

RECOMMENDATION

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MASS MEDIA

Volume I

THE UNCERTAIN MIRROR

Report of the Special Senate
Committee on Mass Media

**CONTINUE RESEARCH INTO THE
CONSUMER ATTITUDES OF THE
MAJORITY TOWARD VISIBLE MINORITIES
IN ADVERTISING**

Merit: The unwillingness of the North American advertising industry to appeal to visible minorities stems from the belief that they have low esteem in society and low purchasing power as a group. This leads to the conclusion that the association of visible minorities with products being advertised does not help sales. It also implies that, independent of their social status or numbers, visible minorities do not merit being part of national advertising or having special advertisements created for their communities. These beliefs combine to effect the virtual exclusion of aboriginal people from advertising.

Potential: The consumer potential of the visible minority communities in Canada is largely unknown. Official figures do not exist, largely due to the government's continued reluctance to ask questions based on race in the Canadian census.

Possible: At least one market research company, however, has recently investigated the ethnic and racial markets in Canada, and it believes advertisers and advertising agencies have seriously underestimated the potential of these markets. It seems possible that the Canadian advertising industry has been infused with American concepts of minority communities as poor and uneducated. However, since the point system was adopted by Canadian Immigration, we can expect that the majority of black, brown and yellow immigrants since then have high educational qualifications.

Compliance: The advertising industry is quick to point out the limits of its ability to contribute to the redress of racial prejudice. Agencies must comply if clients do not want visible minorities appearing in their advertisements, and advertisers are not sure Canadian society has arrived at the stage where visible minorities are more of an asset than a liability in advertising their products.

Compare: Realizing this, the Multiculturalism Directorate invited the Advertising Advisory Board to participate in a research project comparing the response of white and non-white viewers to commercials containing only white characters and commercials containing multiracial characters.

Significant: The Ontario government's Task Force on the Portrayal of Racial Diversity in Government Advertisements and Communications also commissioned an investigation of reactions to two versions of one of its television advertisements, one with white characters only and one with a multiracial cast. Both the federally and provincially sponsored research concluded that the race of the characters was not a significant factor in the reactions of the viewers. To what extent these conclusions are convincing to the advertising industry remains to be seen.

Study: Some progress has already been made since 1971, when the Elkin report to the Ontario Human Rights Commission first raised these issues officially. Both the advertisers, through the Association of Canadian Advertisers, and the agencies, through the Institute of Canadian Advertising, have in the past year struck subcommittees to study the issue. Community groups in Toronto have met with the subcommittees.