

LEARNING LAGNIAPPE: EDUCATOR EXTRAS

MEDICAL ADVERTISEMENTS: CIVIL WAR ERA

The 19th century American public saw advertisements everywhere in daily life, the majority of these were medical in nature. Advertisements were seen on walls, horse carriages, and packaging. Newspapers of the time relied heavily on money from medical advertisements, often as much as 50%. These ads would play off people's fears, such as death and disease, which were in abundance during this time. Medical companies would exaggerate normal life symptoms as tragic signs of terrible diseases. Manufacturers would use things such as celebrities and patriotism to sell their medications.

There were no clear rules or regulations for the creation and advertising of medicines in the 1800s. The lack of regulations allowed companies to lie about what was in the product as well as its effectiveness. Some companies would leave out dangerous ingredients or side effects. Medical advertisements would use symptoms of menstruations and menopause as a way to argue that women were "genetically inferior" and women should purchase the advertised medicine to "cure" themselves of those ailments.

Products were generally marketed to middle-class White people, but these advertisers used other races to sell their products. Calling their products Chinese or Indian, tended to make them seem more exotic. Racial segregation of this time led to African Americans not receiving the same level of medical care as the White population. They often fell prey to these misleading products as a way to treat ailments.

Subjects that can be addressed within this digital archive:

- Civil War
- Civil War medicine
- Early medical advertising

Directions: Students should use the linked analysis tool to study the two following advertisements. Teacher may choose to use online version or print the pdf. Go to the following page and select the written document under Worksheets for Intermediate or Secondary Students. You can then click the blue text for the PDF. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets>





Front



Back

Enrichment Activity:

All advertisements are designed to persuade, or convince a consumer to purchase a product or service. Design an advertisement for one of the following pain medications: Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup or Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. (both used in previous activity)

Teacher may choose to have students create a digital ad or physical ad

Include...

- A detailed and colorful drawing of your product
- A catchy name for your product
- At least five sentences which describe your product and what it is designed to cure.
- Determine which group of people are most likely to buy your product. (Men, women, children, young, old, soldier, mom, etc.)
- How much would your product cost if it was sold in the mid-1800s?