishments for drugs, but also allowed for an increase in police brutality. By 1990, 34.2% of all new prison admissions were drug related.²⁴

In the late 1980s popular culture gave way to the rise of rap music. The music centered on issues that faced African-American society in the United States. Ice-T and Schooly D helped start the new genre of “gangsta rap,” which discussed issues like violence in the inner city.²⁵ In 1988, the N.W.A. released their album *Straight Outta Compton*, which sparked controversy with their lyrics about police brutality, and other issues. While their music was deemed “gangsta rap,” they referred to it as “reality rap.”²⁶ Their songs helped bring this topics awareness to mainstream media. Other groups like Public Enemy become popular with their song, “Fight the Power,” which came off the album entitled *Fear the Black Planet*.

Jordan in the spotlight remained silent and apolitical on current events. He has been described as a “savvy businessman” for not speaking out, while others said he just did not know what to say.²⁷ Jordan gained criticism for not taking political stances during a time where there was so much racial violence. He had a platform to reach millions of people and bring awareness to issues facing the world but did not in some people’s eyes use it. He drew criticism from

²² “Rap of Ages: A Timeline,” *Mother Jones*, November-December 2007, 68-70.

²³ Donna Murch, “Crack In Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War On Drugs,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015): 167; see also *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

²⁴ Murch, 164.

²⁵ Margena A. Christian, “Parental Advisory: The History of the N.W.A.,” *Ebony*, June 2011, 98.

²⁶ Christian, 96.

²⁷ Donald McRae, “Craig Hodges: “Jordan Didn't Speak Out Because He Didn't Know What to Say,” *Guardian*, April 20, 2017, accessed April 29, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/apr/20/craig-hodges-michael-jordan-nba-chicago-bulls?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other.

African Americans and from famous athletes like Jim Brown and Hank Aaron who claimed he had not done enough for African American society.²⁸ Jordan said in an interview, “I’ve been trying to have people view me more as a good person than a good black man.”²⁹ His silence can also be heard in politics. For example, Jordan was asked to back a black democrat running for office in North Carolina, and when he said no, the rumors quoted Jordan saying, “Republicans buy shoes too.” Jordan has been quoted in saying that “I can only do what I’m comfortable doing.”³⁰ Jordan being silent on race issues helped him keep his endorsements. The representation of his silence and quiet demeanor can be seen in his commercials. This portrayal was opposing many of the more prominent African-American figures of the 1980s.

Background

After being selected in the 1984 National Basketball Association’s (NBA) Draft at number three by the Chicago Bulls, Jordan promptly became one of the league’s best players and a major lucrative draw. Jordan would win the NBA Rookie of the Year award, and his quick success would lead him to an endorsement deal with Nike. Jordan was not looking for a deal with Nike; he wanted to sign with Adidas. The company and Jordan never came to any agreements for two major reasons. The first reason was that Adidas at the time was going through managerial and ownership issues. The founder of the company’s wife and then president, Kathe Dassler, was running the head office with her children who were in dispute over

²⁸ Ike Berkow, “Sports of the Times: Basketball; Jordan Tries, So Don’t be “Stoopid,” *New York Times*, September 2, 1991, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/02/sports-of-the-times-basketball-jordan-tries-so-don-t-be-stoopid.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FJordan%2C%20Michael>.

²⁹ Berkow, “Sports of the Times: Basketball...”

³⁰ Ike Berkow, “Sports of the Times; Jordan has the Game, the Values,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1997, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/05/sports/sports-of-the-times-jordan-has-the-game-the-values.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FJordan%2C%20Michael>.

the company.³¹ Then unfortunately, Dassler passed away leaving the company in troubling times. The second reason why Jordan and Adidas partnership never came to fruition is because Adidas did not want Jordan. There were some talks as to signing Jordan to a deal because of his popularity, but headquarters in Germany thought Michael Jordan was not tall enough.³² Michael Jordan is six foot six, but they wanted someone closer to seven feet tall.³³

Jordan, after being turned down by Adidas, went into negotiations and met with Converse. Jordan felt like they had nothing to offer him, and they already had other signees including Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. Finally, Nike made Jordan an offer, almost out of desperation because they were suffering financial issues and even offered to tailor make the shoe to Jordan's liking.³⁴ The deal was worth \$500,000 an enormous sum at the time for endorsements, and so the Air Jordan brand began.

The first pair of Air Jordans were made on November 17, 1984 and eventually released to the public in 1985. The two men, who designed and created these highly recognizable and iconic shoes, were Tinker Hatfield and Peter Moore. Moore is responsible for designing the first pair of Jordans, and Hatfield designed much of the later models. Hatfield also became famous because he was the man behind the famous "Jumpman" logo that became synonymous with the brand. It first showed up on the Air Jordan IIIs. The logo is of Jordan flying through the air performing a one-handed dunk. This symbol became easily recognizable and was, as Hatfield said, "a mark of

³¹ Darren Rovell, "How Nike Landed Michael Jordan," *ESPN* (blog), February 15, 2013, http://www.espn.com/blog/playbook/dollars/post/_id/2918/how-nike-landed-michael-jordan.

³² Ellen Emmerentze Jervell and Sara Germano, "How Adidas Aim to Get its Cool Back: The German Sports Brand Wants to End its Long U.S. Slump," *The Wallstreet Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-adidas--aims-to-get-its-cool-back-1427072066>.

³³ "Why Adidas Passed on Signing Michael Jordan to Endorsement Deal in 1984," *The Postgame* (blog), March 23, 2015, <http://www.thepostgame.com/blog/style-points/201503/michael-jordan-adidas-nike-contract-offer-1984-sign-centers-kareem-7-footer>.

³⁴ Rovell.

excellence.”³⁵ This agreement would soon lead to the production of the first commercials and advertisements of Air Jordan.

Takeoff

The first Air Jordan commercial, “Banned,” aired in 1985. It was released soon after Jordan’s shoes were barred by the commissioner of basketball, David Stern, because the shoes did not match the other players’ sneakers and the bottoms were black. The commercial begins with Jordan standing in his warm-up gear in complete and utter silence, the only noise is the echoes of him dribbling and palming the basketball while he stares at the camera. The camera slowly pans down to the first pair of Air Jordans which are covered by a black bar as if they are being censored, as the announcer states how the shoes were banned on September 18, 1985, and says “Fortunately, the NBA can’t stop you from wearing them.”³⁶

After the release of the first commercial, the idea for the commercials was to have Jordan perform some sort of athletic feat showing his superior prowess on the court. The message behind the commercial was to have the audience believe that they could replicate Jordan’s greatness by purchasing his eponymous sneakers. The performance of athletic feats was the dominating theme early on in the Air Jordan campaign; it would be replaced later on by either comedy or inspirational messages. The commercial held Jordan to limited speaking roles, only allowing him to have at most one line.

The first commercial released with this theme had Jordan running down an outdoor court and when he leaps into the air for his dunk the audience can hear the sound of a jet taking off.

³⁵ Scoop Johnson, “Impact of Jordan Brand Reaches Far Beyond Basketball,” *ESPN* (blog), February 12, 2016, http://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/14760324/cultural-impact-jordan-sneakers-goes-for-basketball.

³⁶ “Air Jordan Commercial- Banned,” YouTube video, 0:32, posted by “Marcel Visser,” January 4, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj-sssMEo58>.

Jordan narrates with his one line for the commercial, “Who says man was not meant to fly?”³⁷ The last commercial for the Air Jordan 1’s stuck with the common theme of athleticism but in a unique approach. Jordan is playing a one-on-one game with a mysterious opponent. After it is clear Jordan is dismantling his opponent it turns out to be Santa Claus.³⁸ It shows Jordan displaying sportsmanship and capitalizing on the largest consumerist holiday season, Christmas. This commercial would be followed by an ad entitled “Rockababy,” which is Jordan performing a series of dunks to music.³⁹

The print ads and posters shown in magazines allowed for some of the most iconic advertisements in Air Jordan history. The first ad for the Air Jordan 1’s was of him performing a slam dunk in the pose of the famous “Jumpman” logo over a city skyline on an outside basketball court (Figure 1).⁴⁰ The athleticism is on full display in this early advertisement. The importance of the ad is that it not only shows Jordan jumping through the air but gives way to the establishment of the iconic brand logo. Along with the classic “Jumpman” poster, the Air Jordan 1 also had the “Runway” poster. In this, Jordan is standing stoically holding a basketball sporting the blue version of his sneakers on a runway surrounded by jets.⁴¹ This poster, although simplistic, compares Jordan’s athletic ability to the takeoff and air gained with that of a jet.

³⁷ “Air Jordan 1 “Man Was Not Meant to Fly,” Commercial,” YouTube video, 0:29, posted by “Nice Kicks,” June 1, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcLMHOAn_HQ.

³⁸ “Air Jordan 1-Michael Jordan vs Santa Christmas Commercial,” YouTube video, 0:32, posted by “KicksOnFirecom,” February 25, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC10Vd5wpUg>.

³⁹ “Air Jordan II “Rockababy,” Dunk,” YouTube video, 0:35, posted by “Dime Magazine,” March 5, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aq2lrt6DstQ>.

⁴⁰ “Jumpman,” digital image, *Sole Collector*, 1985, <https://solecollector.com/news/2015/06/michael-jordan-nike-air-jordan-posters>.

⁴¹ “Runway,” digital image, *Sole Collector*, 1985, <https://solecollector.com/news/2015/06/michael-jordan-nike-air-jordan-posters>.

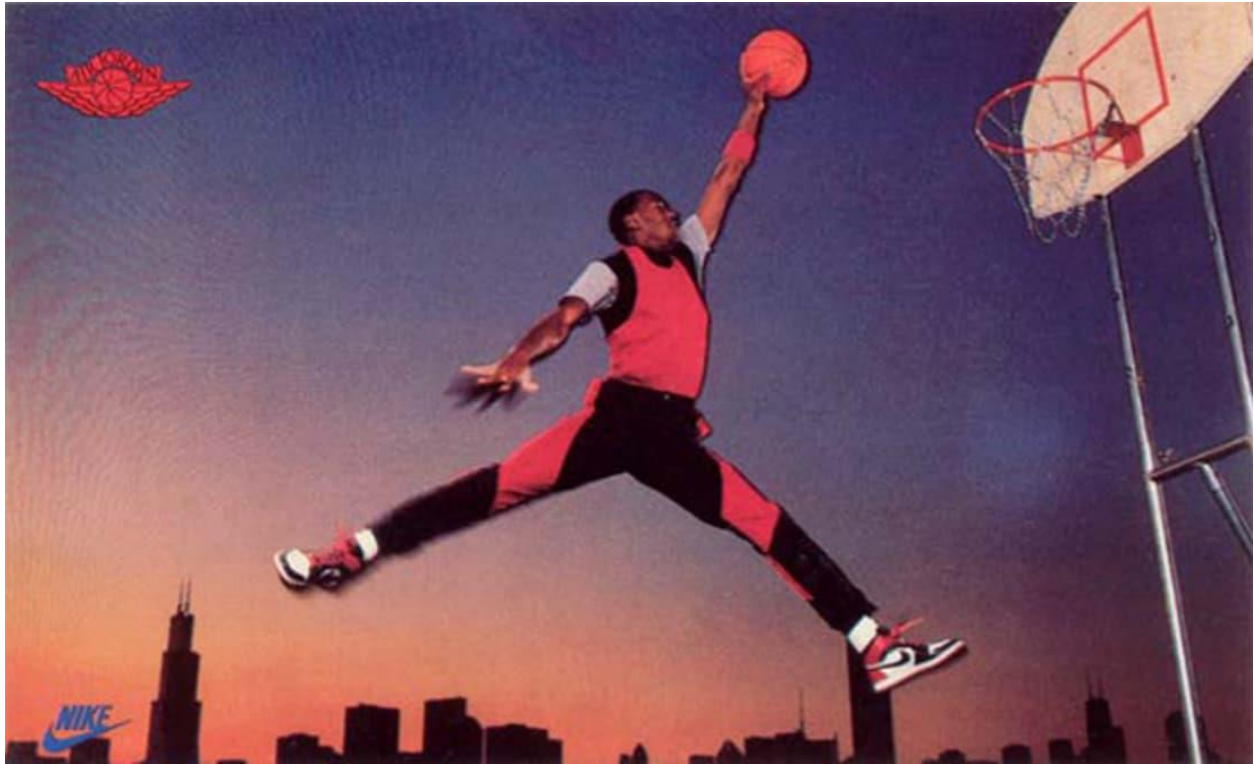


Figure 1“Jumpman,” digital image, Sole Collector, 1985, <https://solecollector.com/news/2015/06/michael-jordan-nike-air-jordan-posters>.

For the Air Jordan II’s the ad is Jordan jumping through the air in his white warm-up gear with the words “Look, up in the air.” The commercial not only shows the stereotypical Jordan ad of him slam dunking a basketball but also more subtly with the language.⁴² It is a reference to the classic Superman tagline. By comparing him to a superhero it shows the level of athletic superiority that Nike believes in Jordan’s capability. The superhuman ability given to Jordan in these advertisements allowed for him to be portrayed as a hero.⁴³ The hero is a common trope in commercials that obviously proves successful.

⁴² “Look up, in the air,” digital image, *Complex*, 1987, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/7>.

⁴³ Berger, 16.

Journey to the Red Planet

In the movie *Do the Right Thing* we enter on the verge of an unusual heat wave in the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, New York stress runs high on an already racially tense neighborhood. As Radio Raheem, and his acquaintances Buggin' Out and Smiley, enter Sal's Pizzeria to confront him and his son on a previous argument about why the Wall of Fame in his restaurant contains no famous African Americans, a reason the group of friends thinks is because of racist thoughts of Sal and his family. The argument begins to heat up as the group trades racial slurs all the while Radio Raheem is blasting his music from his trademark boombox. Sal during the argument tells Raheem to turn off the music when Raheem refuses, Sal smashes it with a baseball bat. This act leads to a fight breaking out between the two, which spills out into the street as the whole neighborhood looks on in shock and drenched in sweat from the exhausting heat wave.

As the fight progresses the police arrive pulling Raheem off of Sal. In this moment the police officer slips his nightstick under Raheem's chin and begins to choke him. The crowd's yells, cries, and pleads to the officer escalating into an almost deafening chant. The neighborhood's racial tension comes to a boiling point as they, including some of the officers, to tell him to let go of the chokehold. The officer refuses to let go and the camera zooms in to the dangling feet of Raheem giving one last twitch of life before his feet go limp. The officer and the rest of the police realizing what has happened in a panic throw Raheem's lifeless corpse in the squad car along with an incensed Buggin' Out in order to cause less of a scene.

Following this event, Mookie, who works for Sal, throws a trash can through the window of Sal's Pizzeria in protest of the arrest and tensions finally overflow. This broken window leads to most of the neighborhood participated in the dismantling, looting, and eventually start of a fire

in the restaurant.⁴⁴ *Do the Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee, follows the life of Mookie (portrayed by Lee) and his life in the Ben-Stuy neighborhood during a heat wave. The movie also follows around the cast of characters in the neighborhood and the racial tensions mostly of the Italian Americans and African Americans who occupy that neighborhood. The movie perfectly captures pressing matters and news of the 1980s including racial tensions and police brutality.

The release of *Do the Right Thing* would launch director and actor Spike Lee into stardom. Lee became famous for being an outspoken, verbal, and controversial figure on issues facing African Americans. His movies often center on the daily routine and life of African Americans. Lee began his film career by opening a production studio named 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks in 1978. The name of the company obviously has historical significance dating back to the Civil War.⁴⁵ His first theatrical release was the movie *She's Gotta Have It* in 1986, a movie centering on the love life of Nola Darling in Brooklyn, New York while she tries to pick between three bachelors. This movie's success along with Lee's rising popularity will lead to him being asked to reprise his role as Mars Blackmon, and star in Air Jordan advertisements and commercials.

The choice of Spike Lee and his character of Mars Blackmon is interesting considering the difference in personalities and views between the two men.⁴⁶ In the film *She's Gotta Have It*, Blackmon is obsessed with the Jordan shoes. He has the classic "Jumpman" poster on his wall,

⁴⁴ *Do the Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee (2010; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 1989), DVD

⁴⁵ "40 Acres Promise to Blacks was Broken," *New York Times*, October 25, 1994, accessed December 18, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/25/opinion/1-40-acres-promise-to-blacks-was-broken-628816.html>. The name of this company references the promise given to recently freed African Americans following the Civil War. President Lincoln had signed a bill in order to divide recently abandoned land in the south into forty acre sections. William T. Sherman earlier set aside land in South Carolina and Georgia for free slaves under Special Field Order 15. This was later vetoed by President Andrew Johnson.

⁴⁶ Wilson, and Sparks, "It's Gotta Be the Shoes...", 399.

and does not take off his shoes when he sleeps. The movie has multiple close ups of Blackmon's shoes since it is key to his character. This kind of promotion and dedication to the Air Jordan brand caught the attention of Nike ad writer Jim Riswold and producer Bill Davenport they appreciated this publicity and they took notice of Lee's debut film success. When asked about approaching Lee for the Air Jordan advertising campaigns Riswold stated, "I think he would've done it for free, just to meet Michael."⁴⁷ The shoes can also be seen in his film *Do the Right Thing*, after Buggin' Out has his shoe scuffed by a passing stranger in a Boston Celtics jersey, which almost leads to a fight between the two men. The two figures although present almost opposing ideologies, the audience can see why this men were brought together. When asked about working with Jordan, Lee said, "Successful blacks are sometimes hesitant to promote other blacks, particularly those with opinions that might be perceived as controversial."⁴⁸

This section will focus on the differing characters and polarizing personalities of Jordan and Lee represented in the advertisements. It will be broken down into four sections each section representing a new type of Air Jordan. Out of the campaigns with Mars Blackmon arose famous slogans like "Do you know?" and "It's gotta be the shoes?" The partnership with Lee and Jordan is interesting because Jordan represents a calm and quiet figure and Lee portrays an intrusive and abrasive persona. The advertising campaigns further represented the true personalities of the actors involved and of the differing sides in African American society on the issues facing them during the 1980s and 1990s.

⁴⁷ Douglas Kellner, *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*, ed. David L. Andrews (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 54.

⁴⁸ "The Media Business; Nike Pairs Michael Jordan with a Down-to-Earth Guy," *New York Times*, February 20, 1989, accessed April 3, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/02/20/business/the-media-business-nike-pairs-michael-jordan-with-a-down-to-earth-guy.html>.

Air Jordan III

The first commercial starring Spike Lee portraying Mars Blackmon was in 1988 for the Air Jordan III's. This commercial opens up with Blackmon sitting on top of the basketball rim proclaiming that he is the greatest player in the game. He then asked the audience, "Do you know how I get ups for my game?" Then the now famous words come out of his mouth "Do you know? Do you know? Do you know?"⁴⁹ He says it is because of Air Jordan. As the camera pans down it shows that he has been standing on Jordan's shoulder's the whole time. Jordan looks up at Blackmon and walks away leaving him dangling on the rim, only to have Jordan come back and slam dunk the basketball in Blackmon's face.

The commercial is shot in black and white just like *She's Gotta Have It*. Blackmon in this commercial is portraying the motor mouthed, "in your face" persona that he portrayed in the movie, while Jordan is quietly standing there. Once again Jordan's only task in the commercial is to display his athletic prowess. The next commercial in the series portrays the opposing dynamics amazingly.

In this commercial, Jordan in the commercial is silent while performing dunk after dunk. Blackmon speaks at a rapid fire pace, proclaiming that no one can cover Jordan. He continues his speaking until Jordan walks over and puts his hand over Blackmon's mouth proclaiming, "But it's easy to cover Mars Blackmon."⁵⁰ The commercial shows Lee's outspokenness so much so Jordan has to hush him. Jordan has only one brief line but this is important because it show the difference in personalities while also showing the comedic side of Jordan.

⁴⁹ "Air Jordan III Commercial," YouTube video, 0:30, posted by "DaniBoxx," March 8, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCavlPRIZz0>.

⁵⁰ "Air Jordan 3 Commercial Cover," YouTube video, 0:30, posted by "Nice Kicks," June 13, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgjV3uhf6IY>.

Accompanying these commercials were the print advertisements. The ad presented a dually framed black-and-white picture with Jordan in one and Blackmon in the other. Jordan is in the left panel wearing his Nike sponsored warm-up gear and the black Jordan III's with bold text underneath him saying "Best on Earth, Air Jordan from Nike." The right panel shows Spike Lee portraying Blackmon in his iconic apparel with the white Jordan III's with the text "Best on Mars, Ditto."⁵¹ The first thing the viewer will notice is the height disparity, and then the serious look upon Jordan's face while Lee has more of a sarcastic sneer. The ad does a lot with few words it shows that Jordan is incomparable to other competitors. Blackmon represents not only the opposite of Jordan in physique but also the common man, while he may not be able to reach Jordan-level greatness, he can still be great but only on another planet. Significantly, this ad is able to advertise not one, but two types of the new Air Jordan III's.

Following up on the "Best on Earth, Best on Mars" campaign, the other iconic photo shows Jordan and Blackmon in the same attire and black and white theme. In this photo Jordan and Blackmon display a more playful and humorous attitude while Jordan and Lee stand next to each other Jordan is resting his arm on top of Blackmon's head.⁵² Air Jordan is able to display Michael's more humorous side in this ad reaching out to a bigger audience by showing him as more approachable.

Another campaign of the Mars Blackmon era is the "Do you know? Do you know? Do you know?" The photo is a close up of Blackmon's face with the Nike logo strategically placed on the brim of his iconic Brooklyn hat while he stares up at the "Do you know?" slogan as it

⁵¹ "Best on Earth, Best on Mars," digital image, *Complex*, 1988, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/6>.

⁵² "Best on Earth, Best on Mars 2," digital image, *Newsweek*, 1988, <http://www.newsweek.com/photos-nikes-air-jordan-ads-251996#big-shots/251996/1>.

covers the background in black font as it is repeated three times.⁵³ The simple ad is just a reminder of the commercial that the viewer may have seen, and reminds the reader subtly about the air Jordan sneaker without having to show the shoe or even Jordan himself. The ability for a campaign to make a viewer recall their product without even showing us displays the true effectiveness.

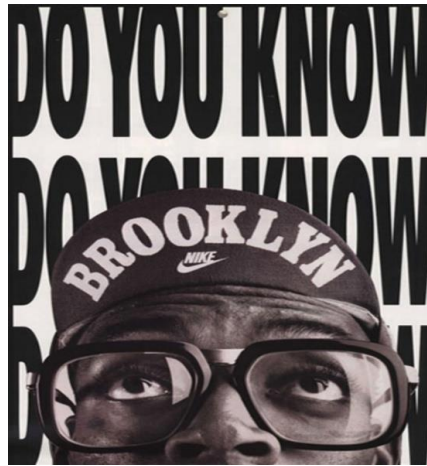


Figure 2 “Do you know,” digital image, *Complex*, 1990, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/10>.

Air Jordan IV

The top down eagle-eye perspective gives way to Jordan jumping through the air and the text of varying fonts while Blackmon looks up in awe. The text reads, “A high flying 360 slam death defying dunk.”⁵⁴ While it is simple it shows the sporadic nature of Blackmon that the commercials capture and chemistry between the two men. Most importantly it shows

⁵³ “Do you know,” digital image, *Complex*, 1990, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/10>.

⁵⁴ “High Flying,” digital image, *Complex*, 1989, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/8>.

Blackmon's amazement and belief that Jordan can do any athletic feat when it comes to basketball.

Air Jordan V

Other commercials of the Mars Blackmon era help reinforce the idea of the forthright and the silent figure. When Blackmon in an ad wonders how Jordan gets so much air in his jumps, he asks an aeronautics expert, who explains to Jordan and Blackmon how he leaps through the air. Jordan looks at the camera baffled while once again not saying anything and Blackmon loudly proclaims his confusion.⁵⁵

The analysis of the commercials with Lee and Jordan can further prove their portrayals with the release of the "It's gotta be the shoes" campaign. In this now iconic commercial, Lee's character Mars Blackmon barrages Jordan with a series of questions on how Jordan has become so great like, "'Is it the vicious dunks? Is it the haircut? Is it the extra-long shorts? Is it the short socks?'"⁵⁶ Jordan always responds with a calm "No." The commercial ends when the camera fades out to black screen then the words appear, "Mr. Jordan's opinions do not necessarily reflect those of Nike, Inc."⁵⁷ The commercial once again focuses on Jordan's athletic prowess and quiet demeanor while Lee portrays the more outspoken figure. The commercials' use of the two stars showed that black culture and society was not a monolith, and there were varying perspectives and attitudes.

Only one Mars Blackmon commercial portrays Jordan in a different way; the commercial featuring Nola Darling. She is the love interest of Mars Blackmon in *She's Gotta Have It*. In this

⁵⁵ "Air Jordan V Commercial "Aeronautics," YouTube video, 0:30, posted by "Romeo Benitez," November 30, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1GTNOn6i1M>.

⁵⁶ "Nike Basketball 1989- It's Gotta be the Shoes- Commercial," YouTube video, 0:32, posted by "streetball21.cz," August 31, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkY7W6kCRY4>.

⁵⁷ "Nike Basketball 1989- It's Gotta..."

commercial, Nola is clinging on to Jordan while looking into his eyes, smiling in the background. While in the foreground, Blackmon once again is speaking into the camera and begins his famous fast-paced nonstop flurry of questions asking Nola why she wants to be with Jordan. She claims it's because he has the new Air Jordans.⁵⁸ The commercial fits the same design as the "It's gotta be the shoes" commercial with asking her questions while she responds "no" multiple times. The commercial portrays Jordan in a sexual manner, the only commercial for Air Jordan that did this. They do this by having Nola choose him over Blackmon and by having her clearly flirting with him in the commercial.

Mars Blackmon stands in his Brooklyn apartment surrounded by previous Air Jordan print ads (that coincidentally feature Blackmon) and iconic posters including the Jordan displaying his wingspan. His cluttered walls spackled with posters all the while Blackmon stands at the center of the room staring up at the ceiling with his hands behind his back with a certain kind of pride with his floor, drawers, television, and bike are covered in a multiple pairs of the Air Jordan V's.⁵⁹ The room he is standing in looks as if a nostalgic bomb containing all Jordan memorabilia went off in his tiny room; this shows the massive amounts of ads, exposure, obsessions, and fandom that the Air Jordan brand has created.

⁵⁸ "Nola Darling Air Jordan Mars Blackmon," YouTube video, 0:31, posted by "sz9," October 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqp7Hd7pZ7A>.

⁵⁹ "Mars' Room," digital image, *Complex*, 1990, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/12>.



Figure 3 “Mars’ Room,” digital image, *Complex*, 1990, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/12>.

The iconic slogan, “It’s gotta be the shoes?” continues in the print ads. In this ad it captures Blackmon spastic nature and constant questioning by displaying the font asking this iconic questions multiple times, while chalk style text wraps around Jordan and Blackmon from all different angles. Jordan is positioned from two different perspectives for the viewers; palming the basketball taking lift off with the look of determination on his face while Blackmon looks up in pure amazement.⁶⁰ The picture is in the classic directorial style of Lee as it is in black and white but the only thing that is in color is the pair of sneakers bringing the viewers’ eyes directly to the fire red shoes.

⁶⁰ “Is It the Shoes,” digital image, *Newsweek*, 1990, <http://www.newsweek.com/photos-nikes-air-jordan-ads-251996#big-shots/251996/15>.

Air Jordan VI

The Air Jordan Flight school ad (Figure 4) presents itself as a pamphlet for aspiring fans to become like Jordan. In big bold letters at the top of the pamphlet in playful font is written, “It’s the Michael Jordan Flight School.” Then it shows photos and what the attendees can learn if they attend the school while Blackmon is there telling the audience to call up. Captions accompanied by photos in a sporadic order inform the reader what they could learn including, “how to increase your hang time, how to dazzle defenses, how to make the all-star team, how to wear really great sneakers, how to stick your tongue out during a game, how to sign lotsa photographs, how to star in lotsa commercials, and how to play golf during the off season.” Then in the left bottom corner is a check list with all the previous captions and a check box with the word “yes” written in bold ink. Another reoccurring thing happened in this ad is that the only thing in color once again is the shoes and the Air Jordan ad which in this occasion is on a golf ball flying towards the audience.⁶¹

The simplicity behind certain Air Jordan advertisements during the Mars Blackmon campaign really brings attention to the viewer. In the first advertisement it is simply Blackmon standing in his traditional attire from the movie *She’s Gotta Have It* (black framed glasses, tank top, and iconic bill flipped Brooklyn hat) while Jordan’s feet sporting the Air Jordan 6’s are above Blackmon’s head, while Blackmon positions his hands in almost a presenting manner. There is no text, just Blackmon and Jordan’s sneakers.⁶² This advertisement capitalizes on marketing Jordan’s athleticism by showing the amount of Air Jordan is capable of getting implying that the buyer could bare the same results if they bought a pair.

⁶¹ “Flight School,” digital image, *Complex*, 1991, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/13>.

⁶² “Air Jordan VI,” digital image, *Jordan’s Daily*, 1991, <http://jordansdaily.com/2015/12/28/mjmondays-mars-says-goodbye-with-air-jordan-vi/>.

It's the *Michael Jordan* flight School

LEARN
HOW TO INCREASE YOUR HANGTIME!

LEARN
HOW TO DAZZLE DEFENSES!

LEARN
HOW TO MAKE THE ALL-STAR TEAM!

LEARN
HOW TO STICK YOUR TONGUE OUT DURING A GAME!

LEARN
HOW TO WEAR REALLY GREAT SNEAKERS!

LEARN
HOW TO STAR IN LOTSA COMMERCIALS!

LEARN
HOW TO SIGN LOTSA AUTOGRAPHS!

LEARN
HOW TO PLAY GOLF DURING THE OFF SEASON!

Flat top hit top

- YES** I want to increase my hangtime.
- YES** I want to dazzle defenses.
- YES** I want to wear really great sneakers.
- YES** I want to sign lotsa autographs.
- YES** I want to play golf during the off season.
- YES** I want to make the all-star team.
- YES** I want to star in lotsa commercials.
- YES** I want a pair of new Air Jordan® basketball shoes.
- YES** I will call my local Nike dealer.

Salesmen standing by!
ACT NOW
Air Jordan from Nike.

Figure 4 "Flight School," digital image, *Complex*, 1991, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/13>.

The Mars Blackmon campaign was a massive success resulting in iconic catchphrases and recognizable advertisements. Blackmon would appear in more ads than any person beside Jordan himself. The Air Jordan brand has honored Blackmon with clothing lines featuring his face and multiple lines of sneakers named after him including the “Spiz’ike” lineup in 2006.⁶³ They would also release an exclusive pair of Jordan’s in honor of *Do the Right Thing*. The shoes look like the pair earlier discussed that Buggin’ Out wore and had scuffed (the sneakers includes a fake scuff mark). Lee would make sporadic appearance like in commercials for Jordan’s first and third retirement. He would also narrate a commercial celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Air Jordan in 2005. The commercial focused on Lee traveling around the United States reading the story of Jordan and his brand from a tome in front of varying groups of people.⁶⁴ All these honors for Lee, and everything came around full circle in 2017. Lee would make a television show for Netflix based on his debut hit, *She’s Gotta Have It*. Although Lee does not portray his character of Mars Blackmon, his character still sports the Air Jordan sneakers.

The 1980s racial incidents lead to differing perspectives among African Americans and these views can be seen in the examination of Air Jordan commercials. The theme of Jordan being a quiet apolitical athlete is present in the early Air Jordan advertisements. His quiet demeanor is carried over into the Mars Blackmon campaign, Lee does all the talking while Jordan performs his athletic feats.⁶⁵ In these advertisements it shows differing perspectives of the African American community.

⁶³ “Jordan Spiz’ike: The Definitive Guide to Colorways,” *Sole Collector*, October 21, 2014, <https://solecollector.com/news/2014/10/jordan-spiz-ike-the-definitive-guide-to-colorways>.

⁶⁴ “2005 Spike Lee Michael Jordan Commercial,” YouTube video, 1:01, posted by “soulman23,” November 11, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNFOMmTWwhps>.

⁶⁵ “The Media Business; Nike Pairs...”

CHAPTER 3

INTERSTELLAR RIDE AND BACK TO EARTH, 1990-2003

The 1990s gave way to a racially tumultuous era filled with prominent controversial figures plaguing the news. Media coverage increases when black males are the perpetrators, which means the masses were exposed to this figures even more than others.⁶⁶ In the sports world some of the most prolific players were also the most controversial including basketball players “Sir” Charles Barkley and “The Worm” Dennis Rodman, and one of the most dominant boxers in history, “Iron” Mike Tyson. The news coverage’s top stories included the trial of O.J. Simpson (former running back for the Buffalo Bills, National Football Hall of Fame member) for the murder of his ex-wife Nicole Brown-Simpson, and racial tensions from the 1980s spilled over into 1990s with the Rodney King Riots in Los Angeles in 1991. In popular culture, gangsta rap gained popularity with artists like Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. The music spouted immediate controversy over lyrics of misogyny, and what some people felt like was a promotion of violence. The racially tense era was filled prominent controversial African American figures in the news cycle, sports, and music.

Among the most popular players of the 1990s was Dennis Rodman. He was known for his rebounding ability, but mostly for his bigger-than-life personality. He was covered in tattoos and piercings, wore ridiculous outfits, his most famous case was wearing a wedding dress at Barnes and Noble book signing.⁶⁷ Rodman was also known for his volatile personality on and off the court. He picked up technical fouls on a regular basis, earning him the moniker of the “Worm” for his dirty play. One of his most famous incidents came on March 17, 1996 when,

⁶⁶ Abby L. Ferber, “The Construction of Black Masculinity: White Supremacy Now and Then,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 31, no. 1 (February 2007): 12.

⁶⁷ Mark Bechtel, “Year of the Worm has any Other Player had an NBA Season as Bizarre as the One Dennis Rodman Just Went Through? Don’t be Ridiculous,” *Sports Illustrated*, June 25, 1997, 36.

during a game against the New Jersey Nets, Rodman got into a disagreement with referee Tom Bernhardt. After yelling at the referee, Rodman preceded to head-butt him, this resulted in a six game suspension without pay and a \$20,000 fine.⁶⁸ The following season on January 15, 1997, Rodman tripped over a cameraman named Eugene Amos. A frustrated Rodman kicked Amos in the groin, again resulting in a suspension, this time eleven games.⁶⁹ Later that season, on March 3rd, Rodman punched Milwaukee Bucks player Joe Wolf in the groin.⁷⁰

Sticking with NBA players, Charles Barkley became famous for his personality as well. Barkley was known for yelling at referees and fans alike, and saying whatever was on his mind. On March 29, 1991, Barkley was suspended after using abusive language during a game then spitting on a fan.⁷¹ In 1997, Barkley got into an altercation at a bar in Orlando, Florida. The incident started after a patron, Jorge Lugo, threw a glass of ice at Barkley, which resulted in Barkley throwing Lugo through a plate glass window.⁷²

Mike Tyson who became known for his short bouts and brutal knockouts became the center of controversy and the topic of news in the early 1990s. He was arrested in January of 1991 for the rape of Desiree Washington. Tyson was later convicted, and on March 26, 1992, was sentenced to a six year prison sentence. Reporters suspected he would be out in three years

⁶⁸ Clifton Brown, "Pro Basketball; Rodman's Suspension Could Cost Bulls, Too," *New York Times*, March 19, 1996, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/19/sports/pro-basketball-rodman-s-suspension-could-cost-bulls-too.html>.

⁶⁹ Bechtel, 36.

⁷⁰ Bechtel, 36.

⁷¹ "Barkley Fined, Suspended for Spitting Incident," *Chicago Tribune*, March 29, 1991, accessed April 1, 2017, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-03-29/sports/9101280556_1_general-manager-gene-shue-charles-barkley-philadelphia-inquirer.

⁷² Kenneth A. Harris, and Tim Povtak, "Barkley Throws Man Through Bar Window," *Sun Sentinel*, October 27, 1997, accessed April 2, 2017, http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/1997-10-27/sports/9710270306_1_jorge-lugo-lugo-s-attorney-barkley-s-group.

pending good behavior, and after three years he was released.⁷³ The sentencing would spark conversation about racial attitudes in the United States.

Tyson would try to recapture the success he had found before his prison sentence by mounting a comeback. His return of the ring would not match his famed past success, and he would find himself at the center of controversy again. Tyson began a rivalry with Evander Holyfield, which led to a second, now infamous, bout that took place on June 28, 1997. In the third round of the fight Tyson bit Holyfield's ear, which gained a harsh warning from the referee, soon thereafter Tyson bit Holyfield again this time ripping a chunk of his ear off and spitting it on the ring mat.⁷⁴ After the fight, because of his actions, Tyson was revoked of his boxing license and fined three million dollars.⁷⁵

NFL Hall of Fame running back, O.J. Simpson became the focus of most people's and news outlets' attention in America for his trial for murder. On June 12, 1994, the bodies of Simpson's ex-wife, Nicole Brown-Simpson, and her friend Ronald Goldman were found at her home's entranceway after being stabbed to death.⁷⁶ Five days later, the LAPD issued an arrest warrant and were convinced to allow Simpson to turn himself over to the station. When Simpson did not arrive, it resulted in a now famed police chase on the highway where finally Simpson

⁷³ E.R. Shipp, "Tyson Gets 6-Year Prison Term For Rape Conviction in Indiana," *New York Times*, March 27, 1992, accessed March 29, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/27/sports/tyson-gets-6-year-prison-term-for-rape-conviction-in-indiana.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁷⁴ Tom Friend, "Tyson Disqualified for Biting Holyfield's Ears," *New York Times*, June 29, 1997, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/29/sports/tyson-disqualified-for-biting-holyfield-s-ears.html>.

⁷⁵ Tom Friend, "Nevada Hits Tyson with Fine and Loss of License," *New York Times*, July 10, 1997, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/10/sports/nevada-hits-tyson-with-fine-and-loss-of-boxing-license.html>.

⁷⁶ Seth Mydans, "O.J. Simpson's Ex-Wife Slain at her Condon in Los Angeles," *New York Times*, June 14, 1994, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/14/us/o-j-simpson-s-ex-wife-slain-at-her-condo-in-los-angeles.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FSimpson%2C%20O.%20J>.

surrendered.⁷⁷ The court hearing was widely televised, and on October 3, 1995 Simpson was found not guilty of the murders of his ex-wife and friend. The verdict was divisive and garnered different reactions from different ethnicities. It raised issues of racial tensions and questioning of the police.⁷⁸

Athletes were not the only celebrities gaining negative press. Rap artists began to gain more negative attention in 1992 when Dr. Dre released *The Chronic* which helped mainstream hip-hop and also popularized “gangsta rap.”⁷⁹ Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. became extremely popular and helped spread East Coast, West Coast rivalry. While rap discussed issues like drug problems in the inner city, racism, and police brutality, it also gained negative attention. The music gained a reputation of being violent, misogynistic, and occasionally homophobic.⁸⁰ Certain events helped further engrave the belief of the violence behind rap including when Tupac Shakur was shot in Las Vegas on September 7, 1996 and died six days later.⁸¹ Six months later, Notorious B.I.G. was shot and killed as well in Los Angeles on March 7, 1997.⁸²

⁷⁷ Seth Mydans, “The Simpson Case: The Fugitive; Simpson is Charged, Chased, Arrested,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1994, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/18/us/the-simpson-case-the-fugitive-simpson-is-charged-chased-arrested.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FSimpson%2C%20O.%20J>.

⁷⁸ Martin Gottlieb, “Not Guilty: The Racial Prism; Racial Split at the End, as at the Start,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1995, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/04/us/not-guilty-the-racial-prism-racial-split-at-the-end-as-at-the-start.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FSimpson%2C%20O.%20J>.

⁷⁹ Jeff Weiss, “25 Years Later, Dr. Dre’s ‘The Chronic’ Remains Rap’s World-Building Masterpiece,” *Chicago Tribune*, accessed February 19, 2018, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/ct-dr-dre-the-chronic-20171215-story.html>.

⁸⁰ Matthew Oware, “Brotherly Love: Homosociality and Black Masculinity in Gangsta Rap Music,” *Journal of African American Studies* 15 no. 1 (March 2011): 22.

⁸¹ “Robert Hilburn and Jerry Crowe, “Rapper Tupac Shakur, 25, Dies Six Days after Las Vegas Shooting,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1996, accessed February 18, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-tupac-shakur-obit-20160913-snap-story.html>.

⁸² Todd S. Purdum, “Rapper is Shot to Death in Echo of Killing 6 Months Ago,” *New York Times*, March 10, 1997, accessed February 18, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/03/10/us/rapper-is-shot-to-death-in-echo-of-killing-6-months-ago.html>.

Racial tensions spilled over into the 1990s and reached the boiling point in 1991. The most infamous case of racial violence and police brutality came on March 3, 1991 when four officers of the Los Angeles Police Department pulled over and stopped Rodney King. The officers then proceeded to unmotivated and unreasonably beat King. The case of King was proof of what the African-American population had been dealing with for years.⁸³ The trial of Rodney King followed, and the four police officers were acquitted of all charges on April 29, 1992. The surprising and grossly misguided decision led to instantaneous outrage from the population of Los Angeles. The riots began, turning Los Angeles into a warzone. The riots lasted for six days resulting in multiple cases of looting, arson, assault, and murder.⁸⁴ The final result of the riots was over one billion dollars in damage, fifty-three people dead, thousands injured, and eleven thousand people arrested.⁸⁵

Jordan's personality played a crucial role in how Americans perceived him and his brand in Air Jordan advertisements. He has kept his image relatively "spotless" during his playing career. One reporter described him as a, "consummate performer in the arena and elegant away from it."⁸⁶ His personality was perceived as kind, as he helped with many charities, provided students with college scholarships, and aided sick children off the court.⁸⁷ This portrayal of Jordan as an outstanding citizen and family-friendly can be seen in his commercials.⁸⁸ His

⁸³ Sylvester Monroe, "South Central 20 Years Since," *Ebony*, May 2012, 134.

⁸⁴ Monroe, 153.

⁸⁵ Madison Gray, "The L.A. Riots: 15 years after Rodney King," *Time*, April 25, 2007, accessed April 2, 2017, http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/la_riot/article/0,28804,1614117_1614084_1614831,00.html.

⁸⁶ Ike Berkow, "Sports of the Times; Jordan has the Game, the Values," *New York Times*, November 5, 1997, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/05/sports/sports-of-the-times-jordan-has-the-game-the-values.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FJordan%2C%20Michael>.

⁸⁷ Ike Berkow, "Sports of the Times: Basketball; Jordan Tries, So Don't be "Stoopid," *New York Times*, September 2, 1991, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/02/sports-of-the-times-basketball-jordan-tries-so-don-t-be-stoopid.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FJordan%2C%20Michael>.

⁸⁸ McDonald, "Michael Jordan's Family Values...", 345; Edward G. Armstrong, "Michael Jordan and His Uniform Number," *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*, ed. David L. Andrews (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 18.

representation was in contrast to figures like Mike Tyson, O.J. Simpson, Dennis Rodman, Charles Barkley, and certain gangsta rappers. He also allowed for inspiration in a time of hardship when African Americans were suffering from inequality like the Rodney King Riots. Nike used this idea of Jordan for multiple reasons. First, most companies do not want people representing their company getting into trouble since celebrity endorsements can be extremely integral to a business.⁸⁹ Jordan was the “corporate friendly image personified.”⁹⁰ Second and most importantly, by promoting Jordan in this way they could reach a wider audience and allow for more people to participate in the consumption of their product.

Interstellar Ride

Jordan was promoted in multiple ways during the 1990s to the early 2000s. He was portrayed as a family-friendly figure with a good sense of humor in his teaming with certain celebrities. This was further exemplified in his partnership with Warner Brothers and the Looney Tunes. His portrayal as a hero can be seen in later advertisements and when he is performing athletic feats. Later in other campaigns he is seen as a figure of inspiration. Since the Air Jordan *was* Michael Jordan, when he was portrayed this way, that is what the shoe represented and implied could be transferred to the consumer.

While the previously mentioned celebrities were getting into trouble, Jordan starred along actor and comedian Steve Martin in a multi-part series of commercials in January 1994. Martin stars as himself in the commercials as a host for a fake investigation show. The commercials were released soon after Jordan’s first retirement. The advertisements center around a new player

⁸⁹ James B. Twichell, *Lead Us into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 81.

⁹⁰ Katherine L. Lavelle, “A Critical Discourse Analysis of Black Masculinity in NBA Game Commentary,” *Howard Journal of Communications* 4 no. 1 (2010): 297.

named Johnny Kilroy, who is taking the league by storm, and other players all over the world who are dominating the game. Every single player mentioned bears an uncanny resemblance to Jordan.

The campaign with Steve Martin used the shocking fact of Jordan's retirement as a joke. For example, in the first commercial Jordan portrays a fake player named Motorboat Jones.⁹¹ Jordan, while acting as Jones, wore goggles and a fake hairpiece. The following commercial entitled the "Popcorn Tape" shows a mysterious player named Johnny Kilroy who scored sixty-nine points in one quarter of play against the Charlotte Hornets.⁹² The impossible feat adds to the comedy and once again in this commercial, Martin reveals many players around the globe that resemble Jordan who are performing ridiculous feats of basketball dominance, and Jordan is in ridiculous disguises. The commercials again have the celebrity as the focal point while Jordan does not speak. Jordan is starring in a commercial with a celebrity whose is family-friendly. He is also presenting himself in a comedic manner allowing for his image to remain clean. The clean portrayal of him allows for Air Jordan to gain the same positive look.

A common theme throughout Air Jordan advertising was a display of Jordan's athletic prowess. This was the focus of his first campaign back in the mid-eighties and continued to be pronounced in the 1990s. As historian Walter LaFeber stated, "he was a superhuman who flew through the air in television advertisements as he endlessly and effortlessly dunked basketballs, and simultaneously, sold Nike sneakers."⁹³ This not only made the shoe seem like it could give consumers the ability to perform like Jordan but also portrayed Jordan in a heroic and

⁹¹ "Jordan Retires is Motorboat Jones," YouTube video, 0:57, posted by "leev13's channel," October 26, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2QR71d3ixI>.

⁹² "Nike/ Jordan Fake Retirement "Popcorn Tape" Commercial," YouTube video, 2:01, posted by "Official," May 13, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL5WnqWqkrY>.

⁹³ Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 15.

superhuman like figure. The heroic trope is a common theme found throughout advertisements.⁹⁴ For example in his ad for the Air Jordan XI's he stands on a court facing a rim as they camera pans back the audience notices the rim is a hundred feet in the air. Jordan runs down the silent court then leaps through the air to deliver an impactful dunk.⁹⁵

Warner Brothers and Nike began a partnership in 1993. The company released a special edition of their Air Jordan 7's entitled "Hare Jordan," a play on the company's name and Bugs Bunny. The print ads included simplistic ads that played into Michael Jordan as a playful and approachable person along with the classic cartoon antics of the Looney Tunes.

In the examination of the first print ad we see Michael Jordan and Bugs Bunny in matching Air Jordan sponsored warm up apparel. Bugs is leaning up against a smiling Jordan as he palms the head of the main protagonist of the advertisements Marvin the Martian. Marvin looking displeased with being lifted off the ground as the text below Marvin's feet (which are wearing a pair of Jordans) says, "This makes me very angry. Very angry indeed."⁹⁶

The advertisement plays into the familiarity of the Looney Tunes by using a well-known and distinctive Marvin the Martian phrase. The fact that Jordan is matching with Bugs and smiling shows a more comical and family friendly persona. The audience can also see an homage to the Mars Blackmon advertisements. In an earlier ad Jordan is palming Mars Blackmon's head similar to the way Jordan is palming Marvin's head. Marvin hails from Mars, the same place

⁹⁴ Arthur Asa Berger, *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2015), 16.

⁹⁵ "Nike Air Jordan XI 100 Foot Dunk 1995," YouTube video, 0:30, posted by "bigfish fromdegie," July 13, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-G24PMFtIM>.

⁹⁶ "Marvin the Martian," digital image, *Complex*, 1993, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/16>.

where Blackmon is said to be the best basketball player. The two “Martians” in their respecting ads have a similar agitating and dueling dynamic with Jordan.

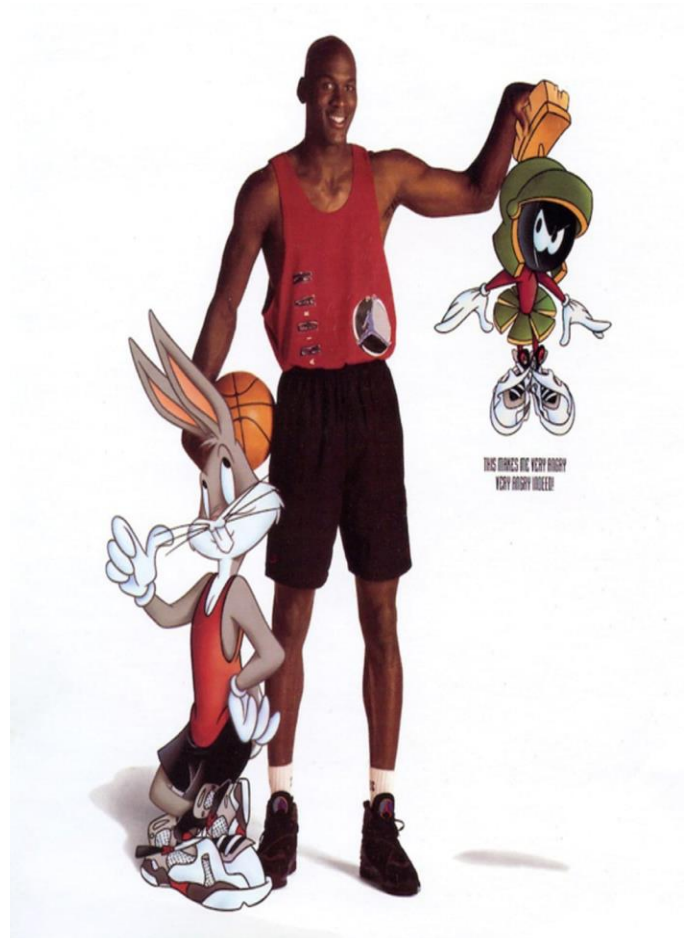
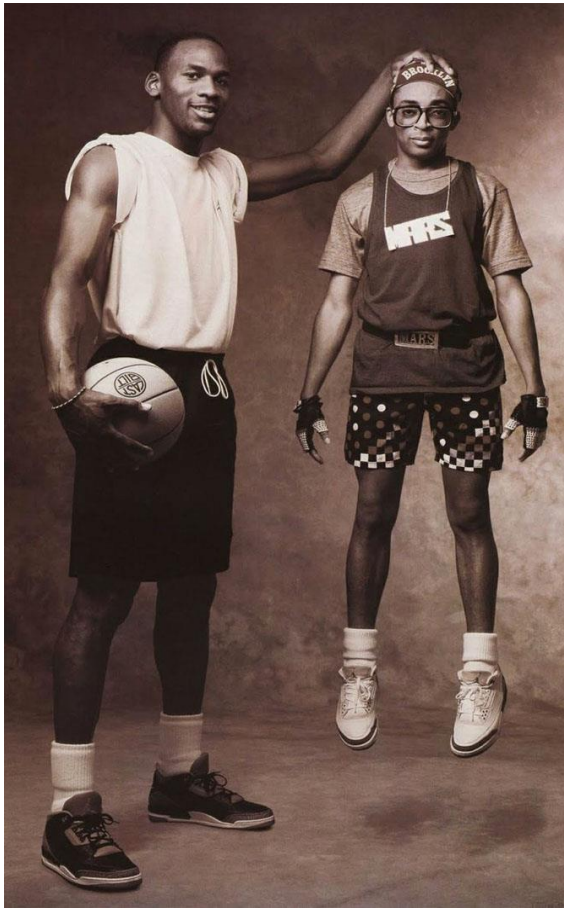


Figure 5 “Best on Earth, Best on Mars 3,” digital image, *Sole Collector*, 1988, <https://solecollector.com/news/2015/06/michael-jordan-nike-air-jordan-posters>; “Marvin the Martian,” digital image, *Complex*, 1993, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/16>.

The special release of the “Hare Jordan” can be seen on display in the “What’s up, Jock?” ad. Bugs Bunny is shown relaxing on the big bold letters stating “What’s up, Jock?” In the foreground of the letters is Jordan looking into the camera with a humorous look, while the new shoes are displayed in the corner leaping off the ground. In the corner of the photograph it says

Air Jordan from Nike, but the word Air is crudely scratched out and says the word “hare” handwritten.⁹⁷

Once again Jordan and Bugs are in matching attire something that presents itself as a continuing trend of this campaign. Nike was also able to show both types of the special edition sneakers in the corner and on Bugs. The pun of “Hare Jordan” along with the famous Jumpman logo being portrayed by the silhouette of Bugs in this advertisement shows the family friendly relationship with Air Jordan and the Looney Tunes. The words that stand so prevalent in the ad are also plays on Bugs’ iconic catchphrase “What’s up, Doc?”

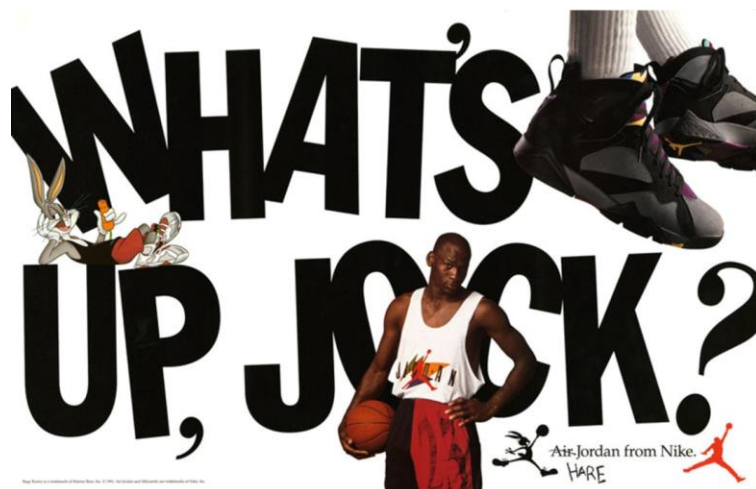


Figure 6 “Hare Jordan,” digital image, *Complex*, 1992, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/15>.

The commercials center on the Looney Tunes more than Jordan himself. Jordan’s speaking role did increase with the release of these commercials. The partnership with Warner Brothers and the Looney Tunes allows for Jordan to be portrayed as more family-oriented figure and go against the threatening or controversial figures that maybe being portrayed in the media at

⁹⁷ “Hare Jordan,” digital image, *Complex*, 1992, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/gallery-23-classic-air-jordan-print-ads/15>.

the time.⁹⁸ In the commercials Jordan teams up with Bugs Bunny to help solve some sort of dilemma and participates in the wild animated antics of the Looney Tunes.

In the commercial for the Air Jordan VIIs, he teams up with Bugs Bunny to battle a bunch of stereotypical jocks who are disturbing Bugs' slumber underneath the basketball court. The disturbance leads to Bugs trying to approach the group, which results in Bugs getting beaten up, and eventually propelled into the basketball rim. Bugs, knowing he is in trouble, straps on the new Air Jordan sneakers and calls on Jordan to help take on the team of jocks in a basketball game. The game displays Jordan participating in cartoonish shenanigans like pies to the face, and anvils being dropped on their opponents' heads accompanied by the appropriate onomatopoeic phrases popping up on the screen.⁹⁹ After the squad is left unconscious with cartoon stars circle around their heads, Jordan and Bugs walk out as Bugs says "This could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

The theme of the family friendly image of Jordan continues into 1994. The commercial is in complete animation except for Jordan, and it centers on Marvin the Martian stealing all the Air Jordans on planet Earth. Jordan and Bugs plan on stopping Marvin, when he sends a group of giant Martians to play them once again in a game of basketball. The antics continue in this game as well, with actions like offering the aliens popcorn that actually have sticks of dynamite in the

⁹⁸ Doug Merlino, "How Michael Jordan Became the First Modern African-American Superstar," *Bleacher Report* (blog), May 20, 2011, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/706837-how-michael-jordan-became-the-first-modern-african-american-superstar-athlete>.

⁹⁹ "Air Jordan VII Hare Commercial feat. Bugs Bunny," YouTube video, 1:01, posted by "Le Site de la Sneaker," April 2, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNypPQs-1Gc>.

boxes.¹⁰⁰ The use of Looney Tunes really helps portray Jordan as a different figure and goes against much of popular culture of the late 1990s.

The climax of the Warner Brothers and Air Jordan partnership was the theatrical release of *Space Jam* on November 25, 1996. This movie allowed for a new kind of marketing opportunity for Air Jordan. The movie is essentially a two-hour advertisement for the sneakers. In analyzing this film we can see the family friendly and family oriented Jordan, as well as product placement throughout.

Space Jam opens up with a young Michael Jordan playing basketball late at night in his backyard in the summer of 1973. The movie then shows a highlight reel with accompanying career achievements leading to a conference meeting where Jordan announces his retirement from basketball (first of three retirements from the game), and he is going to play baseball. Then we go to another planet where a failing amusement park known as “Moron Mountain” is being run by the villainous alien species called the Nerdlucks. They are trying to find out ways in order to get their park out of financial strain. Receiving television feeds from all over the galaxy they stumble onto the Looney Tunes, their leader, Swackhammer (voiced by Danny Devito) says he wants his gang of aliens to go down to Erath and capture the Looney Tunes. During Jordan’s baseball game a cartoon ship can be seen flying overhead when it crashes into the parking lot of a Piggly Wiggly. The driving force of the spaceship goes underground leading to another dimension where the Looney Tunes live. There, the small and weak Nerdlucks announce that they are going to enslave the cartoon characters. Bugs Bunny convinces them that the Looney Tunes should have an opportunity to compete for their freedom. After a quick meeting with

¹⁰⁰ “Air Jordan 8 Commercial “Bugs Bunny,” YouTube video, 1:05, posted by “horace leung,” April 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLyx8vJE2ow>.

characters like Elmer Fudd, Daffy Duck, and Porky Pig, they notice the diminutive size of the villains and decide to play a game of basketball to determine their fate, which the aliens agree.

The aliens come up with the devious plan to steal the talent of famous basketball players using their special alien powers. The aliens visit multiple games and steal the talent of Charles Barkley, Patrick Ewing, Mugsy Bogues, Larry Johnson, and Shaun Bradley. They place their talents into a basketball where the aliens put their hands on the ball and begin to mutate into behemoth sized monsters with the abilities of some of the NBA's finest. The transformation leads to full blown panic by the Looney Tunes who are now seeking desperate measures to ensure they will not be enslaved. Michael Jordan is playing golf with Larry Bird and Bill Murray while there he gets a hole in one and as he is leaning over to pick up his ball he is sucked into the hole and kidnapped by the Looney Tunes who need his help. They convince an unwilling Jordan who is adamant on stating his retirement that he should help. After some bullying by the aliens now being called the "Monstars," the game for the freedom begins.

The game is a one-sided slaughtering as the Monstars are beating the Tune Squad sixty-six to eighteen. Jordan gives them a riveting half-time speech and Bugs gives the rest of the gang a placebo drink that he says will help their abilities. The Tune Squad begins a comeback when the now frustrated Monstars begin to now injure players to ensure their victory. Jordan with the last remnants of his ragtag team pull off a last minute victory as Jordan uses his newly aware dimensional cartoon abilities by stretching out his arm and dunking the game winning basket. Jordan then returns to Earth just in time for his baseball game.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ *Space Jam*, directed by Joe Pytka (2000; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1996), DVD.

The movie's quirky and outrageous plot allowed for extreme sponsorship and to further the portrayal of Jordan as a family friendly character. The sponsorship can be seen with the constant close up of Jordan's sneakers. When Bugs and Daffy have to go back to the human dimension to retrieve Jordan's gear the camera's focal point is on the Air Jordan 9's that they are trying to grab in his trophy room. After putting on his gear, the movie takes on an Air Jordan commercial feel. He begins to run down the court with Seal's version of "Fly Like an Eagle," playing while the camera zooms in on his sneakers and he begins to perform dunk after dunk on a court similar to the "Hare Jordan" commercial. Jordan takes the court against the Monstars, one of the aliens named Blanko compliments Jordan by saying "nice shoes." The whole game which takes up about thirty minutes of the eighty-eight minute movie zooms in on the special edition Air Jordan 11's while he is running past the Monstars and flying through the air. Elmer Fudd when he dunks the basketball is in the famous "Jumpman" logo of the Air Jordan brand. Bill Murray joins later in the game to help an ailing Tune Squad he is wearing the Air Jordan III's. Jordan also when he first arrived is immediately called Air Jordan.

The association with the Warner Brothers and the Looney Tunes is an apparent move towards a positive approachable character for Jordan. Jordan makes jokes and performs in their cartoonish antics. He even has multiple jokes aimed towards his unimpressive baseball career. The more advanced pushing of the positive role model image can be seen throughout the movie. He shows that he is not perfect but does not give up when he is not great as things such as baseball. The most pivotal scene towards the promotion of the family oriented positive figure is when he arrives home after receiving a ride from Stan Podolak, the baseball's team publicist (portrayed by Wayne Knight). Jordan arrives at his medium sized suburban house and is greeted by his dog, his wife, and kids. When he goes inside he is spending time with his children and

watching cartoons with them. Jordan is one of the richest athletes in human history, and Warner Brothers and Nike wanted him to return home from a day of hard work to his quaint and nice house in the suburbs surrounded by family, not to his more accurate mansion. This subtle detail shows the promotion of Jordan as the positive role model in a turbulent and racially tensed time.

Space Jam proved to be immensely successful despite many critics' disapproval of the film. The movie grossed over \$230.4 million worldwide. Along with the movie came a successful soundtrack. The movie had hit songs including "I Believe I Can Fly," performed by R. Kelly. The soundtrack would be declared six-time platinum meaning it sold over six million copies worldwide. Capitalizing on the success of the film, toys were soon released targeting more towards their children audience. As well as a partnership with McDonald's, this allowed for more toys to be distributed through the Happy Meal.

The success of *Space Jam* is indisputable. Almost twenty years later, the familiar tandem of the Looney Tunes and Air Jordan reunite for more commercials. Air Jordan sponsored NBA player, Blake Griffin (formerly of the Los Angeles Clippers, now with the Detroit Pistons), is playing a game of basketball with a kid on an outdoor basketball court. After he dunks the basketball, the kid says, "Griffin with the earth shattering jam," which leads to a spaceship crash landing and the arrival of Marvin the Martian. Marvin states that, "earth shattering is his job."¹⁰² The two then enter a dunk contest which results in Bugs Bunny showing up handing Griffin the new pair of Jordans to allow him to get extra air and get the victory. The second commercial to pay homage to the successful partnership featured Griffin and Jimmy Butler (formerly of the Chicago Bulls, now with the Minnesota Timberwolves). Butler narrates while the returning

¹⁰² "The Dunk to End All Dunks," YouTube video, 2:19, posted by "Jordan," August 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmPJIMajVi4>.

villainous team from *Space Jam*, the Monstars take over the game of basketball and it is up to Griffin and a group of teenagers to stop them. In order to stop them they visit a Footlocker, where Bugs Bunny hands them the new Air Jordan sneakers and clothes to properly beat the evil squad.¹⁰³ And finally, the classic “Hare Jordan” sneakers were re-released in 2015 in honor of the triumphant duo of Jordan and Bugs.

The athletic displays of Jordan allowed for the further advancement that he was superhuman. These feats allowed him to be portrayed heroically, while his partnerships with celebrities like Steve Martin and the Looney Tunes allowed for him to seem more approachable. The celebrity relationships showed Jordan’s humorous side as well as promoting his family friendly image. The campaigns of the 1990s allowed for Nike to successfully promote Jordan in an opposing status of those famous celebrities of the era. This allowed for the Air Jordan product to reach a wider audience and have more products sold.

Back to Earth

On April 16, 2003 Michael Jordan entered the Wachovia Center, home to the Philadelphia 76ers. This day is important because it marked the final game of Jordan’s illustrious career. As the starting lineup began to enter, Ray Clay, the familiar voice of the Chicago Bulls, made a special appearance to announce Michael Jordan. As he jogged down to center court the crowd erupted into a deafening standing ovation that lasting minutes as Jordan stood there almost looking embarrassed as the cheers continued. Jordan finished the game with fifteen points and four assists, a less than average game for him. He walked off the court after making his last free

¹⁰³ “Defy the Monstars,” YouTube video, 1:38, posted by “Jordan,” December 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgUMAAmNtus>.

throw to a thunderous ovation from the crowd, players, and coaches. This moment and season was not only important for sports but also for the Air Jordan brand.¹⁰⁴

Jordan's second and official third retirements from the sport marked a new era of the Air Jordan brand. Entering into his final seasons the mood of the commercials and advertisements that crowds were familiar with had changed. The advertising campaign for Air Jordan would have a somber atmosphere, the camera filter is different, and the commercials are more cinematic in appearance. The campaigns did not focus on Jordan being some impervious, unstoppable force of athletic perfection instead they gave Jordan a more humanistic outlook. The next section will be divided into two parts, Jordan's second and third retirements. The campaigns used multiple themes that will be explored including nostalgia, inspiration, love, and overall Jordan being portrayed as a positive role model.

After returning from his first retirement in 1995, Jordan would play for three more years before calling it quits following the 1997-1998 season. The campaign of portraying Jordan as a positive role model can be seen in commercials like, "CEO Jordan" released in 1998. The commercial shows Jordan during halftime at a Chicago Bulls game running off to a corporate building where he heads to his office to deal with official business. After he deals with his business, he runs back to the game while taking off his suit like Superman to reveal his basketball uniform and continue playing in the second half.¹⁰⁵ The commercial is a significant step in the portrayal of Jordan because it shows that he is more than an athlete and shows the audience to aspire to be more than an athlete but also a successful business owner. It is less

¹⁰⁴ "04.16.03 - Michael Jordan's Last NBA Game Full Highlights (MJ Gets Standing Ovation)," YouTube video, 23:25, posted by "Oldskoolbball," September 18, 2016, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_H7g-jnhMM.

¹⁰⁵ "Air Jordan XIII Commercial- CEO Jordan," YouTube video, 0:44, posted by "Kicksologists," January 8, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWxar8fV6LI>.

serious in its approach but the message is just as important. Most of the pieces during this era of Air Jordan were much different in their approach.

For example, the piece entitled “Failure” became an iconic commercial for the Air Jordan brand. The commercial centered on Jordan getting out of his car before a game headed towards the locker-room. He is walking with his head down lost in thought, totally oblivious of the droves of adoring fans behind security lines and barricades. Jordan serves as the narrator for the commercial and lists off all of his past failures, including the thousands of missed shots and hundreds of games he has lost. As Jordan walks through the doors with his back to the camera he says, “That I have failed over and over and over again in my life, and that is why I succeed.”¹⁰⁶ Jordan in this commercial is humble and provides the audience with a positive message of no matter how many times a person fails, that person will succeed if they do not give up.

This same message can be seen in “Tell Me.” Michael Jordan’s face appears on the screen; he looks up and starts to run down an empty silent court, ball in hand. As he is running in slow motion driving forward, his voice can be heard narrating saying, “Challenge me, doubt me, disrespect me, tell me I’m older, tell me I’m slower, tell me I can no longer fly, I want you to.” On his final word Jordan leaps from the free-throw line and lands an impactful slam-dunk, and then the Air Jordan logo flashes upon the screen.¹⁰⁷

Other commercials during this era allowed for Jordan to be presented as a positive role model, but in a different way. These commercials would not have Jordan speaking, nor was he

¹⁰⁶ “Michael Jordan “Failure” Nike Commercial,” YouTube video, 0:30, posted by “JayMJ23’s channel,” August 25, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45mMioJ5szc>.

¹⁰⁷ “Air Jordan Commercial: Tell Me (Full Version),” YouTube video, 0:34, posted by “pascTV,” April 4, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5NaIM5yBMo>.

performing athletic feats; instead they were inspirational. The commercial for the Air Jordan XIV was a montage of Jordan's career and life accompanied by moving piano music. It showed Jordan winning his NBA championships and also Jordan at his first retirement. Most importantly, in these commercials it shows Jordan with his family playing with his kids, and Jordan playing basketball as a youth.¹⁰⁸ It shows an athlete as great as Jordan had humble beginnings, and portrayed him as a family man. The message is positive and shows Jordan as a role model.

The commercials after Jordan's second retirement as discussed provoked a different feel and provided a different message to those of the previous campaigns. The earliest campaign had Jordan solely displaying his athletic prowess and later on showing off his more comedic side. The approachability that was provided in the years of the partnership with Warner Brothers was continued and accentuated by the advertising campaign of his second retirement from the sport. It allowed for superhuman Jordan to show vulnerability allowing for maturation in presentation of Air Jordan. It shows Jordan as a more relatable figure who had to overcome failures and push-backs just like everyone. The heroic inspirational Jordan was presented during a time of racial tension and controversial figures. The message of inspiration would be carried over into the next campaign of ads during Jordan's third retirement.

Upon his retirement from basketball in 1998, Jordan came back to play for the Washington Wizards from 2001-2003. He was still playing well with the Wizards, but due to injuries he was forced to a limited role. The appearance of Jordan still drew huge numbers in attendance even if he was not the old Michael. The nearing forty-year-old Jordan's longevity was

¹⁰⁸ "Air Jordan XIV Commercial Career Retrospect SneakerNews.com," YouTube video, 01:01, posted by "Sneaker News," August 29, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTFy935x3cs>

limited and Nike knew this. The Air Jordan advertisements focused on the love of the sport and willingness for him to come back and play. These commercials and advertisements capitalized on the nostalgia of Jordan and his brand by showing the ups and downs of his career through the “What is love,” campaign. Through nostalgia they were able to encompass many of the previous themes and techniques used in previous ads to gain more consumers.

The “What Is Love” campaign of Air Jordan began its run as Jordan was entering his final season after he returned from retirement to join the Washington Wizards. The ads and commercials of this campaign focus heavy on recollection and nostalgia from the viewers he grew up watching Jordan. The focus of these ads, are of Jordan being portrayed as a hero and recalling his triumphs and defeats. The print ads are simplistic usually a photo and not more than ten words. The commercials on the other hand for this campaign spared no expense and are long and extravagant.

The most famous commercial of the “What is love” campaign was first aired during halftime of the 2003 All-Star Game in Atlanta, Georgia. This commercial was unusual for one main reason-it was close to five minutes long, an extremely lengthy and costly endeavor. The commercial opens up with a title sequence, which states “Love Supreme: A Jordan Love Story,” followed by the tag line “What is love?” This entry already gives the commercial a cinematic feel. The opening sequence begins a long chronological order of filmed events in Jordan’s career. Each section being accompanied by dramatic music and Jordan narrating saying “Love is being a rookie,” “Love is taking the air less traveled,” and so on. The commercial shows career highlights including winning his NBA Championships and hitting game shots, but also events like him getting fouled hard and hitting the ground, him retiring, and his uneventful minor league baseball career. The commercial ends with Jordan coming off the bench saying “What is Love?”

Love is playing every game like it is your last,” as the camera shot fades to the Air Jordan logo.¹⁰⁹

The ads accompany the commercial perfectly. Each ad follows the same formula and has the words “Love is” followed by a statement. The first print ads analyzed will look at the classic motif that follows Air Jordan campaigns are always the focus on his athleticism, but by using the trope of athleticism they are honing in on the nostalgia of the past ads. In this campaign they used ads like “love is the air less traveled.”¹¹⁰ This is clearly a play on the well-known phrase the road less traveled. By using a play on this phrase it focuses on the nostalgic look on Jordan and his groundbreaking play. The photos used on this ad are four different pictures of Jordan performing gravity defying dunks. The campaign relieves highlights of Jordan’s career. In the ad “Love is dropping 69,” shows him scoring his career high in points scored during a game. The advertisement uses sixty-nine mini photographs of him making a jump shot.¹¹¹

“Love is a buzzer beater” stands at the foreground of the photo while Jordan hits his jump shot. The photo is one of the most iconic moments in NBA history simply known as “The Shot.” Jordan hit the series winning shot in the 1989 Eastern Conference First Round against the Cleveland Cavaliers. The Air Jordan sneakers can be seen in this photo as Jordan kicks up his feet to jump over his opponents guarding him.¹¹² By associating the sneaker with this iconic moment it implies that this sneaker helped Jordan himself make the shot, therefore it could helped people improve their game. Buying a pair of the sneakers that are in the ad would give the

¹⁰⁹ “Michael Jordan- What Is Love?,” YouTube video, 4:34, posted by “skaw23,” February 24, 2006, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=owY34aRiBNU>.

¹¹⁰ “Love is the Air Less Traveled,” digital image, *Tenisfuki.EU*, 2003, <http://tenisufki.eu/artykul/michael-jordan-what-is-love>.

¹¹¹ “Love is Dropping 69,” digital image, *Tenisfuki.EU*, 2003, <http://tenisufki.eu/artykul/michael-jordan-what-is-love>.

¹¹² “Love is a Buzzer Beater,” digital image, *Tenisfuki.EU*, 2003, <http://tenisufki.eu/artykul/michael-jordan-what-is-love>.

viewer a constant connection and reminder to that moment playing right into the nostalgic feeling of Jordan's last season.

"Love is your first," is printed on a photo of Jordan holding his first NBA Championship pressed against his face. Jordan is drenched in sweat after a hard fought game, wearing his NBA Champions' cap with a look of serenity on his face almost holding back tears.¹¹³ This print ad not only like the other ads plays into the nostalgia, but it plays into the emotion of the viewer. Jordan's face is the primary focus of this ad allowing for the viewer to see the emotion in Jordan as his eyes are closed and you can see a peaceful enjoyment. Using the statement "love is your first" also implies a variety of topics including the first love of the audience. Not only does this ad tap into the nostalgic memories of the iconic figure that is Jordan but also for the viewers' personal life.

One ad in particular focuses solely on the shoes something that the other advertisements in this campaign do not. The ad is a close up of Jordan's feet with his iconic high socks and a clean pair of white Air Jordan III's, and reads "Love is wearing a new pair every game."¹¹⁴ This is stating that Jordan wore a new pair of sneakers every game almost trying to entice the reader that they should buy multiple pairs. The statement makes the viewer think if Jordan has all these pairs, maybe by owning a lot of pairs they equal his greatness on the court.

¹¹³ "Love is Your First," digital image, *Tenisfuki.EU*, 2003, <http://tenisufki.eu/artykul/michael-jordan-what-is-love>.

¹¹⁴ "Love is Wearing a New Pair Every Game," digital image, *Tenisfuki.EU*, 2003, <http://tenisufki.eu/artykul/michael-jordan-what-is-love>.



Figure 7 “Love is Dropping 69, Love is Your First” digital image, *Tenisufki.EU*, 2003, <http://tenisufki.eu/artykul/michael-jordan-what-is-love>.

Analyzing these commercials shows that Jordan was used as a positive and family friendly figure. This portrayal allows for easier acceptance and sponsorship, but is important because he is seen in his commercials as a remedy for what was being presented in the media. Controversial athletes like Tyson, Simpson, and figures like Rodman and Barkley allowed for Jordan to be portrayed as a positive African-American figure which can be seen in his Air Jordan commercials.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Jordan's success surpassed what any person could ever think was possible for an athlete. Since his third and final retirement, he has become a billionaire in great part due to his Air Jordan brand. He is now partial owner of and helps operate the head offices of the Charlotte Hornets.¹¹⁵ The next section will discuss the current state of the Air Jordan company. Following this, Jordan and his brand's image and political views in comparison to when he was an active player will be discussed. Finally, this section will examine his influence on relationships between athletes and athletic sponsorships.

Current State of Air Jordan

The Jordan brand has obviously been successful since Jordan's retirement. The company has sponsored numerous athletes from not only basketball, but also baseball, such as the top players of the NBA including Russell Westbrook, Blake Griffin, Chris Paul, and in the MLB, now retired Derek Jeter. Recently Air Jordan signed their first female athlete in Maya Moore of the WNBA.¹¹⁶ The television commercials are seen occasionally, but not as frequently. They now center on the current athletes, and while Jordan is not present, his voice can still be heard narrating certain commercials. The positive messages heard in the commercials of the decades past can still be seen today. For example in the commercial "My Fault," Jordan narrates while the commercial shows empty rooms where Jordan practiced, grew up, and played. The basic

¹¹⁵ Richard Sandomir, "N.B.A. Board Approves Jordan's Purchase of the Bobcats," *New York Times*, March 17, 2010, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/18/sports/basketball/18jordan.html>.

¹¹⁶ Jorge Castillo, "The Marketing of Moore Is a Team Challenge," *New York Times*, August 7, 2011, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/08/sports/basketball/maya-moores-deal-with-jordan-brand-could-be-breakthrough.html>.

concept of the commercial is that you have to work hard to succeed in life.¹¹⁷ The new motto of the company is now “Become Legendary.”¹¹⁸

Scandals and Politics

Jordan like many athletes suffered through scandals through his career. The partnership between Nike and Jordan meant if one or the other fell into a scandal, both had to answer to the media. Nike began to make the news in the early 1990s for violation of labor laws in their factories in Asia. In Indonesia, workers were being paid a meager \$2.23 a day.¹¹⁹ In Vietnam, the mostly female work force, were victims of cruel punishment, low pay, malnutrition, and exhaustion.¹²⁰ When Jordan was asked about this issue, he responded, “I think that's Nike's decision to do what they can to make sure everything is correctly done. I don't know the complete situation. Why should I? I'm trying to do my job.”¹²¹

Jordan’s private life began to take issue as well. In 1992, news got out that he had gotten mixed up with a wrong group of people and his gambling debts were exposed to the world. When a known criminal James “Slim” Bouler was arrested for money and drug laundering, the police found a check from Michael Jordan for \$57,000. During the trial, Jordan admitted that he had given Bouler the money for payment of his debts of gambling on golf and poker.¹²² In 2002,

¹¹⁷ “Michael Jordan Motivational Commercial,” YouTube video, 01:02, posted by “Trainer Rich USA,” June 3, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPmiIusWg3g>.

¹¹⁸ “Jordan Brand Unveils “Become Legendary” Campaign,” *Nike News*, January 8, 2008, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://news.nike.com/news/jordan-brand-unveils-become-legendary-campaign>.

¹¹⁹ LaFeber, 147.

¹²⁰ Bob, Herbert, “Nike’s Boot Camps,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1997, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/03/31/opinion/nike-s-boot-camps.html>; Steven Greenhouse, “Nike Shoe Plant in Vietnam is Called Unsafe for Workers,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1997, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/08/business/nike-shoe-plant-in-vietnam-is-called-unsafe-for-workers.html>; LaFeber, 148.

¹²¹ David Haugh, “Nike, Jordan Endure Share of Controversy,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 10, 2009, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/basketball/bulls/michaeljordan/chi-10-jordan-5-nike-criticssep10-story.html>.

¹²² LaFeber, 113.

Jordan would file for a divorce only to have it delayed until 2005. In 2002, he had admitted to cheating on his wife with a woman named Karla Knafel. The news broke out that he had paid her \$250,000 to remain silent, but she demanded and said that he promised her \$5 million.¹²³ Jordan and his wife Juanita finally divorced in 2006 in what was one of the most expensive divorces in history.¹²⁴

Despite these scandals, as Jordan, has always found a way to bounce back and represent his brand well. He is still remembered as family friendly, a great humanitarian, and legendary player. His popularity and above all else his portrayal as a positive role model through his advertising, shows how successful Nike and Air Jordan were to indoctrinate generations. Even with negative press the years of constant exposure through advertising allowed for him to recover and still be perceived as he is in the Air Jordan ads.

Throughout Jordan's career, he remained silent on racial and political issues. With current events like Ferguson, and multiple incidents involving African Americans being shot by the police, people once again inquired about Jordan's opinion. Unlike his playing days, Jordan spoke up. Jordan discussed his frustration and said, "As a proud American, a father who lost his own dad in a senseless act of violence, and a black man, I have been deeply troubled by the deaths of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement and angered by the cowardly and hateful targeting and killing of police officers."¹²⁵ While Jordan was careful in his approach and answer, he also donated one million dollars each to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational

¹²³ Selena Roberts, "Sports of the Times; Jordan and His Image Have Lost Air and Come Back to Earth," *New York Times*, December 15, 2002, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/sports/sports-of-the-times-jordan-and-his-image-have-lost-air-and-come-back-to-earth.html>.

¹²⁴ "Michael Jordan, Wife Divorce after 17 Years," *Seattle Times*, December 29, 2006, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/michael-jordan-wife-divorce-after-17-years/>.

¹²⁵ Cindy Boren, "Michael Jordan Breaks his Silence over Racial Violence in America," *Washington Post*, July 25, 2016, accessed April 2, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2016/07/25/michael-jordan-breaks-his-silence-over-racial-violence-in-america/?utm_term=.5863d13c2cf2.

Fund and the Institute for Community-Police Relations.¹²⁶ In 2014 when, then Los Angeles Clippers owner, Donald Sterling made egregious racist comments, Jordan spoke up again and said “he was disgusted that a fellow team owner could hold such sickening and offensive views.”¹²⁷ Many still wonder why he did not do this during his playing career.

Influence

Jordan’s influence can still be felt today with the relationship between athletes and athletic sponsorship. Before Jordan, not many athletes, especially African-American athletes were able to gain sponsorship.¹²⁸ While athletes before him like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and George Gervin were able to land deals, they did not have signature shoes and were not nearly as successful as Air Jordan. Now tons of athletes are sponsored by athletic companies, and develop their own signature shoes- NBA stars like LeBron James, Chris Paul, Carmelo Anthony, James Harden, Stephen Curry, and Damian Lillard. The contracts athletes are receiving are unheard prior to Jordan. James Harden of the Houston Rockets signed a \$200 million contract with Adidas.¹²⁹ In 2016, news broke out that LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers had signed a new lifetime contract with Nike at an estimated worth of over a billion dollars.¹³⁰ Air Jordan not only sponsors athletes but schools’ athletic programs as well. In basketball, they sponsor universities like Georgetown, Marquette, and California. They also have crossed over into

¹²⁶ Jonah Engel Bromwich, “Michael Jordan Say he is Deeply Troubled by Recent Police-Related Violence,” *New York Times*, July 25, 2016, accessed April 2, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/sports/basketball/michael-jordan-statement-on-police-related-violence.html?_r=0.

¹²⁷ Cindy Boren, “Michael Jordan “Completely Outraged” by Donald Sterling’s Alleged Comments,” *Washington Post*, April 27, 2014, accessed April 2, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2014/04/27/michael-jordan-completely-outraged-by-donald-sterling-comments/?utm_term=.006af5fde2c5.

¹²⁸ Kellner, “The Sports Spectacle...,” 47.

¹²⁹ Sam Amick, “James Harden Agrees to \$200 million Shoe Contract with Adidas,” *USA Today*, August 13, 2005, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/rockets/2015/08/13/james-harden-adidas-shoe-contract/31634809/>.

¹³⁰ “LeBron James’s Nike Deal may be Worth More than \$1 Billion,” *Sports Illustrated*, May 17, 2016, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.si.com/nba/2016/05/17/lebron-james-nike-deal-contract-one-billion>.

football sponsoring the University of North Carolina, the University of Michigan, and Oklahoma University.¹³¹

Air Jordan did not just inspire athletes to seek athletic sponsorships but companies to seek athletes. The Nike advertisements also inspired the approach companies take to represent their athletes. For example, in his commercial for Adidas, Damian Lillard of the Portland Trailblazers displays his athletic abilities through a highlight reel and his hard work through his training montage.¹³² This feeling of showing dedication and dominance in the game in commercials is reminiscent of something Jordan perfected in his career. Another example is LeBron James in his commercial entitled “Come out of nowhere.” In this commercial it shows children and teenagers overcoming their doubt and exceeding their expectations. The whole time James narrates giving inspiration while the audience shows people struggling and overcoming on the basketball court.¹³³ This commercial has a similar feel to Air Jordan commercials during his second and third retirement, focusing on inspiring and overcoming. The influence of Air Jordan has on athletes and sponsorships is unparalleled.

Jordan still remains a popular topic for scholars; his brand but mostly the advertisements still relatively untouched. While articles have been released that discuss Air Jordan, they do not look into his advertisements and what they represent. Much more research can be done, and can look further into portrayal and race in advertisements, but also this can be applied to the topic of gender. The field is expanding for research on Jordan and his brand.

¹³¹ Chip Patterson, “Oklahoma Becomes Third Program to Sign with Jordan Brand in Football, Basketball,” *CBS*, November 10, 2017, accessed December 18, 2017, <https://www.cbssports.com/college-football/news/oklahoma-becomes-third-program-to-sign-with-jordan-brand-in-football-basketball/>.

¹³² “Adidas Damian Lillard Creators Never Follow Commercial 2016,” YouTube video, 1:00, posted by “AdsHouse,” December 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiZUaTVbRyo>.

¹³³ “LeBron James- Inspirational Nike Commercial "Come Out Of Nowhere" [2017],” YouTube video, 1:27, posted by “Lethal Hooper,” July 18, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2PzHyUXNiE>.

While the 1980s and 1990s proved to a tumultuous time filled with racial violence and protests. Figures whether they are positive outspoken figures or figures associated with negativity like Tyson and Simpson proved impactful in how audiences were exposed to certain aspects and figures of African-American society, and how this led to the formation of certain stereotypes. Jordan was able to provide through his advertisements a different perspective of African Americans and different opinions on issues. Whether people like or dislike Jordan, he was impactful and able to provide a differing view from the outspoken and was portrayed as a positive image compared to certain athletes and celebrities of the time.

REFERENCES

PrimaryNewspapers

Chicago Tribune

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

Seattle Times

Sun Sentinel

The Guardian

Wall Street Journal

Washington Post

Magazines, Periodicals, and Newsletters

Complex

Ebony

Mother Jones

Newsweek

Nike News

Sole Collector

Sports Illustrated

Time

USA Today

Films and Television

Do the Right Thing

“Jordan’s Last NBA Game”

She’s Gotta Have It

She’s Gotta Have It (television series)

Space Jam

Print Ads and Posters

“Air Jordan VI”

“Best on Earth, Best on Mars 2”

“Best on Earth, Best on Mars 3”

“Best on Earth, Best on Mars”

“Do You Know”

“Flight School”

“Hare Jordan”

“High Flying”

“Is it the Shoes”

“Jumpman”

“Look Up, In the Air”

“Love is a Buzzer Beater”

“Love is Dropping 69”

“Love is the Air Less Traveled”

“Love is Wearing a New Pair Every Game”

“Love is Your First”

“Mars’ Room”

“Marvin the Martian”

“Runway”

Commercials

“100 Foot Dunk”

“20th Anniversary”

“Aeronautics”

“Air Jordan 8, Bugs Bunny”

“Air Jordan III”

“Banned”

“Career Retrospect”

“CEO Jordan”

“Come Out of Nowhere”

“Cover”

“Creators Never Follow”

“Defy the Monstars”

“Dunk to End All Dunks”

“Failure”

“Hare Jordan (featuring Bugs Bunny)”

“It’s Gotta be the Shoes”

“Man Was Not Meant to Fly”

“Michael Jordan Motivation”

“Michael Jordan vs. Santa”

“Motorboat Jones”

“Nola Darling”

“Popcorn Tape”

“Rockababy”

“Tell Me”

“What is Love”

Secondary

“40 Acres Promise to Blacks was Broken.” *New York Times*, October 25, 1994. Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/25/opinion/1-40-acres-promise-to-blacks-was-broken-628816.html>.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: New Press, 2012.

Andrews, David L. “The Fact(s) of Michael Jordan’s Blackness: Excavating a Floating Racial Signifier.” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 125-158.

Andrews, David L. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Armstrong, Edward G. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Berger, Arthur Asa. *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising’s Impact on American Character and Society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2015.

Carrington, Ben, David L. Andrews, Steven J. Jackson, and Zbigniew Mazur. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Christian, Margena A. “Parental Advisory: The History of the N.W.A.” *Ebony*, June 2011.

Christian, Margena A. “Parental Advisory: The History of the N.W.A.” *Ebony*, June 2011.

Cole, C.L. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Cooper, Hannah L.F. “War on Drugs Policing and Police Brutality.” *Substance Use and Misuse* 50, no. 8/9 (June/July 2015): 1188-1194.

Cross, Gary. *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism won in Modern America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Denzin, Norman K. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Dikovitskaya, Margaret. *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

- Dyson, Michael Eric. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Ferber, Abby L. "The Construction of Black Masculinity: White Supremacy Now and Then." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 31, no. 1 (February 2007): 11-24.
- Gray, Madison. "The L.A. Riots: 15 years after Rodney King." *Time*, April 25, 2007. Accessed April 2, 2017. http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/la_riot/article/0,28804,1614117_1614084_1614831,00.html.
- Harkness, Geoffrey Victor. *Chicago Hustle and Flow: Gangs, Gangsta Rap, and Social Class*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Hoechsmann, Michael. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Johnson, Scoop. "Impact of Jordan Brand Reaches Far Beyond Basketball." *ESPN* (blog), February 12, 2016. http://www.espn.com/nba/story/_id/14760324/cultural-impact-jordan-sneakers-goes-for-basketball.
- Kellner, Douglas. "Sports, Media Culture, and Race- Some Reflections on Michael Jordan." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no.2 (1996): 458-467.
- Kellner, Douglas. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- LaFeber, Walter. *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*. New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2002.
- Lavelle, Katherine L. "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Black Masculinity in NBA Game Commentary." *Howard Journal of Communications* 4 no. 1 (2010): 294-314.
- McDonald, Mary G. "Michael Jordan's Family Values: Marketing, Meaning, and Post-Reagan America." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 344-365.
- McDonald, Mary G. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Merlino, Doug. "How Michael Jordan Became the First Modern African-American Superstar." *Bleacher Report* (blog), May 20, 2011. <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/706837-how-michael-jordan-became-the-first-modern-african-american-superstar-athlete>.
- Murch, Donna. "Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarization, and Black Response to the Late Twentieth-Century War On Drugs." *Journal of American History* 102 no. 1 (June 2015): 162-173.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York, NY: Psychology Press, 1994.

- Oware, Matthew. "Brotherly Love: Homosociality and Black Masculinity in Gangsta Rap Music." *Journal of African American Studies* 15 no. 1 (March 2011): 22-39.
- "Rap of Ages: A Timeline," *Mother Jones*, November-December 2007.
- Roberts, James A. *Shiny Objects: Why We Spend Money We Don't Have in Search of Happiness We Can't Buy*. New York: Harper-Collins Publisher, 2011.
- Rovell, Darren. "How Nike Landed Michael Jordan." *ESPN* (blog). February 15, 2013. http://www.espn.com/blog/playbook/dollars/post/_id/2918/how-nike-landed-michael-jordan.
- Serrienne, Nina Esperanza. *America in the Nineties*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015.
- Strasser, Susan. *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*. Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1989.
- Twitchell, James B. *Lead Us into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Weiss, Jeff. "25 Years Later, Dr. Dre's 'The Chronic' Remains Rap's World-Building Masterpiece." *Chicago Tribune*. Accessed February 19, 2018, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/ct-dr-dre-the-chronic-20171215-story.html>.
- "Why Adidas Passed on Signing Michael Jordan to Endorsement Deal in 1984." *The Postgame* (blog), March 23, 2015. <http://www.thepostgame.com/blog/style-points/201503/michael-jordan-adidas-nike-contract-offer-1984-sign-centers-kareem-7-footer>.
- Wilson, Brian and Robert Sparks. "It's Gotta Be the Shoes: Youth, Race, and Sneaker Commercials." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, no. 2 (1996): 398-427.
- Wilson, Brian and Robert Sparks. *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Edited by David L. Andrews. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.