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D E M O C R A T I C C O M M U N I Q U É

Representations of the Working Class in Trump-Era Advertising

Matthew P. McAllister

This essay argues that in the early- to mid-Trump era – starting with his active campaign for the US Presidency in 2015 and through his subsequent administration pre-Covid through February 2020 – working-class bodies were used in advertising to both contest and enact prominent values and ideological tensions that became prominent during Trump's reign. Advertising used class-based representations in several ways: to critique Trump and his policies; to depict working-class hardships under Trump; and, conversely, to celebrate white working-class masculinity, authoritarianism, and classed masquerades. Each of these themes highlights a particular tension indicative of the Trump era. Often contradictory, such representations exemplify stereotypes about the working-class and serve to solidify enduring and often stifling lessons about class in society.

Keywords: Donald Trump, advertising, working-class bodies, masculinity, authoritarianism

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Critical advertising studies, as a research paradigm, highlights the relationship of advertising and promotion to regimes of social power and the power differences these regimes perpetuate. Critical political economy approaches to advertising as a funding system for media and critical textual analysis that foregrounds advertising's role in perpetuating hegemonic symbols through commercial venues (such as the advertisement itself) can both be methods for critical advertising studies. Much of critical advertising scholarship focuses on socio-cultural categories including gender, race, nationality, and sexuality (Hamilton & Bodle 2017; West & McAllister 2013).

Counterintuitively, class is often not explicitly highlighted to the same degree in critical advertising research as the above categories, especially with textual approaches (as noted by Callier 2014; Foster 2005; and Paulson & O'Guinn 2012, 2018). However, class is a salient concept in consumer culture, in the political economy of media commercialism, and in cultural manifestations of brand advertising. One of the first explorations of class and consumption, of course, is Veblen's (1922 edition) interrogation of "conspicuous consumption," in which consumers attempt to assert a desired class status through the display of prestigious consumer goods. By emphasizing self-worth through consumption performance, social differences (including by class) are continually constituted, over-spending is encouraged, and non-material values such as altruism are underutilized (Assaf 2016).

In advertising's role as a key funding source for media, the goal of advertisers to reach demographically desirable audiences – include those with sufficient disposable income – has long incentivized media to create content appealing to those audiences, and excluding those not economically desirable for advertisers, such as the poor (Baker 2002). Programming that emphasizes middle-class or upper-middle class representations also flow well with commercials that create aspirational worlds filled with material goods (Budd, Craig & Steinman 1999). Even when the working-class is portrayed in media, it may be in ridiculing and stereotypical ways (Butsch 2020; Rennels 2015), narrative tendencies that encourage pleasurable downward social comparisons for audiences who root their identity in being middle class and above.

Class also manifests as a category of representation in advertising. Advertising has long attempted to create positive affect for their products through class-based icons, or negative connotations about competitors or for those not using the advertised brand. In advertising, class positions are portrayed through strategic construction of class-oriented symbols that are associated with the corporeal, including body shapes, hair, and clothing, among other iconographical tools used by marketing. Advertising thus offers normative lessons about how different classes look, sound, behave.

This essay argues that in the era of Donald J. Trump as a presidential candidate and then president – starting with his active campaign for the US Presidency in 2015 and ending with the Covid-19 pandemic – advertising used representations of classed bodies, and especially working-class bodies, to both question and accentuate prominent values and ideological tensions Trump and his supporters enacted. Class-based representations in commercial discourse sometimes critiqued Trump and his policies and portrayed hardships of the working-class under Trump and his policies. However, other advertising flowed with Trumpian values, including the celebration of white working-class masculinity, authoritarianism, and classed masquerades. Taken collectively, these

contradictory representations exemplified long-standing stereotypes about the working class – although often with a Trumpian twist – and served to reinforce stigmatizing lessons that circulate in popular culture and political discourse about class in society.

Class, Advertising History, and the Trump Presidency

Social class of course has a strong materialist component given its roots in capitalistic inequities/discrepancies in economic resources. But class also is semiotically constructed in various cultural forms such as fictional film and television, journalism, and advertising. Class is constructed intersectionally, with variants that combine class with other social categories including but not exclusively gender and race. For white males, for example, class position may be symbolically indicated by types of clothing (literally blue collars vs. white collars; jeans/t-shirts vs. Armani suits), body shapes (with, contradictorily, both obese and muscular bodies signifying working class), skin (tattoos vs. tattoo-less), hair styles (uncombed vs. coiffed), facial hair (beards vs. clean shaven), settings (factory vs. office; bars vs. resorts), and artifacts (pickup truck vs. luxury sedans) (see Paulson & O'Guinn 2012, 2018; Callier 2015).

Ironically (given the importance of class position to consumer culture), class is often not foregrounded in advertising because of an assumed middle- or professional-class positioning of most representation in advertising (Callier 2005). Magazine ads, for example, only represent the working-class in about 10 percent of advertising (Paulson & O'Guinn 2012, 2018). Except for celebrities in advertising for beauty and other elite brands, people in advertising often seem declassed with default middle-class iconography of body types, hair styles, and clothing. Similarly, class is de-emphasized because rarely do representations of different class positions appear in the same advertisement, as is consistent with increasingly prevalent niche marketing strategies that target consumers by offering representations of their matched class position (or, perhaps, their aspirational class position; see Turow 2006).

However, Marchand (1985) argues that certain periods of US history, especially ones marked by distinctive political or economic events, may foreground class in advertising more than in other eras. In the Depression, for example, the upper class was used to offer tales of class mobility if one successfully consumes brands; servant classes also signified a life of leisure for brand users. The post-recession era of 2013+ offered class positions that were explicitly contrasted in ads to emphasize the elevated promise from brands like Buick and Air Emirates; the commercial denigration of the working class illustrated a form of "class shaming" (McAllister & Aupperle 2017).

Arguably, the political rise of Donald Trump was both an extension of the earlier US post-recession era, and one that manifested class tensions in society and culture in particular ways. Trump is the purported billionaire who was often described as appealing to working-class whites.[i] During his days when he was in Trump's favor, Anthony Scaramucci, the shortest-tenured White House Communications Director, titled his book *Trump: The Blue Color President* (2018). True believers could purchase merchandise with Trump's image over an American flag with the legend "Working Class Hero" (CafePress 2019). Trump himself wore a hard hat emblazoned with a Presidential seal (O'Brien 2019). His purported class appeal, of course, is strongly tinged with antipathy toward other lower- and working-class groups, especially people of color, as emphasized through the framing of issues as resulting from racialized criminality (blaming immigrants and urban centers

for a slow economy and high crime rates), branding (repeated use of words such as "invasion" in political rhetoric), and tweets, race-baiting strategies that Trump cultivated over many years (Vaidhyanathan 2019). Proponents of Trump's white working-class appeal emphasized his supposed economic benefits to the white working class – framed as "economic anxiety" – rather than his appeal to their racial biases (Beauchamp 2018). As will be discussed in the conclusion, Trump's own political advertising, and those of Political Action Committees (PACs), prominently used working-class bodies as political symbols.

Adding to the paradox of a billionaire working-class hero was the damage that Trump's policies did to those very groups, including eroding health insurance protections and social services, and imposing tariffs that increased prices and decreased international demand in such sectors as agriculture and passing tax cuts that privileged the rich (Johnston 2019). Aside from the classed-based values and policies of Trump as campaigner and President, another element that enhanced the salience and influence of the Trump era to advertising is that Trump himself has been a long-time presence in commercials, including in promotions for his NBC program *The Apprentice*, in commercials for Trump-branded products like Trump Steaks, or as a spokesperson for brands like McDonald's and Pizza Hut (for the latter, see Donald Trump TV Commercials 2016).

It can be essentialist to connect messages of commercial culture to a particular zeitgeist, including making airtight causal claims that particular classed tropes in advertising were more prominent in the late 2010s than in early eras and were directly related to Trump's political image and policies. Nevertheless, considering that particularized forms of socio-cultural trends are a recognized contextual frame for analysis of media texts (Christians and Carey 1989), in this specific case, some relatively distinctive appeals in US print and television advertisements resonated with Trump administration's orientations toward class. These appeals appeared not only in "niche" or conservative media such as Fox News but also in widely popular outlets such as sports magazines and entertainment cable television networks. As such, they distribute lessons about the nature of working folk, and sometimes their relationships to other social classes, that both flow with previous tendencies, and refocus others. The prevalence of Covid-19 radically altered the messages and emphases in advertising beginning in March 2020 (Einstein 2020). But from the launching of his successful campaign for the US Presidency in 2015 through February 2020, we saw references to Trumpian classness in many high-profile advertising campaigns.

The following sections review several Trump-era advertising tropes that use working-class bodies. The essay engages, using textual analysis, the visual and verbal symbols in the ads, particularly of and surrounding working-class bodies, but also integrates supplemental materials such as reviews of campaigns, tweets, and commercial websites to supplement the analysis.[ii]

Advertising Vs. Trump

One mini-trend that occurred during and soon after the 2016 election was advertising that referenced Trump and Trump policies critically – although typically metaphorically or obtusely – often using working-class bodies as symbols for such criticism. Such advertising, though, faced significant pushback from Trump supporters.

Some ads referenced Trump satirically but were not especially classed portrayals. Smirnoff, for example, in 2017 out-of-home advertising, announced that its vodka was "Made in America. But

we'd be happy to talk about our ties to Russia under oath"; the campaign was seen as an early success, but "Smirnoff had some trepidation about the Trump ads" (Schultz 2017a). More explicit was a pre-primary 2015 southern California Spanish-language commercial for local Nissan dealers, airing on a local NBC/Telemundo affiliate that featured a store manager and employee beating a Trump pinata. Nissan as a corporation distanced themselves from the commercial, labeling it as not "responsible or respectful" (Chappell 2015), and the video was removed from the Internet soon after it attracted national attention.

Other ads were obliquely critical of Trump policies – and again soon faced backlash – but featured class as a construct. This was most clearly seen during the 2017 US broadcast of the Super Bowl, the championship game of the NFL. Coca-Cola re-aired an ad from 2014 that presented a diversity of races and ages, with America the Beautiful sung in different languages, but including an opening shot of a man in jeans and cowboy hat riding a horse (who we see again near the end drinking a Coke). Attracting the most attention – and the ones most explicitly featuring working-class bodies -- were commercials for Anheuser-Busch's Budweiser beer and 84 Lumber. The former a series of bodily indignities for the newly arrived, young, white immigrant Adolphus Busch: battered in the hold of a ship crossing the Atlantic, jumping from a burning steamboat, walking in mud, being bumped by nativist Americans ("You're not wanted here, go back home!" shouts one obvious bigot). The ad concludes with him meeting the friendly fellow immigrant Eberhard Anheuser. 84 Lumber was more contemporary: with little dialogue, it depicted the story of a brown-skinned mother and her young daughter who brave the tough journey to, presumably, the United States. As with Budweiser, the harrowing nature of the travel is illustrated by insults to the foreign body: riding in the back of a truck with animals, unprotected by the elements, maneuvering through streams and deserts. The complete commercial story was not aired during the Super Bowl broadcast itself: viewers were urged to view the longer version on the 84 Lumber website – a narrative that ends with the mother and daughter walking through a door (enabled by materials from 84 Lumber?) of a giant wall that initially blocks their way.

The advertisers faced significant backlash (Payne 2017; O'Reilly 2017). Budweiser downplayed the interpretation of the ad as a Trump response, but nevertheless the misspelled #BoycottBudwiser trended on Twitter after the Super Bowl (Tribune News Services 2017). One correctly spelled Tweet declared: "Never drinking @Budweiser you should respect the AMERICAN president instead you mock with liberal propaganda #boycottbudweiser" (reproduced in Belam 2017). For 84 Lumber, the commercial had to be altered before being approved by the Fox broadcast network (with no wall to be shown during the broadcast), and before the ad aired, the ad agency attempted to depoliticize its message: "the ad isn't about the wall, it's about opportunity," claimed one marketing executive (Mayo 2017). The political message was seen as ambiguous by some, but nevertheless the Twitter response was heavy and divisive, with some tweets ridiculing the ad as unrealistic because of the weak nature of non-white women's bodies – "#84Lumber doesn't mention women left in the desert bc they're slowing the group down and die from thirst" – or as a later drain on the system – "I bet the 2nd half of the 84 Lumber ad doesn't show her at the food stamp office" (Galarza and Stoltzfus-Brown 2021).

This backlash seemed to have a stifling effect on anti-Trump commentary the next year. During the 2018 Super Bowl, even any vaguely metaphorical political messages about Trumpian policies were absent: as one media commentator noted, "marketers this year seemed to tone down the snark and avoid anything with a whiff of a political statement" (Deggans 2018). Ads critical of Trump

did not disappear entirely later in his administration. A 2019 Times Square outdoor campaign for the athletic-wear brand Dhvani featured muscular women physically roughing up a Trump impersonator. Even so, before approval by Times-Square landlords the campaign needed to demonstrate a certain level of "facial obfuscation" (Sherwood 2019). Despite this 2019 example, the lesson of this initial wave that marketers learned was to avoid commercial criticism of Trump. However, Trump-analogue advertising did not disappear, but rather took different forms, including to vaguely address Trump-era economic challenges or to adopt more sympathetic commercial analogies for Trump's America, often using the classed body as a part of their symbolic repertoire.

Working-Class Hardships

Another category of advertising used working-class bodies to illustrate class-based hardship. These can be read as less a criticism of Trump, given the lack of explicit connections, but still an awareness of the struggles of the working-class that were exacerbated by Trump-administration policies. Trump's use of tariffs created additional financial strain for sectors of society. Similarly, the Trump administration was hostile to the Affordable Care Act, the comprehensive health care coverage policy also known as Obamacare. Although the administration failed to remove the policy, it was weakened by underfunding and underpublicizing; this likely led to more Americans being underinsured during his administration (Collins, Bhupal, and Doty 2019). Commercials during his presidency used portrayals of the working class to dramatize hardships that flowed with these political trends, hardships that also, within the narrative logic of the ads, situated the brands as heroic remedies.

A 2019 Ram pickup truck commercial begins quietly with a white man in jeans in a "Howe Farms" t-shirt walking in a field. A male narrator says,

> Out here, you know what needs to be done. And you know what it means to those you are doing it for. Every sunrise brings something new, with the weather, the soil, the markets, your machinery. You can't always predict what it will be. So it's good to know that Ram trucks are more than capable of helping you do it right.

Here farmers are coded as determined, authentic, and centrally of the earth (as illustrated by shifting through soil, harvesting), surveying their land with a dog and Ram by their side, white and mostly male (excepting one brief shot of a woman working in a field with other men). The only time they are seen as out of their element is when the narrator says "the markets" – a particularly salient concept for farmers in the Trump presidency -- as a white male farmer looks worriedly at a laptop. In another promotional video on the "Ram Agriculture" brand website, a farmer evokes bankruptcy by saying, "My grandpa and dad both built a legacy, and I won't let it die with me." The end slot of this video embodies farming *in* the people: "It's more than a living, it's a way of life" ("Ram Agriculture" 2019).

Two campaigns for health-care insurance and pricing anxieties also situate these anxieties in working-class bodies. One from 2018-19 centers healthcare worries as a hazard of working-class motherhood. A concerned service-class woman – still in her work uniform, including a nametag -- walks into a drugstore at night with her two tired children firmly by her side, in a commercial for the pharmaceutical coupon app GoodRx ("Good Rx TV commercial, 'My son needs this drug'"

2019). Clearly, she cannot afford a babysitter, given that she must bring both of her children with her to the drug store. As she walks in, we hear her thoughts (including, oddly, a sigh): "[SIGH] My son needs this drug. I hope it doesn't cost too much. I hope my insurance pays for it." When told by the pharmacist (visually coded with an info-rich ID badge, contrasting with the protagonist's basic nametag) that it will be $67, she turns with her children to talk away, but then the calm, helpful pharmacist asks, "Wait, have you heard of GoodRx?" The service-class woman's furrowed brow turns to a smiling face as she grasps the benefits of the app: "I had no idea!"

In this ad, the burden of the main character – a working-class white woman -- in a time of high health-care costs is signified by her work clothes, worried face, and most of all by her bodily "accessories" in the drug store: the young children by her side who witness that they almost had to do without – that they almost had a failing mother – but for GoodRx. Without this app, the ad implies, women in the working-class may be forced to sacrifice their children's health.

Health-care pressures of the working class are literally embodied in an online commercial -- shown on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter -- for UPMC (the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center) ("UPMC TV Commercial" 2019). A relatively large-bodied construction worker is "humorously" forced back to work early from a hospital stay since he is not, in the words of a narrator, "completely covered"; the lack of coverage is illustrated literally by his wearing of a hospital gown (with hard hat) at the work site, a gown that does not completely cover the man's physical body. His co-workers show disgust and discomfort as they view his normally hidden body while he jackhammers, walks on a ladder, and exposes his backside directing a work vehicle. While played for laughs, this portrayal not only illustrates the pressures to return to work even before recovery from a health problem, it also illustrates a long tradition in commercials of the working-class body as disgusting, open to ridicule and displays of displeasure from onlookers (McAllister and Galarza 2020).

In these examples, economic hardships are literally embodied by white working-class characterizations – the farmer, the working mom, the construction worker -- and highlight issues indicative of Trump policies, even though Trump is never alluded to. What the ads do, however, is amplify existing class stereotypes in the Trump-era context. Although the portrayals as sympathetic, they still essentialize the working-class as inherently stressed and problematic and tied to other assumed attributes (farmers as tied to land; the precariousness of harried working-class motherhood; large grotesque working bodies).

Trumpian Commercial Masculinity

It is not controversial to note that commercial culture is profoundly gendered, with assumptions made of appropriate and desired modes of masculinity and femininity (Kelso Chap. 6 2019). A particular type of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) may be displayed in working-class bodies: that of the tough, strong, down-to-earth, mono-syllabic no-nonsense man. To what extent, then, did such portrayals focus even more narrowly on a type of masculinity – including especially toxic forms – that Trump himself embodies or voices? This form of hegemonic masculinity embraces discursive bullying and trolling, and aggressively sexist discourse as enacted in the Access Hollywood tape, the Brett Kavanaugh hearing, and especially vitriolic reactions to women political opponents (Kramp 2019). As one columnist declared during the 2016 election, "Donald Trump is a macho fantasy of a president" – including accompanying authoritarian tendencies

(Horsey 2016). Trump's Twitter-era pattern of speech (i.e., "SAD!") adds to this. He is known for using one-two word expressions, expressions that emphasize a stereotypical masculine style that conveys a manly promise, according to linguist Jennifer Sclafani, that "he can get the job done through his use of hyperbole and directedness," contrasting to the typical verbose politician (quoted in Inzaurralde 2017). Commercial versions of what has been a long tradition of working-class masculinity took on particularly Trumpian spins.

Tobacco advertising has long emphasized its connection to working-class men; this goes back to at least the western-themed Marlboro Man (Sivulka 2012). This connection continued during Trump. Magazine ads for Winston (2016-2018) emphasized in its catch phrase a punctuated rhythm that is reminiscent of a Trump tweet: the "BOLD. CHOICE." of smoking, driving, and being a white, working-class, heterosexual man. Iconography for the working-class Winston smoker included the normally rare image of a cigarette-in-mouth as well as blue jeans, tattoos, motorcycles, and in-your-face, individualistic slogans that varied by ad. One such slogan is particularly Trump-esque, overlaid with a photo of a t-shirted man watching two young women walk toward a waterfall: "Apologies are for everyone else" (Trinkets and Trash 2019; Figure 1). Although tobacco commercials are prohibited in US broadcasting and cable, internet outlets such as Vimeo allow them. A video version of this campaign shows a quick succession of images from the male's point of view, reflecting even more than the print versions a "consumer male gaze" (McAllister and DeCarvalho 2014), although a very white, working-class version. The commercial ends with a slogan of binary in-your-face simplicity that evokes Trumpian speech: "ALL IN. OR NOT AT ALL" (ITG Brands LLC 2016).

Other tobacco brands added nationalistic or implied geo-political working-class masculinities. For example, although the beginnings of Skoal's "American Grown" slogan in magazine ads slightly pre-date Trump's announcement for President, 2016-2017 found significant magazine placement in such magazines as *Playboy*, *Men's Journal* and *Rolling Stone* (Trinkets & Trash 2019). A 2017 ad from *Entertainment Weekly* showed white men covered in sand just after riding off-road recreational sports vehicles, accompanied by a white-lettered "100% American Grown" slogan soiled with the same sand. Similarly, a direct-mail ad for Red Seal smokeless tobacco used a from-below camera angle of a white male farmer, with the phrase "We're proud to call the heartland home," signaling a geographic element to masculinity that differentiates from the (politically blue) east and west coast of the United States (Trinkets and Trash 2019).

Crasser is a television campaign that aired heavily on ESPN and other US men-targeted networks in 2018 and 2019. The brand, Alpha King, is a testosterone supplement –

a product category that seemed especially apt for masculinist sales rhetoric – that asks, "What happened to the real men of America?" The narrator of the commercial claims, "We have less testosterone than our fathers, and even less than our grandfathers." This "vital crisis" and "masculinity epidemic" is illustrated by images of supposedly feminized men sitting in bathtubs, getting a facial, and crying at movies. In one ad, a deep-throated narrator warns, "Guys…we're being robbed of our masculinity" while on the screen a woman – who bears at least a passing resemblance to Hillary Clinton – yells in the face of a beaten-down man with two-day beard. These demasculinized images contrasted, though, with nostalgic ones of hegemonic masculinity in the working-class: men welding as sparks fly and men in the military (in black and white archival footage) (Force Factor 2019). One version especially uses language that evokes Trump and his

MAGA slogan. Promoting their free-sample "Man Up America" event, the commercial promises that, by using the supplement, "Now you can continue to feel like the real men that made this country great" as viewers see an iconic black and white image of construction workers sitting on a skyscraper's steel beam. "Do America a favor: Text NUT…to get your complimentary bottle." Such ads increase requests to physicians for testosterone testing and prescriptions, despite the health risks involved (Layton, Kim, Alexander and Emery 2017). But more pertinent to this project is the limited, and Trumpian, representations of masculinity. These ads offer a mythical time in America's past is romantically alluded to and illustrated with photos of construction workers, and one that can be returned to with more masculinity that can help make America great again; these are images and rhetoric that fit in quite well with Trump's own political speeches and Tweets.

With the tobacco ads, such images also represent a particular noxious version of masculinity that ties into stereotypes of sexually driven and muscular working-class men who bully ("apologies are for everyone else"), are fiercely American, and obsess over the dangers of emasculation.

"Dilly Dilly!": Celebrating Authoritarianism

Related to Trump's version of masculinity is his autocratic tendencies. He represents a hold on white, male power against threats from women, people of color and liberal elites that appeals to his base (Smith 2019). It again evoked a nostalgia for a romanticized point in history, in this case for a time when white men had seemingly unquestioned authority. One campaign seemed to particular flow well with this.

A high-profile beer campaign (2017-2019) featured a Bud Light-loving king in a medieval world. The campaign initially winked at fans of the HBO program *Game of Thrones*, with the first commercial debuting before a season finale of the series (Schultz 2017b). However, its depiction of an authoritarian monarch in an earlier time who ruthlessly punished the bodies of those who displeased him – as his loyalists chanted a simplistic, nonsensical phrase at gatherings – could be seen as a Trump allegory (and, in fact, as discussed below, *was* seen this way by some Trump supporters and merchandisers).

In this initial ad, a line of royal subjects gives tribute and offerings to a king and queen (both white) during a banquet, with medieval-era music. The first two subjects, a white man and a black woman, offer the king a six pack and 12 pack of Bud Light, respectively. After each successful tribute, the King says, "Dilly Dilly," with the royal onlookers repeating it in response. However, a smug third subject approaches, with the music stopping when he lays a non-Bud Light bottle before the King. "What…is that?" asks the king. The subject replies snobbily, "This is a spiced honey-mead wine that I've really been into lately." The King, displeased, orders the mead-giver to "Please follow Sir Brad; he's going to give you a private tour of the Pit of Misery." A Bud Light-drinking onlooker shouts his approval: "The Pit of Misery! Dilly Dilly!" with others chanting "Dilly Dilly" as the violator is taken away by the imposing bald, bearded enforcer, Sir Brad. Later ads show prisoners chained in the Pit of Misery; all of them – dressed as commoners – still hating not on the king who imprisoned them, but on the elitist mead-drinker Doug.

The campaign and its follow-ups were very successful for the brand. In a 2019 interview, the Chief Marketing Officer for Anheuser-Busch noted the "cultural currency" the campaign generated:

> I think that one of the proofs of success, nowadays, from a cultural standpoint, is when you go to Amazon and you don't do anything, there are people already selling t-shirts. Two weeks ago, I went on Amazon. There were like ten different types of "Dilly Dilly" t-shirts. I said "Yes! That's it!" (Flanagan and Dua 2019)

However, is the only reason the ads were popular is the *Game of Thrones* connection, or is there another reference point? In the first ad, a hipster is punished by an autocratic leader to the glee of a chanting crowd. This scenario is not that different from chants of "Lock Her Up," by crowds at Trump rallies, or from the hatred expressed toward liberals ("own the libs") and other groups. This concordance of themes between the campaign and Trump's appeal has been picked up by Trump supporters and entrepreneurs who want to financially benefit from the perceived connection. Although most of the campaign-based merchandise available on Amazon (alluded to by the company's CMO) is just "Dilly Dilly" on t-shirts and hats, others are more specific. A t-shirt with Trump's likeness, wearing a crown, appears over the slogan "Make America Dilly Dilly again." One may also purchase another image – on a flag, shorts, and even a babies' onesie – of Trump hoisting a beer with the phrase. This latter merchandise is an especially ironic image given that Trump claims he does not drink and has never even had a beer (Nicholson 2019). Regardless of the contradictions, well into 2019 one found hybrid memes and tweets: "Pipeline Protesters in Jail Dilly Dilly" and "Dilly dilly to King Donald" (Figure 2). Although other memes also used Dilly Dilly to be critical of Trump, there was no merchandise equivalent of this. His supporters saw the campaign's portrayal of an authoritarian ruler who punished elites or those who did not give proper deference as one of which they approved and use it as their own "cultural currency" to reify these values in our own society, not just in a fantasy past.

Working-Class Face

Members of a dominant culture who masquerade as members of an oppressed culture is an enduring cultural trope. In terms of race, we see such performative modalities with blackface, brownface, redface, and yellowface, as whites self-reflexively darken their skin and exaggerate their behavior to crudely mimic stereotypical behavior and appearance of those from African, Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian descent, as is especially found in the history of film and television but also more broadly, even in social events like costume parties. Such acts reaffirm hierarchies and ridicule those oppressed cultures by assuming their "natural" association with animalistic impulses, non-civilized eroticism, and exaggerated emotions (hooks 2012). Recent racialized masquerades are illustrated by various degrees of performed blackness in popular culture (Mislán and Ashley 2018), and political scandals when previous blackface performances surface (Coletta 2019).

Class is also a category in which a dominant class may perform as a lesser-status class. Famous actors, of course, routinely cross class-lines when they play a character in a low socio-economic status. Audiences know that Julia Roberts did not economically struggle like the legal-clerk character she played, Erin Brockovich. If this portrayal were a race-switching performance, likely critical responses would be prominent, but class-switching is viewed as non-transgressive (or are not noticed at all). However, other venues in our culture more obviously and self-consciously display class-based code switching, including in political activity/personas, and in advertising. Donald Trump, as noted earlier, is a billionaire who pretends to approximate the spirit of the

working class – or, rather, its stereotypes. His speech style is simplistic; he famously eats fast food (Rosner, 2019), pretends to drive a big rig (Caplan 2017), brags about how hard he works (Chillizza, 2019) and wears hard hats during speeches (Marra 2016). The 2016 campaign phrase "Trump Digs Coal" can be interpreted in several ways, including implying that he literally could dig coal (although clearly an absurd notion). In such instances, Trump performed his working-class characteristics; he adapts a "class face," or, more specifically, a "working-class face." Everyone knows of course he is not poor – this is not a case of attempted "class-passing" (Foster 2005) – and this knowledge makes his working-class performances self-conscious and opens it to being cynical ridicule and condescension rather than sympathetic tribute.

Advertising has also used class-shifting strategies, done self-consciously, often as part of the humor of the ad. This humor serves to deflect criticism from what may, in a more earnest tone, be seen as mocking references to working-class stereotypes. This trend existed before the Trump presidency (McAllister and Aupperle 2017) but continued after the election, and with his prominence arguably took on a new resonance.

One such campaign is for Allstate, where the character Mayhem (played by white actor Dean Winters, wearing a suit and tie) represents some object or person that creates expensive chaos for an unfortunate victim – who hopefully is covered by Allstate insurance. In many of the Trump-era iterations, he is a member of the non-professional classes. In such ads, the joke of the working-class face performance is that the middle-class Mayhem lets his working-class freak flag fly by being especially careless and callous. In one commercial, he is a "parking lot guy" who gleefully damages middle-class drivers' cars by cramming too many cars in tight or rough spaces ("Allstate TV Commercial, 'Mayhem: Parking Guy" 2019). Others include Overly Confident Dog Walker (who trips on the victim's property, likely leading to a lawsuit for the unsuspecting homeowner) and Car Thief (who laughs as he recklessly drives away), also exuberantly played by the actor in an emotional and exaggerated style not normally displayed by a white man in a business suit.

In another widely aired television commercial from 2019 for "cash-back" Capital One credit cards, popular-music singer Taylor Swift appeared as a server in three different locations -- a diner, a bar and a malt shop – with each Swift version wearing a different service-work uniform. In both cases, she is recognized by customers, but she also continues to perform the work… in exaggerated and comically inept ways. She makes a mess by shaking a cocktail shaker too hard and sprays too much canned whipped cream on a fountain drink. Afterwards, she sprays the whipped cream directly into her mouth. Here the famous singer is both able to "have fun" while exaggerating working-class tasks and illustrate that she is not good at such tasks – with the lesson that, despite Swift's class-based play, ultimately class mobility is "rigid," a common mediated lesson about class (Foster 2005). Taylor Swift spilling her mixed drink as a bartender, then, is the equivalent of Donald Trump playing at driving a big-rig truck while the engine is off. As he grimaces with exaggerated effect, we know that Trump has never been a truck-driver, does not know how to drive a truck, and part of his elite class status is precisely this lack of such commoner knowledge.

In these ads, there is the potential of class ridicule as an actor of one class very self-consciously and reflexivity playing a character of another class. This is signaled through direct address (Mayhem, a white male, looking at the camera and saying, "I'm a parking guy."), and another recognizing the disconnect (Taylor Swift's fans gawk in amazement that she is serving pie). But class is also performative in these ads: Mayhem happily displays the slovenliness and lack of care

associated with non-professionals; Swift, as a rich performer, is bad at labor. As noted, Trump enacts his own bad classed performance, including tweeting his dinner on the campaign airliner of a bucket of KFC while campaigning through the mid-west United States, but betraying his classed background by using a stainless-steel knife and fork to eat a piece of fried chicken while sitting in a seat that has his embroidered family crest (Cillizza 2016). It signals that Trump, like commercials, has the right to mimic working-class symbols for his own purposes while at the same time enforcing rigid class differences.

Conclusion

The advertisements discussed above, of course, were not the only reflections of Trump or Trumpian themes in advertising. Ads appearing in conservative media overly celebrated Trump. A commercial for the American Mint Trump Commemorative Coin (airing on such outlets as the American Heroes Channel through 2017) entices supporters with "Vowing to make America great again, this renegade businessman is ready to create history, and when he does, you'll be glad to have this exquisite item on hand" ("American Mint TV Commercial" 2019). Similarly, political advertising designed to sway the voters – rather than consumers – or shore up Trump's base is obviously designed to be explicit in its appeals to Trump supporters. Many of these used images of the poor or of the working class. Whether these portrayals were sympathetic depended on race. His first television ad, released in early 2016, showed grainy images of immigrants supposedly storming national borders ("Donald Trump Releases" 2016). Contrastingly, another 2018 political commercial warns "we can't go back" to earlier times with higher unemployment, illustrated by black and white video of purportedly unemployed people waiting in lines (although exactly what they are waiting for is unclear; unemployment benefits?) ("New Trump Ad" 2018). For many consumers and voters, such ads may have little effect since they do not appear in the media they use. For others who are the targeted audiences, these themes may reinforce their political orientations. They also may flow with what they see in other genres and media texts, including consumer advertising designed for larger audiences, the kinds discussed in this paper.

In fact, as this article argues, we see Trump in the commercial sphere in other ways besides political ads and ads for Trump merchandise. Just as Donald Trump the politician used white working-class bodies to get elected (particularly whether in how his rhetoric constituted one category of his presumed voter base) so too does advertising in Trump's America use working-class bodies to reflect, reflect on, and perhaps amplify Trumpian values and policies. This project of course selected a few to highlight out of the thousands of commercials that aired or were printed in this era. Advertising with other messages (most perhaps non-specific or irrelevant to these trends) may have overwhelmed any political meanings. Even within the ads discussed, there could be a level of ambiguity or polysemy that undermines uniform meanings and interpretations about any Trump values seemingly reflected in this commercial discourse.

Some ads were at least by analogy critical of Trump, and others seemed to reflect more Trumpian language and values, although the former often received a backlash on Twitter or conservative media. The ads, though, perhaps were more strongly evocative of the working-class than Trump. Many discussed in this essay reinforced long-standing stereotypes about the working class. These include the idea that the working-class have essentially abused bodies (84 Lumber, Bud Light), ridiculous/disgusting bodies (UPMC), hypermasculine bodies (Winston Force Factor),

American/patriotic bodies (Skoal), bodies of the earth (Skoal, Ram), and masqueraded/appropriated bodies (Allstate, Capital One).

It is perhaps not an accident that, during the early months of Covid-19, a common trope in advertising was the romanticized celebration of working- and service-class heroes who labored and risked their health during the pandemic, for the comfort of the middle- and upper-class consumer (Hess 2020). One legacy of Trump, perhaps, is that this era gave advertising additional license to highlight working-class bodies in these typical ways, amplifying rigid notions about different class positions, the people who occupy them, and the roles they should serve in society.

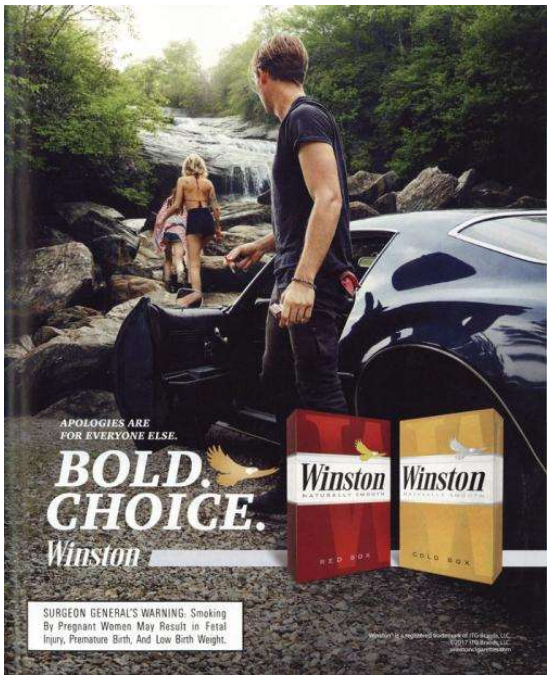

Figure 1. Trumpian masculinity in a Winston cigarette print ad. Source: Trinkets & Trash: Artifacts of the Tobacco Epidemic. Rutgers University School of Public Health. https://trinketsandtrash.org. Accessed October 2019.

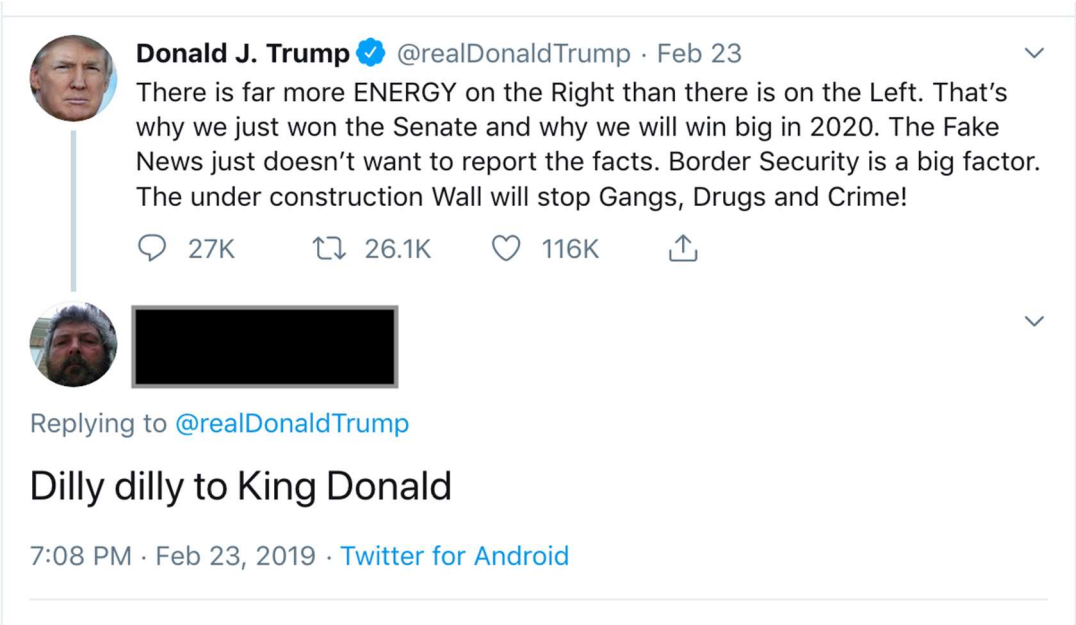

Figure 2: Pro-Trump Twitter response using Bud Light ad slogan (anonymized). Accessed October 2019 at twitter.com.

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[i] About 30% of Trump's 2016 voters were white working-class, although 60% of white working-class voters voted for Trump (Carnes and Lupu 2021).

[ii] Conventional media-text databases often do not include advertising and searching for abstract ideological themes/categories such as class or "Trumpian similarities" adds another challenge. Advertisements were selected in a variety of ways, including trade journal articles (from sources such as *Advertising Age*) that noted ads or campaigns as especially relevant to Trump. Scrolling through various advertising databases (such as iSpot.tv, adsoftheworld.com, and adage.com's "Creativity Search") also uncovered ads with characteristics that seemed to exemplify Trump's ideology or "brand." Some ads were included when noted through the author's own media use. Campaigns that seemed relevant were also searched through Twitter for additional Trump connections.