

Chapter Four: Local Manufacturing and Divergent Markets

In 1933, a South African manufacturer began marketing a skin lightener to the largely coloured readership of *The Sun*, a newspaper published out of Cape Town. Presenting whiteness as a beauty ideal, an early advertisement for “Karoo Freckle and Complexion Cream” promised to remove freckles and blemishes, and leave a “clear, white complexion” (figure 4.1). It featured the photo of a blonde-haired woman admiring her face in a compact mirror and explained that the cream came in three strengths (mild, medium, and strong).¹ At four shillings per pot – then the equivalent of about two days’ wages for a black worker employed in manufacturing or more than one week’s wages for domestic workers, it was a considerable but not inconceivable expense.² With this imagery and copy, Karroo privileged whiteness while promoting its skin lightener as a product suited for consumers with diverse skin colors and with varied cosmetic needs.

This advertisement together with the history of the Karroo company suggest their skin lightener was first developed with white consumers in mind and then migrated across the country’s racial divides to coloured and African consumers. Karroo began in Middelburg, a small sheep and cattle farming town located midway between Cape Town and Johannesburg. The Karroo name referenced Middelburg’s location in the semi-desert area known as the Karoo, and evoked that region’s reputation as the country’s rugged and healthful heartland.³ Some time before the early 1930s, one of the town’s chemists, W. C. Turpin or his son, started manufacturing a skin lightener containing mercury.⁴ With its ornate storefront and location on a central corner in Middelburg’s business district (see figure 4.2), Turpin’s Karroo Pharmacy

¹ “Karoo Freckle and Complexion Cream” advertisement, *The Sun* (19 Jan. 1934), 4. An earlier Karroo cream advertisement appeared in *The Sun* (15 Sept. 1933), 4. On occasion, some contributions to *The Sun*, a weekly newspaper, appeared in Afrikaans. A. S. Hayes, a journalist, and C. Stewart, a printer, founded the paper in 1932; it ceased publication in 1956. Politically, the paper supported the coloured African People’s Organisation (APO) and the white United Party. Les and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho, a Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines, 1836-1976* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979).

² W. F. J. Steenkamp, “Bantu Wages in South Africa,” *South African Journal of Economics* 30: 2 (June 1962), 96, Table II. From 1825 until 1961, South African currency was measured in the British units of pounds, shillings, and pence (12 pence = 1 shilling, 20 shillings = £1). When South Africa became a republic in May 1961, a new currency was introduced of rand and cents (100 cents = 1 rand), with the initial rate of exchange of being two South African rand to one British pound. Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa*, xx. Personal communication with Keith Breckenridge, 28 July 2008; and T. Dunbar Moodie, 17 September 2009.

³ Phillip Rolfe, the chairman of Rolfe Laboratories – the company that now owns Karroo – explained that in order for the company to register its name as a trademark it had to develop a unique spelling for “Karoo” and, hence, the additional “r.” Interview with Phillip Rolfe by Lynn M. Thomas, Mt. Edgecome, KwaZulu-Natal, 29 July 2008.

⁴ Interviews with Francois Roux by Lynn M. Thomas and Sarah Epis-Sanchis, Middleburg, 14 July 2008; and with Philip Rolfe by Lynn M. Thomas, Mt. Edgecombe, 29 July 2008. Relevant information also gathered from framed photograph of Turpin’s Karroo Pharmacy (Apteek) at Rolfe Laboratories Office, Middleburg. By the 1950s, the company had been renamed Karroo Apteek and, later, K.A. Laboratories.

(Apteek, in Afrikaans) catered to an in-store clientele that was predominately white. Yet, like pharmacists in all parts of South Africa, the Turpins recognized the financial advantages of offering services and products, perhaps through the pharmacy's back door or through hawkers, to the area's substantial black population.⁵ Given that Middelburg's black population (4,000 classified as coloured; 5,500, as African) was more than double its white, the temptation to tap that market must have been considerable. Turpins' engagement with black consumers soon extended far beyond Middelburg.⁶ By the early 1940s, African shoppers in Johannesburg – more than 700 kilometers to the northeast – were requesting Karroo by name and, by the 1950s, it was the largest manufacturer of skin lighteners in the country.

Karoo's history demonstrates that alongside importers of African American cosmetics, South African companies had begun manufacturing and marketing commercial skin lighteners to black South Africans by the early 1930s. Whereas, in the last chapter, we saw how African American companies produced and exported some of the earliest cosmetics targeting black consumers, here, we see how local cosmetic manufacturers, mainly white pharmacists, started plying the same products either in response to black demand or in the hope of cultivating it. This chapter examines the early history of these South African cosmetic manufacturers and their marketing strategies, and explains why they proved much more successful at persuading black rather than white consumers to purchase their products. Their relative lack of success with white consumers had much to do with cosmetics' status as luxury commodities and the racialized history of manufacturing in southern Africa. In the specific case of skin lighteners, as we shall see, other influences also came into play. Among black South Africans during the 1930s, a mix of factors including increased engagement with urban consumer culture and wage labor, and the continued political disenfranchisement of those with phenotypically-dark skin enhanced skin lighteners' appeal. By contrast, for many white consumers in South Africa, as in the United States, an embrace of tanning combined with rising health and regulatory concerns about mercury to diminish desire for these same cosmetics.

* * * * *

To turn a profit, pharmacists in South Africa and elsewhere often sold a range of non-medicinal products including cosmetics, perfumes, soda water, candies, and photographic equipment. The sale of such products, including skin lighteners, helped protect pharmacists' bottom line. Illustrating the significance of such enterprises, the inaugural issue of the *South African Pharmaceutical Journal* in 1934 carried a full front-page advertisement for an imported skin lightener, "'Ysabel' Lemon Cold Cream," that promised "an excellent margin of profit."⁷

⁵ In 1935, for instance, one pharmacist complained of colleagues who "employ native touts and travelers, who diagnose and supply the chemist's mixtures in the locations." E. Gordin, letter-to-the-editor, *South African Pharmaceutical Journal* (Feb 1935), 33.

⁶ Union of South Africa, *Sixth Census of the Population of South Africa, Enumerated 5th May, 1936, Volume I, Population – Sex and Geographical Distribution of the Population* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1938), 11.

⁷ "'Ysabel' Skin Whitening Lemon Cold Cream" advertisement, *The South African Pharmaceutical Journal* (Oct. 1934), 1. The same issue also included two other advertisements for cosmetics, two for "Kodak" film and cameras, and suppository contraceptive "Ortho-Gynol," manufactured by Johnson & Johnson.

Around the world, such enterprises, in fact, could end up dwarfing sales of medicines. A pharmacist in Atlanta, for one, developed “Coca-Cola” while some of the twentieth-century’s largest cosmetics and toiletry companies began in drug stores.⁸

With very few exceptions, pharmacy was an all-white profession in South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century. Apart from two chains, pharmacies operated as independently owned businesses.⁹ Individual pharmacists and provincial associations ensured racial exclusion by controlling who received required apprenticeships.¹⁰ Such requirements quelled but did not eliminate competition. In the sale of patented medicines, poisons, and cosmetics, pharmacists competed with shopkeepers and general traders. In dispensing other medicinal preparations, they vied with black healers and white biomedical doctors. Playing, in part, on racist fears, white pharmacists lobbied for and achieved significant protections under the Medical, Dental, and Pharmacy Act of 1928. The Act severely limited the ability of traders – frequently depicted during lobbying efforts as Indians, Chinese, and recently-immigrated Jews – to sell poisons, banned African healers (outside of Natal Province) from practicing their craft and selling medicines, and required doctors who mixed and dispensed medicines to purchase a special license and prohibited them from operating pharmacies.¹¹ Despite these protections, the profitability of pharmacies continued to depend on selling a wide range of products.

⁸ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 71; Geoffrey Jones, “Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980,” *Economic History Review* 61, 1 (2008): 125-54, 128.

⁹ The two chains were Lennon Limited, and Sive Brothers and Karnovsky. A third retail chain, Publix, was founded in 1934. Mike Ryan, *A History of Organised Pharmacy in South Africa, 1885-1950* (Cape Town: The Society for the History of Pharmacy in South Africa, 1986), 36, 97-9. In the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Africa, as in Germany and Britain, “chemist” referred to those who had undergone an entrance examination in chemistry and botany and served an initial apprenticeship while “pharmacist” was reserved for those who had also passed advanced examinations in chemistry and botany and served an additional apprenticeship. Under the South African 1928 Medical, Dental, and Pharmacy Act of 1928, “pharmacy” designated the profession and place “where medicines and drugs were dispensed” and reserved for pharmacists “exclusivity in the use of the terms chemist and druggist, pharmacist, pharmaceutical chemist, dispensing chemist or druggist, dispenser or compound of drugs, pharmacy, chemist’s shop, drug store.” Ryan, *A History of Organised Pharmacy in South Africa*, 31 and 73. While lay South Africans have often and still do use chemist and pharmacist interchangeably, within the trade, “pharmacist” denotes someone with the license to dispense medicines while “chemist” refers to someone with the only the right to prepare medicines. Interview with Gerald Schap by Lynn M. Thomas and Sarah Espis-Sanchis, Cape Town, 22 July 2008. On no “native” qualified chemist existing on the register for the Cape in 1925, see National Archives, Cape Town file 3/CT, 4/1/5/1247, Coulter and Co. Attorneys, Cape Town to Town Clerk, City of Cape Town, “Chemist and Druggist at Langa Location,” 27 October 1925.

¹⁰ Karen Flint, “Competition, Race, and Professionalization: African Healers and White Medical Practitioners in Natal, South Africa in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Social History of Medicine* 14, 2 (2001): 213. For those rare exceptions and the “clubbiness” of the apprenticeship system, see Ryan, *A History of Organised Pharmacy*, 38 and 35-6.

¹¹ The only exception to the ban on African healers was *inyanga* already licensed in Natal. Following the Act’s passage, provincial pharmaceutical societies investigated Africans suspected of practicing without a license or selling “European medicines,” reporting violators to state authorities. Flint, “Competition, Race, and Professionalization,” 216-7; Ryan, *A History of Organised Pharmacy*, 25-6, 69-70 and 115; Catherine Burns, “Louisa Mvemve: A Woman’s Advice to the Public on the Cure of Various Diseases,” *KRONOS* 23 (1996): 108-34.

The most profitable medicinal and cosmetic products for pharmacists were those they manufactured themselves. Trade journals carried articles on how to manufacture these products, and pharmacists routinely and successfully steered customers towards their own preparations.¹² Gerald Schap, a pharmacist who first learned to manufacture medicines when he apprenticed at a retail chemist in East London during the late 1940s and 1950s and later went on to make and sell his own diet pills (“Slimming Dradgings”), laxatives (“Movies”), and de-worming medication (“Early Bird”) in Cape Town, recalled that such products generated two to three times more income than those purchased wholesale and then resold.¹³ A number of medicinal preparations developed by South African pharmacists such as Lennon’s “Dutch medicines” and “Zam-Buk” multi-purpose skin ointment grew to have wide national distribution that cut across racial groups and remain popular brands today.¹⁴

Pharmacists, however, had much more difficulty convincing white women to buy locally manufactured cosmetics than medicines. In 1931, the Port Elizabeth office of the U.S. advertising and marketing firm J. Walter Thompson (JWT) undertook a survey of the South African cosmetics market for Lehn & Fink Products Co., an U.S. manufacturer. Imagining the cosmetics market as almost exclusively white, that report ranked chemists along with hairdressers, beauty parlors, department stores (in cities and large towns), and general dealers (in small towns and villages) as the main purveyors of cosmetics.¹⁵ Conveniently in accordance with the interests of JWT’s U.S. client, the survey found that white South African women preferred imported face creams and cosmetics such as “Pond’s,” “Icilma,” “Elizabeth Arden,” “Yardley,” “Bourjois,” “Tanjee,” “Coty,” and “Max Factor.” The U.S. apparently held the reputation for the best creams and nail preparations, France for make-up items, and England for hair lotions. In a rare reference to black women, the report noted that coloured women too

¹² H. R. Hudson, “Manufacture of Toilet Preparations,” *South African Pharmaceutical Journal* (June 1935), 43; Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, J. Walter Thompson Collection, reel no. 225, Marketing Reports, South Africa, Port Elizabeth, J. Walter Thompson Co. (Pty.) Ltd., “Report for Unguentine” (1929), 1 and 5; Ryan, *A History of Organised Pharmacy in South Africa*, 100.

¹³ Interview with G. Schap, 22 July 2008.

¹⁴ Following the South African War, British soldiers quickly spread “Zam-Buk” to other parts of the empire including London and India as well as Australia and New Zealand. “Zam-Buk” advertisements appeared in *The Mafeking Mail and Protectorate Guardian* (2 Oct. 1903), 4; the *Illustrated London News* (14 Oct. 1905), 559 and (15 Feb. 1919), 236; and *The Times of India* (9 March 1905), 7, and (18 Sept. 1919), 13.

¹⁵ Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library (hereafter, Duke Library), J. Walter Thompson Collection, reel no. 225, Marketing Reports, South Africa, Port Elizabeth, J. Walter Thompson Co. (Pty.) Ltd., “Report for Lehn & Fink” (Sept. 1931), 9, 11, and 13. JWT opened this first office in South Africa as part of an agreement the company had with General Motors (GM) to have an office in each country where GM had a manufacturing or assembly facility. Subsequent offices were opened in Cape Town (1930), Johannesburg (1932), and Durban (1935). From 1932, JWT-South Africa operated as an independent subsidiary of JWT-New York with Cape Town serving as the head office. JWT, Young Papers, Box 2, File “Notes on Billing, 1927-29,” “International Offices,” 8 January 1957; JWT, Sidney Berstein Papers, Box 5, File “International Office Histories, South Africa, January 1964,” “Report for J.W.T.’s 100th Anniversary Book, New York: J.W.T. in Southern Africa.”

preferred an imported face powder (“Phul-Nana”). Over the next decade, imports continued to dominate the South African cosmetics market. A 1944 government survey of the industry found that cosmetic and toiletry importers outnumbered local manufacturers by more than three to one. In addition, a number of in-country manufacturers were simply subsidiaries of international cosmetic and pharmaceutical companies including Bristol Meyers, Colgate-Palmolive, Johnson & Johnson, and Richard Hudnut & Co.¹⁶

The dominance of imported cosmetics and luxury toiletries persisted despite the South African government’s effort to spark local manufacturing. Beginning in the mid-1920s, politicians sought to diversify the economy and create more jobs for white workers by promoting secondary industry through the introduction of extensive protections. Tariff Acts imposed taxes on hundreds of imported semi-durable consumer goods.¹⁷ Cosmetics, perfumery, and toilet preparations garnered the highest level of customs duty: forty per cent on the value of the imported product.¹⁸ In 1940, the duty increased to fifty per cent.¹⁹ Policy makers figured that as non-essential goods that could be suitably manufactured in South Africa, cosmetics and toiletries merited elevated protection. These relatively high duties, however, had limited impact on the more affluent segments of the market. In 1937, the South African subsidiary of Unilever concluded that local manufacturing of luxury toiletries did not make financial sense as “the tariff on toilet preparations was too low” and “the consumer preference for imported goods remained

¹⁶ Thirty-six manufacturers to one hundred and twenty-five importers. Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter CAD) CSO 2, file S02/10, “Local Manufacturers – Toilets & Cosmetics” and “Importers – Toilets & Cosmetics,” 9 May 1944.

¹⁷ Charles H. Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 116-9. Also see, G.F.D. Palmer, “Some Aspects of the Development of Secondary Industry in South Africa since the Depression of 1929-1932,” *The South African Journal of Economics* 22, 1 (1954): 148-59; D. Hobart Houghton, *The South African Economy* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1964), 112-8; D.E. Kaplan, “The Politics of Industrial Protection in South Africa, 1910-1939,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3, 1 (1976): 70-91; G. Marais, “Structural Changes in Manufacturing Industry 1916 to 1975,” *The South African Journal of Economics* 49, 1 (1981): 26-45. By as late as 1936, the U.S. government considered South African customs tariffs to still be quite low. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Advertising in the Union of South Africa* (trade information bulletin no. 829) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1936), 1.

¹⁸ The Customs Amendment of 1923 placed a 40% duty on perfumery and toilet preparations. Act No. 23 of 1923, Customs and Excise Duties Amendment, *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1925* (Cape Town: Government Printer, 1923), 204-22, perfumery rate listed on 220; and “Annexure ‘I’: Principal Increases in Customs Duties since 1920” in Board of Trade and Industries, Union of South Africa, *Report No. 282: Investigation into Manufacturing Industries in the Union of South Africa (First Interim Report)* (Cape Town: The Cape Times Ltd., 1945), 168. Previously, these items had been taxed at 25%. Ryan, *A History of Organised Pharmacy in South Africa*, 79. The Customs Tariff Act of 1925, the most comprehensive act of the interwar period, placed cosmetics under “Class VIII. Drugs, Chemicals and Fertilisers” and “Category 238. Perfumery and toilet preparations, n.e.e., including powders, washes, pomatums, cosmetics, pastes, dyes, hair oils, but not including tooth powders, tooth pastes and tooth washes.” Act No. 36 of 1925, Customs Tariff and Excise Duties Amendment, *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1925* (Cape Town: Government Printer, 1925), 452-583, category listing on 530.

¹⁹ “Annexure ‘I’: Principal Increases in Customs Duties since 1920” in Board of Trade and Industries, Union of South Africa, *Report No. 282: Investigation into Manufacturing Industries in the Union of South Africa (First Interim Report)* (Cape Town: The Cape Times Ltd., 1945), 168.

too strong.”²⁰ When it came to cosmetics, luxury commodities imbued with the power to transform appearances, white women were willing to pay more for foreign brands deemed superior. In the United States too, early consumers preferred cosmetics manufactured by French companies and their subsidiaries that were often of higher quality than U.S. products and evoked Paris’s reputation as the international capital for fashion and cosmopolitan elegance.²¹

In South Africa, white women’s strong and enduring preference for imported cosmetics was also shaped by the country’s racialized history of manufacturing. In the early twentieth century, white consumers frequently disparaged South Africa-made goods as “Kaffir products.”²² Derived from the Arabic word for “unbeliever,” “Kaffir” was used in southern Africa since the sixteenth century to refer to black Africans. Over time, “Kaffir,” like “nigger” in the United States, became a racial insult when used by whites to address or reference blacks. The epithet “Kaffir product” simultaneously acknowledged that black consumers were more likely to purchase cheaper, locally made products, and cast those commodities as inferior.²³ As late as 1945, the Board of Trade and Industries recognized the substandard reputation of locally manufactured products when it advised *against* requiring companies to mark their goods as “Made in the Union of South Africa.”²⁴ Cosmetics’ elevated status as luxury goods combined with white consumers’ strong preference for imports to ensure that some of the largest South African cosmetics manufacturers catered to black consumers. And for those manufacturers, skin lighteners grew to rank among their biggest sellers.

Like his colleagues, Turpin, the pharmacist who developed Karroo Freckle and Complexion Cream, would have had easy access to formulae for skin lighteners. Handbooks and trade journals for pharmacists or chemists had long carried recipes for cosmetics alongside those for medicines. Such publications from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries listed a

²⁰ D. Fieldhouse, “Unilever in South Africa,” *South African Journal of Economic History* 11, 2 (1996):

²¹ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 98.

²² Belinda Bozzoli, “The Origins, Development and Ideology of Local Manufacturing in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1, 2 (1975): 194-214.

²³ “Kaffir products” was tied to “Kaffir trade” and “Kaffir truck,” phrases used throughout southern Africa to refer to the itinerant traders who sold cheap manufactured goods, largely imported, to Africans living in rural areas around the turn-of-the-twentieth-century. Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 66-7; “Kaffir” in *A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 342-50.

²⁴ Explaining that manufacturers frequently are “through force of circumstances, compelled to make use of inferior or substitute materials” and that “workmanship is often not what it should be on account of labour shortage,” the Board concluded that such compulsory marking of goods would likely do more to harm than to help local manufacturing Board of Trade and Industries, Union of South Africa, *Report No. 282: Investigation into Manufacturing Industries in the Union of South Africa (First Interim Report)* (Cape Town: The Cape Times Ltd., 1945), 168. A decade later, a “Buy South African” campaign was launched. “Why the ‘Buy South African’ Campaign is Important,” *The African Market* (April 1955): 15. As Graeme Bloch explains (“Room at the Top? – The Development of South Africa’s Manufacturing Industry 1939-1969,” *Social Dynamics* 7, 2 (1981), 50, “light consumer goods and intermediate goods were increasingly produced locally rather than imported, in the mid-1950s.”

range of active ingredients for “face bleaches” including citric, lactic, and acetic acid; hydrogen, zinc, and magnesium peroxides; the perborates of sodium, zinc, and magnesium; as well as ammoniated mercury and bichloride of mercury (corrosive sublimate). While, at times, pharmacy handbooks and journals warned of the ill health consequences of mercury, they also described mercury creams and ointments as an effective treatment for skin infections and hyperpigmentation, and provided formulae for producing them under a medical doctor’s prescription or as cosmetics.²⁵ Turpin likely obtained his recipe from such a source.

By 1943, demand for Karroo was so great that production moved across town from Turpin’s pharmacy to a newly built factory. The factory produced a range of cosmetic and medicinal products including “Karoo Matt Cream,” “Karoo Foot Powder,” and “Snellerin,” an analgesic. The best-selling product, however, was the skin lightener. People who worked in the factory or grew up in Middelburg recall that from the start, Karroo Freckle Cream contained mercury. They also recall that each week truckloads of it left the factory for distribution across the country. During the 1940s, advertisements for the freckle cream ran in *Die Huisgenoot* (The House Companion), an Afrikaans-language family photomagazine. The cream promised to remove freckles and “colourization” (*verkleuring*) caused by the sun, leaving a complexion that was “satin smooth” (*satyngladde*) and “snow white” (*sneeuwitte*). Such advertisements also claimed that using the cream boosted women’s “self-confidence” and made them more “attractive to men” (figure 4.3).²⁶ In the decade that followed, as we shall see in the next chapter, Karroo became a staple in the black photomagazines *Zonk!* and *Drum* through its full-page advertisements and sponsorship of beauty contests. It also became one of Middelburg’s largest employers while its owners, by then a group of seven Afrikaans men known locally as the *Skewe Sewe* (the crooked seven), ranked among the town’s wealthiest residents. One long-term resident

²⁵ X. Apothecary, “Quackery and Cosmetics,” *Druggists’ Circular and Chemical Gazette* (1 Oct. 1892), 219; B. Fenner, *Fenner’s Twentieth Century Formulary and International Dispensary* (Westfield, N.Y.: B. Fenner Publishers, 1904), 1385; Richard Von Foregger, “Oxygen Toilet Preparations,” *American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record* (12 Feb. 1906), 61-2; *ibid.*, “New Pharmaceutical Sources of Oxygen,” *American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record* (26 March 1906), 155; *ibid.*, “New Pharmaceutical Sources of Oxygen,” *American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record* (26 March 1906), 155; Francis Chilson, *Modern Cosmetics: The Formulation and Production of Cosmetics, together with a Discussion of Modern Production and Packaging Methods and Equipment, first edition* (New York: The Drug and Cosmetic Industry, 1934), 113; E. Fullerton Cook and Charles H. LaWall, *Remington’s Practice of Pharmacy, eighth edition* (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1936), 780 and 1989-2020.

²⁶ “Karoo Sproete-Salf” advertisement, *Die Huisgenoot* (18 Oct. 1946), 73. In translation, the full text reads: “This basic beauty-secret will reveal your hidden beauty. It is an undisputed fact that freckles hide beauty which is the right of every woman. There is also no doubt that freckles are not supposed to be there! *Across the whole of South Africa women have discovered this skin-beauty secret.* Freckles are nothing else than the colourization of the skin’s surface because of excessive sunburns. Karroo freckle-cream will literally sweep the colourization away and will give you a satin smooth and snow white complexion which is so attractive to men. Only a few rubs of Karroo is necessary to allow the natural transparency to be revealed and to reinstate your self-confidence. Start today with this very important beauty treatment – the costs are low but the results are high. KARROO Freckle-Cream – available in three strengths – strong, medium or mild, in attractive screw-top containers. To use it as a general skin-product the mild strength option would be suitable. 4/6 at all Pharamcists.” I am indebted to Emile Coetzee for translating this advertisement and some others from Afrikaans to English. Personal correspondence, 27 March 2012. Other Karroo advertisements appeared in *Die Huisgenoot* on (4 Oct. 1946), 48; (25 Oct. 1946), 79; (8 Nov. 1946), 70; and (29 Oct. 1948), 85.

remembered that they were the first people in Middelburg to own expensive cars with air conditioners.²⁷ For some white businessmen, manufacturing cosmetics for black consumers became quite profitable.

Other local manufacturers of cosmetics also seem to have begun with white consumers in mind. Keppels, during the 1930s, plied its products in the *Rand Daily Mail*, an English-language paper published in Johannesburg for a predominately white readership.²⁸ Seeking to broaden its market, in 1939, the company ran an advertisement in *Bantu World* (figure 4.4), explaining that its products were available from “high-class chemists.” Beneath the slogan “brighten up your skin,” Keppels promoted an acne cream for men and women of all ages, an olive-tint face powder for “dark ladies,” and a freckle wax that could make a lady’s “face lighter in colour and bring[] out its true beauty.” The freckle wax was the most expensive of the three products, costing the same as Karroo Freckle and Complexion Cream: four shillings per container. In contrast to Karroo’s 1934 advertisement, this one featured black figures rather than a white one. Drawing on the international tropes of before-and-after illustrations and an image of a stylish dancing couple, it promised the paper’s black readers that happiness and glamour were within their reach.²⁹

Keppels’s advertisements, like those of other skin lightener manufacturers during the 1930s and 1940s, paired images of beauty and refinement with relatively descriptive or spare text. South African advertisers both engaged and departed from marketing methods pioneered in the United States. Trade publications such as *South African Business Efficiency* recognized U.S. advertisers as the world’s leaders and encouraged readers to learn from their cutting-edge techniques. Yet, overall, advertisements in the South African press were more subdued. In 1936, an U.S. Commerce of Department report on advertising in South Africa referred to the dominant type of copy as “reason why.” Whereas “testimonial” and “scare” copy were common in the United States, the report explained that South African advertisers preferred “simple, straightforward, conservative copy devoid of extravagant claims and complex expressions.” In a context where “unscrupulous” salesmen had frequently preyed upon unwitting consumers, especially in rural areas, many consumers regarded advertisements as providing a “guarantee of quality.” South Africa’s Newspaper Press Union lent credence to this perspective by issuing guidelines for the size and format of advertisements, and censoring those that were misleading,

²⁷ Interview with Roux and conversations with factory employees, 14 July 2008. Karroo also sold “nerve and pain tablets,” and remedies for appendicitis and foot corns. Karroo advertisements, *The Sun* (17 Feb. 1933), 3, (17 March 1933), 5, (24 March 1933), 5, (5 Jan. 1934), 4, (2 Feb. 1934), 4. In an interview, Joe Vorster explained that the name *Skewe Sewe* originated from their drunken walking style following the rugby matches they attended on weekends. The name stuck when one member developed a spinal condition that caused him to walk with a limp. Interview with Joe Vorster by Lynn M. Thomas and Sarah Espis-Sanchis, Mossel Bay, Western Cape, 23 July 2008. For more on the *Skewe Sewe*, see interview of Tony Allan by Lynn M. Thomas and Sarah Espis-Sanchis, Constantia, Western Cape, 25 July 2008.

²⁸ “Keppels Foundation Cream” advertisement, *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 Dec. 1938, 11. Whereas in this advertisement the ingredient of “avocado oil” is touted for “preserv[ing] complexion,” in later ones it is also associated with the color of some of the cosmetics.

²⁹ “Keppels” advertisement, *Bantu World* (1 April 1939), 17.

included invidious comparisons, or contained copy that imitated a competitor's. Suggesting the sensitivity of their standards, in 1934, the Union reportedly developed a "violent antipathy to the use of the word 'best' or any other unqualified superlative" and requested a number of firms to adjust their copy.³⁰

In addition to suggesting a product's quality, advertisements served South African shoppers as material aids. At most retail stores, sales agents stood behind counters and handed requested items to consumers. Through advertisements, consumers learned of specific brands and sometimes presented clippings to ensure their procurement. The presentation of clipped advertisements was most common in the purchase of packaged foodstuffs, toiletries, and other household goods.³¹ In the case of pharmacies, it was an especially noteworthy practice because, as we have seen, pharmacists and their counter help frequently tried to direct customers to their own products. Advertisements, as bearers of product names and logos, offered consumers, particularly those not highly literate or very familiar with the English-language names of products, material assistance in procuring specific brands and fending off the pressures of sales agents. By advertising in newspapers, skin lightener manufacturers enhanced the reputation of their products and provided a shopping aid.

Keppels ran other advertisements in the *Cape Times* (figures 4.5) a few years later, claiming that its cosmetics, now expanded to twelve items, mitigated the harmful effects of "our South African climate" by restoring "pristine skin-texture and colour." Although the primary readership of the *Cape Times* was white, blacks literate in English would have also read it. This Keppels advertisement, with its "avocado" face powder and image of a woman with grey skin and wavy black hair, appears to have targeted black readers and, more specifically, the significant portion of the Western Cape population classified as coloured. In comparison to Apex with its appeals to trans-Atlantic racial solidarity, Keppels touted its familiarity with national conditions and marketed its products through chemists rather than door-to-door sales agents.³²

Around the same time as this Keppels campaign, another major South African manufacturer of skin lighteners emerged. A Johannesburg-based pharmacist, whose last name was Arenband, developed "Bu-Tone Freckle and Complexion Cream" under the auspices of Crowden Products Ltd.³³ Like the manufacturers of Karroo, Arenbrand seems to have initially

³⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Advertising in the Union of South Africa*, 14, 11-12, 47; "Harrow," "Critical Commentaries on Current Advertising – No. 11," *South African Business Efficiency* (October 1934), 302-08, esp. 304. This regular column ran from, at least, December 1933 through June 1936.

³¹ Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, J. Walter Thompson Collection, reel #225, Marketing Reports, South Africa, Port Elizabeth, J. Walter Thompson Co. (Pty.) Ltd., "'Unguentine' in the South African Market," (1929), 1; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Advertising in the Union of South Africa*, 11; "The Native Trade: The Non-European Market Provides the Chemist with a Valuable but Difficult Business," *South African Retail Chemist* (February 1953), 31-2.

³² "Keppels" ad, *Cape Times* (3 July 1945), 8. Also see, "Keppels" ad, *Cape Times* (10 July 1945), 8.

³³ Interview with S. Krok, 12 August 2008 (37:15). Krok recalled that Arenband's pharmacy was located in Doornfontein and that he later emigrated to Israel.

marketed his product to white and coloured consumers. Advertisements that appeared in *Die Huisgenoot* and the *Cape Times* promised that Bu-Tone Complexion Cream could keep skin “forever young” (*jeugdig die uwe*) and “soft, pliant and smooth in the face of harsh winds and searing sun” and promoted it alongside a cold cream, vanishing cream, and light talcum powder.³⁴ Within three years, Bu-Tone advertisements frequently appeared in *The Sun*, the same coloured newspaper where Karroo marketed its products in the early 1930s. Those advertisements featured white-looking figures and emphasized the cream’s ability to remove freckles and blemishes (figure 4.6). Soon, the copy – and not just the images – promoted an overall lightening effect, claiming that Bu-Tone could render one’s complexion “ivory white – the envy of all your friends” (figure 4.7).³⁵ By the 1950s, Bu-Tone’s Complexion Cream in three strengths vied with Karroo’s to be the most heavily marketed and top-selling skin lightener brand in South Africa.³⁶ Illustrating their remarkable omnipresence in black print media, starting in 1953, Bu-Tone advertisements appeared alongside the masthead of *Bantu World* (figure 4.8).

Advertising copy for another, less widely known skin lightener, “Be-A-Beauty Complexion Cream,” reveals how an African entrepreneur adopted a somewhat different marketing strategy from white manufacturers. Around 1940, Israel Alexander, a wealthy Sesotho-speaking healer who operated several herbal shops and a mail-order business in Durban, advertised this cream in one of his pamphlet catalogs (figure 4.9). In translation from the original Sesotho, the copy read:

“BE-A-BEAUTY” COMPLEXION CREAM

The ointment that BEAUTIFIES. If your face is black and your color is not lovable, use “BE-A-BEAUTY” Complexion Cream. This ointment will remove your dark complexion, you will glow/shine and as a result your complexion will be lighter/whiter and more lovable. It also removes dark patches and wrinkles that come with old age.

Buy yourself this amazing ointment to beautify yourself. Boys and girls who value beauty use this ointment daily.

The price for “BE-A-BEAUTY” COMPLEXION CREAM is 5/6 postage included.³⁷

³⁴ “Bu-Tone *Jeugdig die Uwe*” advertisement, *Die Huisgenoot* (7 April 1944), 31; “Bu-Tone Complexion Cream” advertisement, *Cape Times* (10 July 1945), 6.

³⁵ “Bu-Tone Complexion Cream” advertisements, *The Sun* (4 March 1949), 5; and (7 March 1953), 5. Others appeared on (2 Jan. 1948), 2; (9 Jan. 1948) 2; (6 Feb. 1948), 2; (1 April 1949), 5; (14 April 1949), 5; (20 Jan. 1949), 4; (19 June 1953), 5. The “Bu-Tone” advertisement in April 1949 was a direct translation from Afrikaans of one that appeared in *Die Huisgenoot* (29 Oct. 1948), 34.

³⁶ Interview with S. Krok, 12 August 2008 (37:15). In a 1969 presentation, marketing man L.M. Guthrie identified Karroo, SuperRose, Bu-Tone, Artra, and Ambi as the five major brands of skin lighteners in South Africa. Mr. L.M. Guthrie, Manager, African Market Sterling Drug (S.A.) (Pty) Ltd., Durban, “Successes and Failures in Bantu Marketing” in The National Development and Management Foundation, *The Urban Bantu Market: Understanding its Complexities and Developing Its Potential – Proceedings of a 2-Day Seminar held in February 1969, Durban, Natal* (Johannesburg: The National Development and Management Foundation of South Africa, 1969), 63-74.

³⁷ Israel Alexander pamphlet (c. 1940), National Archive Repository, Pretoria (SAB), GES, 1788, 25/30M cited in Karen E. Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 135. Thanks to Karen Flint for sharing Alexander’s pamphlet with

Whereas the Sesotho-language Apex advertisement discussed in the previous chapter performed the pedagogical work of explaining that a “skin bleach” lightens/whitens, clarifies, and smoothens the skin, it did not introduce claims beyond those that commonly appeared in English-language advertisements. Alexander, by contrast, promised that “Be-A-Beauty” would provide a “glow/shine” (*u khanya*), a quality that, as we saw earlier, southern Africans had long associated with beauty, especially that of young women. He also proclaimed its capacity to make one’s skin color “lovable” (*ratehe*). By casting his cream as a kind of charm with the power to attract others, Alexander made explicit a faith that was generally implicit in English-language cosmetic advertisements.³⁸ Moreover, compared to other skin lightener advertisements, Alexander’s spoke more directly to the fact that Africans possessed diverse skin colors. He expressed an aversion to “black” complexions, a sentiment that may have been more common in the Sesotho/Setswana-speaking areas from which he hailed than in the largely isiZulu-speaking province where he plied his trade. In so doing, his advertisement articulated and disseminated a preference for lighter colored skin rooted in colonial racial hierarchies as well as conceptions of beauty specific to certain regions within South Africa. Finally, Alexander pushed the boundaries of skin lightener marketing by hailing young men and women – “boys and girls” – as consumers. In comparison with white manufacturers, Alexander recognized more reasons to use skin lighteners and imagined a broader, not exclusively female, market for them.

With his cosmetic, perfumes, and hair products, Alexander targeted an urban and more cosmopolitan clientele. Advertisements for these products, in contrast with those for his medicines, carried English-language rather than Sesotho names and used graphics of labels and glamorous black people rather than photos of healers and respectable patients (for comparison, see figures 4.10 and 4.11). Alexander also advertised his “Gro-Strate Hair Straightener” in *The Sun* (figure 4.12). Some of the graphics in his advertisements may have been copied from elsewhere. In particular, the image of the stylish couple used in his catalog (figure 4.10) to illustrate the sleek and marcelled hair achieved with “The Hair Curler Pomade” closely resembles graphics used by the African-American company Valmor Products. This resemblance suggests how U.S. visual influences and beauty practices circulated beyond the marketing of products actually manufactured there. Objections from white pharmacists demonstrate how Alexander crossed numerous cultural and racial boundaries in promoting his products. He and a

me together with a preliminary translation of the Be-A-Beauty advertisement. I am indebted to Tumishang Leta and Natasha Erlank for providing a more literal translation from the Sotho. Personal correspondence, February 2012.

³⁸ In another advertisement in the same catalog, Alexander described the effect of “Love-Drops,” a “Wonder-Perfume” for men, in similar terms: “It makes people’s hearts happy as a result they will love and be joyful towards you.” (*E thabisa lipelo tsa batho ba u rate ba u thabele.*) Thanks again to Tumishang Leta for translating this, February 2012. Alexander pamphlet, SAB GES, 1788, 25/30M. Alexander’s copy for “Be-A-Beauty” Complexion Cream and “Love-Drops” does not cast them as “love medicines,” preparations composed of animal, plant, or store-bought materials that aimed to make a man or woman irresistibly attractive or guard a lover’s affection from interlopers. In interwar South Africa, love medicines ranked among the most common treatments sought from healers like Alexander. Whereas Alexander’s cream and perfume, like other cosmetics, were knowingly applied by a user to him or herself in the hope of attracting potential suitors and lovers, users of love medicines generally hid them in the food or vicinity of someone who they sought to enchant and who then, unknowingly, ingested or touched them. On the ubiquity of love medicines in interwar South Africa, see Lynn M. Thomas and Jennifer Cole, “Introduction: Thinking Through Love in Africa” in Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas, *Love in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 7.

few other African healers infuriated pharmacists by advertising themselves as “qualified doctors” and owning establishments “with all the outward appearance of European chemist shops.” In 1932, Alexander even managed to have himself listed in the Durban city directory under “European Chemists.”³⁹ Alexander probably accessed recipes for skin lighteners through the same channels as white pharmacists: by perusing cosmetics and pharmacy handbooks or by gaining knowledge of his competitors’ enterprises.

* * * * *

Whereas advertisements reveal much about who manufactured skin lighteners when and how they promoted them, a letter written by an African woman in 1941 indicates something of how black consumers articulated their desire for such products. The letter was part of a correspondence between Zilpah Skota and her husband Mveli Skota, a prominent member of the African National Congress, struggling journalist, and the author of *The African Yearly Register*. Financial difficulties compelled the Skotas to sublet part of their house near Johannesburg and Zilpah to return to her family home in Klerksdorp. She filled her letters to Mveli with expressions of love, news about ailing relatives, promises to send photos of herself, and requests for clothes and commodities. In one, she wrote: “send me one jar of Karoo [as] I am already dark through the sun.”⁴⁰ Zilpah’s request demonstrates how skin lighteners – like love letters and snapshots – had become part of the routines of some young African women or modern girls, even of one barely able to make ends meet. It also reveals how such women linked their need for skin lighteners to tanned skin gained through time spent working outdoors. In Belinda Bozzoli’s history of labor migrancy, *Women of Phokeng*, one interviewee, Mrs. Mokale, recalled that being out of the sun was one of the few positive aspects among the hardships of being a domestic worker in white households in Johannesburg during the 1920s and 1930s: “what we liked about being indoors was . . . our complexion lightened and turned very beautiful.”⁴¹ These remarks suggest how some women grew to associate urban life and its related forms of indoor work with lighter skin. Whereas, in rural areas, the only extended periods that most girls and women spent free from outdoor labor were during initiation, premarital, or postpartum seclusion, in cities, work inside of buildings protected them from the sun’s darkening and roughening effects.

³⁹ Flint, *Healing Traditions*, 136 and 143.

⁴⁰ James Campbell, “T.D. Mveli Skota and the Making and Unmaking of a Black Elite,” unpublished paper presented to the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop (9-14 February 1987), 30-1; J.D. Mveli Skota Correspondence, Historical Papers, University of Witwatersrand AD2781, letter from Zilpah T.D. Skota to J.D. Mveli Skota, 17 April 1941. For more on Skota and *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who’s Who) of Black Folks in Africa (Contributions by the Leading Native Ministers, Professors, Teachers, and Doctors)* (Johannesburg, 1930), see Couzens, *The New African*, 3-14; and Veit Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (New York, 1999), 53-8.

⁴¹ Belinda Bozzoli with the assistance of Mmantho Nkotoso, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 102. For another account from this study that describes light complexions as beautiful, see Mrs. Mekgwe: “In those days Aunt Naomi was a real beauty, so light in complexion that she looked coloured, and yes, she had an eye for clothes, that one . . .” (101)

Such sun-induced differences in skin color were readily expressed in racial terms. In her book on beauty culture, Nakedi Ribane, a former South African model and fashion journalist, recounts the practice of brides-to-be in Sepedi-, Setswana-, and Sesotho-speaking areas remaining indoors for several days to avoid “the harsh rays of the sun” and develop a “radiant look.” On their wedding day, well-wishers would then sing, “Come out and behold, the bride is so pretty she looks Coloured!” Ribane notes that in post-apartheid South Africa, where people have become more self-conscious of employing the old regime’s racial schema, singers sometimes stumble on the last word and replace “Coloured” with “*naledi*,” meaning “star.”⁴² By comparing the lightened and clarified skin of a bride to that of a coloured person, earlier well-wishers yoked a regional aesthetic and spiritual preference for young women to cultivate bright/light/white appearances to a racial classification. In so doing, they evoked not only the lighter skin tones associated with this classification but its more privileged social, economic, and political status.

By 1941, when Zilpah Skota requested a jar of Karroo from her husband, those classified as coloured, especially in urban areas, possessed significant material advantages over those recognized as African. They were not subject to pass laws and curfews that restricted mobility. The 1923 Native Urban Areas Act, which gave municipal authorities enhanced authority to restrict African migration and deport those deemed “idle and undesirable,” did not apply to coloureds. Moreover, coloureds generally garnered higher salaries, had access to superior housing and social services, and exerted more influence in national politics. Whereas the South African parliament eviscerated Africans’ limited voting rights in 1936, coloureds possessed a qualified franchise that allowed for direct representation for twenty more years. In the Western Cape, where the coloured population was the largest and carried the most political clout, employers and unions frequently barred Africans from semi-skilled positions, reserving them for coloureds.⁴³ During the 1930s and 1940s, such advantages encouraged some classified as African to pass, whether officially or unofficially, for coloured. The 1936 Native Representation Act, the very law that whittled away African voting rights, stipulated that well-educated “natives” could obtain the franchise by petitioning for “promotion” to “Coloured.”⁴⁴ Although very few Africans pursued such legal channels, the fact that racial classifications afforded such distinct material opportunities meant that looking coloured was always about much more than appearances.

Just as segregation’s hierarchy of racial privilege encouraged some classified as Africans to cultivate coloured looks, it induced some classified as coloured to pass for white and many

⁴² Nakedi Ribane, *Beauty: A Black Perspective* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), pp. 105 and 12. “*Tswang, tswang, tswang, le boning, ngwana o tshwana le le Coloured!*”

⁴³ Ian Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* (New York: Longman, 1987), 36-47; Mohamed Adhikari, “Predicaments of Marginality: Cultural Creativity and Political Adaptation in Southern Africa’s Coloured Communities” in Mohamed Adhikari, (ed.), *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2009), viii-xxxii, esp. x.

⁴⁴ Deborah Posel, “Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth-Century South Africa,” *African Studies Review* 44, 2 (2001), 97; idem, “What’s in a Name? Racial Categorisations under Apartheid and their Afterlife,” *Transformation* 47 (2001), 60.

others to valorize white attributes. Up until the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, the racial boundary between coloured and white in the Cape was somewhat fluid; those with wealth, skills, and more European-looking features were generally accepted as white. Liberal observers estimated, given the country's long history of European colonization that entailed much intimate contact between immigrants and indigenous peoples, that more than one-quarter of those classified as white in the 1930s were of "mixed blood."⁴⁵ Those classified as white enjoyed greater access to better jobs, housing, and schools. With such marked advantages in mind, one South African writer pointedly defined coloured as any person who "failed to pass as a White."⁴⁶ Within coloured communities, people with the highest status frequently possessed lighter skin and less curly hair, spoke English over Dutch or Afrikaans, and embraced practices deemed Western and bourgeois. In 1920, one commentator attributed such intra-coloured social distinctions to "white-mindedness."⁴⁷ An article published around the same time in the *A.P.O.*, the newspaper of the main coloured political body – African People's Organization, contested this pervasive thinking. The author implored coloured women to foster "race pride" by first combating prejudice in their own homes: "Do not let us be loud in our condemnation of the European policy of prejudice and insolent pride and at the same time teach our children that lightness of colour, regularity of features, texture of hair, have special values of their own, and allow these physical accidents to influence our affections for our children."⁴⁸ Such pleas suggest the very intimate realms within which skin color consciousness was cultivated.

During the 1930s, the coloured press included debates over beauty and racial respectability that, in many ways, were quite similar to those in *Bantu World*. A male reader, Henry C. A. Cloete, wrote a letter to *The Sun* in 1934 complaining of young women who wore scanty clothing. He blamed this and other unsuitable trends in "modern fashion" on racial mimicry facilitated by domestic service: "Our girls, especially those in domestic employment, are apt to copy their mistresses, and it is from their mistresses that they have copied the art of powdering, painting and smoking."⁴⁹ Readers rebuked Cloete by insisting that such practices were simply part of being "modern" and not the preserve of any particular race or class. Two domestic servants pointed out that "factory girls" also frequently wore make-up and smoked cigarettes while a male reader observed that women's magazines regularly featured such commodities.⁵⁰ Responding to these rebukes, Cloete argued that such "modern" practices looked

⁴⁵ George Findlay, *Miscegenation: A Study of the Biological Sources of Inheritance of the South African European Population* (Pretoria: "Pretoria News" and Printing Works Ltd., 1936); Graham White, *Passing for White: A Study of Racial Assimilation in a South African School* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 18-19; Goldin, *Making Race*, 80.

⁴⁶ L. Green, "XXX," *Outspan* (17 Nov. 1950), 19 cited in Watson, *Passing for White*, 18.

⁴⁷ Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 11-4. Adhikari (11) attributes "white-mindedness" to someone writing in the *Educational Journal* (Nov. 1920).

⁴⁸ "Shifting the Colour Bar," *A.P.O.* (11 March 1922), 6.

⁴⁹ Henry C. A. Cloete, "The Dress of Non-European Girls" letter-to-the editor, *The Sun* (2 March 1934), 5.

⁵⁰ "Two Domestic Servants of Wynberg," "Dress and Habits" letter-to-the editor, *The Sun* (9 March 1934), 7;

strikingly “primitive.” He noted, no doubt partly in jest, that dancers of the Charleston required only “knop-kerrie[s]” to appear as “first class Zulu warrior dance[ers]” and that white mistresses copied their make-up practices from “the Native races who smeared their faces with red stone.”⁵¹ Just as it was ridiculous for white women to flirt with African practices, Cloete insisted, it was equally so for coloured women.

Concerns over respectability also surfaced in relation to an early coloured beauty pageant. *The Cape Standard*, another weekly newspaper published in Cape Town, reported in late 1936 on difficulties that organizers faced in recruiting beauty contestants for the “Western Province Pageant Sports Meeting” to be held over the New Year’s holiday. In contrast to the *Bantu World* competition that simply required entrants to submit portrait photographs, this one entailed a public appearance, something that, as we shall see in the next chapter, caused concern among parents who sought to safeguard their daughters’ reputations. Eventually, the event organizers succeeded in securing entrants including a young woman from Kimberley, Miss Hazel Kensley, described as possessing “good looks and figure” as well as a “pleasing singing voice and a flair for classic dancing.”⁵² By considering competitors’ talents, these organizers, like those who sponsored similar contests in the United States and elsewhere, sought to allay criticisms that they promoted a superficial conception of beauty. Mention of Kensley’s figure, however, likely only confirmed some readers’ suspicions about the bawdy and titillating intent of such events.

When discussion of beauty and racial respectability arose in the coloured press, talk of skin color and hair texture was frequently involved. A 1940 article, which enumerated and criticized the “economic and moral” reasons why some coloureds chose to pass for white, opined: “In the eyes of very many Coloured people the fairness of the skin conferred on the bearer both beauty and the right to be respected.” The author further argued that this valorization of light colored skin was so deep-seated that, for most people, it operated on a “subconscious” level.⁵³ Expressing similar sentiments, editorials and letters-to-the-editor called for a positive “race consciousness” among coloureds. They derided those with “lily-white” complexions who passed for European or discriminated against those with darker skin and hair that was not straight

Francis C. Rousseau, “Re ‘The Dress of Non-European Girls’ letter-to-the-editor,” *The Sun* (6 April 1934), 5. Also see, Andrew Mackrill, “Women’s Dress,” *The Sun* (25 May 1934), 7.

⁵¹ Henry C. A. Cloete, “Dress and Habits,” *The Sun* (16 March 1934), 2; idem, letter-to-the-editor, *The Sun* (20 April 1934), 6. For someone who agreed with Cloete’s criticism of scanty clothing, see “Modesty” letter-to-the-editor, *The Sun* (20 April 1934), 6.

⁵² “Pageant Progress,” *The Cape Standard* (2 Feb. 1936), 2; “Pageant Queens,” *The Cape Standard* (28 Dec. 1936), 6; “Pageant Plans Complete,” *The Cape Standard* (28 Dec. 1936), 7. Compared to *The Sun*, *The Cape Standard* (1934-47? – **check Switzer bibliography**) was more outspoken in its condemnation of racial discrimination, and, based on examination of available issues, appears not to have carried skin lightener and hair straightener advertisements. Les and Donna Switzer, *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho*. In 1943, the *Cape Standard* carried advertisements for the Governor-General’s National War Fund Beauty Contest. “Beauty Contest,” *Cape Standard* (8 June 1943), 1.

⁵³ “Why Coloureds Pass as White: Economic and Moral Urge Involved,” *The Cape Standard* (2 July 1940), 7.

like a “horsetail” (*perdestert* in Afrikaans).⁵⁴ Turning the language of respectability on its head, one letter writer explained that such prejudice caused youth, notably male youth, to lose “respect” for their elders. He gave the example of parents of “long-haired daughters” who refused to allow “young men of woolly hair” to befriend them, explaining that when such men politely asked for permission, they faced “blunt refusal[s]” and often “insulting remarks.”⁵⁵ The absence of rebuttals to such pieces reveals how, within the relatively progressive political sphere of coloured newspapers, intra-coloured prejudice was indefensible. Yet, the presence, on some of those same pages, of advertisements for hair straighteners and skin lighteners demonstrates that manufacturers, at least, believed that their products appealed to the newspapers’ readers.

* * * * *

At the same time as the mass manufacture of skin lighteners was taking off in South Africa and increasingly targeting coloured and African consumers, these products were becoming less popular with white consumers in South Africa, the United States, and elsewhere. This decline in popularity stemmed from two developments, both with roots in health concerns. The first was tanning. As discussed in chapter two, around the turn-of-the-century, medical experts began prescribing ultra-violet light as a beneficial treatment for tuberculosis patients. Soon after, heliotherapy – as contemporaries termed it – was advised for other illnesses including rickets and lupus, and as a general restorative of physical and mental well being. In the name of health, people took up sunbathing and other outdoor activities such as swimming, golf, and tennis. This embrace of sunshine and sports dovetailed with eugenicist efforts to improve the “fitness” of racially-defined populations as well as the emergence of new forms of femininity, personified by the “New Woman” and, later, the “modern girl,” that entailed athleticism and a passion for the outdoors.

For many urban white women and men in Europe and the United States, tanned skin became a badge of health and fitness. It also became a beauty attribute, and an expression of class and racial privilege. By the 1930s, pale skin, especially during the summer months, signaled someone who was sickly or confined to long hours of factory or office work whereas tanned skin symbolized someone who was fit, attractive, and had the luxury of spending holidays at the beach or afternoons enjoying a game of tennis. From socialites like Coco Chanel sunning themselves in the south of France to working-class young men and women flocking to Coney Island on summer weekends, temporarily darkened skin became a valued bodily achievement.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ “Race Consciousness,” *The Sun* (21 June 1935), 3; “Will They?,” *The Sun* (3 March 1938), 3; J. H. Pitt, “Pride and Prejudice” letter-to-the-editor, *The Sun* (18 Jan. 1935), 5.

⁵⁵ “No Permission,” “Old Age Versus Youth,” *The Cape Standard* (9 July 1940), 2.

⁵⁶ Kerry Segrave, *Suntanning in 20th Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., Publishers, 2005), chapters 2-3; Devon Hansen, “Shades of Change: Suntanning and the Twentieth-Century American Dream” (Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 2007), chapters 2-4; The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group (Alyse Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Y. Dong, and Tani E. Barlow), “Chapter 2: The Modern Girl Around the World: Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of Race and Style” in The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, ed., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 25-54, esp. 46-50; Syd Sarah Lindsley, “Girl Pictures: The Politics of Sexuality and Female Display in the Twentieth-Century United States” (Ph.D. thesis, University of

White South Africans' embrace of tanning and outdoor leisure is chronicled in the pages of *South African Pictorial: Stage & Cinema*, a weekly illustrated magazine dedicated to leisure, covering theater, film, and sports at home and abroad. Whereas the U.S. press often reported tanning as a fad that Americans copied from upper-class Europeans, this South African magazine placed the United States and specifically California at the trend's epicenter. A 1917 issue featured a photograph of sunbathers with the caption "wealthy and fashionable Americans at Palm Beach."⁵⁷ A few years later, *South African Pictorial* launched a "bathing beauty contest," sponsored by the U.S. film and camera company Kodak. Portrait photography in studios had long encouraged the cultivation of pale skin. Through this competition, Kodak promoted its "Brownie" snapshot cameras as the best way to capture active and tanned bodies. To provide readers with example images, the magazine published a photo of Charles Ray, a U.S. film star in his Hollywood swimming pool, together with two stills of sunbathing young women from a new Gloria Swanson film.⁵⁸ Subsequent issues featured dozens of photos, submitted from across southern Africa, of groups and individuals sunbathing and swimming. Only a few of the entrants wore hats or carried parasols; most posed in bathing costumes alongside beaches, pools, and rivers in full view of the sun.⁵⁹

Contemporary beauty advice columns and toiletry marketing also reflect the rise of tanning among white South African women. A 1925 column in *The South African Lady's Pictorial and Home Journal* offered advice on how to avoid the reddening and damaging effects of sunburn while acknowledging, "it looks very nice to be burnt to a deep tan."⁶⁰ In a marketing survey conducted a few years later for the U. S. manufacturer of a skin ointment, the South African office of J. Walter Thompson explained that climatically the country was "comparable to Arizona, California, and Texas" and that sunburn was common, especially among city-dwellers who enjoyed coastal resorts during summer months.⁶¹ Amid tanned skin's newfound popularity, skin lightener manufacturers sought to remain relevant by touting their products' ability to reduce the roughening results of sunburn and windburn. Karroo explained that "excessive sunburns" caused the freckles that its complexion cream could vanquish (figure 4.3) while Keppels promoted its products as a defense against South Africa's climate that "ravages

Washington, 2011), chapter 1.

⁵⁷ "Peace and War: A Study in Contrast," *Stage & Cinema: The Dramatic Sporting & Social Journal of South Africa* (26 May 1917), 5. Soon after this issue the title changed to *South African Pictorial: Stage & Cinema*.

⁵⁸ "Bathing-Photo Competitors, Please Note!," *South African Pictorial: Stage & Cinema* (16 Dec. 1922), 11.

⁵⁹ See *South African Pictorial: Stage & Cinema* from 23 December 1922 through 10 February 1923.

⁶⁰ "Sunburn," *The South African Lady's Pictorial and Home Journal* (1 Feb. 1925), 8.

⁶¹ Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, J. Walter Thompson Collection, reel no. 225, Marketing Reports, South Africa, Port Elizabeth, J. Walter Thompson Co. (Pty.) Ltd., "Report for Unguentine" (1929), foreword and 27. For an early locally-manufactured sunscreen, see "'Torch' Brand Sunban" advertisement, *The South African Pharmaceutical Journal* 1, 3 (Dec. 1934), cover.

complexions” (figure 4.4).⁶² The appeal of skin lighteners for white consumers no longer stemmed from preserving a refined, pale complexion but removing the marring effects of outdoor leisure.

The more extensive discussion of tanning in the U.S. press occasionally pointed to the racial politics of this increasingly international practice. By the late 1920s, articles in trade journals declared that the “tan fad” was here to stay. A piece that appeared in *Advertising & Selling* likened young women’s embrace of tanned skin and colorful make up to members of “savage tribes” who painted and distorted their faces to “indicate relative position.”⁶³ Similarly, another in *Printers’ Ink Monthly* mockingly suggested how the trend unsettled racial distinctions: “[Flappers] flocked to the beaches day after day in bathing suits as close to the ultimate zero as was permitted . . . and return[ed] to their Northern and Eastern haunts to display an expanse of deeply tanned skin that would arouse the envy of an Indian.”⁶⁴ According to these authors, “modern girls” challenged the boundaries of “civilized” and respectable femininity. Yet, racial privilege ensured that they remained white even when they darkened their skin. Contemporary developments in filmmaking further encouraged young women to cultivate darker “exotic” skin tones. With the rise of Technicolor films, Hollywood combined forces with cosmetics companies, most notably Max Factor, to highlight the new technology’s advantages through using a fuller palette of face make up. “Colorful” ethnic beauties including Rita Hayworth, Dolores Del Rio, and Anna May Wong became film stars while fair actresses like Joan Crawford, Joan Bennett, and Marlene Dietrich were made more exotic and alluring through dark-hued cosmetics and tans.⁶⁵

Beauty advice columns and skin lightener advertisements that cast tanning as a seasonal fashion also situated white women’s skin color as a matter of consumer choice. Throughout the interwar period, beauty columnists in major U. S. publications like *The Washington Post* and *Vogue* advised women to cultivate moderate tans over the summer or while on holiday but to remove them soon after.⁶⁶ Seeking to maintain their products’ relevance, skin lightener

⁶² “Karoo Sproete-Salf” advertisement, *Die Huisgenoot* (18 Oct. 1946), 73; “Keppels” ad, *Cape Times* (3 July 1945), 8. Also see, “Bu-Tone” and “Keppels” advertisements, *Cape Times* (10 July 1945), 6 and 8.

⁶³ Marie Du Bois, “What is Sun-Tan Doing to Cosmetics?,” *Advertising & Selling* (12 June 1929), 19-20, 62, 64. Also see, Marie Du Bois, “The Sun-Tan Mode Arrives,” *Advertising & Selling* (1 May 1929), 28, 76.

⁶⁴ Donald S. Cowling, “Will the Vogue for Tan Last?,” *Printers’ Ink Monthly* (August 1929), 31-2, 82, 84. This discussion of the Cowling quote and other material in this paragraph draws on the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group’s interpretation in “Chapter 2: The Modern Girl Around the World: Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of Race and Style,” 46-8. Similarly, a beauty advice column from 1900 noted that a popular expression for referring to deeply tanned white skin was “as black as an Indian.” Grace Peckham Murray, “The Summer Girl’s Complexion,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (16 June 1900), 444.

⁶⁵ Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), chapter 3; Hansen, “Shades of Change,” chapter 3.

⁶⁶ For example, “Doris Interprets the Mode,” *The Washington Post* (4 Dec. 1929), 16; Elsie Pierce, “How to be Beautiful,” *The Sun* (27 Aug. 1936), 8; “Beauty and the Elements . . . Sun, Wind, and Water,” *Vogue* (15 May 1941), 34-41. Also see, Hansen, “Shades of Change,” chapter 3.

manufacturers seconded this advice with slogans such as “vacation is over – off with the tan” or “bleach your way to autumn beauty.”⁶⁷ Letters written to *Hygeia*, the consumer health magazine of the American Medical Association, and to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reveal that not all women were as sanguine about removing tans or the stability of their racial identities. In the mid-1920s, two women wrote to *Hygeia* explaining that they had lived for a number of years in “tropical” countries where they had become “very tanned” and “unusually dark.” They requested advice of how to regain their “natural complexion[s]” before returning to the United States. Although one knew of “patent preparations” used by “Negroes,” she was reluctant to try them as she was unsure of their ingredients.⁶⁸ About fifteen years later, a desperate woman holed up in Chicago sent the following plea to the FDA:

Will you please tell me how I can take the skin off my neck, hands and arms? I have a tan that is terrible that I got in Phoenix and Los Angeles. I have used Drug Store bleaches for six months and now want to take the skin off as that is the only way to get this tan off. My home is Washington, D.C. and I can't come back black. Do let me hear from you.⁶⁹

Together, these letters demonstrate that what was deemed an acceptable shade of tan for white women varied not just seasonally but between countries and across regions of the United States. For some, like the woman unable to return to Washington, D. C., the palpable fear of being taken for “Negro” under Jim Crow segregation animated the desire to remove tanned skin.

Commentators in the African American press also took note of the fad for tanning, frequently juxtaposing it with skin lightening. Articles published in a number of black papers in 1929 identified Europe, specifically Germany and England, as the source of the trend. Observing that much money had already been spent on trying to change “colored skins to white,” a short piece in the Baltimore *Afro-American* hailed tanning as “another kind of assault on the color line.”⁷⁰ A satirical piece in the *New York Amsterdam News*, commenting on a German scientist’s recent claim to have developed a pill that could turn black people white, chided the trend of American men and women bathing on beaches and taking “great pride in seeing just how near to colored people they can become.”⁷¹ Also with a bemused tone, a *Chicago Defender* columnist

⁶⁷ “Daggett & Ramsdell’s Perfect Cold Cream” advertisement, *New York Times* (1 Sept. 1918), 61; “Helena Rubinstein” advertisement, *The Spur* (15 Sept. 1926), 107; “Gervaise Graham Lotion Face Bleach” advertisement, *McClure, The Magazine of Romance* (July 1927), 97; “Helena Rubinstein” advertisement, *Vogue* (?? 1928), ??.

⁶⁸ In both cases, the author of the advice column responded that time in a temperate climate would naturally return the writer’s original skin color. H. G. L., Cuba, “Tropical Climate,” *Hygeia* (Feb. 1926), 119; K. T., Idaho, “Face Bleacher,” *Hygeia* (March 1927), 162. Cited and discussed in Hansen, *Shades of Change*, 41-2.

⁶⁹ After some joking in internal correspondence, an FDA official advised Mrs. Buck to see a physician. NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1942, 581.1: Mrs. J. Mott Buck, La Salle Hotel, Chicago, Illinois to FDA, Agriculture Dept., 12 Nov. 1942; H. Wales, Acting Chief, Interstate Division, FDA to Mrs. Buck, 23 Nov. 1942.

⁷⁰ “Sun Tan,” *Afro-American* (24 Aug. 1929), 6.

⁷¹ J. A. Rogers, “Europe’s Sun Tan Fad,” *The New York Amsterdam News* (21 Aug. 1929), 20. Virtually the same article appeared under a different title as J. A. Rogers, “Berlin’s Fashion Decrees Dark Skin Color,” *Afro-American* (17 Aug. 1929), 5.

pointed to the similarly absurd appearances created by a white girl darkening her face with a “sun-tan” colored powder but leaving her ears and neck untouched, and a “colored girl” lightening her face and ignoring the same.⁷²

Although the tanning fad did not diminish the prevalence of skin lightener advertisements in the African American press, it did influence their messages. In the mid-1920s, Madame C. J. Walker, a black-owned cosmetic company that, as we saw in the last chapter sought to promote “race pride” through entrepreneurship and self-improvement, launched its first skin lightener, “Tan-Off.” With this name, the company alluded to the increasingly popular pastime of tanning and cast black women’s use of these products in a less racialized idiom. Through slogans like “enjoy this summer’s sunshine” and silhouetted figures of young women swimming, boating, and playing tennis and golf, “Tan-Off” advertisements situated African American young women as potential “modern girls” and acknowledged that such outdoor activities could darken black as well as white skin. “Fan Tan,” one of the most heavily marketed skin lighteners in the 1930s, also related skin color to sun exposure and promised that it could be easily adjusted. With resulting shades described as “Sun-Brown,” “Spanish,” and “Ivory White,” “Fan Tan” advertisements situated black women’s desire for lighter skin outside the stark U.S. white/black racial binary by evoking the contemporary craze for tanning and a more cosmopolitan color palette.⁷³

The sparse discussion of tanning in South Africa’s black press makes it more difficult to discern the practice’s racial politics there. A 1938 beauty advice column for “holiday-makers” that appeared in *Cape Standard*, a paper with a predominately coloured readership, offered the same counsel found in contemporary white newspapers: tans should be cultivated gradually to avoid damaging sunburn.⁷⁴ Such advice suggests that some of the paper’s readers embraced seasonal tanning as part of outdoor leisure. As we have seen, skin lightener advertisements encouraged both white and coloured consumers to remove tanned skin.⁷⁵ Zilpah Skota, an African woman, agreed with that advice. By requesting a jar of Karroo for skin that had become

⁷² Alfred Smith, “Adventures in Race Relations,” *The Chicago Defender* (3 May 1947), 15.

⁷³ “Tan-Off” advertisement, *Baltimore Afro-American*, 1928; “Fan Tan” advertisement, *Baltimore Afro-American* (26 Oct. 1929), 20. In some markets, “Tan-Off” was the Walker Company’s best-selling product by the late 1920s. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 113. This discussion of “Tan-Off” and “Fan Tan” draws on material and analysis the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group’s interpretation in “Chapter 2: The Modern Girl Around the World: Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of Race and Style,” 48-9. Berry argues that the discourses found in cosmetic advertisements worked “to normalize [racial/ethnic] difference by treating it euphemistically.” *Screen Style*, 94. Interestingly, “Tan-Off” did not contain mercury until the early 1940s. NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1942, 581.1: “Memorandum of Interview” involving Mr. Buck, Plough Chemical Co., Memphis, Tennessee and, from the FDA, Mr. G.F. Larrick, 26 Nov. 1940.

⁷⁴ “Dangers of Sunburn: Hints for Holiday-makers,” *Cape Standard* (4 Jan. 1938), 10. For examples of similar advice in the white British and U. S. press, see “The Summer Complexion,” *The Times* [London] (7 July 1939), 19. Allen Klein, *How to Suntan for Health and Fun* (Emaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1938).

⁷⁵ “Keppels” advertisement, *Cape Times* (3 July 1945), 8; “Bu-Tone” advertisement, *Cape Times* (10 July 1945), 6. References to complexions “ravage[d]” by South Africa’s “cruel” climate and “harsh winds and searing sun” may have also served as euphemisms for skin that was naturally brown.

“dark through the sun,” Skota sought to remove the effect of outdoor labor on her skin.⁷⁶ For Skota and the black women who valued the lighter appearance that indoor domestic work afforded, darkened skin embodied the menial status of outdoor labor rather than the pleasure of leisure. For these “modern girls,” untanned skin continued to convey privilege and beauty.

As tanning took root during the 1930s, the marketing of skin lighteners to white consumers in both the United States and South Africa declined while the promotion of sunning products took off. In 1931, the New York office of J. Walter Thompson compiled a list, focused mainly on the white cosmetics market, of over two hundred “skin bleaches” manufactured in the United States, from Detroit to Paris, Tennessee to Los Angeles. Although the length of this list attests to skin lighteners’ status as commonplace cosmetics, the accompanying report chronicled their plummeting popularity. According to trade sources, sales of Mercolized Wax, a major brand marketed in South Africa and elsewhere overseas, were “small and declining.”⁷⁷ Similarly, in her 1934 handbook for cosmetic manufacturers, Francis Chilson wrote “bleaching creams are not as popular as they once were when favored lily white complexions instead of the outdoor tan which has won current favor.”⁷⁸ For the remainder of the decade, cosmetic companies and their marketers spent considerable energy responding to the trend for “color” by developing sunburn preparations, suntan lotions, and tinted powders and foundations.⁷⁹ Sunbathing, which had begun as a health prescription, had become a favorite pastime for many white people, a development that had immediate commercial consequences. Its most serious health consequence – increased risk for skin cancer – did not garner significant popular attention until the 1970s.⁸⁰

* * * * *

Mercury was the second health concern that contributed to the decreased popularity of skin lighteners among some white women during the 1930s. As we saw in chapter two, since the middle of the nineteenth century, medical experts in the United States and elsewhere had warned of the harm caused by cosmetics containing ammoniated mercury and bichloride of mercury

⁷⁶ J.D. Mveli Skota Correspondence, Historical Papers, University of Witwatersrand AD2781, letter from Zilpah T.D. Skota to J.D. Mveli Skota, 17 April 1941.

⁷⁷ Duke Library, J. Walter Thompson Collection, reel no. 53, Investigations, “Pond’s” (1931), 15-20 and 1-3. This list notably excluded a number of products regularly advertised in the African American press.

⁷⁸ Chilson, *Modern Cosmetics*, 113.

⁷⁹ “Sunburn Preparations,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 34 (March 1934), 237-8; “Sun Tan Lotion,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 41 (July 1937), 131. Duke Library, J. Walter Thompson Collection: reel no. 233, Investigations, “Test of Pond’s New Sun Tan Powder (April 1936); reel no. 233, Investigations, “Skol Company, Incorporated; Consumer Investigation on Sunburn Preparations” (Sept. 1937); reel no. 233, Investigations, “Skol Company, Incorporated; Second Consumer Investigation on Sunburn Preparations” (Oct. 1937); reel no. 233, “Rend in Sales of Sun Tan Lotions, Creams and Pads in Drug, Department and Variety Stores” (Aug. 1938); reel no. 712, Pond’s, “Information on Tinted Foundation and Creams” (April 1941).

⁸⁰ Segrave, *Suntanning in 20th Century America*, chapter 6; Hansen, “Shades of Change,” chapter 8.

(corrosive sublimate) with some calling for state regulation. In the decades that followed, reports of such cosmetics causing ailments, ranging from discolored skin and lesions to systemic and fatal poisoning, could be found in medical journals as well as daily newspapers and women's monthly magazines.⁸¹ Some beauty advice columns in mainstream and African American newspapers recommended milder bleaches containing lemon juice, buttermilk, and peroxide rather than mercury.⁸² Between 1911 and 1936, the American Medical Association published a compendium of "nostrums and quackery" afflicting public health. Skin lighteners containing mercury featured among the products profiled as the AMA's leadership called for federal regulation of these and other cosmetics.⁸³ By the mid-1930s, even the drug and cosmetic industry's trade journal advised that while mercury was an effective agent in "freckle removers" and "bleaching creams," it was too dangerous for manufacturers to use.⁸⁴

Regulation, however, remained piecemeal and uneven. Around the turn of the century, health authorities in a couple of states – namely, Massachusetts and Indiana – began requiring manufacturers of cosmetics containing mercury to label their products as poisons with skull and

⁸¹ Emma E. Walker, "Pretty Girl Papers," *The Ladies' Home Journal* (April 1905), 35; "Perils of Face Beautifiers Told By U.S. Drug Expert," *The Washington Post* (10 May 1912), 2; "The Toxicology of Toilet Preparations," *Medical Record* (4 Dec. 1915), 964; William H. Goeckermann, "A Peculiar Discoloration of the Skin," *Journal of American Medical Association* 79, 8 (19 Aug. 1923): 605-607; Dr. W. A. Evans, "How to Keep Well," *The Washington Post* (13 Aug. 1924), 9; Antoinette Donnelly, "The Case Against Cosmetics," *The Washington Post* (27 July 1924), 10; Morris Fishbein, "Your Good Health," *The Sun* (Baltimore) (20 July 1924), 3; "Beware of Poisonous Ingredients in Cosmetics," *The Washington Post* (17 Aug. 1924), 3; Dr. W. A. Evans, "How to Keep Well," *The Washington Post* (5 April 1932), 10; Dr. Irving S. Cutter, "Face Bleachers Often Injurious as Beauty Aid," *The Washington Post* (30 April 1936), x13. Also see, Henry W. Woltman, "Lead Poisoning from Face Enamel," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 79, 20 (1922): 1685.

⁸² For example, Valeska Suratt, "How to Make Big and Little Wrinkles Disappear," *The Washington Post* (19 Oct. 1913); "Beauty Hints," *Afro-American* (30 April 1932), 24; Elsie Pierce, "How to Be Beautiful," *The Washington Post* (20 Sept. 1932), 9. For a trade journal advocating the same, see *American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record*: (1 Oct. 1917), 38; (1 Aug. 1918), 25-7; (1 Oct. 1919), 50; and (1 Sept. 1921), 23-6.

⁸³ Arthur J. Cramp, *Nostrums and Quackery: Articles on the Nostrum Evil, Quackery and Allied Matters Affecting the Public Health; Reprinted, with or without Modifications, from The Journal of the American Medical Association* (Chicago: Press of the American Medical Association, 1911-36); "Curb on Cosmetics Urged by Doctors," *New York Times* (17 May 1927), 7. On concerns over mercury expressed through the AMA, also see William H. Goeckermann, "A Peculiar Discoloration of the Skin," *Journal of American Medical Association* 79, 8 (19 Aug. 1923): 605-607; National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter, NARA), Records of the Federal Drug Administration (hereafter, FDA), RG 88, General Subject Files, 1923, 580.20; Walter S. Long, City Chemist, Kansas City, Missouri to Mr. W.S. Frisbie, Chemist in Charge of Cooperation, Bureau of Chemistry, Washington, DC, 5 Dec. 1923; Frisbie to Long, 12 Dec. 1923; Long to Frisbie, 27 Dec. 1923.

⁸⁴ "Removing Freckle," *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 31, 5 (1932), 440; "The Compounders' Corner," *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 37, 5 (1935), 673; "Readers' Questions: Skin Bleaches," *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 39 (1937), 382. Interestingly, the journal responded to a reader in Chicago's request for a formula for a "strong bleaching agent for Negro skin" by writing: "Preparations such as you ask for would be extremely valuable (if available) and would undoubtedly be kept as closely guarded secrets. To our knowledge there is no bleaching agent that would have any effect upon the color of Negro skin. The pigment is located in the lowest layers of the skin and quite difficult to reach from the outside. Concentrated hydrogen peroxide or chlorinated lime solutions might be useful in this respect, but they probably merely destroy the skin." "Readers' Questions: Skin Bleaches," *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 40, 6 (1937), 874.

crossbones warnings.⁸⁵ Internationally, police in Berlin sought to discredit advertisements for such cosmetics by placing beneath them declarations of their poisonous ingredients while some authorities in Great Britain required them to carry poison labels.⁸⁶ Taking a different tack, postal authorities in Virginia in 1905 brought a fraud order against Doctor Winfield & Co. for advertising in a “negro paper” that its compound could “turn the skin of a the blackest of negroes to a beautiful lily white.” The order also noted the ill-health effects of this mercury-based product: “while the compound has a temporarily bleaching effect, it is not permanently beneficial, but is ultimately injurious.”⁸⁷ As campaigns against skin lighteners picked up steam over the twentieth century, this twinned focus on fraudulent claims and harmful health consequences would grow.

In 1938, the U.S. Congress passed the first comprehensive national law – anywhere in the world – to regulate cosmetics: the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic (FDC) Act. Like its predecessor, the 1906 Food and Drug Act that established the FDA, the 1938 law was the product of widespread consumer activism, much of it spearheaded by women. Between the passage of the two laws, cosmetics use in the United States skyrocketed. Whereas cosmetics sales amounted to less than \$100,000 in 1900, by the mid-1920s, they totaled an astonishing \$1.25 million per year and nearly twice that a decade later. As *The Washington Post* put it in 1927, “the ‘flapper’” had made cosmetics “practically universal.” Along with greater use came reports of devastating physical damage: eyebrow dyes and mascaras that caused blindness; hair products that burned the scalp and resulted in permanent hair loss; and facial compounds and creams that produced rashes, scarring, and discoloration. Journalists and consumer activists publicized the worst of these incidents, galvanizing public opinion in support of government regulation. The FDC Act empowered the FDA to prohibit cosmetics deemed injurious to health and to monitor truthfulness in labeling.⁸⁸

Discussions leading to the passage of the act garnered international attention. In 1934, the trade journal *South African Business Efficiency* lauded the draft bill, noting that South Africa too could benefit from government oversight in the sale of cosmetics, foods, and patent medicines.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ “Enforcing the Poison Law,” *Druggists’ Circular and Chemical Gazette* (1 Feb. 1891); “Poison in a Cosmetic,” *Druggists’ Circular and Chemical Gazette* (1 Oct. 1893); “Poisonous Cosmetics,” *Medical Record* (14 Oct. 1905).

⁸⁶ “Poisonous Cosmetics,” *The British Medical Journal* (26 Aug. 1893), 480-1; “Poison in a Cosmetics,” *Druggists’ Circular and Chemical Gazette* (1 Oct. 1893); “German Paternalism,” *The Urn* (25 April 1893); “House & Health,” *Christian Observer* (4 Sept. 1895); . For a German chemist arguing for the “establishment of cosmetic technology on a rational basis,” see Theodor Koller, *Cosmetics: A Handbook of the Manufacture, Employment, and Testing of All Cosmetic Materials and Cosmetic Specialities*, trans. from German by Chas. Salter (London: Scoot, Greenwood & Son, 1920, second reset and reprint; first Eng. Edition 1902).

⁸⁷ “Virginia Company Barred: Accused of Advertising a Compound that Would Make Negroes’ Skin White,” *The Washington Post* (8 June 1905), 5.

⁸⁸ “Poisonous Cosmetics,” *The Washington Post* (5 June 1927); Ruth deForest Lamb, *American Chamber of Horrors: The Truth About Food and Drugs* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936); Senator Royal S. Copeland, “Protection for the Public,” *Scientific American* (Nov. 1938), 257-8; Gwen Kay, *Dying to be Beautiful: The Fight for Safe Cosmetics* (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2005), sales figures from p. 6.

⁸⁹ “Stricter Control of Advertising?,” *South African Business Efficiency* (Nov. 1934), 330-1. For an account from

Although, in Britain, statutes governing food and drug safety had existed since the mid-nineteenth century, they were not extended to include cosmetics until the 1970s and, then, only at the prompting of a European Economic Community directive.⁹⁰ Thus, even though South Africa was a dominion of the British Commonwealth, U.S. rather than British law often provided the touchstone when discussion of cosmetics and their possible regulation emerged in twentieth-century South Africa.

The FDA classified skin lighteners containing mercury as both drugs and cosmetics, because they sought “to affect the structure and function of the body” and “to promote attractiveness and to alter the appearance of the person.” Demonstrating just what a prominent health concern skin lighteners had become, they ranked among the very first cosmetics to be regulated under the FDC Act. But rather than banning them entirely as some critics suggested, the FDA chose to limit the amount of mercury they could contain. In 1939, it issued a “Notice to Manufacturers of Mercury Bleach Creams” that restricted ammoniated mercury concentrations in cosmetics to 5% or less (bichloride of mercury to .2% or less) and recommended that such cosmetics carry warning labels with the following information:

- “that if skin irritation appears after application, use of the product should be immediately discontinued”;
- “that such articles should not be applied to irritated or damaged skins, such as cut, bruised, sunburned, or sore skin, after shaving, or after using a depilatory”;
- “that prolonged use may produce unsightly discoloration”;
- “that application to a large area of the body is dangerous”;
- “adequate directions for conducting a preliminary test, and for repetition of such testing”; and
- “advise against vigorous applications and should direct that a thin layer is to be applied and left on for not more than one-half hour and then cleaned off with some substance such as benzene or oil.”

The “Notice” also stated that “claims” made for mercury bleaching creams “should be limited to such temporary lightening effect as they possess.”⁹¹ Whereas the FDA could now seize

the 1930s of how South Africa possessed no body equivalent to the FDA, see U.S. Department of Commerce, *Advertising in the Union of South Africa*, 47.

⁹⁰ R. E. Curran, “British Food and Drug Law – A History,” *Food Drug Cosmetic Law Journal* 6, 4 (April 1951), 247-68; Robin Young, “New Regulations to Outlaw Cosmetics Harmful to Health,” *The Times* (London) (4 Aug. 1978); “Safety Rules for Cosmetics to be Introduced,” *The Times* (London) (21 Sept. 1978); Evelyne A. Friedel, “Regulation of Cosmetics in the Common Market,” *Food Drug Cosmetic Law Journal* 46 (1991), 429-40.

⁹¹ “Notice to Manufacturers of Mercury Bleach Creams” reproduced in C. W. Ozier, “Chapter 9: Skin Lighteners and Bleach Creams” in Edward Sagarin, ed., *Cosmetics: Science and Technology* (New York: Interscience Publishers, Inc., 1957), 213-21. Also see discussion of notice in “F.D.A. and F.T.C. Activities,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 44, 6 (1939), 735; NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1942, 581.1: H. Wales, Acting Chief, Interstate Division, FDA to Mrs. L.H. Dudley, 1825 P Street S.E., Washington, DC, 17 Feb. 1942; NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1940, 581.1: Walter H. Gottlieb, Counsellor at Law, 152 W. 42nd St., New York to FDA, 22 Dec. 1939; P.B. Dunban, Assistant Chief, FDA, to Gottlieb, 11 Jan. 1940; H. Wales, Acting Chief, Interstate Division, FDA to Mr. C. Ibeson Stewart, 1010 Western Pacific Building, Los Angeles, California, 27 Sept. 1940. The notice came into effect on 1 January 1940. In addition to bichloride of mercury, it also restricted concentrations in comparable amounts of other mercury compounds to .2%. Peiss (*Hope in a Jar*, 212) mentions heightened FDA scrutiny of skin lighteners in the 1930s.

preparations containing more than the above-specified percentages of mercury, the labeling guidelines were only advisory. As FDA Chief W. G. Campbell explained in correspondence with a Dallas manufacturer, the guidelines were “based upon the advice of competent dermatologists” but did “not have the force and effect of law.”⁹²

The FDA’s approach to cosmetic labeling was intimately tied to the Federal Trade Commission’s (FTC’s) monitoring of truthfulness in cosmetic advertising. Alongside the FDC Act, Congress passed the Wheeler-Lea Act in 1938 that extended the FTC’s authority beyond ensuring fair competition between businesses to protecting consumers from unfair trade practices, including false advertising of food, drugs, and cosmetics.⁹³ The FDA’s interest in bleaching preparations, in fact, grew out of investigations that the FTC had begun in the mid-1930s into the marketing of “Golden Peacock Bleach Cream,” “Miracream,” and “Mercolized Wax” to white and black consumers.⁹⁴ Interrupting the FDA’s recommendation that claims for mercury bleach creams should no longer exceed a “temporary lightning effect,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* warned that advertisements should stop using statements such as “removes freckles,” “removes pimples,” “rid skin of blemishes,” “remedy for or prevents blackheads and acne,” and “lightens dark skin.”⁹⁵ Yet, as we shall see, the FDA and FTC did accept broader claims to lightening and whitening.

To the surprise of some manufacturers, the new regulations quickly came into force. In April 1939, the FDA seized, in Cleveland, skin bleaches containing amounts of ammoniated mercury in excess of 5%, explaining to the Toilet Goods Association that more seizures would follow elsewhere.⁹⁶ A few months later, the FTC ordered the manufacturers of “Mercolized Wax” and “Kremola” to discontinue advertisements that claimed their products removed freckles and cured pimples and blackheads. The FTC also cited these manufacturers for failing to reveal

⁹² Campbell’s letter continued: “It is by such notices that we acquaint manufacturers and other interested parties with our opinions concerning the interpretation of important sections of the Act and thus be of assistance to the trade in their efforts to devise satisfactory labeling. Whether or not a manufacturer uses the Administrative opinion as a guide is within his own discretion. Ultimately, of course, when legal actions are instituted, differences of opinion with respect to legal requirements are resolved by the courts.” NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1940, 581.1: W.G. Campbell, Chief, FDA to Superior Products Company, Attention of Mr. E.E. Roessler, 2200 South Lamar Street, Dallas, Texas, 25 April 1940.

⁹³ The Wheeler-Lea Act amended Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act of 1914. Milton Handler, “The Control of False Advertising Under the Wheeler-Lea Act,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 6, 1 (1939), 91-110; Kay, *Dying to be Beautiful*, 118-9.

⁹⁴ For those FTC investigations, see NARA, FTC, RG 122, Docket 3156 and NARA, FTC, RG 122, Docket 3593. **[I need to look at summaries that Sharae did of these investigations]**

⁹⁵ “A Legal Issue,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 46, 5 (1940), 537-551, 563. **[need to get 563 and determine if statements on p. 550 on Wheeler Lea were advisory or mandatory]** For another instance of the journal informing readers of relevant FDA and FTC regulations, see S.L. Mayham, “Legal Angles,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 44, 6 (1939), 733.

⁹⁶ “May Require Badges,” *New York Times* (7 April 1939), 39.

that their products contained ammoniated mercury, a potentially harmful substance.⁹⁷ Soon ads for skin lighteners in both white and black publications alerted readers to their ammoniated mercury content.⁹⁸

By the mid-1940s, most major U.S. skin lightener manufacturers appear to have complied with the key FDC and FTC regulations and recommendations. Some manufacturers even decreased the concentration of ammoniated mercury in their products to below 5%, noting that 1-2% ammoniated mercury seemed to have the same lightening effect as higher concentrations.⁹⁹ Handbooks for cosmetics manufacturers also no longer included recipes for skin lighteners containing mercury.¹⁰⁰ From the 1940s through the 1960s, the FDA occasionally issued citations to companies that failed to comply with the recommended warning label.¹⁰¹ The FTC continued

⁹⁷ “Mercolized Wax Stopped,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* (Sept. 1939), 325; “Freckle Ointment Cited,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 46, 1 (1940), 65.

⁹⁸ For example, see, “Dr. Fred Palmer’s Vanishing Cream” ad, *New York Amsterdam News* (2 March 1940), 10.

⁹⁹ NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1945, 581.1-.10: W.A. Queen, Chief, Division of State Cooperation, FDA to Mr. J.W. Forbes, Chief, Food and Drug Section, State Department of Health, New Orleans, Louisiana, 17 Jan. 1945; NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1945, 581.1-.10: W.A. Queen, Chief, Division of State Cooperation to Mr. J.W. Forbes, Chief, Food and Drug Section, State Department of Health, New Orleans, Louisiana, 17 Jan. 1945; NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1947, 581.1: W.A. Queen, Chief, Division of State Cooperation, FDA to Mr. Jerome Trichter, Director, Bureau of Food and Drugs, Department of Health, New York City, 22 April 1947; D. F. Nealon, “Analysis of Consumer Complaints,” *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* ?, ? (1945), ?? . For products containing these lower concentrations, the FDA recommended only one change in the warning label; it need not contain a caution “against systemic toxicity.” NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1945, 581.1-.10: “Memorandum of Interview” involving Mr. James F. Hoge, New York and, from the FDA, Mr. G.P. Larrick, Dr. R.P. Herwick, and Dr. Adolph Rostenberg, Jr., 4 Jan. 1945.

¹⁰⁰ Whereas the 1934 edition of *Modern Cosmetics*, published by the Drug and Cosmetic Industry, noted that ammoniated mercury was “harmful” but included some skin lightener recipes containing it, the 1947 edition explained the FDA’s limit of 5% and did not include any recipes with ammoniated mercury. E. G. Thomssen, *Modern Cosmetics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Drug and Cosmetic Industry, 1947), 243-6. For another, contemporary handbook that also did not contain skin lightener recipes with mercury, see Ralph G. Harry and P. B. Mumford, *Modern Cosmeticology, Third Revised Edition* (Brooklyn: Chemical Publishing Co., Inc., 1947). For one that did, see Ozier, “Chapter 9: Skin Lighteners and Bleach Creams.”

¹⁰¹ NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1940, 581.1-.23: W.G. Campbell, Chief, FDA to Chief, Central District, FDA, 13 Nov. 1940; NARA, FDA, RG88, General Subject Files, 1940, 581.1-.23: G.P. Larrick, Acting Commission, FDA to Chief, Central District, FDA, 13 Nov. 1940. By the 1960s, the FDA offered the following standardized wording: “Warning – Discontinue use if rash or irritation develops. Do not apply to irritated or damaged skin (cuts, bruises, sunburn) or after shaving or using a depilatory. Do not apply to children under 12 years of age. Frequent or prolonged use or application to large areas may cause serious mercury poisoning.” NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1963, ????: Juanita P. Horton, Assistant to the Director, Division of Advisory Opinions, Bureau of Enforcement, FDA to Mr. W.T. Murray, Tyson & Company, Inc., Paris, Tennessee; NARA, FDA, RG88, General Subject Files 1965, 581.1-.10: C.E. Beisel, Advisory Opinions Branch, Division of Industry Advice, Bureau of Education and Voluntary Compliance, FDA to Mr. R.A. LaForge, Pharmaceutical Consultant, Greenville, South Carolina, 25 May 1965.

to investigate skin lightener manufacturers whose advertisements made unsupported claims, particularly as regards health benefits.¹⁰²

Neither the FDA nor FTC, however, objected to labeling or advertising claims that preparations containing ammoniated mercury could lighten skin color. As an FDA official in Washington, D.C. explained to a medical officer in the agency's Western District in 1943: "There seems to be some evidence that 1½% ammoniated mercury will make the skin appear whiter and accelerate the rate at which the horny tissue is exfoliated."¹⁰³ Similarly, in 1957, another FDA official assured the manufacturer of "Mercolized Wax" that its claims to produce "whiter, smoother and radiantly clearer complexion" were not extravagant.¹⁰⁴

The work of D. F. Nealon, a research chemist employed by the National Toilet Company of Paris, Tennessee, seems also to have played a role in convincing federal officials that lightening and whitening claims were not fraudulent. Starting in the mid-1920s, Nealon sought to gather "scientific proof" that would corroborate consumer testimonials that "Nadinola Bleaching Cream" – the company's product – did, in fact, lighten skin color. Through consultation with photography experts at the U.S. Bureau of Standards and Eastman Kodak Company and experimentation with numerous groups of young white and "colored" women, Nealon developed an elaborate, standardized system for photographically recording and measuring the cream's lightening effects. He found that "Nadinola" did produce lightening, especially during the winter months and especially among women with darker skin color. He also found that lower amounts of ammoniated mercury could be just as effective as higher ones. Between 1927 and 1941, the National Toilet Company reduced the concentration of ammoniated mercury in "Nadinola" from 10% to 1.5% while their sales more than tripled. Nealon attributed the upward sales trend to a range of factors in addition to the product's effectiveness: wartime prosperity, more intensive marketing, and, somewhat ironically, increased consumer confidence inspired by the FDC Act.¹⁰⁵ He failed to mention that such growth was mainly, if not entirely, among African American consumers.

¹⁰² NARA, FTC, RG 122, Docket 5188. The case against the Superior Products Company noted that "Sue Pree skin bleach" did not include a warning label specifying that it contained 5% ammoniated mercury.

¹⁰³ NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1940, 481.1: Dr. Adolph Rostenberg, Jr., Senior Medical Officer, FDA to Dr. Ralph Weilerstein, Senior Medical Officer, Western District, FDA, 18 Nov. 1943.

¹⁰⁴ NARA, FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1957, 581.1-.10: James I. Herring, FDA, Chicago District to FDA, Washington, DC, 15 Oct. 1957; Harold O'Keefe, Assistant Director, Bureau of Enforcement, FDA to Mr. H.H. Bowen, Chicago, Illinois, 14 Nov. 1957. For similar responses to concerns raised by a consumer and a journalist, see NARA FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1944, 581.1-.10: P.B. Dunbar, Commissioner, FDA to Mr. William D. Conklin, Dansville, New York, 30 Sept. 1944; NARA FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1957, 581.1-.10: James I. Herring, FDA, Chicago District to FDA, Washington, DC, 15 Oct. 1957; NARA FDA, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1953, 581.1-.10: "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Miss Virginia L. Barrows of the NBC Broadcasting Network, New York and Mr. O'Keefe regarding Madame C.J. Walker Mfg. Co.," 15 May 1953.

¹⁰⁵ "Nadinola Cream" ad, *Atlanta Daily World* (31 Oct. 1940), 2; D. F. Nealon, "Ammoniated Mercury and the Skin," *The Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 52, 2 (1943), 159-62; D. F. Nealon, *Report of Studies on Nadinola Bleaching Cream* (Paris, Tennessee: National Toilet Company, 1946).

A great deal of the FDA and FTC correspondence on skin lighteners from the 1940s through the 1960s related to African Americans and other people of color. The FDA and FTC set significant parameters on the manufacture and marketing of skin lighteners but they did not quell the trade. In fact, in some quarters, government regulation appears to have buoyed consumers' faith in these products. **[Add a few more paragraphs describing the kind of correspondence received by the FDA/FTC and the ongoing presence of skin lighteners in the African American press: some discussion of the dangers of mercury but skin lighteners still heavily marketed.]**

* * * * *

This chapter has documented the emergence of the local manufacturing of skin lighteners in South Africa, and the linked and shifting markets for these cosmetics in the United States and South Africa. Whereas in the early twentieth century, skin lighteners were commonplace cosmetics used by both white and black women in the United States, by the 1940s, they had become cosmetics primarily associated with black consumers. In South Africa too, the market for skin lighteners underwent a similar shift. The white South African press routinely carried ads for these products in the 1920s and 1930s but by the 1940s such ads were mainly found in newspapers and magazines targeting coloured and African consumers. White women's disavowal was, in large part, fueled by the rise of tanned skin as the embodiment of a healthy and leisure-filled lifestyle. In addition, growing concerns over the ill-health effects of mercury and the FDA's regulation of it, beginning in the late 1930s, persuaded some consumers to stop using these cosmetics. For many black women and perhaps men, though, untanned or lighter colored skin continued to signal the privileged avoidance of outdoor labor and the possibility of improving one's place within racial orders insidiously calibrated according to minute differences in skin color.

Stymied by white consumers' preference for imported cosmetics, a number of South African manufacturers saw commercial opportunity in directing their attention to black consumers and the marketing of skin lighteners. Much of the evidence for these activities comes from ads that promoted skin lighteners as products that could beautify; even out, lighten, and brighten skin coloring; restore damaged and aging skin; boost self-confidence; and enhance one's social and love life. Fragmentary evidence suggests that these claims resonated with some black South African modern girls by promising that a luxurious and barely affordable commodity could enhance their appearance and stature within black communities and render them recognizable in larger segregationist, and later apartheid, publics.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the marketing and use of skin lighteners among African Americans decreased significantly amid the political and cultural influences of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Over precisely those same decades, the sale of skin lighteners to black South Africans took off as they became more engaged in consumer culture and apartheid policies further heightened the salience of skin color. Through advertising in popular magazines like *Zonk!* and *Drum*, South African manufacturers marketed skin lighteners across the southern African region and into west and east Africa, generating a multi-million rand per year industry.