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Targeting a New World

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Targeting a New World

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TARGETING A NEW WORLD

"Advertisers will have" their choice of horizontal demographic groups and vertical psychographic program types."

“Our judgment as to the enhanced quality of our subscriber base has been confirmed by the advertisers."

“Unfortunately, most media plans are based on exposure opportunities. This is particularly true for television because G.R.P. analysis is usually based on television ratings and ratings do not measure actual exposure."

Most Americans would likely have a hard time conceiving the meaning of these quotations. The words would clearly be understood as English, but the jargon would seem quite mysterious. They might be surprised to learn that they have heard a specialized language that advertisers use about them. Rooted in various kinds of research, the language has a straightforward purpose. The aim is to package individuals, or groups of people, in ways that make them useful targets for the advertisers of certain products through certain types of media.

Clearly, the way the advertising industry talks about us is not the way we talk about ourselves. Yet when we look at the advertisements that emerge from the cauldron of marketing strategies and strange terminology, we see pictures of our surroundings that we can understand, even recognize. The pictures remind us that the advertising industry does far more than sell goods and services through the mass media. With budgets that add up to hundreds of billions of dollars, the industry exceeds the
church and the school in its ability to promote images about our place in society—where we belong, why, and how we should act toward others.

This book is about a revolutionary shift that is taking place in the way advertisers talk about America and the way they create ads and shape media to reflect that talk. The shift has been influenced by, and has been influencing, major changes in the audiovisual options available to the home. But it most importantly has been driven by, and has been driving, a profound sense of division in American society.

The following pages argue that the era we are entering is one in which advertisers will work with media firms to create the electronic equivalents of gated communities. Marketers are aware that the U.S. population sees itself marked by enormous economic and cultural tensions. Marketers don't feel, though, that it benefits them to encourage Americans to deal with these tensions head-on through a media brew of discussion, entertainment, and argumentation aimed at broadly diverse audiences. Rather, new approaches to marketing make it increasingly worthwhile for even the largest media companies to separate audiences into different worlds according to distinctions that ad people feel make the audiences feel secure and comfortable. The impact of these activities on Americans’ views of themselves and others will be profound, enduring, and often disturbing.

The changes have begun only recently. The hallmark is the way marketers and media practitioners have been approaching the development of new audiovisual technology. Before the late 1970s, most people in the United States could view without charge three commercial broadcast stations, a public (non-commercial) TV station, and possibly an independent commercial station (one not affiliated with a network). By the mid-1990s, several independent broadcast TV stations, scores of cable and satellite television channels, videocassettes, video games, home computer programs, online computer services, and the beginnings of two-way (“interactive”) television had become available to major segments of the population with an interest and a budget to match.

As the following pages will show, people in the advertising industry are working to integrate the new media channels into the broader world of print and electronic media to maximize the entire system’s potential for selling. They see these developments as signifying not just the
breakup of the traditional broadcast network domain, but as indicating a breakdown in social cohesion, as well. Advertisers' most public talk about America—in trade magazine interviews, trade magazine ads, convention speeches, and interviews for this book—consistently features a nation that is breaking up. Their vision is of a fractured population of self-indulgent, frenetic, and suspicious individuals who increasingly reach out only to people like themselves.

Advertising practitioners do not view these distinctions along primarily racial or ethnic lines, though race and ethnicity certainly play a part, provoking turf battles among marketers. Rather, the new portraits of society that advertisers and media personnel invoke involve the blending of income, generation, marital status, and gender into a soup of geographical and psychological profiles they call "lifestyles."

*Breaking Up America* explains how this vision of America came to be and how advertisers developed it from the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s. The core argument is that the U.S. is experiencing a major shift in balance between society-making media and segment-making media. Segment-making media are those that encourage small slices of society to talk to themselves, while society-making media are those that have the potential to get all those segments to talk to each other. During most of the twentieth century, a huge number of ad-supported vehicles—mostly newspapers and magazines—have served as a way to reinforce, extend, even create, identities for an impressive array of segments that advertisers have cared about, from immigrant Czechs to luxury-car owners to Knights of Columbus and far more. At the same time, some ad-sponsored newspapers, radio networks, and television networks—especially the latter—have been able to reach across these groups. Through entertainment, news, and information, society-making media have acted out concerns and connections that people ought to share in a larger national community.

For those who hope for a caring society, each level of medium has had its problems. Segment-making media have sometimes offered their audiences narrow, prejudiced views of other social segments. Similarly, society-making media have marginalized certain groups, perpetuated stereotypes of many others, and generally presented a portrayal of the world that is more the ideal vision of the corporate establishment sponsoring them than a reflection of competing visions of various publics. Nevertheless, the existence of both forms of media has meant that the
potential has existed for an equilibrium between healthy social segments and a healthy collectivity. In the ideal scenario segment-making media strengthen the identities of interest groups, while society-making media allow those groups to move out of their parochial scenes to talk with, argue against, and entertain one another. The result is a rich and diverse sense of overarching connectedness: what a vibrant society is about.

*Breaking Up America* argues that we are losing the potential to achieve that scenario because of a profound movement by advertisers away from society-making media. The fundamental changes taking place in the television industry have been leading national advertisers, along with their ad agencies and media firms, in unprecedented attempts to search out and exploit differences between consumers. These activities have centered on entering individuals' private spaces—their homes, their cars, their offices—with lifestyle-specific news, information, entertainment, and, especially, commercial messages. They also have involved tailoring public spaces—concerts, races, and other open-to-the-public events—so that they attract customers who fit narrow profiles demanded by particular sponsors.

At the business level, what is driving all this is a major shift in the balance between targeting and mass marketing in U.S. media. Mass marketing involves aiming a home-based medium or outdoor event at people irrespective of their background or patterns of activities (their lifestyles). Targeting, by contrast, involves the intentional pursuit of specific segments of society—groups and even individuals. The Under- ground [radio] Network, the Comedy Central cable channel, and *Details* magazine are far more targeted than the ABC Television Network, the Sony Jumbotron Screen on Times Square, and the Super Bowl. Yet even these examples of targeting are far from close to the pinpointing of audiences that many ad people expect is possible.

The ultimate aim of this new wave of marketing is to reach different groups with specific messages about how certain products tie into their lifestyles. Target-minded media firms are helping advertisers do that by building primary media communities. These are formed when viewers or readers feel that a magazine, TV channel, newspaper, radio station, or other medium reaches people like them, resonates with their personal beliefs, and helps them chart their position in the larger world. For advertisers, tying into those communities means gaining consumer loyalties that are nearly impossible to establish in today's mass market.
Nickelodeon and MTV were pioneer attempts to establish this sort of ad-sponsored communion on cable television. While they started as cable channels, they have become something more. Owned by media giant Viacom, they are lifestyle parades that invite their target audiences (relatively upscale children and young adults, respectively) into a sense of belonging that goes far beyond the coaxial wire into books, magazines, videotapes, and outdoor events that Viacom controls or licenses.

The idea of these sorts of "programming services" is to cultivate a must-see, must-read, must-share mentality that makes the audience feel part of a family, attached to the program hosts, other viewers, and sponsors. It is a strategy that extends across a wide spectrum of marketing vehicles, from cable TV to catalogs, from direct mailings to online computer services, from outdoor events to in-store clubs. In all these areas, national advertisers make it clear that they prefer to conduct their targeting with the huge media firms they had gotten to know in earlier years. But the giants don't always let their offspring operate on huge production budgets. To keep costs low enough to satisfy advertisers' demands for efficient targeting, much of ad-supported cable television is based on recycled materials created or distributed by media conglomerates. What makes MTV, ESPN, Nickelodeon, A&E, and other such "program services" distinctive is not the uniqueness of the programs but the special character created by their formats: the flow of their programs, packaged to attract the right audience at a price that will draw advertisers.

But, as later chapters will show, media firms have come to believe that simply attracting groups to specialized formats is often not enough. Urging people who do not fit the desired lifestyle profile not to be part of the audience is sometimes also an aim, since it makes the community more pure and thereby more efficient for advertisers. So in the highly competitive media environment of the 1980s and early 1990s, cable companies aiming to lure desirable types to specialized formats have felt the need to create "signature" materials that both drew the "right" people and signaled the "wrong" people that they ought to go away. It is no accident that the producers of certain signature programs on Nickelodeon (for example, Ren and Stimpy) and MTV (such as Beavis and Butt-head) in the early 1990s acknowledge that they chase away irrelevant viewers as much as they attract desirable ones.

An even more effective form of targeting, ad people believe, is a type
that goes beyond chasing undesirables away. It simply excludes them in the first place. Using computer models based on zip codes and a variety of databases, it is economically feasible to tailor materials for small groups, even individuals. That is already taking place in the direct mail, telemarketing, and magazine industries. With certain forms of interactive television, it is technologically quite possible to send some TV programs and commercials only to neighborhoods, census blocks, and households that advertisers want to reach. Media firms are working toward a time when people will be able to choose the news, information, and entertainment they want when they want it. Advertisers who back these developments will be able to offer different product messages—and variable discounts—to individuals based on what they know about them.

Clearly, not all these technologies are widespread. Clearly, too, there is a lot of hype around them. Many companies that stand to benefit from the spread of target marketing have doubtless exaggerated the short time it will take to get there and the low costs that will confront advertisers once they do. Moreover, as will be seen, some marketers have been slower than others to buy into the usefulness of a media system that encourages the partitioning of people with different lifestyles.

Nevertheless, the trajectory is clear. A desire to label people so that they may be separated into primary media communities is transforming the way television is programmed, the way newspapers are “zoned,” the way magazines are printed, and the way cultural events are produced and promoted. Most critically, advertisers’ interest in exploiting lifestyle differences is woven into the basic assumptions about media models for the next century—the so-called 500 Channel Environment or the future Information Superhighway.

For me and you—individual readers and viewers—this segmentation and targeting can portend terrific things. If we can afford to pay, or if we’re important to sponsors who will pick up the tab, we will be able to receive immediately the news, information, and entertainment we order. In a world pressing us with high-speed concerns, we will surely welcome media and sponsors that offer to surround us with exactly what we want when we want it.

As an entirety, though, society in the United States will lose out. The following chapters argue the dark side of the unrelenting slicing and dicing of America that advertisers are already beginning to orchestrate...
through all major media. The chapters show that marketers look for splits in the social fabric and then reinforce and extend the splits for their own ends. Wanting the marketers' money, media firms buy into these divisions, build formats around them, and work to attract the audiences they imply. The way they do it—urging consumers toward media designed for them and away from media designed for others—discourages people from coming into contact with news and entertainment that other parts of society find important.

One of the consequences of turning the U.S. into a pastiche of market-driven labels is that such a multitude of categories makes it impossible for a person to directly overlap with more than a tiny portion of them. If primary media communities continue to take hold, their large numbers will diminish the chance that individuals who identify with certain social categories will even have an opportunity to learn about others. Off-putting signature programs such as Beavis and Butt-head may make the situation worse, causing individuals annoyed by the shows or what they read about them to feel alienated from groups that appear to enjoy them. If you are told over and over again that different kinds of people are not part of your world, you will be less and less likely to want to deal with those people.

The creation of customized media materials will likely take this lifestyle segregation further. It will allow, even encourage, individuals to live in their own personally constructed worlds, separated from people and issues that they don't care about or don't want to be bothered with. The desire to do that may accelerate when, as is the case in the late-twentieth-century United States, seemingly intractable antagonisms based on age, income, ethnicity, geography, and more result from competition over jobs and political muscle. In these circumstances, market segmentation and targeting may accelerate an erosion of the tolerance and mutual dependence between diverse groups that enable a society to work. Ironically, the one common message across media will be that a common center for sharing ideas and feelings is more and more difficult to find—or even to care about.

The ideas explored in this book tie into a growing literature on the way we "imagine" the civilization that surrounds us. The writings spring from the basic realization that words such as society, community, and na-
tion do not stand for real "things"; you can't point to a society or nation as you can point to a zebra in a zoo. Rather, the words represent abstractions, conceptions on how people relate to others. We typically use the word society, for example, to refer to large numbers of individuals, groups, and organizations that see themselves linked politically and economically. We might think of the word community as indicating people who live in the same locality or, alternatively, as meaning people who hold similar interests.

Saying that people generate versions of society implies that society is constructed; it is created through communication. In a multitude of ways, people tell themselves and others about who belongs to society, what they are like and how they live, what is good about them, what distasteful. Every such construction involves selection. Accuracy, if it is considered important, may be only a small part of the challenge. Categories that may seem easy to gauge—for example, the number of people in the society who are literate—turn out upon closer inspection to reflect a lot of social deliberation, even argument. (Exactly how do we judge whether a person is "literate"? Why that way and not another way?)

Claiming the right to construct versions of society for large populations means claiming a lot of power. The military, education, government, medicine, religion, and the law are among the institutions that traditionally hold the prerogative to proclaim what the world looks like or ought to look like. In the U.S. and many other countries, media such as newspapers, magazines, movies, radio, musical recordings, and television also offer constructions of the world to millions of people. While medicine addresses health care concerns and the law sees the formal rules in society as its domain, the media institution takes as its territory the depiction of these and all other institutions. The media, in short, are the quintessential vehicles for portraying the life of society to society.

Most people who write about the media's power to present notions of society emphasize that it takes place through the telling of stories in one form or another. Their point is that all forms of media performance, from Beverly Hills 90210 to MTV videos to Rush Limbaugh to the New York Times, continually provide people with insights into parts of their society with which they have little direct contact. The power of stories is not that all people interpret media images in the same way, for they often do not. Rather, the tales direct attention toward certain concerns and away from others. Stories tell audiences what civilization out there is like,
how they fit in, what others think of people like them, and what people “like themselves” think of others.

Because of their concern with storytelling, though, the writers ignore an even more blatant way in which media signal social similarities and differences to large populations. That is through the very structure of the media system: the number and distribution of different types of media outlets—different magazines, newspapers, radio stations, and so on. The idea that the structure of an institution promotes certain views of social life has been put forward convincingly by social historian Benedict Anderson. Using the concept of “nationhood” in Malaysia as a starting point, Anderson shows how the governing elite has inserted its ideas about society into the structures, or basic patterns, of daily life. The way citizenship is defined, who gets to go to school, when they go to school and where, who gets to be a civil servant—these and other laws have built into the fabric of public activities particular ideas about society and its boundaries.7

Anderson doesn’t mention media, but his point would seem generalizable there, as well. Format is an especially relevant part of media structure. The term refers to the layout and general approach that TV networks, magazines, newspapers, and other media outlets take to their material, including advertising. It is the format that creates what people think of as the “personality” of those media. Radio stations may act out their particular formats through the songs they play, the commercials they air, and the banter of the on-air personalities. Magazines and newspapers have detectable formats, too. The New York Times is recognizably the New York Times every day, while People magazine has a very different, yet consistent, style. In television, Nick at Nite, a nightly cable service loaded with TV shows and movies chosen to attract people who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, is but one example of a channel format.

With Benedict Anderson in mind, we should expect that the organizations involved in news and entertainment would build certain social values, priorities, and ideas about the audience into the formats they create. Tracking how they do that would seem particularly useful now, when the media system is changing drastically. Understanding the views of society that media practitioners are knowingly building into the new media structure can help us get a handle on what the new structure means in comparison to the one it is gradually displacing.

Exploring the new media system’s structure also provides a new way
to evaluate a growing literature that centers on the consequences of the new wave of television technologies for American life. There are those who feel that new gizmos will bring society together and others who believe they will push it apart. Nicholas Negroponte, director of the futuristic Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is an unabashed utopian. In his 1995 book, *Being Digital*, he notes that organizations are at work creating intelligent computer-based menus, or “navigators,” that will construct distinctive rosters of news and entertainment according to people’s descriptions of their interests as well as continual analyses of what they choose from among the navigators’ selections. Technology will encourage even the daily newspaper to be customized and delivered by wire to a flexible and portable paper-thin screen; Negroponte calls it *The Daily Me*.

Negroponte sees this development as a boon for both the individual and society, even though he is conscious of the tensions between the two. Despite his prediction that “true personalization” will be the order of the day, he insists that the technological setup will not deter people from looking outside their personal spheres. Marketing consultants Don Peppers and Martha Rogers could hardly disagree more. They predict in their marketing guidebook *The One to One Future* that interactive media will inevitably lead people to belong to “image tribes”—their term for primary media communities made up of people who share lifestyles.

They picture a society linked by optical fibers, “with the information power of today’s supercomputers at Everyman’s fingertips.” Individuals, they say, “will have the chance to restrict the flow of information to themselves, and to congregate into politically segregated factions, electronically connected only to other like-minded group members.” Marketers should realize, they say, that “an image tribe’s common gathering places will include the electronic stores, electronic bulletin boards and video mail meetings of tomorrow’s . . . media. If you have a business in the future . . . you’ll turn your store into [that kind of] electronic gathering place.”

Like Negroponte, Peppers and Rogers attribute social consequences not to media firms—or any other organizations—but to the logic of media technologies. It will happen, they argue, because media technologies will make it happen. Such technological determinism is not total fantasy. After all, decisions to develop technologies such as interactive
TV and the Internet necessarily involve assumptions about what the world is like and how the world ought to be. Those values might well lend what might be called "social tendencies" to a new technology. Still, once technologies are introduced into the media system, government agencies, corporate competitors, and other forces shape them in ways their creators never considered. Executives develop formats and content that present perspectives on society. These may be quite different from the views that shaped the products in the first place.

The views of technological determinists, then, must only be a starting point. The best tack is to evaluate their predictions in view of the influences that are acting to shape the way the technologies are used. Answering three basic questions is crucial for getting a sense of the media system's trajectory for defining Americans to Americans: What considerations lead executives in media industries to hold certain views about society? To what extent, and how, do those views guide the way they create formats and content for the media system? And to what extent, and how, do these resulting formats and content encourage consumers toward separate primary communities ("image tribes") or toward a balanced concern for the personal and the collective?

The advertising industry provides a compelling place to answer these questions. A proposition at the core of this book is that what advertisers do gives them the power over the very structure of the media system. A corollary is that it is impossible to grasp the direction or implications of the emerging media world without looking at the ad industry's role in that world.

Advertising involves payment for attempts to persuade people to purchase or otherwise support a product or service. It is by itself a major producer of communication materials. Billboards, handbills, catalogs, audio cassettes, records, even video cassettes, are part of a blizzard of media that sometimes carries only sales messages. Often, though, advertisers (the companies that want to sell products or services) find it useful to be media clients, to pay media firms for placing commercial announcements alongside materials that don't seem to have any obvious persuasive intent—for example, newspaper and magazine articles, radio programs and television shows. The advertisers hope that the people us-
ing those media will attend to the commercial messages and respond favorably to them.

Media executives typically consider it part of their duties to think about how advertising can fit into their plans. Their motive is the same as it has been for over a hundred years: money. In the U.S., funding for the media through taxes is meager. Media firms have therefore developed two other streams of support: one from individual consumers and the other from companies that want to sell products or services to them. Purchases by individuals are most familiar in the book, newspaper, and magazine industries as well as in the recorded music and movie businesses. The approach has also gained ground in the electronic media. Pay-cable channels such as HBO, pay-per-view movie selections, and digital music services assess the public for discrete items (the viewing of a particular film, for example) or for unlimited use of a service for a specified period of time.

But charging individuals has always led many media executives to fear that after a certain point, and not too high a point, the public will simply not want to pay any more. Moreover, the technology of broadcasting in its early days did not allow individual stations to charge fees to listeners. (The begathons of public radio and television are vivid reminders that no hand reaches out of the electronic box to stop individuals from tuning in if they haven't paid.) The result was that media firms found themselves hoping that their cash flow would be augmented by advertisers wanting to reach their audiences.

Historically, the advertiser-media relationship developed differently in different media. Newspapers and magazines allowed ads early in their existence, while moviemakers and movie theaters have only recently invited advertisers into their operations on a national level. Book companies have always dabbled in advertising, mostly to announce their own books. Similarly, while recording firms have never placed advertising between music cuts, they have advertised their other albums within CD cases. Home video distributors have been following the record model, typically placing only film ads on their cassettes. At the same time, some video firms have been quite a bit more active than record companies in building revenues by using videos themselves to persuade people to buy products. So, for example, a marketer (McDonald’s, Goody’s) may advertise that consumers can get one or another of a company’s video at a deep discount where they buy burgers or music CDs.
These examples suggest how widespread and varied advertiser support of the media has become. For a number of key industries, in fact, ad support makes the difference between life and death. For consumer magazine and newspaper publishers, advertiser sponsorship has come to equal at least 50 percent of their revenues. For broadcast radio and television, advertising has until recently represented virtually all of the cash intake.

If Wall Street estimates are anything near accurate, the amount of money advertisers shell out is impressive. According to the firm of Veronis, Suhler and Associates, which brokers the sale of media companies, in 1993 advertisers spent about $26.6 billion in support of network and local television broadcasting and about $9.4 billion to fund network and local radio broadcasting. In addition, the ad industry spent $46 billion on daily newspapers, compared to the $31.9 billion that consumers shelled out. Advertisers funded consumer magazines to the tune about $7.3 billion, while consumers dropped a smaller $6.7 billion into the periodicals’ coffers.11

Cable television did not follow the pattern; there subscriptions to consumers accounted for $19 billion while advertising comprised a much smaller $2.5 billion. Yet advertisers’ interest in cable developed only in the 1980s, and slowly at first. By the 1990s, though, advertising was growing in cable faster than in most other media. Veronis, Suhler predicted that cable advertising would increase nearly 11 percent a year through much of the decade, a rate that would be almost three times the growth of cable subscriptions from consumers.12

While these advertising numbers are imposing, they do not represent nearly the full presence of advertising in the media system. They do not, for example, reflect the monies that advertisers spent to sponsor relatively new vehicles such as CD-ROM, online services such as the Internet and America Online, supermarket-based radio stations, and informational kiosks at stores and shopping centers. Nor do they include promotions (sweepstakes, coupons, giveaways), direct marketing (e.g., catalogs, infomercials), and the placement of products in the plots of video games, TV shows, and movies. Industry estimates indicate that the amount spent for all advertising more than doubles if, following recent inclinations among ad people, we draw the boundaries of the industry to include these activities.

Expenditures of such magnitude begin to suggest why media execu-
tives consider the needs of advertisers when they consider starting a new magazine, cable channel, or Internet site. Which advertisers they think of depends at least partly on the medium. It is hard for television executives to ignore Philip Morris, for example, which spent about $2 billion to advertise hundreds of products in 1989, 19 percent of it going to network TV and 2 percent going to local stations. Even more difficult to ignore are classes of advertisers—food firms, airlines, tobacco companies, and the like—that pack a lot of financial clout in certain media businesses. For example, only five department stores (May, R. H. Macy, Sears, Campeau, and Dayton Hudson) together contributed about $819 million to newspaper coffers in 1989.

Less obvious, but even more concentrated in their ability to direct the flow of cash to media across the U.S., are the advertising agencies that serve national advertisers. In 1993 thirteen advertising agencies each paid over one billion dollars to various U.S. mass media firms for carrying their commercial announcements. The range of manufacturers whose cash the agencies controlled was quite broad. For example, Young and Rubicam, with $1.7 billion in ad placement billings (and $7.9 billion worldwide), operated in support of firms as diverse as AT&T, Bausch and Lomb, Colgate Palmolive, Dr. Pepper, Eastman Kodak, Holiday Inn, and Xerox. Of that money, the agency allocated $645.8 million of its billings to network TV, $158.9 million to consumer magazines, $97.8 million to newspapers, and $22.9 million to outdoor advertising. Much of the rest went to cable TV, local (“spot”) TV, network radio, Sunday newspaper-distributed magazines, and business publications. Other agency leaders doled out money in rather similar proportions.

Popular books, movies, magazine articles, and television shows encourage most people to think of a large and powerful ad agency such as Young and Rubicam when they think about the advertising industry. Although not the only model for success in an increasingly complex marketing world, a “full service” agency such as Y&R does embody the three basic functions of adwork: creative persuasion, media planning and buying, and market research.

It may seem strange to list the creative persuasion function first after spending several paragraphs on the buying clout of the ad industry. Ultimately, though, advertising is about persuasion. Creative directors, copywriters, art directors, and illustrators work individually and in teams to
come up with ideas that will move the chosen audience to try a product or service. No shrewdness in buying time or space can blur the primary importance of the ideas behind the message and the artistry of the execution.

Society is constructed in this meeting of ideas and artistry. Whether a magazine ad that details the joys of a Ford Mustang, a TV commercial that extols Pond's cold cream, or a video game that includes McDonald's Hamburglar in its cast, the creators' goal is to suggest a story that bespeaks the product's usefulness for the audience. Of course, to do that the ad people must have thoughts about the audience, particularly as it relates to the product they are selling. The goal is to imagine the product in a social environment that reflects the intended audience and its values. Armed with these imaginings, a creative team can concoct a sales pitch. Inevitably, it portrays a world of the intended audience, a problem in that world, and actions that show how the product can solve the problem.

The phrase "intended audience" leads us to a concern with media buying, the second agency function. Just as "creatives" must construct a version of society when they make commercial messages, so planners must work with an idea of the proposed audience's social world when buying time and space. The reason is that the planners have to choose the correct place for the ad to be seen by its intended market. They do that by learning as much as they can about the people and their interactions with media at home and out, at work and play. While planning involves the detailed imagining of this audience and its media use, sometimes in cooperation with creative personnel, buying involves the pragmatic acting out of this imagination. The aim is to choose the most efficient media vehicles that resonate with the lifestyles that planners visualize the audience to have.

The major stimulus for creatives and planners regarding the market is provided by the ad agency's research function. Research might involve compiling results of previous investigations, including those by the agency's clients. It might involve commissioning original surveys or experiments with potential customers to check on the persuasiveness of a new ad or the success of one that has already been introduced to the marketplace. It might involve joining other firms in ongoing "syndicated" studies that inquire about social trends, general product use, media habits, or other characteristics of the American population. Through these and other approaches, researchers construct detailed portraits of
the intended audience and its position within the society at large. Then creatives and planners mix those portraits with their own sensibilities and apply them to their work.

That work affects the media’s construction of society in at least two ways. Most obviously, the advertisements that show up in magazines, radio stations, TV networks, and other media act out advertisers’ notions of their audiences and their worlds. Less evident, but at least as important, media planners run the ads only on formats that they feel are in sync with their assumptions about society that are reflected in the ads. In view of the tens, even hundreds, of millions of dollars that national advertisers dole out to vehicles that match their expectations, it is not surprising that media firms create and revise formats in attempts to be in sync with client needs. Formats that do not attract the kinds or numbers of people advertisers care to reach will fade away.

When people read a magazine, watch a TV show, or use any other ad-sponsored medium, then, they are entering a world that was constructed as a result of close cooperation between advertisers and media firms. Designed with marketing goals in mind, the formats and commercials aim to signal to people whether and how they fit the proceedings. They also signal what people might buy or do to keep fitting in.

And yet, with all their traditional influence over media content and structure, advertising agencies have not been comfortable with the contemporary media scene. Since the early 1980s, in trade magazines and at conferences, agency executives have been warning that transformations in technology have been threatening their power over media and audiences. Some executives have argued that millions watching at home may abandon ad-sponsored programming entirely as pay-per-view presentations without commercials become increasingly popular. Others have pointed out that the explosion of new television choices, a product of the video and cable revolution, has complicated the business of media planning immensely, since people have been migrating away from the broadcast networks to other audiovisual channels.

The following chapters show how researchers, creatives, media planners, and their bosses have been nervously facing up to the sea of changes in their business, working furiously to make sure that the transformations that are taking place favor them. Targeting lifestyle segments through specialized formats has become their central solution. Chapter 2 sketches the history of target marketing, suggests why advertising exec-
utives and social analysts have played it down until recently, and notes how it began to gain attention in the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter 3 explores how the ideas about a profoundly divided American society developed among advertising and media practitioners in tandem with their increasing fascination with targeting in the 1970s and 1980s.

With this background in mind, Chapter 4 "maps" the different images of divided America that advertising and media practitioners have attempted to capture. It shows how they have constructed and deconstructed the activities and attitudes of women, men, homosexuals, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, the affluent, the suburbs, families, children, seniors, and other familiar labels—all under the broad umbrella of disposable income. The goal has been to locate and label the most relevant consumers and then reach them via various media.

Chapters 5 and 6 track the approaches that marketers and media practitioners have been developing to attract certain desirable audiences, often while keeping undesirables away. Creating targeted formats that signal an interest in certain types of people, engaging in targeted publicity across formats, tailoring ads and media materials to individual consumer interests—these represent only the tip of a huge glacier of activities that have been reshaping the media landscape. Chapter 7 carries such developments into the future by showing how major marketers and media firms have been preparing themselves for an era that heightens signaling and tailoring with new technologies, building into them visions of an ever-fragmenting America.

Chapter 8 evaluates all of this in terms of other cross-currents in American life and links it to the perspectives that were introduced in chapter 1. Among other points, it concludes that the spread of targeted, customized media ought to ignite concerned discussion across the American public. The hope is that this book can be a nudge in that direction.