1999 Second Place Critical Analysis

PALL MALL:
Conformity and Fun for the Fifties

Sloan Wilson did not publish *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, a classic on 1950's middle-class conformity, until 1955. But, by July 1953, PALL MALL cigarette advertisers appear aware that "society seemed to reward those who lacked rough edges and eschewed eccentricity" (Blum 794). This conclusion seems justified by a TIME magazine advertisement. Here, these promoters apply this conformity principle and other advertising techniques to a specific socioeconomic group. They seek to lure the expanding male, middle-class audience by presenting indecorous fun, an enticing social situation, and smooth smoking delight all stemming from their product.

The advertisement's rich red coloring immediately strikes a viewer with exciting and salacious overtones. The red lettering, border, cigarette package, and swimsuit all emphasize social and physical pleasure. The other colors' absence only strengthens the red coloring's implications.

Prominent curving lines support the coloring's implied connection between enjoyment and the product. The foreground woman's curvaceous waist, chest, shoulders, hair, and cheeks give the scene a fun and lively feeling. Further in the background, the other women's similarly curved bodies also emphasize the cigarette's fun. Even the arching beach umbrellas portray such a feeling. Finally, the small boat's billowing sails, pushed by the wind, show excitement and pleasure, an appeal directly to the intended audience.

Other aspects strengthen the advertisement design's sexual appeal. The foreground woman's strapless swimming suit, highlighted in red, is the most notable example. Her chest prominently resides above horizontal boxes in both the main picture and the smaller one, adding to its emphasis. Further, the PALL MALL cigarette packages are the same "distinguished red," reinforcing the relationship between the woman's sexual appeal and the product. The woman gazes directly at her cigarette, likewise strengthening such a relationship. The three background women's revealing swimming suits also contribute lusty connotations to the cigarettes. Even the picture's relative center, the bust and hips of the woman between the foreground cigarettes, gives the product sexual appeal.

However, the layout's fun and sexy feelings are not its only appeal; the advertisement entices 1950's middle-class conformists with a promise of social acceptance. Each cigarette in the scene carefully balances a couple: a woman on one side and her partner on the other. The individuals' smiling faces remind the viewer that these cigarettes inspire enjoyable relationships. Further the scene portrays the presumably male viewer offering his own partner a PALL MALL. Apparently his partner comes courtesy of the cigarette. Also strengthening the product's social importance, the cigarettes emerging from his package form a line leading to his partner's cigarette. The line continues to her eyes. Her eyes, of course, are directed back down this line, through her cigarette, and into the package. In a similar manner, the couples behind this line reinforce PALL MALL's social potency: The males stare directly at their buxom companions.
The viewer sees the social pleasures PALL MALLs offer in the bottom right box as well. Here the foreground woman and a man, presumably the viewer, enjoy cigarettes together. The woman wears the same enticing red swimming suit, and both individuals portray large, satisfied smiles while puffing their cigarettes.

The advertisement's text hits the audience with a more explicit bandwagon approach. It invites them to conform with their supposed peers. For instance, a viewer reads, "Wherever you go, notice how many people have changed to PALL MALL in the distinguished red package." The large cigarette package itself displays, "WHEREVER PARTICULAR PEOPLE CONGREGATE." Although partially obscured here, this phrase is prominent in other 1950's PALL MALL advertisements, so a magazine reader is presumably familiar with it. The package also proclaims, "FAMOUS CIGARETTES." Though the cigarette's renown is not explained, this assertion tells a viewer that everyone else is already familiar with the reputable brand. Such implications entice those wishing to conform to established society.

PALL MALL's smooth smoking is also projected. The opening lines state this pleasure directly: "Guard Against Throat-Scratch-- enjoy the smooth smoking of fine tobaccos." The red underlining highlights the enjoyment of smoking such a "smooth" tobacco. The advertisement's bottom again notes, "Outstanding . . . and they are mild!" Two assertions that PALL MALLs are "the finest quality money can buy" strike the viewer. The repetitiveness ensures he will remember the product's delight.

The picture's design also emphasizes PALL MALL's delight. The horizon presents a broad, horizontal line. This line gives the background a sense of comfort and stability, adding a soothing touch behind the exciting foreground. The smooth sea-- an image of calm water-- further highlights the product's "smooth" feelings. And, again, the people's smiles remind the viewer that smoking PALL MALLs is enjoyable.

Finally, the advertisement adds a special box in the bottom right. This box explains exactly how PALL MALL's longer cigarette provides a pleasure-filled experience. The title proclaims, "Here's Mildness You Can Measure," and two diagrams reinforce the brand's extra length. The box's text portrays the PALL MALL puffing experience with words such as "mild," "cooler," and "sweeter." The box summarizes itself by asserting, "PALL MALL gives you a smoothness, mildness and satisfaction no other cigarette offers you."

Of course, the audience need not accept the text's promise of pleasure. They can easily see that PALL MALLs bring happiness. The picture clearly shows that all middle-class white males frolicking on beaches with beautiful women carry PALL MALL cigarettes. After all, the advertisement's fun and sexy appeal, its enticement to social enjoyment, and its portrayal of the brand's pleasures certainly imply that PALL MALLs bring social happiness. Then again, cigarette advertisers notoriously ignore tobacco's detrimental effects, but who has time to consider negatives when viewing such an appealing scene?

WORKS CITED