“YOU CAN FOOL SOME OF THE PEOPLE SOME OF THE TIME”: PERSPECTIVE BY INCONGRUITY IN BALLYHOO MAGAZINE, 1931-1932

BY

TROY COOPER

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Cara Finnegan, Chair
Professor Kent Ono, University of Utah
Associate Professor John Murphy
Associate Professor Inger Stole
Abstract

This study analyzes two years of images from *Ballyhoo* magazine (1931-1932) as a form of visual rhetoric. I analyze the visual rhetoric of *Ballyhoo* to illustrate how it treated three important issues of 1930s America. First, *Ballyhoo* portrays Prohibition as a detrimental policy and scapegoats its creators and maintainers. Second, *Ballyhoo* comments on the Great Depression by both ridiculing the wealthy and powerful and identifying the ironies of living poor amid the Depression. Finally, in its critiques of consumer culture, and especially advertising, *Ballyhoo* employs parody to rhetorical effect by mocking the entire advertising enterprise. This study contextualizes, analyzes, and interprets *Ballyhoo*’s production of perspective by incongruity on the most pressing issues of the early 1930s. Ultimately, *Ballyhoo* succeeded in constructing a critical rhetoric of incongruity that was both timely in the 1930s and foundational to contemporary critiques that employ perspective by incongruity.
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From the very first issue in August of 1931, *Ballyhoo* magazine had its finger on the pulse of the public. Though it was somewhat of an anomaly as a successful startup magazine during the Great Depression, and a humor magazine at that, the reasons for its success are not difficult to discern. *Ballyhoo*’s content reflected the collective anxieties of a frustrated public. The magazine’s tenor is identifiable within the first few pages of the first issue. On the inside cover of the first issue, in a bit entitled “A Note to Advertisers,” the editor leads with a series of
jokes about the prophesied circulation of Ballyhoo, placing it at five billion and rising. Another joke provides fake demographic data on its readership. Still another pokes fun at more serious mainstream magazines like Vanity Fair. A few pages later, a cartoon depicts an alcohol bootlegger smiling beside his bounty of booze, giving the thumbs up to Lady Liberty from the dock. Still later in the first issue, there is a depiction of the “Hoover Hunch,” a man hunched over and sleeping on a park bench, rendered homeless by the Great Depression. Ballyhoo primarily was a humor magazine. However, its method of delivery and the thematic content of its jokes offered a compelling critical account of American culture in the early 1930s.

Ballyhoo mobilized humor, creating perspective by incongruity through the employment of several key rhetorical strategies including scapegoating, parody, and visual disconnect. The rhetorical strategies employed by Ballyhoo sought to provide readers with partisan views on the most pressing issues of the day. It did so by seeking to produce perspective by incongruity, a method of shifting audience perspective by appropriating and repurposing original content for alternative uses. This study surveys the visual and verbal rhetoric of Ballyhoo to illustrate how it critically examined three issues important to the early 1930s: Prohibition, the Depression, and the rise of consumer culture and advertising. The unique combination of these simultaneous cultural shifts provides a rich font for rhetorical inquiry. I contextualize, interpret, and evaluate Ballyhoo’s visual attempts to produce perspective by incongruity on each of these three topics. This examination covers the period of 1931-1932. These two years represent a moment of crisis for American democracy and capitalism, converging on the waning of Prohibition, the worst years of the Depression, and the emergence of modern national advertising.
**Ballyhoo Magazine**

Edited by Norman Anthony, *Ballyhoo* magazine came into being in August of 1931. George T. Delacorte, Jr., head of Dell Publishing Company was familiar with Anthony’s work on *Judge*, another popular humor magazine of the 1930s. Anthony had just been fired from *Life* magazine when he was approached by Delacorte. In his autobiography, Norman Anthony described the road to *Ballyhoo* as one of both surprise and revenge. Despite the falling market for magazines, and especially humor magazines, Delacorte offered Anthony free reign over the entire publication, so long as it was a humor magazine. Anthony jumped on the opportunity and thus *Ballyhoo* was born.

Provided with the golden opportunity of creating a magazine from scratch, Anthony chose a groundbreaking route. When he previously worked for *Judge*, Anthony spearheaded an issue of the magazine devoted solely to mocking advertisements. Drawing on the success of that issue, Anthony decided to maintain the critique of advertising and consumer culture as a primary strategy for *Ballyhoo*. From the very outset, *Ballyhoo* held a very strange relationship to advertising. Anthony describes his antipathy toward advertising in his autobiography, *How to Grow Old Disgracefully*: “I felt a bitterness against rump-kissing advertising agents, rump-kissing advertising salesmen, and rump-kissing magazines.”

Reflecting on the success of the advertising burlesque issue of *Judge*, Anthony remarked about *Ballyhoo*: “I’d give them nice pretty text around their nice pretty ads but in that text I’d tell what I thought of them. I recalled the success of the burlesque advertising issue of *Judge* and began to see a glimmer of light. Since that time advertising had grown more and more flagrant, more and more ridiculous in its claims; cigarette manufacturers were even shouting to the world that their special brand was good for the
Clearly, Anthony felt an aversion to the kinds of advertising that he saw as deceptive and/or overbearing. Throughout the first several issues of the magazine, no advertising money was accepted. However, as the magazine became more popular, companies began to take interest in *Ballyhoo* and approached Anthony as potential buyers. Anthony’s reaction was telling; eventually, *Ballyhoo* did accept advertising, with the caveat that any advertisement that appeared in the magazine would be given the same treatment that the advertising parodies already in the magazine received. Thus, advertisers would pay to have their products mocked in a humorous way. Beech-Nut Gum and Gillette, for example, took advantage. It attests to the success and popularity of the magazine that successful national corporations were willing to risk humiliation in order to advertise products in *Ballyhoo*. The sustained critique of advertising and consumer culture was an anomaly among humor magazines of the time, and *Ballyhoo* would become one of the first to provide this critique.

While *Ballyhoo*’s relationship to advertising was an important theme, one that permeated throughout the magazine’s entire run, it was not the only one. Issues of the magazine typically contained a number of features. Certainly, there was an abundance of advertising parodies and critiques of consumer culture, which I will analyze in Chapter Four. However, *Ballyhoo* was uniquely positioned during a time of political and social upheaval in America. In the early years of the Great Depression, and surviving despite its duration and devastation, *Ballyhoo* fared well. The magazine sold out its initial run of 150,000 copies in less than three days, leading to an increased production rate for the subsequent issues. The popularity of the magazine was undeniable, and the magazine drew a number of imitators, though none fared as well. In describing the process of creating the material for the magazine, Anthony stated: “I started in burlesquing the ads and it was like shooting fish in a barrel; I didn’t even have to change them
Aside from the advertising burlesques and parodies, *Ballyhoo’s* content ranged fairly widely.

Issues of *Ballyhoo* typically contained a central section of single frame cartoons, ranging in topic from bathroom humor, to advertising critique, to ruminations on 1930s political culture. As might be expected, *Ballyhoo* kept pace with the most pressing issues of 1930s culture. Particularly during the first two years of the publication, *Ballyhoo* kept the issue of alcohol in the minds of its readers. *Ballyhoo* embodied a strong stance against Prohibition and continually presented content that derided the policy and demanded its repeal. Much like the critique of advertising, the magazine’s treatment of Prohibition persisted in nearly every issue leading up to, and even continuing after, the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Chapter Two examines *Ballyhoo*’s attempt to identify with its audience by promoting an anti-Prohibition agenda.

The Great Depression, of course, was a constant and undeniable reality during *Ballyhoo*’s publication run. Unsurprisingly, the magazine had a lot to say about the Depression, its real life effects, and the leaders with the ability to effect change on the policy. In each case, with advertising, Prohibition, and the Depression, *Ballyhoo* sought to identify with its audience by creating humorous disconnect, perspective by incongruity. To be sure, *Ballyhoo*’s bias was clear in each case: it was avidly anti-Prohibition, politically progressive on Depression issues, and anti-advertising. In the case study chapters, I examine *Ballyhoo*’s treatment of each of these issues to illustrate the strategies put to use in forming the trajectory of the magazine’s rhetorical agenda.

Determining *Ballyhoo*’s actual audience is a difficult task to engage. Little subscription data and circulation statistics are available. The publication was marketed as a humor magazine. Beyond that, the content of the magazine suggests that the primary target audience of the
publication was men. Even a cursory examination of the magazine’s content would clue one in to this information. Depictions of women in the magazine took one of three forms—they were either curvaceous and scantily-clad (or nude), objects for ridicule, or they were nagging wives. Many of the jokes in the magazine centered on women. For instance, one of the running gags throughout *Ballyhoo* was the “woman in the bathtub” (Fig. 2).

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 2: “Mind if I open this window a little, Mam?” *Ballyhoo*, August 1931, p. 20.

While the specific scene changes, the gag typically visualizes a bathing woman being interrupted—whether by a plumber, salesman, window-washer, or whomever. The content of *Ballyhoo* was sometimes racy, but never delved into the raunchy, a fact that Anthony touted as important to the magazine’s success. With the exception of chastising advertising’s treatment of women as always in need of improvement, *Ballyhoo* did little to speak to the empowerment of women during the period.
Another potential indicator of *Ballyhoo*’s audience was the urbanity of its content. The magazine was created by Dell Publishing out of New York City. The connection to New York is obvious in the substance of the magazine. The cityscape was the common background for most of the cartoons in *Ballyhoo*—skyscrapers, street vendors, automobiles, and billboards dominated the pages. Interactions took place in lobbies of fancy hotels, in taxi cabs, and on street corners. Judging from the content of the magazine, one could justifiably argue that *Ballyhoo*’s target audience was white, urban males. Despite the urban setting, notably absent from *Ballyhoo* were depictions of minorities. The few exceptions depicted minorities in racist caricature, but even those inclusions were very few and far between. The characters in the magazine were overwhelmingly white, again pointing to the target audience of the magazine.

Very few scholars have addressed *Ballyhoo*, and none have done so with an eye toward its rhetorical import. Historian Roland Marchand calls *Ballyhoo* an “unlikely depression phenomenon [that] offered vivid evidence of a latent public skepticism of all advertising.” The magazine was unlikely in that it survived the most severe economic crisis the nation has ever faced, and did so by providing humorous takes on some of the most serious issues of the era. David E. E. Sloane asserts that *Ballyhoo* “deserves most attention for reformulating humor magazines into the mode dominant throughout the remainder of [the twentieth] century.” Sloane goes on to reiterate that *Ballyhoo* became an important predecessor for many magazines to come in the twentieth century:

Anthony’s content in *Ballyhoo* matched his layouts in outrageous burlesques of conventional advertising and commercial slogans, freeing the comic periodical medium in ways that he had been prevented from attempting in *Life*. *Ballyhoo* alone establishes his importance as a twentieth-century innovator in comic magazine format and ideology.
Ballyhoo’s innovations made possible the later, bolder, and broader changes in National Lampoon and Mad in inventing their own formats and employing crudely vulgar and unpleasant material as a counter-irritant to the prevailing cultural blandness they saw around them.7

Ballyhoo sought not only to counter the “cultural blandness” of other humor magazines, but also offered critical argument on the political and social issues important to citizens of 1930s America. American Studies scholar Margaret McFadden asserts that along with the obvious critique of consumer culture present in the magazine, “Ballyhoo combined these barbed assessments of mass culture with equally scathing attacks on the businessmen and politicians who had led the nation into the Depression, equating the deceptive claims of advertisers with the political pronouncements of Herbert Hoover and his wealthy allies.”8 What little research that has been published on Ballyhoo comes out of journalism and history. My look at the magazine’s rhetorical force goes beyond reportage and documentation to suggest Ballyhoo’s role in shaping cultural forms; it also allows us to generate an early collection of rhetorical conventions implemented visually to critique popular mass culture. Indeed, Ballyhoo might arguably be understood as an early twentieth century form of culture jamming. Culture jamming is defined as “semiological or meme warfare, a contest over meanings and forms of representation, particularly as propagated in society through various media of communication.”9 Culture jamming disrupts the mainstream and creates perspective by incongruity. A rhetorical approach to Ballyhoo that carefully analyzes the textual and visual composition of its humor gives us a more specific understanding of how the magazine participated in the politics of this period.
Why Study Ballyhoo?

*Ballyhoo* is particularly interesting to study from a rhetorical perspective for a number of reasons. Historically, it is a very early example of the critique of consumer culture. Scholars in communication studies only recently have turned toward the study of consumer culture, and even fewer rhetorical studies of consumer culture exist. Given the state of consumer culture currently in the United States and worldwide, a study of the critique of consumer culture in the 1930s provides us with a potential timeline and reference point for considering contemporary critiques.

Consumer movements have been in existence since at least the late 1920’s. As communication scholar Inger Stole argues, advertisers during that period were “forced to contend with a full-fledged consumer movement that challenged the industry’s view of consumers as helpless and irrational and called for a discontinuation of advertising that played too heavily on emotions.” Groups such as the National Consumers’ League formed to harness political power in the service of workers’ rights. Adapting with the growing role of advertising in American consumer culture, various groups and individuals challenged the growth of advertising and decried its effects on the public. With direct political action, these groups were successful inasmuch as they produced regulations on corporate advertising.

Within the contemporary anti-consumerism/anti-corporate movement, scholars such as Christine Harold find productive potential for social change. Harold discusses culture jamming and its limits as a means of disrupting capitalism. In her book, *Ourspace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture*, Harold suggests that a more productive way to approach the problem of corporate culture is to allow for a more open public, particularly through innovations in digital technology. Cultural critic Mark Dery also argues for culture jamming as a means of social protest. As my analyses of the magazine’s images will show, the advertising parodies
featured in Ballyhoo might be seen as an early form of culture jamming. Ballyhoo’s early critiques of consumer culture helped to set the stage for contemporary critiques.

Finally, Ballyhoo is an example of visual rhetoric of the 1930s that has not been studied by other scholars, who have tended to focus on other kinds of visual rhetoric of the period. This dissertation provides a different view of 1930s visual culture by examining a popular culture text’s attempt at constructing argument through humor. Ballyhoo did this not only about the rise of modern advertising, but also about Prohibition and the Depression. I now turn briefly to a discussion of terms important to the dissertation. Each of the following concepts informs my argument and my reading of Ballyhoo.

_Perspective by Incongruity_

Kenneth Burke’s theory of perspective by incongruity is formed around the notion that symbolic action is malleable. Symbolic action is a fluid construct which can be used for many purposes and in many circumstances. Burke defines perspective by incongruity as “a method for gauging situations by verbal ‘atom cracking.’” It is a way to gain perspective on a situation through a re-visioning of the situation. As Burke notes, “a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category.” David Levasseur asserts that perspective by incongruity “seeks to re-describe familiar surroundings in unfamiliar terms.” When one takes a form and plays with it, often new meaning is created. Denise Bostdorff argues that perspective by incongruity “is the general formal strategy through which the meaning of a [political] cartoon is apprehended.” Bostdorff’s study is particularly helpful in informing the current project. Given that our artifacts have great overlap (much of the content in both magazines might be considered “political
cartoons”), her methods of analysis carry over well to my project. She analyzes political cartoons according to their specific viewer orientations, and demonstrates the incongruity created by the cartoonist. One can see without much extrapolation how parody utilizes perspective by incongruity. In the case of an advertising spoof, the viewer is provided with a familiar visual and verbal form (the advertisement), yet is confronted with image and text that does not fit neatly into that form. In Burke’s terms, the typical information of the advertisement has been wrenched loose and replaced with a different set of symbols. At the same time, the information contained in the parody may have been loosened from another source and applied to the format of the advertisement. In both cases, perspective by incongruity helps us to understand why such practices can be effective. Provided with new perspective, readers are called to question their assumptions about particular forms.

Naomi Rockler asserts perspective by incongruity as a potentially useful tool for teaching media literacy. She argues that “[p]erspective by incongruity is one tool that instructors can use to persuade students that the media are congruous with critical analysis and not merely with entertainment and escape.”18 The viewing and reading practices of citizens have profound effects on the way that artifacts are understood. Similarly, Mari Boor Tonn and Valerie Endress utilize Burke’s concept of perspective by incongruity to analyze Ross Perot’s 1992 presidential bid. They argue that Perot’s campaign “invited consideration of alternative political perspectives and offered an appealing glimpse into a dormant, more deeply held American ideal.”19 They argue that Perot’s utilization of perspective by incongruity allowed some followers to transcend their own shortcomings and recognize the imperfections of democracy. These scholars and others offer perspective by incongruity as a means of helping citizens realize the problems our nations face; the concept is also offered as a tool to better understand the world around us.
Scapegoating

One of the major rhetorical strategies that *Ballyhoo* uses is scapegoating. Scapegoating produces perspective by incongruity by rhetorically flattening an issue. That is, a broad cultural problem is condensed into one specific target. This allows for incongruous, if sometimes unfair, rhetoric. Kenneth Burke notes that a scapegoat is “‘charismatic,’ a vicar. As such, it is profoundly consubstantial with those who, looking upon it as a chosen vessel, would ritualistically cleanse themselves by loading the burden of their own iniquities upon it.” In this way, a collective can metaphorically shift blame away from itself and target another entity. Scapegoating is a process of atonement for Burke. Shaun Treat notes that Burke’s conception of the scapegoat is based on sacrifice: “Burke (1970) notes that the guilt from failures of perfection symbolically necessitates a sacrifice or purging of this guilt on some level.” In terms of *Ballyhoo*’s employment of scapegoating, the magazine points the finger toward higher authority for its perceived faults concerning the biggest problems of the 1930s, namely Prohibition and the Depression. Kenneth Burke’s notion of the scapegoat maintains that through an externalization process, some group or individual is selected to take the blame of society’s sins. James Jasinski notes that “in many cases, the scapegoat is symbolically slain (through artistic images or as part of a ritual religious or cultural event) or banished from the society.” While *Ballyhoo* does not go so far as to banish Herbert Hoover from society (although he was not re-elected), the magazine uses the strategy of scapegoating to symbolically transfer the weight of society’s ills to the shoulders of those in power. Through employing the rhetorical scapegoat, *Ballyhoo* symbolically sacrificed and ridiculed public figures as a means of highlighting the hypocrisy and ineptitude of America’s leaders.
Parody, Appropriation, and Burlesque

Much of Ballyhoo’s scapegoating occurred within its employment of parody. Parody and appropriation are concepts that rely upon one another and both are strategies that create perspective by incongruity. Their relationship is a symbiotic back-and-forth of borrowing, stealing, making fun, critiquing, politicizing, masking, revealing, and a host of other actions. Indeed, parody could not survive without appropriation, and appropriation would lose some of its flair without parody. In its most basic form, as Helene Shugart notes, “appropriation refers to any instance in which means commonly associated with and/or perceived as belonging to another are used to further one’s own ends.” While Shugart is primarily interested in theorizing appropriation as a feminist rhetorical strategy, her definition nicely summarizes the general concept as it applies across the literature. As she argues, “[r]hetorical analysis, however, appears to reveal that, for the most part, subversive appropriation is a highly complex enterprise, reflective of the equally complex issues of power, ideology, and hegemony with which it deals.” This is certainly the case in the texts that Shugart analyzes, which deal with the counterhegemonic potential of rhetorical appropriation. By the same token, it is easy to see how rhetorical appropriation of images and texts of advertising and consumer culture might contribute to discourses of anti-consumerism and critiques of advertising.

Similarly, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright define appropriation as “the act of borrowing, stealing, or taking over others’ meanings to one’s own ends…In addition, appropriation is one of the primary forms of oppositional production and reading when, for instance, viewers take cultural products and re-edit, rewrite, or change them in some way.” This definition seems to provide room for both a more neutral reading of the term appropriation,
while also offering potential for a more critical interpretation. Thus, as we will later see with conceptions of parody, appropriation is understood in a variety of ways, both neutral and resistant.

Anne Demo provides a compelling example of how appropriation can be used as a resistant practice in her study on the Guerrilla Girls. Using Kenneth Burke’s ideas of perspective by incongruity and the comic frame, concepts central to my study as well, Demo describes appropriation: “[r]ather the point is that dominant symbolic codes—when opened up to what they exclude through planned incongruity—constitute a powerful inventions resource within a feminist comic corrective.” Demo argues that the actions of the Guerrilla Girls, an activist art collective, appropriate conventional myths of femininity and challenge them through subversive performance. In this way, appropriation is less a neutral practice and more of a politically motivated maneuver. By identifying, and then challenging social norms, the Guerrilla Girls appropriate common conceptions of femininity and produce resistant readings of those conceptions.

Literary critic Julie Sanders distinguishes between two types of appropriation as they relate to literature: embedded texts and sustained appropriations. She notes that appropriation “frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain.” She contrasts appropriation with adaptation, which relies more heavily on retaining original elements and meanings from the original source. Sanders describes the practices of appropriation and adaptation primarily through the exemplar of Shakespearean literature. For instance, she notes that a film version of Hamlet that stays true to the original would be an adaptation; however, something like West Side Story, which mimics Romeo and Juliet, lies in the realm of appropriation because of its creation of new meaning. Appropriation,
in Sanders’s sense, falls in line with rhetorical definitions of appropriation, as it places emphasis on newly constructed cultural products based upon original source material.

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites share an extensive research record on the concept of appropriation as it is manifest in photojournalism and specifically as it relates to iconic images. For instance, one essay explores the function of collective memory as it relates to the iconic photograph loosely termed “Accidental Napalm.” Based upon a reading of the original photograph, Hariman and Lucaites explore the notion of collective memory as it relates to public identity, particularly of the Vietnam era. The essay examines a series of appropriations of the iconic image, ranging from political paintings to digital creations. In the various appropriations of the original image, key compositional features of the original (the screaming girl, the position of the soldiers, the other children, etc.) remain in place as to assure recognition. However, as might be obvious, the appropriations of the image employ various features and manipulate some of the original features of the photograph in ways that distort or reconfigure audience perceptions of the image. While not necessarily so, one could argue that such a practice is synonymous with parody. However, one of the key differences is in the practice itself, rather than the end product. Whereas parody often relies heavily on the original form of its target, appropriations often take one or two features of the original text as reference points for the new work. To put it another way, all parody contains appropriation, but not all appropriations are parodies. In a sense, traditional parodies extend appropriation to its furthest ends, appropriating the entire form of the original target, while proposing an alternative context for that form. For instance, Hariman and Lucaites, in *No Caption Needed*, describe that appropriations “demonstrate that common images are used to model normative behavior but also for satiric mimicry to challenge those norms, strategic improvisation to change them, and other forms of
artistic invention for purposes both serious and silly.”

The subject matter of appropriated content varies widely, as does the intent of the author. Often, images and ideas are appropriated to parodic ends.

One of the foremost contemporary theorists on parody is Linda Hutcheon. Hutcheon’s project is an in-depth theorization of parody as a concept. She provides an important distinction: “Ironic ‘transcontextualization’ is what distinguishes parody from pastiche or imitation.” In other words, parody is able to take a concept, image, or literary pattern and apply it across a new context. For instance, a parody of a public figure does not necessarily have to materialize in human form, as in an impersonation. It can be applied across a number of contexts—audio, visual, textual, etc. However, as Hutcheon also notes, the target of parody should be limited to similar forms of “coded discourse.” One of the most common misconceptions about parody is that it must ridicule its subject to some degree. Hutcheon does much to disprove this assumption: “There is nothing in parodia that necessitates the inclusion of a concept of ridicule, as there is, for instance, in the joke or burla of burlesque. Parody, then, in its ironic ‘trans-contextualization’ and inversion, is repetition with difference.”

The reader must, of course, recognize the difference between the target of the parody and the new product (which Jameson insists is impossible in postmodernism), but that recognition does not necessarily have to involve humor or ridicule at all. As Hutcheon puts it, the “intertextual bouncing” is the primary feature to be engaged by the viewer. This opens a lot of space for the parodist to work within. Clearly, parody still has the ability to cast a critical light on its original target; yet, it also may simply promote an intertextual conversation between two or more works in a non-humorous manner. Similarly, a parody does not necessarily have to ridicule or mock its original source. In many instances, the
focus of critique is not on the image/text/idea portrayed in the original, but rather is focused on some separate concept or idea altogether.

Literary critic Simon Dentith offers another definition of parody that merits attention. In his book-length theorization of parody as a concept, Dentith argues that parody “includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice.”[33] Like Hutcheon’s, Dentith’s conceptualization of parody also foregrounds the idea of intertextuality. Parody imitates and transforms the cultural work of others. However, the function of the imitation may vary widely: “…many parodies draw on the authority of precursor texts to attack, satirise, or just playfully to refer to elements of the contemporary world.”[34] This view provides perhaps the most wide-reaching definition of parody in terms of its utility. It dispels the notion that a parody must chastise its target, that the end result of parody must be directly related to the original source material. Rather, much like Hariman argues, parody becomes a resource for constituting public culture. It helps to establish a reference point, albeit removed from a prior, original reference point, from which one might judge public culture. Parody establishes a wide array of possibilities from which a variety of messages might materialize.

Perhaps part of the skepticism of parody’s political potential stems from the breadth of possibility attached to the concept. If one can use an image or text to attack a corporation or a product by turning its brand image upon itself, is it equally as effective if the creator simply uses name/image recognition to promote a political message unrelated to the corporation? There is also the ever present concern that a parody will simply reinforce the original text, and perhaps reinforce the very ideas that are being challenged by the parody. How then, does one interpret such a text in light of contemporary theories of parody and appropriation?
Ultimately, I argue that parody is a prevalent and popular modality of political culture. Parody enables the creation of perspective by incongruity. It shifts conventionally consistent ideas or reverses them entirely as a means of establishing an alternative perspective. As Robert Hariman argues, parody is the necessary foil to serious rational discourse. Without a lively counterpart, democratic political culture lacks something important. The humor that is often tied to parody serves a couple of functions. First, and most obvious, it serves an attention-getting function. We are drawn to humorous things because it fulfills a void for us. In the case of political parody, that void is the dissenting voice to rational-critical discourse. Another function that humor plays in parody is what we might call the recognition effect. That is, not only do we laugh at a humorous parody of a serious topic, but we understand why we find the parody humorous. It is funny because we find some truth in the parody. That we are able to laugh in spite of a potentially very serious issue is important. This is where the potential for subversion appears. The rhetorical functions of parody and appropriation are studied in a number of ways. One particularly productive way to study parody is to analyze its use throughout history. Chapter Four does just that by illustrating Ballyhoo’s attack on advertising and consumer culture through parody.

Burlesque is a term employed by Norman Anthony to describe what he did with advertisements in Ballyhoo. Burlesque is a term that overlaps with parody and appropriation. Burlesque is a form of caricature or parody that is normally associated with literature and performance, but can be applied to other forms of symbolic meaning as well. Burke notes that burlesque allows the rhetor to attack the subject by distancing the self from the subject. That is, much like with scapegoating, when a rhetor burlesques something, he/she renders it outlandish and as different from the self. The rhetor is wholly separate from the target, and thus is able to
attribute negative connotations to it without damage to the self. Theories of burlesque span the humanities and are taken up in a number of different ways. Mikhail Bakhtin writes about burlesque in terms of the carnival. Bakhtin also attributes revolutionary potential to the actions of the carnival. As Michael Holquist argues, “Bahktin’s carnival…is not only not an impediment to revolutionary change, it is revolution itself.”37 Along with parody and appropriation, burlesque offers a vision of the potential of critical humor discourse. Ballyhoo’s visual rhetoric utilizes these strategies successfully and interchangeably in its critiques of 1930s American culture.

In this dissertation, I analyze how Ballyhoo attempted to provide readers with perspective on some of the most important issues of 1930s America by constructing incongruous images and texts. In each case study, Ballyhoo utilized different rhetorical strategies in order to create this incongruous perspective. In Chapter Two, I show how Ballyhoo argued against Prohibition by rhetorically scapegoating political leaders and arguing for practical and political common sense. In Chapter Three, I examine how Ballyhoo created perspective by incongruity in terms of the Great Depression by ridiculing the wealthy and scapegoating the political elite. In Chapter Four, I study how Ballyhoo employed parody and appropriation in its critiques of advertising and consumer culture.

This study examines a large collection of texts for its themes and rhetorical strategies. Ballyhoo had a production run from 1931-1939, with a few attempts to revive it in the 1950s. For this study, I concentrated on the 1931-1932 period, as it most closely relates to the target content of the dissertation. While the magazine continued until 1939, it began to lose its more critical leanings much earlier. After the initial success of the magazine in the early part of the decade, Ballyhoo switched to a smaller digest form and focused more heavily on humor for the sake of humor rather than a humor that had a critical message. Each issue averaged around fifty pages,
with content on the inside of both covers as well. For each issue, I catalogued content according to theme (e.g. Prohibition, Depression, ad parody, etc.). From the resulting list, I chose representative exemplars for analysis in the dissertation. I was fortunate to be able to obtain personal copies of the majority of these issues through various outlets. Those that were not obtainable were borrowed from various library collections.

From the perspective of rhetorical methods, this study provides an illustration of how one might study a large corpus of images for their rhetorical features. By examining a large group of texts, I am able to make some general claims about how visual rhetorics of humor and parody work, as well as how they work in the specific case of *Ballyhoo* circa 1931-32.

*Overview of Chapters*

This dissertation is organized into three case studies of events during the 1930s, plus an introductory chapter and a conclusion chapter. Each case study includes a historical/contextual component as well as a set of analyses of various rhetorical artifacts within *Ballyhoo* related to each cultural moment. The first section of each case study contextualizes the magazine’s content within the political culture of the 1930s, and particularly of 1931-1932. This is essential for understanding the readings of the images that follow.

Chapter Two covers the historical period of 1931-1932. The first case study examines the magazine’s treatment of national Prohibition in America. Formally adopted in 1920 with a constitutional amendment, the prohibition of alcohol in the United States maintained a strong presence until its ultimate repeal in 1932. *Ballyhoo* came to the scene in August of 1931, during a period in which fervent calls for repeal on the basis of the policy’s ineffectiveness abound. From the very first issue, *Ballyhoo* argued in favor of repeal through a variety of means. In this
chapter, I argue that Ballyhoo presented a strong case for repeal by employing the rhetorical strategies of scapegoating and appealing to common political and economic sensibilities. Through visual images and verbal texts the magazine calls for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment by targeting those with the political power to influence repeal, namely President Herbert Hoover. Ballyhoo foregrounded the hypocrisy of continuation of the unpopular policy and structured its argument through consistent visual and verbal rhetorical tropes, ultimately creating perspective by incongruity. Prohibition was a common political topic in Ballyhoo that recurs throughout its run to the point of repeal, and the magazine celebrated the victory of repeal as it happened.

Chapter Three attends to the Great Depression as a cultural moment of critical reflection. The stock market crash of 1929 serves as a commonly accepted starting point of the Great Depression. The worst economic crisis in the history of the United States spanned nearly the entirety of the 1930s. Ironically, Ballyhoo magazine fared remarkably well as an upstart publication during these harsh economic times. Given the scope of the Depression in the United States, it is no surprise that Ballyhoo would attend to the economic situation in its pages. As with its treatment of Prohibition, Ballyhoo presented arguments that ridiculed political leaders during the Depression; again, the primary target was Herbert Hoover. By presenting Hoover, the political elite, and the economic elite as villains deserving of blame, Ballyhoo rhetorically shifted the conversation away from the desperation of everyday life toward a fingering of the culprits responsible for allowing the Depression to develop and continue for so long. Second, Ballyhoo presented a realist approach to persuasion. The more somber critique of Depression was presented through visual and verbal arguments regarding homelessness, hunger, and unemployment. The rhetorical combination of ridicule and realist argument presents the viewer
with a unique look at what popular cultural texts during the Depression offered to the political conversation. *Ballyhoo* argued that those with the power to effect change were out of touch with reality. At a pivotal point in economic struggle, the magazine pulled no punches in its rhetorical attack on political ambivalence.

Chapter Four examines the rise of advertising and consumer culture during the 1930s. Advertising was by far the most frequent target of ridicule in the pages of *Ballyhoo*. Indeed, the critique of the entire advertising enterprise was one of the primary objectives forwarded by its editor Norman Anthony. During the 1930s, consumers were faced with more consumption choices than ever before and more brand names than ever before from which to choose. The advertising industry had begun to take shape. Faced with the dilemma of increased competition, many advertisers took the liberty of producing advertisements that were overstated or downright untruthful. *Ballyhoo* critiqued the industry, the advertising men, and the advertisements themselves continually throughout its tenure. Primarily through rhetorical appropriation and parody, the magazine called attention to the faulty claims of advertisers and presented an image of the industry as manipulative, deceptive, and opportunistic. Through advertising parodies, humorous stories about ad men, and cartoons, *Ballyhoo* characterized the advertising business as a deceitful industry. *Ballyhoo* argued that the structure of the advertising industry degraded human judgment and treated consumers as if they were uneducated and gullible.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation. The political, social, and economic winds during the 1930s combined to create the perfect storm for *Ballyhoo*. While the real world effects of Prohibition, the Depression, and advertising weighed down upon the population, *Ballyhoo* took notice and presented readers with potential critiques of the situation. Popular culture texts reach a large number of people, but are often not associated with larger political and social institutions.
In the conclusion, I argue that Ballyhoo’s treatment of these three overlapping cultural milieus provides respite for its readers and articulates a critique through perspective by incongruity that has lasted the test of time. Ballyhoo’s rhetorical force lies in its ability to identify, contextualize, and attack perceived ills of 1930s political culture. In doing so, the magazine provides insight as to how some perceived the crises of democracy and capitalism/consumer culture during the 1930s.

Ballyhoo depicted partisan views of public culture in the early 1930s. While it cannot gauge how audiences reacted to these depictions, Ballyhoo provides us with a unique look into a particular form of visual rhetoric based in critique during this pivotal period of history. It also provides us with an early example of critical visual discourse based in humor that utilizes rhetorical strategies consistent with contemporary texts in the same vein. For its unique stance on pertinent political and social issues, its ability to synthesize public sentiment, its powerful execution of visual critique, and its unique historical positioning, Ballyhoo is an important rhetorical artifact to consider.

Notes

2. Anthony, How to Grow Old Disgracefully, 120.
4. Anthony, How to Grow Old Disgracefully, 120.
11 Christine Harold, OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
13 Cara A. Finnegan, Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2003). Finnegan examines the role of documentary photography during the Depression era. Finnegan illustrates the varied and complex messages about poverty during the Great Depression constructed by photographers and magazines of the era. Her study examines photographs captured by photographers of the Farm Security Administration and the ways that these photographs were used to construct varying arguments about poverty during the Depression.
14 Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 308.
15 Burke, Attitudes Toward History, 308.
31 Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, 16.
32 Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, 32.
34 Dentith, Parody, 9.
36 Burke, Attitudes Toward History. See especially pages 52-6.
Fig. 3: “I owe it all to the little woman.” Ballyhoo, August, 1931.

By the time that calls for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment were becoming strongest, the underground liquor trade had become an organized and successful venture for those inclined to the trade. In Fig. 3 above, from the first issue of Ballyhoo, we see a depiction of a successful bootlegger of liquor. The markers of his success are evident. He wears a three-piece suit with a tie and hat. He is well-dressed and shows no signs of the often depicted dirty, torn-clothes
common criminal. The ring on his finger shines in the moonlight, the size of the stone remarkable. Even the vessel he stands upon is an indicator of his success. Way more than just a simple boat, this vessel is equipped with a gun turret. The man leans leisurely against a bounty of liquor, boxes marked “XXX Whisky,” cigar in mouth, with a sly smile on his face. The man is not afraid of being caught, even in the open sight of the famous landmark. The scene behind the bootlegger is serene. The sea is calm in New York Harbor, the full moon casting a glare on the sea surrounding Lady Liberty. Indeed, the sea was relatively calm for bootleggers in general toward the end of Prohibition, as speakeasies excelled and bootleggers prospered without much interference. The caption in the image presents readers with the punch line: “I owe it all to the little woman.” The bootlegger’s statement suggests that America is to blame for his successful criminal enterprise. Without the restrictions of Prohibition, bootleggers would not be in high demand and would largely disappear. *Ballyhoo’s* inclusion of this image in its first issue provides us with a very early statement on its platform on Prohibition.

Beginning in 1920, a constitutional amendment prohibited the production, sale, distribution, and consumption of alcoholic beverages in the United States. As with any issue worthy of constitutional attention, the public was divided into several camps. On one extreme stood the temperance advocates, the “drys,” who lauded the amendment as a victory for family values and a boon for moral and economic prosperity. On the other extreme stood the “wets,” who viewed the amendment as a basic violation of individual rights and as a detriment to the nation’s economic well-being. Until its eventual repeal in 1933, Prohibition maintained a lingering presence in the lives of the American public. Prohibition did not eradicate the alcohol trade, of course; it simply drove the production and sale of its products underground. Speakeasies, hidden and in plain sight, became common establishments, especially in larger
cities like New York and Chicago. Backyard brewing operations sprang up in areas all across the nation. By some accounts, the illegal sale and consumption of alcohol during the Prohibition period increased the amount of crime in major cities significantly. In the age of Prohibition, bootleggers and gangsters gained infamy, and allegations of police corruption abounded. Stories of backdoor dealings between gangsters and police forces became the stuff of legend.

Surprisingly, very little scholarship in the field of communication studies has addressed Prohibition, yet the Prohibition period in the United States is a rich font for rhetorical inquiry. The influence of Prohibition reached into the courts, invaded the platforms of politicians, and permeated public discourse among Americans of all classes. The historical significance of the Prohibition era has been studied by scholars of history, economics, political science, and numerous other disciplines, the communication literature is lacking in this area. Empirical research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of Prohibition on curbing the consumption and sale of alcohol, with results varying widely. This information has been published in venues from historical government documents to contemporary economic inquiries. While studies may disagree as to the effectiveness of the law, overall consensus suggests that the “Noble Experiment” ultimately was a failure. To be sure, Prohibition caused a great deal of anxiety for politicians, enforcement agents, and citizens of the era.

To get a clearer picture of the widespread anxiety over Prohibition in the United States, one need look no further than the popular cultural texts of the period. Popular culture provides us a window into public sentiment and perhaps a vision of the period unattainable in the scholarly writing and empirical research studies. In this chapter, I analyze Ballyhoo magazine’s content related to Prohibition in order to illustrate the deep cultural anxiety embedded in the public over the controversial policy. I argue that Ballyhoo’s treatment of the issue represented a rhetorical
plea for repeal of the Prohibition amendment that operated through positioning the issue as a laughable, and simultaneously harmful, public policy. Ballyhoo constructed perspective by incongruity to demonstrate the hypocrisy of the failed Noble Experiment. Ballyhoo’s attack on Prohibition employed perspective by incongruity through two primary rhetorical strategies. First, Ballyhoo vilified the creators and enforcers of the policy by rhetorically scapegoating them. Challenging the authority of the police and politicians by casting them as corrupt, incapable agents, Ballyhoo framed the Prohibition fight as unwinnable. The architects, supporters, and maintainers of the law were cast as stubborn, stupid, and opportunist. Second, Ballyhoo called for repeal through appeals to practical and economic common sense. As Ballyhoo came into being toward the tail end of Prohibition, its appeals suggested the frustration the public shared over the unpopular and failing policy and the unwillingness of those in power to give in to common sense solutions. In doing so, Ballyhoo provided its audience with a politically savvy and socially popular alternative. Ballyhoo seized the political moment of 1931-1932 to illustrate how the conversations about and actions taken toward solving the Prohibition crisis were too little and too late.

Ballyhoo’s treatment of Prohibition was based both in selfishness and civic demand. The magazine’s readership, primarily urban, white working-class men, historically was avidly anti-Prohibition. Keeping in mind that Ballyhoo was a humor magazine, it is clear that the editors and artists of the publication understood the impact of Prohibition on this particular audience. To capitalize on public sentiment, Ballyhoo consistently printed content that kept Prohibition in the minds of its readership, as it actively argued against the policy. The magazine lampooned the policy itself, the policy’s architects and supporters, and the policy’s effects on public culture. This was true from the very first issue of the magazine in August, 1931 until the issue directly
following the repeal of Prohibition in December, 1933. Indeed, Ballyhoo went so far as to put out a “Repeal Number,” an entire issue celebrating the repeal of the 18th Amendment. For this chapter, I examine issues of Ballyhoo from August 1931 through the end of 1932—from Ballyhoo’s inception into the waning years of Prohibition. I catalogued all references to Prohibition-related material, and chose exemplars based on the recurring themes most utilized.

This chapter contains two major components. First, I provide a brief historical account of Prohibition in America. Because Ballyhoo made its debut toward the tail end of Prohibition’s tenure, I focus primarily on the late 1920s and early 1930s in this account. I focus particularly on 1931-1932, as these are the years of Ballyhoo from which I draw my analysis. I will illustrate the various public and scholarly reactions to the policy in order to provide context for my reading of Ballyhoo. The second section analyzes the content of Ballyhoo on Prohibition and its effects. The public sentiment, as read through Ballyhoo, suggests a strong push for repeal of the unpopular amendment based on the ineffectiveness of enforcing the laws, reversal of authority, calls for common sense, and popular support for repeal.

Prohibition’s Rise

While the beginning of Prohibition came with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1920, the debate over alcohol prohibition had been brewing for decades. In Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition, Daniel Okrent outlines the numerous historical precedents and catalysts fueling the drive toward Prohibition. The story of alcoholic beverages in the United States dates to the founding of the nation. Okrent states that “the ship that brought John Winthrop to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 had more than ten thousand gallons of wine
in its hold and carried three times as much beer as water.”¹ From the earliest days of the republic, the nation’s relationship with alcohol was an issue of great contention.

The nation’s first large-scale anti-alcohol expression came in the form of the Washingtonian Movement in 1840. The Washingtonian organization was comprised of a number of individual alcoholics who took it upon themselves to help each other kick the addiction. Some credit the movement as being a predecessor to Alcoholics Anonymous. While many church and religious groups in fledgling temperance organizations centered their attention on the social and public ills of alcohol, the Washingtonians took an individual approach.² The degree to which anti-alcohol sentiment addressed the nation as a whole varied throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In 1895, the Anti-Saloon League formed to focus its efforts on legislation rather than on correcting the behavior of individuals or punishing individual drinkers. The League was one of the first bureaucratically organized issue-based groups to center attention on a singular issue of political import. Daniel Okrent notes that the “Anti-Saloon League may not have been the first broad-based American pressure group, but it certainly was the first to develop the tactics and the muscle necessary to rewrite the Constitution.”³ While predecessors of the Anti-Saloon League existed and exerted pressure, none did so with such a strongly organized and well-backed plan. The Anti-Saloon League had a wide-reaching network of advocates across the span of the American landscape, due in part to its heavy ties with religious groups and particularly Protestants. Because of the League’s integral ties with various churches, it could easily organize efforts across a wide landscape. The Anti-Saloon League had a built-in network of supporters in the many and various denominations of churches across America. The group began its campaign
in Ohio with a state-based effort, eventually gaining a foothold in the political houses of the state government and expanding to national influence.

David Kyvig argues that “opposition to prohibition existed from the moment liquor bans were first proposed. Brewers, distillers, brewery workers, and hotel and saloon keepers fought hard to protect their financial interests against the passage of laws that would devastate them.” While the temperance advocates argued that an end to alcohol would drive citizens to more productive activities and stimulate the economy, many wets, and especially those already employed in the alcohol industry argued that Prohibition would be a devastating blow to the economy not only then, but in the future as well. Kyvig goes on to argue that the economic arguments of anti-prohibitionists diminished very quickly after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, though they re-emerged as the Depression more fully set in.

Perhaps the watershed moment in the buildup toward national prohibition of alcohol in the United States came with the passage of the Volstead Act in 1919. This is the legislation that paved the way for the Eighteenth Amendment. While the act was named after Andrew Volstead, a dry politician and chair of the House Judiciary Committee at the time of the bill’s passage, it is widely accepted that the law was authored by Wayne Wheeler. Wheeler was lawyer for the National Anti-Saloon league and co-creator of the act and became the League’s most well-known and dutiful lobbyist. Wheeler’s control of the League focused sole attention on achieving nation prohibition of alcohol, as opposed to the efforts of some earlier temperance groups who attempted to exert influence on a number of moral and political issues. Wheeler’s fervor for Prohibition was unmatched, and he made the mission of the League very clear. Wheeler even became known as the “dry boss” in some circles, due to his significant influence. Under Wheeler’s version of the legislation, prohibition would adhere to the strictest of guidelines. The
Volstead Act had three major purposes: to prohibit intoxicating beverages, to regulate the production and distribution of alcohol for purposes other than drinking, and to ensure that alcohol was available for research purposes and religious rituals. The Volstead Act also held the important distinction of being the document that defined what constituted “intoxicating liquor.” The definition left very little question about the meaning of the term. Okrent says of Wheeler, “Wheeler’s hammer came down on a stunningly severe definition of ‘intoxicating’—anything ingestible that contained more than 0.5 percent alcohol.” This definition precluded the consumption, production, and distribution of even the lightest of alcoholic beverages, leaving no room for dispute as to the intention of the legislation.

Having paved the way with the passage of the Volstead Act, the anti-alcohol contingent got its ultimate wish on January 29th, 1919 when thirty-six states ratified the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Section 1. After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

Section 2. The Congress and the several States shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the States by the Congress.
This Amendment combined with the Volstead Act as the enabling legislation would come to mark the beginning of the Prohibition Era. For the next thirteen years, national prohibition of alcohol took hold in the United States. Of course, this is not to say that the public merely accepted the policy blindly. On the contrary, the fight over Prohibition had just begun.

Throughout the 1920s, there were various attempts to modify the policy and calls for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. For instance, the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, which came as a response to the Anti-Saloon League, backed and supported a group of wet politicians for Congress in 1922. These attempts were largely unsuccessful, as Wayne Wheeler strongly warned the candidates with personal letters as to the mistakes they were making in considering running for election on the platform of repeal.6 Wheeler’s influence was felt strongly in the 1920s, and wet candidates had trouble winning elections throughout the early part of the decade. The Anti-Saloon League’s possessed great influence in this period. Edward Behr notes that the ASL’s finest hour came just at the conclusion of World War I. The Worldwide Prohibition Congress was held in Columbus, Ohio, where prominent politicians and religious leaders rejoiced in the now almost unstoppable march toward national prohibition.7

The presidential election of 1928 is quite telling of the disparity of opinion based around the issues of Prohibition. The Republican candidate, Herbert Hoover, ran on a platform of support for Prohibition. The Democratic candidate, Alfred Smith, was a known wet candidate. Hoover won the election in a landslide, despite the growing animosity over the effectiveness of Prohibition. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the tide began to turn for the anti-Prohibition crowd. Growing suspicions of political graft, corruption, and hypocrisy coupled with the ineffectiveness and lack of enforcement of the laws regarding alcohol caused a shift in the political landscape. Indeed, Hoover changed his position on Prohibition for the 1932 presidential
election. However, at that point it was too late for Hoover, as the Depression had set in and Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the election with ease.

About midway through Prohibition’s tenure in 1926, the effectiveness of the law was assessed by Paul R. Kach of the Baltimore Bar Association. He notes that Friend and foe of the Volstead Act alike admit its ineffectiveness; the one urges stricter enforcement, the latter modification. Truly, the present situation is well nigh appalling. Corruption stalks in high places; crime steadily increases; respect for law diminishes. The Federal Courts—actually the most potent of our judicial tribunals—their dockets crowded with important litigation, find their time consumed by cases often of so trivial a character as to be more properly disposed of by a police magistrate. New classes of offenders arise; new recruits are steadily added to the rank of crime, lured by the easy profits of bootlegging; our amusements become a reproach instead of a diversion. Yet the expenses of administration mount ever higher, and not even drunkenness decreases.\textsuperscript{8}

Kach’s assessment of Prohibition’s effectiveness during the heart of its existence sheds light on public and judicial perception of the law. The account expresses frustration with the approach of enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment, suggesting that judicial resources could be better applied to more important matters than trivial alcohol-related crimes. It also expresses knowledge of both the advocates and opponents of the Volstead Act that the policy had proven ineffective, citing several compelling reasons. He notes that bootlegging increased, and more people were drawn to bootlegging as an easy means of making money. Ultimately, Kach’s account of Prohibition suggests that a modification or repeal of the policy would be desirable publicly and judicially. Kach goes on in this statement to propose a policy wherein each state may modify the legal definition of what constitutes illegal alcohol, such as allowing a certain
percentage of alcohol per volume on a state by state basis. This compromise is one that was suggested by many during Prohibition. Rather than advocating for outright repeal, many chose to fight for more moderate gains.

The degree to which Prohibition caused an increase in crime, particularly organized crime, is an issue of dispute among contemporary scholars and scholars during the Prohibition era alike. John Landesco, in 1932, argued that “[g]angs and syndicates did not originate with prohibition. In fact, the contraband beer and liquor industry, flanked by its gangster militia carrying on war and peace, was organized by brothel and gambling-house bosses experienced in large-scale vice and gambling operation and in negotiations and arrangements with politicians and officials for concessions.”

Landesco’s study looks at the crime statistics leading up to and throughout the Prohibition era in order to discern any significant increases in particular crimes or types of crimes. Ultimately, the study concludes that there are too many factors to provide sufficient evidence that national prohibition increased crime, not the least of which the increased availability of automobiles, which enable hastier escape. There is no denying that alcohol-related crimes were rampant during Prohibition. The existence and abundance of known operating speakeasies is testament enough to that fact. However, many argue that the Prohibition era jump started organized crime in the United States, and that is not necessarily the case. It is known, however, that several organized crime syndicates had a hand in the illegal alcohol trade during the Prohibition period, including Al Capone’s.

In 1947, Lawyer Hoyt E. Ray, reflected on Prohibition:

The Eighteenth Amendment was rather abruptly repealed by a disillusioned society after a little more than a decade of restless experiment. The group reverted to regulatory laws to replace sumptuary legislation, and this was a reversal unique in the annals of the
society of America. Society, under the emotional strains and urges of World War I, took group action which it a little more than a decade later repented. Today, after World War II, the same but more intense emotions disturb the social group, but there appears little evidence that society will again write into its organic law the prohibition of alcoholic beverages. The turmoil and attendant social evils of the attempt of prohibition by the social group remain vividly impressed on the collective memory of the people.¹⁰

This account seems to follow with popular opinion in contemporary times that Prohibition was a mistake and caused more problems than it solved. There was no real consensus on the effectiveness of the Prohibition laws. However, public memory of the Prohibition era suggests that the endeavor as whole was a failure. While it may have been deemed the “Noble Experiment,” ultimately, history remembers this experiment as a failure. One of the many objections to the policy was the impotence of enforcement.

Another general problem with the Prohibition laws was the issue of who was responsible for enforcing the laws. While the Constitutional amendment made the sale of intoxicating liquors illegal throughout the nation, the question of who should be in charge of enforcing this law at the state and local levels remained unanswered and ambiguous. As Timothy Olewniczak notes, “when local authorities got involved in enforcement chaos ensued as to which authority should enforce the law. Attempts at reforming Prohibition enforcement caused further disorganization that played into the bootleggers’ hands.”¹¹ The nature of bootlegging itself made enforcement difficult. Particularly in more rural areas of the country, it simply was not possible for enforcement agents to patrol the area with any effectiveness. As homebrewing became more popular in the absence of legal alcohol, enforcement of Prohibition faced the challenge of
deciding where to focus its attention. This is one of the many reasons why enforcement of the law was so difficult.

This is not to say that enforcement efforts were unanimously unsuccessful. Indeed, raids upon illegal alcohol operations were common occurrences and millions of gallons of alcohol were destroyed during Prohibition’s tenure. For instance, in Pittsburgh, John Pennington, the Prohibition Administrator, “conducted more than fifteen thousand raids and arrested over eight thousand people” between 1926 and 1930.\textsuperscript{12} Even so, these raids only scratched the surface of the illegal alcohol operations, and enforcement fell far short of solving the overall problems associated with Prohibition.

It did not take very long for the public to recognize the shortcomings of Prohibition. The rumblings for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment began shortly after its ratification. Almost from the very outset, there were calls for repeal. However, the fervor grew with the passage of time. Herbert Brucker notes that one of the breaking point moments leading to repeal was right around the election of 1928. Al Smith, the wet candidate, was defeated by Herbert Hoover. Brucker argues that “Al Smith made liquor an issue. When he was licked, the Drys said the issue was dead. It wasn’t.”\textsuperscript{13} Brucker goes on to explain that in 1930, public opinion polls began to show more support than ever for the repeal of Prohibition. Brucker states that “an avalanche of Wet victories in local primaries and elections has come crashing down upon the bewildered candidates of the Drys…The Democrats, in their Convention, came down with both feet on repeal, to the accompaniment of roars and whoops that sounded like the crack of Prohibition’s doom.”\textsuperscript{14} The pendulum was swinging strongly toward repeal of the amendment by 1930. It was within this context that \textit{Ballyhoo} entered the scene in the fall of 1931.
The period of 1931-1932 is especially important to consider, as it coincides with *Ballyhoo*’s construction of its anti-Prohibition argument. More than a decade into the Noble Experiment, the character of its nobility was certainly in question. By this point, political corruption, graft, poor enforcement, and public ignorance of the law had become rampant. This was particularly apparent in cities like New York, where there was a “dual public state of mind and constitutional conception.” In Chicago, as the *New York Times* put it, prohibition was imposed on an “unwilling metropolis…and the pressure for public sale and private manufacture had been tremendous and has broken through the walls of the law, which finds itself without the support of public opinion.”¹⁵ This sentiment resulted from release of the Wickersham Report, which, in 1931, still conceded very little to anti-Prohibitionists.

Notably, the Wickersham Report alluded that the failure of Prohibition lay not in the law itself, but rather in the political issues associated with it. It noted that “enforcement of the dry law during at least the last part of the past decade has been riddled by politics and surrounded at times by graft.”¹⁶ Thus, even governmental authority conceded that upholding the controversial law was being thwarted by corruption. In one specific case, a former Police Inspector, Thomas Mullarkey, was indicted in late 1931 “of having received money from bootleggers for protection which he was unable to give.”¹⁷ The bootlegger in the case testified of paying graft. This is but one of many stories detailing the corruption of police and government officers. In another case, “uniformed patrolmen interfered with Federal Prohibition agents in a way that gave practical ‘protection’ to the Phoenix Brewery…described as a principal source of beer for several thousand New York speakeasies.”¹⁸ Clearly there is a problem when local law enforcement run interference on alcohol busts led by federal prohibition agents. Corruption and graft were so rampant, in fact, that special commissions were organized to determine the scope of the
problems. Samuel Seabury headed one such committee, and determined that “public officeholders with incomes far in excess of their salaries, for which they could give no reasonable explanation, had been found in virtually every city department…” Given this sentiment, it is clear why public opinion of Prohibition provided so little support. At the time, repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment seemed far out of reach, despite public outcry for just that. This did not, however, stop attempts to modify the dry law. One particular strategy seems worth noting here. The wording of the Prohibition amendment outlawed intoxicating liquors, and delineated exactly what constituted such. Many wet advocates ushered attempts to loosen that definition to provide for the sale of beer and light wines. One such group was the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform. In late 1932, the organization urged an immediate passage of a “beer bill” for “economic and humanitarian reasons.” Mrs. Charles Sabin noted in her argument that “the legalization and taxation of light wines and beers alone would do more to balance the budget than all the nuisance taxes that have been proposed.” Labor groups also fought for modification laws if repeal was not imminent. Noting the hypocrisy of the federal government, union leaders urged for common sense solutions to the problems of Prohibition. Support for modification of the Volstead Act came from many different camps, but there was similar fervor by those who sought strict repeal.

One letter to the editor of the New York Times, by Galley Hill of Brunswick, Georgia, made the case that any limitation on the alcoholic content of drinks would only invite more bureaucracy and clutter up the already overstressed courts fighting Prohibition cases. He asserts: “If this country awakes and refuses to be ruled any longer by the minority which forced prohibition upon it, let the bill authorizing the reintroduction of decent beverages read ‘Beer and
Wine’ and nothing more.” Fearing that modification of the Volstead Act would only lead to more issues, many sought solely for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.

Even so, public sentiment certainly was shifting toward repeal. One poll conducted by Literary Digest in 1932 found a significant increase in wet support since 1930. The poll showed that, out of over 4.5 million ballots, nearly 73% supported repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Public officials from all over the nation were urging votes for repeal, with reasons spanning economic, moral, and commonsensical boundaries. Action to repeal the amendment did not materialize until Roosevelt took office.

It did not take long for Roosevelt to move on the issue of Prohibition. In March of 1933, Roosevelt signed the Cullen-Harrison Act, which allowed the sale of beers and wines with alcohol content of 3.2 percent or less, something that the public had been urging Hoover to consider throughout his presidency. Not long after, in December of 1933, national Prohibition was lifted with the ratification of the Twenty First Amendment. The saga of Prohibition had a long history and its official national tenure lasted nearly thirteen years. While the responses to the policy were many and varied, it is undeniable that Prohibition was a major presence in the lives of Americans and in the life of American politics in the 1920s and 1930s.

Popular culture, of course, was also greatly affected by Prohibition. William H. Young and Nancy K. Young write that popular culture during the 1930s kept Prohibition and alcohol consumption in the minds of the public, and specifically so through film. Films such as *Little Caesar* and *Public Enemies* showed gangsters involved in the illegal liquor trade, while other non-gangster films showed high-class men and women sipping martinis. They note that “Being able to drink was a mark of conspicuous consumption and rebellion; it meant the person had the cash necessary to indulge a habit not sanctioned by the government. It appealed to that old
American streak of individuality, the chance to thumb one’s nose at authority. As a result, although Prohibition only lasted through the first years of the 1930s, it still played a major part in the popular culture of the period. Rachel Black asserts that the silent film era was representative of dry values and typically depicted drinkers as sinful or nefarious. However, as the tide began to turn toward repeal of the Prohibition amendment, “movies capture and reflect the hypocrisy of social reality, showing drinking by major and minor characters of both genders and all ages and socioeconomic classes.” Popular culture during the Prohibition era catered to both ends of the political spectrum; however, as repeal started to become likelihood, many sources took the critique of Prohibition more seriously. Thus, Ballyhoo was not alone in the critique of Prohibition. Popular film, editorial cartoons, comics, and various other media also had a hand in pushing back against the policy. Consider, for example, a cartoon published in April of 1930 (Fig. 4):
The public is urged to jump ship from Prohibition, while the repeal crowd and those pushing for modification of the Prohibition amendment fight for who gets to be the savior. Other editorial cartoons of the period depict gangsters, corrupt politicians and police officers, and various other negative attributes of Prohibition.

Debra Lucas Muscoreil argues that support for Prohibition slid during the Depression. She notes that “people believed that ending Prohibition would create alcohol manufacturing and
distribution job opportunities.” This re-emergence of the economic line of argument would become one of the major strains of rhetoric leading to the repeal of Prohibition. Along with the various other ill societal effects resulting from the amendment, in a time of depression, the stifling of industry seemed especially heinous.

_Ballyhoo and Prohibition_

_Ballyhoo_ entered the Prohibition conversation in August of 1931, well into the period in which repeal was a growing possibility. In its characteristically sarcastic tone, _Ballyhoo_ provided its platform on Prohibition in its September 1931 issue. In a section entitled “Editorial (Written by Our Advertising Man),” Prohibition was given the parody treatment in the form of an advertising appeal, which was a common form utilized in the magazine: “NOW, American citizens! Consider your Adam’s Apple! Don’t rasp your throat with harsh irritants! Please! Actually put your finger on your Adam’s Apple! Do you know, fellow citizens, that you are actually touching your larynx? This is your voice box. Why don’t you use it and yell ‘Down with prohibition!’” Peppered with common slogans from advertisements and from _Ballyhoo_’s parodies of advertisements, the “editorial” made an unabashedly direct proclamation of its position. With the claim stated, the piece went on to provide evidence in support of its claim: “Now! Actually think of it! Ninety million bootleggers endorse prohibition! Prohibition is KIND to ninety million bootleggers!” By the 1930s, the apparatus of organized crime surrounding alcohol production and underground bootlegging was well-established and far reaching. By coming out against Prohibition, _Ballyhoo_ argued that a repeal of Prohibition would reduce the number of bootleggers and presumably reduce the amount of crime and corruption associated with the whole enterprise. The tagline says it all: “REPEAL—Purified by Violet
Rays of Intelligence! Your throat protection—against irritation—against hard times—against crime—against graft!"

The magazine utilized many different forms to argue against Prohibition: advertising parodies, comic-strip cartoons, and short stories to name a few. The common thread that weaved through all of them was parody, which produced perspective by incongruity. Due to the nature of the venue, the humor magazine, this is perhaps unsurprising. However, the degree to which Ballyhoo employed parody is striking. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the various ways in which parody is implemented to rhetorical effect in the service of opposing Prohibition. Ballyhoo created perspective by incongruity as a way to bring important issues to the attention of its readership in a way that is both humorous and critical. Ballyhoo built a narrative that demonstrated the folly of Prohibition and its prolonged stay. Through scapegoating of politicians, enforcement agents, police, and supporters of Prohibition, as well as through appeals to economic and political common sense, Ballyhoo argued that the repeal of Prohibition was a no-brainer. The aforementioned rhetorical strategies served to create perspective by incongruity for Ballyhoo’s readership.

Vilification, Scapegoating, and Challenged Authority in Ballyhoo

The very first issue of Ballyhoo contained no fewer than four direct references to Prohibition. This does not include inferred references, such as those implicating crime and those depicting police chases. It is clear from the very outset of this publication that Prohibition was a topic of great concern. Ballyhoo’s treatment of the controversial policy was based in humor and the magazine ridiculed the policy extensively. Take for instance, the first mention of Prohibition in the magazine. In a section entitled “Manhattan Madness,” two short stories, accompanied by
drawings, told of sustained use of alcohol despite the illegality of the practice. One of the stories was relatively harmless and described a new game that people in the know play called Cocktail Checkers, in which the checkers are drinks to be consumed when a checker would be taken. The story ends with both players falling out of their chairs drunk. The second story, however, was somewhat more pointed. While still meant to be humorous, there is a critical edge to the story which is indicative and exemplary of Ballyhoo’s treatment of Prohibition. In this story, a man is described as having left his car outside “one of Those Places Where People Imbibe Spiritous Liquors” (a speakeasy). While inside, two men pick up his car and move it around the block. Assuming the car stolen, the man puts an ad in the newspaper describing the car and its contents: “Some loose change, a powder puff, a pocket knife, and two tickets to the Policemen’s Ball.”

References to police complicity in the underground alcohol trade are common in Ballyhoo up until the policy’s repeal in 1933.

One of the many objections to Prohibition, both in society at large and in Ballyhoo, was the difficult task of enforcing the policy. One of the running themes in Ballyhoo consisted of stories and drawings intimating the corruption of police forces by bootleggers and politicians. To that effect, the magazine provided ample content that places police officers in speakeasies, in back-alley dealings with criminals, and in compromising situations with politicians. In the short story summarized above, the writers used a tongue-in-cheek punchline-driven humor to drive the point home. In other instances, the critique was much more direct and critical of police involvement in the whole enterprise of illegal liquor.

Another common depiction was the impotence of police officers to deal with crime. Consider the following cartoon entitled, “1931—The Surrender of New York” (Fig. 5). As the city lay crumbled around them, a group of gangsters armed with tommy guns accepts the
surrender of the New York police force, which is depicted as beaten down and defeated. While not necessarily directly tied to Prohibition, the image provides a sense of public perception of law enforcement’s ability to deal with crime, and particularly crime perpetrated by those involved with organized crime, symbolized by the gangster characters.

Fig. 5: “1931 The Surrender of New York.” *Ballyhoo*, December, 1931, 21.
1931, The Surrender of New York is an image representative of public perception regarding the effectiveness of law enforcement during the Prohibition era. The image is compositionally bifurcated. The height of the broken city is pressed down up on the figures. On the left side of the image stands a group of gangster characters wielding varied weaponry. On the right side, the police force is gathered as if to surrender control of the city to the criminals. The police officers are depicted with no weapons, and indeed the foreman of the police group is relinquishing control of his nightstick to the leader of the gangster group. One of the police officers appears significantly injured, as he is depicted with a cast on his leg and leaning on a crutch. The left hand side of the image is shaded much lighter than the right side, indicating the success on the part of the gangsters; the police force is shaded much more darkly, indicating defeat and shame. The criminals appear without any apparent injuries, while the police officers are depicted with arms in slings, on crutches, and donning eye patches. Even the building behind the group of gangsters seems to be more intact than the area surrounding the police. It also appears as though the criminals extend beyond the edge of the image, suggesting the numerous ranks of the criminal class. The police officers stand amid the rubble of the broken city, just behind an overturned vehicle—perhaps a police car. The scene depicted is one of frustration, desperation, and resignation. The city that should be protected by the police force is being handed over to the criminal underworld, as a result of faulty political and legal policies over Prohibition and its enforcement. “The Surrender of New York” image clearly demonstrates Ballyhoo’s strategy of perspective by incongruity. By positioning the police as losers and the criminals as winners, the artist illustrated the fatal flaw of enforcing Prohibition, its futility. As the popular narrative pits
police as heroes and criminals as foes, providing this incongruous reversal encourages the viewer to adopt the anti-Prohibition argument.

Here perspective by incongruity challenges the public’s notions of established order and authority. The forces that were supposed to be trustworthy and powerful were instead corrupt and powerless. The rhetorical construction of authority that Ballyhoo generates provides its audience with a mental quandary to solve: Who really is in charge here? In the same manner, Ballyhoo capitalized on public sentiment and depicted authority as out of order. The strategies were surprisingly similar: the genre of the humor magazine afforded Ballyhoo the opportunity to playfully turn the tables; the visual makeup of the artifact allowed viewers to witness the incongruity; Ballyhoo mobilized a public upset and angry about the failure of Prohibition. This rhetorical shift of authority played out frequently in Ballyhoo’s attack on Prohibition.

Ballyhoo’s treatment of Prohibition repeatedly remarked on the policy’s inadequacies related to enforcement and the law’s inability to control illegal alcohol consumption and distribution. The complicity of police forces was depicted at great length in the magazine. Police officers are shown drinking, taking money from criminals, and in general involving themselves in the alcohol business in ways contrary to the law.
As Fig. 6 suggests, perception of the role of the police during the Prohibition period is suspicious. In this case, a speakeasy owner refuses to admit the police officer, who in turn pickets outside the door of the establishment. Rather than enforcing the law against the illegal sale of alcohol by the establishment, the officer instead turns a blind eye to the offense and protests the establishment’s non-cooperation with the police. The image infers that either the speakeasy is not willing to bribe the police officer or that they will not allow the police to partake
in the activities therein. In either case, the cartoon suggests that there is a fundamental distrust in the ability of law enforcement properly to deal with Prohibition offenses. It also stands to reason that police complicity with bootleggers and gangsters signaled the ineffectiveness of Prohibition altogether, since the law relies on enforcement agents to control the sale and distribution of intoxicating liquors. Again, perspective by incongruity is employed to mark the police as the bad guys and/or as criminals. Where we expect to see an officer busting an illegal speakeasy, instead he is protesting his inability to participate in its illegality. At the very least, the viewer is called to see the police as unwilling or incapable of enforcing established laws, which undermines the fundamental premise of policing.

“Locked Out” illustrates one aspect of the perceived inability of police to enforce the laws regarding Prohibition. The police officer holds a picket sign that reads “Locked Out, This Speakeasy is Unfair to the Police.” The image immediately brings to mind associations with organized labor protests, which were common during the period. The black cat standing guard at the door may also be an allusion to the Industrial Workers of the World, a prominent union organization, whose symbol is a black cat. However, the fact that the police officer is protesting against the speakeasy, rather than simply shutting it down or arresting the proprietor, suggests that there are underlying dynamics at play which prevent him from doing so. The officer shoots a stern glance back at the door of the speakeasy, where the proprietor keeps an eye on the officer through the sliding peephole. In both cases, the expressions on the men’s faces are stern, if not annoyed. The speakeasy is hardly recognizable in terms of any official markers, but the officer’s sign labels it as such. Otherwise there are no distinguishing factors that place this door as different as any other. Thus, the officer’s picketing is not only odd due to legal reasons, but the officer’s presence also attracts attention to the location of the speakeasy. Perhaps the frustration
on the proprietor of the establishment is due to the lack of business from the police officer’s antics. He may also be irked that his establishment may be labeled as unfriendly to police, and therefore an easy target for raids. *Ballyhoo* did not solely focus on the police and Prohibition enforcement agents in its critique of the policy; however, the degree to which the magazine included such critiques suggests that distrust of authorities was prevalent.

One of the major rhetorical strategies that *Ballyhoo* used was scapegoating. The police forces and enforcement agents were some of the most frequently scapegoated agents in *Ballyhoo*. It is worth revisiting Treat’s explanation here: “Burke (1970) notes that the guilt from failures of perfection symbolically necessitates a sacrifice or purging of this guilt on some level, theorizing that this rhetorically functions through either victimage or mortification (5). Victimage requires a sacrificial “scapegoat,” for either the social hierarchy of a factional group or the supernatural hierarchy for universal humanity, who is blamed for the social imperfection and symbolically punished or purged as evil because they violate social norms or categories.”

In the case of scapegoating the police, it is clear that *Ballyhoo* perceived the police forces as having failed to properly enforce the laws of Prohibition. The police became the scapegoat based on their actual failures which have led to several social problems that are depicted throughout the magazine. Police officers were frequently provided as sacrificial scapegoats for the many ills associated with Prohibition. Their inability to deal with crime put them in a position of ridicule from which *Ballyhoo* rhetorically scapegoated the group as a means of critiquing the larger societal issue of Prohibition.

Whether this scapegoating of the police is fair is up for question. The goal of scapegoating a group is to provide people with a tangible entity to blame for some societal ill. In the case of Prohibition’s shortcomings, *Ballyhoo* culled from current events and news the
hypocrisy and corruption of the police, a group that was sworn to protect the public. While the police certainly were to blame for much of the maintenance of bootlegging, it is fair to say that they are not wholly to blame for Prohibition’s failure. Yet, vilifying and scapegoating such a monumental policy failure such as the Eighteenth Amendment required broad strokes. Not only did President Hoover support the policy, not only did Congress pass the constitutional amendment, not only did local politicians look the other way when confronting the issue and moral leaders sustain the policy, but many police officials were complicit in the trade. Ballyhoo understood the scope of the corruption and provided its audience with a range of scapegoats.

Political Scapegoats and Appeals to Common Sense

Another main pillar of Ballyhoo’s critique of Prohibition castigated the political leaders that guided the passage of the Prohibition amendment, and particularly President Herbert Hoover. One of the major targets of the magazine’s ire was Andrew Volstead, a Minnesota congressman instrumental in the implementation of Prohibition through his sponsorship of the Volstead Act. The Volstead Act allowed for the enforcement of Prohibition after the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution. Consider Fig. 7, which features Volstead prominently.
This image appears above an advertising spoof that promotes “Darbasol” shaving cream, an obvious take on the popular Barbasol brand of shaving cream. The text reads “Popular faces are
shaved with DARBASOL.” As was the case with many advertisements of the early 1930s, this spoof included a tie-in with a radio program, albeit a fake one: “Tune in to station D.R.Y. and hear Andrew and his Hill Billies sing rollicking old drinking songs and ballads.” In the image, Volstead’s visage is superimposed with a speakeasy scene, complete with police and gangsters. The ad spoof touts Volstead’s involvement in “The American Tragedy” that is Prohibition. As I will explain in much further detail in chapter four, Ballyhoo was very critical of the rise of advertising and consumer culture in the United States during the 1930s. The use of popular consumer brands and images as a template for critique was one of the major rhetorical strategies Ballyhoo implemented in its rhetorical plan. The template served not only as a springboard for the critique of actual products and brands, but also as a means to identify with audiences through the form, while advancing political and/or social critiques important during the 1930s. This worked through the rhetorical application of parody.

Parody relies on the audience’s recognition of an original form, in this case advertisements for Barbasol brand shaving cream, in order to produce a formally similar, yet wholly different message. The change in the brand name is only slight in the parody version, with only a one letter difference. This serves to insure that the audience acknowledges the form through recognition of the original brand name. Rather than employing a scene in which a man’s face is cleanly shaven or in the process of becoming so, the parody changes the meaning by placing a well-known public figure as the center of attention in the image. Andrew Volstead was well-known as one of the major advocates for the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Within Ballyhoo’s readership, Volstead was a villain. Thus, using his image in this parody prepares the audience for a critical message. The speakeasy scene taking place on Volstead’s face suggests that the negative actions related to Prohibition are due in part, or wholly, to Volstead’s political
actions. What is fascinating about this particular argument against Prohibition is its breadth of subject. This image encapsulates a moment in American history by including several different aspects of the time period. It includes a parody of a popular figure in Volstead, visual markers of crime related to Prohibition in the gangsters and police, parody of advertising in the manipulated form of the Barbasol advertisement, and a nod to the popularity of radio in the fake radio program tie-in. Not only does this provide the audience with timely and tailored content congruent with the time period, but it also accurately portrays the role of Ballyhoo overall. As national radio was becoming more popular, Ballyhoo often lamented the advertising that took place on the air, and particularly with cases in which programs were sponsored by companies. By this time, Volstead is a household name, one that is associated with Prohibition almost exclusively. Thus, in this image, we have a microcosm of the most salient strategies utilized by the writers, creators, and editors of the magazine. We also have a strong statement in opposition to Prohibition and its creators.

Volstead’s face is the setting for a Prohibition scene. Volstead gazes toward the left of the image. On the left side of his head, near his left temple, the door to a speakeasy is depicted, as is obvious from the sliding peephole in the door and the presence of a face behind it and a patron knocking on the door trying to gain entry. On the right side of Volstead’s head, near his right temple, an arm reaches out of the backdoor of a speakeasy, firmly planting money into the hand of a complicit police officer. The scene presents Volstead’s head as a representation of a speakeasy. This suggests that Prohibition was his “brainchild,” literally placing the action pictorially in his brain. The depictions of Prohibition are certainly the negative aspects of the law, suggesting a critical stance on the part of the illustrator. Near the bottom of the image there
is a depiction of a gunfight between gangsters, another common association with Prohibition’s lack of enforcement and the harms it causes.

*Ballyhoo* took aim at some of the most prominent political figures of the Prohibition era, the two most prominent being Andrew Volstead and Herbert Hoover. Kenneth Burke’s notion of the scapegoat maintains that through an externalization process, some group or individual is selected to take the blame of society’s sins. James Jasinski notes that “in many cases, the scapegoat is symbolically slain (through artistic images or as part of a ritual religious or cultural event) or banished from the society.”33 In the case of *Ballyhoo*, the scapegoats for the problems associated with Prohibition were already built in. Who better to blame the ills of Prohibition on than the creators and maintainers of the policy itself? Volstead, if mostly for the naming of the enabling legislation for the Eighteenth Amendment, became the scapegoat for all of the policy’s ensuing problems—crime, graft, violence, political corruption, and the like.

*Ballyhoo* quite literally took the image of Andrew Volstead and placed it as the venue for ridicule in the “Darbasol” image. Volstead became a scapegoat due to his association with Prohibition. He became the target of a parody that was critical of Prohibition. Volstead was chastised through the use of images—his face becomes the space for a scene with bootleggers, gangsters, and corrupt cops. The image argues guilt by association by placing each of these perceived negative results of the Prohibition amendment in direct vicinity with Volstead—literally on his face. Despite the fact that Volstead was not the most vociferous of the anti-alcohol brigade, his name and image become the scapegoat for a failed policy through a series of symbolic associations. As a publicly recognizable figure, Volstead was an easy visage for *Ballyhoo*’s readership to identify, and an easy target for ridicule. Volstead was made to look responsible and foolish for providing his name and support for such an unpopular and ineffective
public policy. *Ballyhoo*’s rhetorical scapegoating provided its audience with someone to blame for the frustration it suffered. This technique was effective because it established a dichotomy between the public and the dry politicians and opened a space where dissent could be voiced.

Another strong example of perspective by incongruity enacted through parody can be seen in Fig. 8, an advertisement spoof featuring Herbert Hoover endorsing the “Hoover Cleaner” vacuum. Remember that Hoover successfully won the presidency on a pro-Prohibition platform in 1928, and leading up to the 1932 election, pressure for repeal became much stronger than it had previously been.

![Image of the Hoover Cleaner advertisement](image)

*Fig. 8: “The Hoover Cleaner.” Ballyhoo, May, 1932, front inside cover.*
The image depicts Hoover sucking money out of the pockets of citizens as the text explains the parody: “The HOOVER is guaranteed to clean everything and everybody but the bootleggers.”

The parody of the vacuum cleaner company is used to call into question the effectiveness of Hoover’s enforcement of Prohibition, along with his tax policies, which are depicted as a drain on the defenseless citizenry. Ballyhoo’s treatment of the Hoover presidency was grounded primarily in his inability to act on the inadequacies and detriments of Prohibition and the onset of the Great Depression. Hoover, who won the presidency over Alfred E. Smith, a well-known opponent of Prohibition, garnered much support from voters on the issue. Ballyhoo, decidedly a “wet” publication, took advantage of this fact and launched critiques of Hoover over his position on Prohibition. Hoover became somewhat of a villain for Ballyhoo, and the magazine used its popularity to critique Hoover’s policies, or lack thereof, regarding Prohibition. Of course, at this point in 1932, Franklin Roosevelt was the incoming presidential candidate vying to replace Hoover. Support for Roosevelt came from many groups, but perhaps most tellingly, Republicans for Roosevelt: “Roosevelt, we are here. Tired of pussyfooters on prohibition, roundabout relief, and political Pollyannas, we are for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, modification of the Volstead Act and restoration of their personal rights to the American people. We are, therefore, for you for President.”

Hoover’s inadequacy with regard to dealing with Prohibition was seen as remedied through Roosevelt. Ballyhoo never faltered in its ridicule of Hoover, but certainly dialed up the intensity as the election neared. Hoover’s incompetence and stubbornness were put on display as a direct argument for political change.

In the “Hoover Cleaner” image, the president is depicted as standing alone and elevated above the rest of the population. He stands superimposed on a map of the United States, suggesting his dominion over the population. He wields the hose of a vacuum cleaner with a
stern look on his face. The end of the vacuum hose reads “TAXES.” The villainous Hoover is literally sucking money out of the pockets and purses of unsuspecting citizens. Men and women alike flee surprised and upset at the attack upon their purse strings. Empty pockets and purses suggest that the amount of money being taken is significant. The text in the box to the left of the images suggests that this process takes place quarterly in the form of taxes. However, the bootleggers seem to be safe from this pecuniary invasion.

Herbert Hoover, who was scapegoated even more than Volstead, was featured repeatedly as a rhetorical punching bag. Though Hoover had very little to do with the onset of Prohibition, his seeming unwillingness to address its shortcomings while it was in place and his advocacy for the policy during the 1928 election gave the wets ammunition and reason to scapegoat the president. *Ballyhoo*’s depictions of Hoover quite literally positioned him as a villain to the American people. In this case, Hoover is using a vacuum cleaner to suck money out of the pockets of the citizens. His face displays a determined and sinister look, while the victims are dumbfounded and taken aback by the actions of the president. On point with the advertising aspect of the parody, the message states that Hoover is guaranteed to “clean everything and everybody but the bootleggers.” Positing Hoover as on the side of the bootleggers scapegoats him into a position of complicity with the negative aspects of Prohibition. In another depiction, he is portrayed as a stubborn schoolboy who is unwilling to recognize the detriment that Prohibition is causing on the national economy. *Ballyhoo* presented these images as parodic scapegoating mechanisms, providing its audience with someone to point its finger at in troubling times. Scapegoating was used to rhetorical effect in *Ballyhoo* as a means of placing blame and of venting frustration.
Ballyhoo’s critiques stemmed primarily from Hoover’s seeming ambivalence toward repealing the policy, despite its more obvious failings.

Fig. 9: “A Not So Comic Valentine.” Ballyhoo, March, 1932, 16-17.
In Fig. 9, *Ballyhoo* calls for a tax on liquor, as opposed to its prohibition altogether, as a means of eradicating the national deficit. Hoover is depicted as a stubborn, angry schoolboy who does not want to give in to reality. “Don’t Be a Dummy!” reads the tagline, suggesting the obviousness of taxing liquor as a cure for national economic woes. Many of *Ballyhoo*’s cartoons mimicked editorial cartoons, as the above image illustrates. Hoover is depicted as ignorant, complacent, stubborn, and in some cases just stupid. It is fairly widely known that Hoover, on a personal level, was only mildly in support of Prohibition. He had a political advantage in the presidential election against the “wet” candidate Alfred Smith in 1928. Hoover is said to have owned an impressive wine collection prior to the passage of Prohibition and would occasionally partake in alcoholic beverages on foreign soil. Even so, public perception of Hoover placed him in the dry category and critiques of his stances and his (in)actions abound.

“Don’t Be a Dummy” depicts Hoover in a ludicrous manner. It places him as a schoolboy beside a chalkboard. The image also feminizes Hoover, perhaps calling into question his ability to lead, and certainly his power. The math problem on the chalkboard is a very simple one. Hoover stands by with a stubborn look on his face, as if he is unwilling to accept the solution to the math problem. The image proposes a solution to the national deficit in the form of a solution to a math problem. The analogy is simple, yet the president is reluctant to accept it. The math problem suggests that a tax on liquors would eliminate the national debt and then some. Indeed, it suggests that he tax on liquor alone would offset the national deficit. The elimination of funding for enforcement of the policy would only provide more of a boost to the nation’s economy in a very tough financial period.

Along with scapegoating, *Ballyhoo*’s other major rhetorical strategy with regard to Prohibition was the appeal to common sense. In the same image depicting Hoover as a
schoolboy, Ballyhoo implores Hoover, “Don’t be a Dummy!” In this case, the tagline combined with the text on the chalkboard painted a picture that illustrated how simple it would be to solve the problems surrounding Prohibition and the national deficit. It was offered as economic common sense that a tax on intoxicating liquors would bring in enormous amounts of revenue, potentially enough to eliminate the national deficit according to the image. Common sense appeals appeared frequently in Ballyhoo, a byproduct of and nod to its status as a humor magazine.

One image in Ballyhoo presented a particularly poignant argument offered to President Hoover as a means of action (Fig. 10).
At various points during the tenure of the 18th Amendment, calls were introduced to legalize the sale and consumption of beer and light wines as a way to assuage the public uproar over total prohibition of alcohol. Liquors would still be illegal, but the “less harmful” alcoholic beverages would be allowed. In the above image, the Capitol building is swarmed with flies, each representing a problem associated with Prohibition and its effects. Ballyhoo suggests that the
introduction of beer and light wines into the public would rid the Capitol, and therefore the nation, of problems like graft and crime related to Prohibition. Those groups in favor of modification of the Volstead Act introduced legislation to gradually reintroduce alcohol to the masses. Yet, Hoover opposed such a strategy, fearing that doing so before repeal of Prohibition would anger his supporters. The Modification League, a group dedicated to fighting the Volstead Act, presented a petition claiming that over eighty percent of those in Washington favored modification or repeal. Even still, Hoover vowed to veto any bill that passed allowing beer and/or light wines. Contrarily, after Hoover’s defeat in the 1932 presidential election, Franklin Roosevelt introduced this legislation very quickly, which eventually led to repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. As more and more citizens began to join the repeal bandwagon, critiques of Prohibition became more frequent and more direct. The political appeals in Ballyhoo are a testament to the kinds of critiques launched via popular cultural sources and provide a unique look into public perception of “the Noble Experiment.”

“Quick, Herbie!” takes the familiar form of an editorial cartoon, rife with visual symbolism and analogy. The capitol building represents American and its political structure. The flies are representative of individual problems associated with Prohibition. Flies are generally associated with attraction to filth and dirt. That they are swarming the Capitol is a not so subtle argument that Prohibition’s problems are swarming and becoming cumbersome. Graft, crime, and prohibition are named, but the thousands of nameless flies represent a multitude of additional problems. The caption, “Quick, Herbie!,” suggests the urgency of the situation. Action needs to be taken immediately if the nation is to avoid being overrun by the flies of corruption, graft, and crime. The proposed solution comes in the form of an insecticide to kill the flies, in this case light beers and wines, with which Hoover could eliminate the oncoming swarm. Just as
an insecticide would ward off swarms of flies, the introduction of light beers and wines would ward off the swarms of problems associated with Prohibition. Again, Hoover was depicted as stupid, or at least complacent when it came to the issue of Prohibition, another vilification attempt from *Ballyhoo*.

The “Quick, Herbie!” image is a perfect exemplar of the rhetorical appeal to common sense in *Ballyhoo*. In the style of a political cartoon, the image suggests that it would be so simple to eradicate some of the major problems facing the nation; Hoover simply needed to allow light beers and wines to be sold. This is not even a call for full repeal, but rather a compromise that would alleviate some of the tension surrounding the president and the government with regard to Prohibition. Despite Hoover’s gradual shift away from a prohibition stance, the public saw his stance as one of ambivalence and unwillingness to act. By suggesting that curing the problems associated with Prohibition was practically a common sense endeavor, *Ballyhoo* provided its readers with a shared common bond. Hoover took a stand that was too little, too late, and as a result, he was defeated in the next election. The appeal to political common sense is a strong rhetorical strategy as *Ballyhoo* employs it. The arguments provide clear, simple instructions that might be undertaken to provide relief to the economic situation, reduce crime and graft, and lift the spirits of the public.

*Ballyhoo* established a nostalgic rapport with its audience with the following image. Despite the magazine’s clear antipathy toward advertising, it lamented the absence of advertisements for alcohol in a thinly veiled disguise of a call to end Prohibition (Fig. 11).
Fig. 11: “In Memoriam.” *Ballyhoo*, January, 1932, 46.

*Ballyhoo* lamented the overstated and often false claims that many advertisers made during the 1930s. However, in the above image, the magazine memorialized the advertisements for
alcoholic beverages that were once common in popular culture. “In Memoriam” establishes a reverent relationship between the alcoholic drinks the public once enjoyed, and indeed, even reminisces on the advertising attached to it. It should be clear that Ballyhoo opposed Prohibition for many reasons, not the least of which was its ineffectiveness; however, it should also be noted that opposition to the policy was also selfish on some level. The magazine’s readership was presumably “wet,” and to appease its base audience Ballyhoo provided content commensurate with its readership’s political beliefs. Ballyhoo was marketed to a primarily working-class, male audience, and its content reflects the views of that audience. By reminding the readers of various real alcohol advertisements of old, Ballyhoo established rapport with the audience sympathetic to the cause for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.

Conclusion

Ballyhoo’s rhetorical framing of Prohibition demonstrated the deep cultural anxieties that the public felt over Prohibition. Certainly there were several camps and myriad positions on both the wet and dry side of the spectrum. Ballyhoo provides scholars with a look into the popular cultural reaction of the wets. Prohibition was viewed as an attack on personal liberties. Some viewed the policy as a radical fundamentalist attempt at controlling public behavior, as a social experiment. Critics also presented Prohibition as an economic detriment. Certainly many alcohol manufacturing businesses failed after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, and many never recovered after its repeal. During a time of extreme economic turmoil, the loss of income and tax revenue from alcohol-related businesses only worsened the state of things. And then there was the problem of enforcement, perhaps the most maligned issue related to Prohibition. The cost of enforcement was high, and the public saw very little result. Alcohol was still rampant, crime
increased, and corruption ensued as enforcement agencies struggled to deal with the various illegal bootlegging operations across the nation.

*Ballyhoo* placed all of these anxieties under scrutiny, but ultimately sided with the wets. By scapegoating the major players in the controversy, the magazine provided readers with someone to blame for the frustrations they felt. By appealing to common sense in various ways, *Ballyhoo* illustrated to its readers just how detrimental the policy had become, and how simple it would be to correct through repeal. This was a valuable critique because it demonstrated the critiques being made simultaneously with the political struggles of Prohibition and the leadup to its repeal.

*Ballyhoo*’s anti-Prohibition argument entered the conversation in the twilight of the policy’s existence. Granted, in the eleven years of Prohibition prior to the magazine’s conception, many of *Ballyhoo*’s critiques had been made in other venues. What *Ballyhoo* provided was a synthesis of myriad arguments permeating the public sphere in 1931-1932.

*Ballyhoo* was also notable in its form. As a humor magazine, *Ballyhoo* was afforded artistic license to argue public policy in a way that was both argumentative and entertaining to its audience. The critical edge advanced by *Ballyhoo*, combined with its visual nature, provided a critique unseen to the public in the early 1930s, save perhaps in scattered political cartoons. Thus, one of *Ballyhoo*’s greatest contributions is in its critical cataloguing of public sentiment in visual form. I do not mean to diminish the strength of the magazine’s critical edge, though.

Scapegoating and vilifying key figures has the potential to sway politics. As the tide turned toward repeal during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the upset public needed villains to blame for all of the problems caused by Prohibition. Using these strategies to create perspective by incongruity, *Ballyhoo* wagged its finger at Hoover, Volstead, police, and various others as a
way to demonstrate the wide range of ineptitude the nation had seemed to embrace. As Ballyhoo made clear, though, it was time to push back against those forces and to rectify the situation by repealing the Eighteenth Amendment.

Humor is a powerful critical tool. Given Ballyhoo’s sarcastic, humorous tone, perspective by incongruity seems a legitimate rhetorical strategy. By visually documenting the seemingly upside-down world, where police were controlled by criminals and political leaders ignored the public’s cries, Ballyhoo pointed out to its audience that change was necessary, but did so in an undemanding manner. That is, Ballyhoo did not provide its audience with a tangible call to action; rather, it implied that current inaction was insufficient, and it pointed the finger at those figures that maintained inaction. In this way, form was limiting for Ballyhoo. Ballyhoo also used humor to point out just how commonsensical repeal should be. Again, pointing out the economic, political, and social success that could be had with repeal, Ballyhoo argued the merits of shedding the policy. Ultimately, Ballyhoo offers us a repository of arguments critical toward Prohibition at a time when Prohibition is all but done for. Its uniqueness lies in its breadth of subject, its strategies of scapegoating and vilification, its calls for common sense, and its artistic form.
Notes

1 Daniel Okrent, Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition (New York: Scribner, 2010), 7.
3 Okrent, Last Call, 35.
5 Okrent, Last Call, 111.
6 Okrent, Last Call, 233-34.
21 “Women Urge,” 44.
26 Rachel Black, Alcohol in Popular Culture (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 93.
30 Ballyhoo, Editorial, 15.
Chapter Three: “Smile Away the Depression!”: Ballyhoo’s Visual Rhetoric of the Great Depression

Fig. 12. “The Key to Prosperity” Ballyhoo, September, 1932, back inside cover.

Ballyhoo’s treatment of the Great Depression was integrally linked with its sentiment toward Prohibition. Indeed, one of the major arguments that Ballyhoo advanced in favor of repeal was its potential impact on the economy. The above image is representative of that connection. In the form of a very simple jigsaw puzzle, a feature that became fairly common in the magazine, Ballyhoo presents a full beer mug as “The Key to Prosperity.” The puzzle hardly
needs putting together to figure out the resulting image, an argument that might be carried over to the Depression and Prohibition. According to *Ballyhoo*, the pieces are easily put together, and making beer and alcohol legal again would lead to prosperity. This sentiment was not unique to *Ballyhoo*, though. The New York State division of the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform publicly declared that “the amount of money spent for enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment has added greatly to the financial depression.”¹ Another group, the Crusaders of Chicago, estimated that since the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, there had been a “yearly average of $2,800,000,000 expense and wastage entailed.”² In concert with its campaign against Prohibition, *Ballyhoo* took issue with any and all policies detrimental to economic recovery.

The Great Depression was a time of economic, political, and social turmoil in the United States. Following the stock market crash of 1929, America entered a long period of stifling economic suffering, leading to widespread poverty, hunger, joblessness, and fear. After the relatively prosperous 1920s, the United States witnessed a reversal of fortunes that lasted for over a decade. In this chapter, I analyze *Ballyhoo*’s content related to the Great Depression in order to illustrate how the magazine’s perspective by incongruity worked. The magazine presented a consistent critique of Depression-era politics utilizing two particularly salient rhetorical strategies. First, *Ballyhoo* again used scapegoating techniques to vilify the wealthy and powerful, from verbally and pictorially blaming the president to ridiculing the upper class and its economic behaviors. *Ballyhoo* also presented a more direct and somber critique of the Depression by foregrounding the visual topoi of the Depression. Visual topoi are common images/topics that would have been easily recognizable within their historical context by *Ballyhoo*’s readers. Images of homelessness, hunger, and desperation call attention to the
severity of the Depression. The visual topoi of the breadline, the failing business, the “Forgotten Man,” and several others were by then common to *Ballyhoo’s* audience. *Ballyhoo* utilized these topoi to iterate the economic turmoil and its effects on the general public. Combined, these strategies painted a picture of the Depression that both recognized the depth and seriousness of the nation’s economic troubles and simultaneously pointed a finger at those figures and groups that seemed to be at fault for creating and maintaining those troubles.

To begin, I provide pertinent historical context through which *Ballyhoo’s* critiques of the Depression may be read. For this chapter, I focus attention beginning with the commonly accepted start of the Depression with the stock market crash of 1929 and proceed through 1932, as these were the years relevant to *Ballyhoo’s* treatment of the issue. Next, I analyze numerous example images from the magazine to demonstrate the salient rhetorical strategies of scapegoating and somber reminders so common in *Ballyhoo*. Finally, I reflect on the usefulness of these critiques and argue for the rhetorical value of *Ballyhoo’s* critiques of the Depression.

*The Depression*

The economic prosperity of the 1920s came to an abrupt conclusion in the fall of 1929. Industrial expansion receded and economic growth gained during the Twenties was quickly squandered following the market crash of 1929. As David M. Kennedy notes, “the ratcheting ticker machines in the autumn of 1929 did not only record avalanching stock prices…they came also to symbolize the end of an era.”3 Herbert Hoover was president of the United States when the market crashed. Hoover, a proponent of progressive politics, though with little government involvement, was a respected and dignified man in the eyes of America prior to the Depression. He was an advocate of public service and civic-mindedness. His reputation was solid and he was
considered a humanitarian. This rosy perception, of course, would change tremendously as the economic situation worsened.

Economist Harold Bierman provides a succinct summary of the immediate causes of the stock market crash: “In 1929 the majority of the press and the federal government agreed that the stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange…were too high…In October 1929, the investors acted on the belief that stocks were too high, and the market crashed.” The tipping point came on “Black Thursday,” October 24. A record number of shares were traded on that Thursday, causing panic on Wall Street and sending politicians into a state of emergency. Despite momentary respite on the following day, the market would take a drastic turn for the worse the following week, leading up to the infamous “Black Tuesday.” John Kenneth Galbraith asserts that Tuesday, October 29th, 1929 “was the most devastating day in the history of the New York stock market, and it may have been the most devastating day in the history of markets.” Black Thursday and the days leading up to Black Tuesday consisted of immense amounts of trading, and Black Tuesday was no different. However, the volume of shares sold off on Black Tuesday outpaced the previous days and signaled the overall crash of the market. Kennedy sums up the immediate aftereffects of Black Tuesday: “If Thursday was black, what could be said of the following Tuesday, October 29, when 16,410,000 shares were bought and sold—a record that stood for thirty-nine years? ‘Black Tuesday’ pulled down a cloak of gloom over Wall Street. Traders abandoned all hope that the frightful shake-out could somehow be averted. For two more ghastly weeks stock prices continued to plummet freely down the same celestial void through which they had recently and so wonderfully ascended.” Kennedy goes on to argue that the crash was neither the sole, nor even an empirically feasible reason for the devastating effects on individual citizens and families during the Depression, for the vast majority of citizens owned no
stock. However, it was a catalyst for the extended Depression. Rhetorician Davis Houck also shares this sentiment, arguing that Hoover’s rhetorical plan of “economic confidence” was a clear success in the short run, but ultimately failed to quell the depth of the depression.\textsuperscript{7} Even so, the Great Depression is forever linked with Hoover’s presidency, and Hoover’s legacy is forever entwined with the nation’s worst economic crisis. Houck argues that “one of the many ironies of the Hoover presidency is that Franklin Roosevelt is the one remembered for his aphoristic attack upon fear…Hoover had been saying as much for the better part of four years. Such a belief undergirded his unceasing commitment to a belief that the Great Depression was just that—a mental condition in which pessimism had gained the upper hand.”\textsuperscript{8}

In the early onset of the Depression, Hoover reacted with confidence and resolve, mostly looking overseas for a scapegoat. Hoover famously said in 1930 that “the major forces of the Depression now lie outside the United States.”\textsuperscript{9} Rather than continuing with his original fervor in attacking the economic crisis, he reverted to a more conservative, self-protective strategy. This strategy obviously drew criticism from the American public, as the perception was that Hoover was acting cautiously or not at all. In an unsuccessful attempt to raise revenue and protect American jobs, and especially agricultural jobs, Hoover signed into law the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act in 1930. The bill raised tariffs on more than 20,000 goods produced in the United States. However, the effects of the tariff were not as the Republicans had predicted. Indeed, some economists of the era argued that this law was to blame for deepening the Depression beyond repair. Hoover was not convinced that this measure should be undertaken, but eventually caved under pressure from his party. Economics scholar Douglas Irwin notes that Hoover was bombarded with “requests to veto the bill as farmers objected, newspaper editorialists moaned, foreign governments protested, and 1,028 economists signed a petition urging the president not
to sign the legislation.”

Other nations responded in kind, raising tariffs and ultimately nullifying the effects of the act. The failure of this act served as a turning point in popular opinion for Herbert Hoover. Even those who praised his economic vision a year earlier began to turn against him. Negative public opinion of President Hoover increased dramatically and it showed in a variety of ways—from political polls to humor magazines such as *Ballyhoo*. From the very outset in 1931, *Ballyhoo* depicted Hoover as a villain and a stubborn politician unwilling to do what it took to dig the nation out of the Depression.


11
The above political cartoon illustrates the perception that Hoover played a passive role in stopping the Depression. He struggles to quiet the voices crying about business depression, drought damage in the Dust Bowl, and the Smoot-Hawley tariff that turned out to be an overall failure. Meanwhile, the Democrats march outside touting these faults as evidence for necessary change in political leadership. The perception that Hoover was a passive politician ran rampant during the Depression, especially as the tangible effects of the Depression rose in severity and duration.

One of the biggest issues facing citizens during the Depression was the towering unemployment rate. By January of 1931, Hoover’s Emergency Committee for Unemployment relief reported that the number of unemployed in the United States soared above five million.\textsuperscript{12} Kennedy argues that “no issue plagued Hoover more painfully, or caused him more political and personal hurt, than the plight of the unemployed. By early 1932 well over ten million persons were out of work, nearly 20 percent of the labor force. In big cities like Chicago and Detroit which were home to hard-hit capital goods industries like steelmaking and automobile manufacturing, the unemployment rate approached 50 percent.”\textsuperscript{13} These extraordinary rates of unemployment were beyond what the apparatus in place to protect against such matters could handle. The amount of unemployment, combined with its long duration, stretched the available relief to its limits, and left many families destitute. The familiar images of long bread lines and groups of men seeking employment relief provide a visual marker of the effects of unemployment during the Depression.

Federal unemployment relief got its beginnings during the Depression. Jeff Singleton notes that “from 1930 to the end of 1935 general relief administered by local public and private agencies was the primary source of aid to the unemployed.”\textsuperscript{14} Private organizations, businesses,
churches, and charity groups served a vital role in providing relief to unemployed families during the Depression. Singleton argues that the early thirties would come to be vitally important toward creating the welfare system currently in place in the United States. With the introduction of the Social Security Act, a new era of social policy was enabled. Many objected to unemployment relief, mainly conservatives, as it was seen as a sign of moral bankruptcy. However, unemployment relief was vitally important to staving off hunger and death for a large number of families during the Depression. David E. Kyvig asserts that “Those who lost their jobs often lost their homes as well when they could not afford to pay the mortgage or rent. Some built makeshift shacks on vacant land. As whole communities of cardboard, scrap lumber, and tarpaper shacks arose, they came to be called Hoovervilles, a sneering reference to the president who had predicted growing prosperity.” Hoover’s namesake became a popular way to describe the terrible economic state during the Depression. Hoovervilles began to spring up all over the nation as the economic situation worsened. Some, rather than constructing makeshift housing, became itinerants, searching for work wherever they could find it. The number of migrant workers increased significantly and the plight of the workers became a major political issue during the Depression.

The loss of jobs and homes was not the only issue leading to a destitute population. The economic impact of the stock market crash had a particularly devastating impact on the farmers of America. Saddled with an abundance of crop yield that was not worth much at all due to the surplus, farmers struggled to stay afloat at the outset of the Depression. However, an even more devastating problem surfaced as the 1930s progressed. A long period of drought across the Great Plains, combined with unstable planting practices and economic instability, led to what would become known as the Dust Bowl. To stave off increasing debt, farmers continued to produce
more and more wheat without performing necessary crop rotations. Years of growing wheat without alternating crops to replenish nutrients in the soil led to acres and acres of unusable farmland. Dust storms devastated farms, burying homes and farm equipment and preventing crops from being grown. Millions of farmers and families suffered at the hands of the Dust Bowl. The plight of the Dust Bowl is forever immortalized in the photography of Dorothea Lange and the many other photographers commissioned to document the Depression and its effects on the citizenry.

1932 was by far the worst year of the Depression to that point. The U.S. Gross National Product fell a record 13.4 percent in 1932. Unemployment also soared to nearly 24 percent. Also in 1931, the Bank of the United States in New York went under, marking the largest single bank failure in American history. Indeed, banks were failing all over the nation as the Depression deepened. In February of 1932, the New York Times reported that “800,000 persons [were] unemployed in New York City” alone. The article also noted that “the unemployment situation and the depression are likely to affect adversely the Republican party and its nominees in the forthcoming campaign.” Public awareness of the Depression and its effects certainly contributed to 1932 election cycle. Of course, unemployment had other detrimental effects as well. Naturally, services would suffer if unemployment rose, leading to further unemployment. One such example was in public transit. New York noted “a marked decline in subway and elevated traffic in New York City, attributed mainly to unemployment.” Thus, the cycle of the Depression continually established itself in repeat.

Even aside from GNP and unemployment, contributing factors to the Depression were multifold. In 1924, a bill was passed in Congress to provide “bonus” funds to veterans of World War I for their military service. In January of 1931, Texas congressman Wright Patman
introduced legislation for immediate dispersal of these bonus funds. President Hoover was reluctant to release these funds, however, as the resulting payment would land a nearly four billion dollar hit to the Treasury. Patman’s attempt to have the bonuses converted to cash was met with much opposition. Even the American Legion, a natural ally, would not agree, noting that “the Legion should not initiate or sponsor any legislation for cash payment of compensation certificates.”

Patman’s struggle for compensation of veterans would begin a movement that would result in scores of veterans marching on Washington in June of 1932, the “Bonus Army.”

In May of 1932, a small group of veterans from Portland, Oregon began a march to Washington, D.C. in order to demand the promised bonuses. By June, between 15,000 and 25,000 World War I veterans had made their way to the capital as the “Bonus Army.” They set up encampments near the White House and the Capitol. Congressman Patman’s bill passed in the House of Representatives, but was defeated heavily in the Senate, denying the veterans of the bonuses. Many of the veterans stood their ground in Washington, but eventually Hoover arranged for the encampments to be broken, and on July 28, two veterans were killed when Hoover ordered federal troops to disperse the veterans.

With the Depression worsening, and seemingly no relief coming from Washington, families in need were increasingly going hungry. “Hunger Marches” began springing up all over the nation, and in some case, “Hunger Riots.” These marches were met with opposition from officials in many cities. For instance, in Indiana, the marchers were met by police with tear gas bombs. Another attempt at marching on the Capitol in Washington also came up empty: “The ‘national hunger marchers,’ who for a week past have been threatening a White House demonstration against the unemployment relief policies of the Hoover Administration, came to grief this afternoon when they marched up Pennsylvania Avenue with the intention of bringing
their complaints to the President. All that happened was a quick intervention by the police and the arrest of all the marchers, fourteen in number, one of them a woman.”21 Hunger marches began organizing strategically, as well, as Hoover was visiting cities across the nation. Across the nation, frustrated and destitute unemployed workers sought out food by any means necessary. Some of the marches even turned violent. One particular strike at a Dearborn, Michigan Ford plant ended with five protesters dead and several others wounded in March of 1932: “The Ford Hunger March was organized to press 11 demands, including jobs for the jobless; the seven-hour day; the end of speed-up; no racial discrimination; abolition of the Ford Service Department; and winter relief.”22 The marchers were met by police with tear gas and guns. Obviously, the marches did not sit well with the authorities, as the aforementioned examples demonstrate. Yet the marchers and rioters did call attention to the issue of hunger, prompting lawmakers to draft legislation to provide relief. Dr. John Dewey urged in a letter to President Hoover “to call a special session of Congress to provide a ‘hunger loan’ of at least $3,000,000,000.”23 While this never came to fruition, the public sentiment clearly echoed Dewey’s charge.

Hoover was the primary recipient of blame for the widespread joblessness and hunger. David Kennedy notes that “cartoonists now routinely caricatured him as a dour, heartless skinflint whose rigid adherence to obsolete doctrines caused men and women to go jobless and hungry.”24 Hoover’s public image suffered more and more as the Depression went on. He was seen as a politician that would not give in to common sense despite overwhelming evidence. This was reflected in popular culture in the form of political cartoons, and definitely so in magazines such as Ballyhoo. Of course, Hoover lost the presidency in a landslide to Franklin Roosevelt in the 1932 election.
Ballyhoo’s treatment of the Depression was centered on highlighting the depth of the Depression and foregrounding the ineptitude and inaction of the “haves” who possessed the means to provide relief. In arguing about the Depression, Ballyhoo was much more interested in illustrating the real-world effects of economic devastation. Not only that, but it also provided its readership with figures on which they could place blame.

As a humor magazine, Ballyhoo continually adhered to its genre. Yet, simultaneously it broke its generic boundaries. There was a give and take in the magazine that seems important to note. On one page, there could be a cartoon of a herd of elephants chasing after an explorer; on the following page, there could be an indictment of Herbert Hoover’s political inaction. Thus, the interspersed content provided a unique mixture of humor and critique. This variety worked in the magazine’s favor, as the political critiques did not fall victim to heavy-handedness, but rather functioned as an important counterpart to the lighthearted nature of many of its comedic features. Indeed, Ballyhoo’s critiques still stand out, and with good reason.
To begin, let us return to a familiar image from the preceding chapter (Fig. 14). The “HOOVER Cleaner” image is an exemplars of Ballyhoo’s rhetorical scapegoating endeavors. Herbert Hoover is cast as a dastardly villain in this image. He stands atop the outline of the United States, towering above the unsuspecting citizens of America. With a determined and sinister look on his face, Hoover leans forward, actively pursuing his victims. With a vacuum cleaner marked as “taxes,” the president quite literally sucks the money out of the pockets of the citizens below. The citizens produce a number of reactions. The man closest to Hoover flees in fear of the fate...
the tax vacuum brings. In the middle of the frame, citizens display anger and resentment toward this theft of money. In the foreground, citizens appear shocked and upset as their pockets and purses have been sucked dry.

This image takes the form of an advertisement parody. The coincidence of the president having the same name as a prominent vacuum cleaner company provides this template with rhetorical significance, as it associates the name brand, the president, and the depiction below as one cohesive idea. By using the advertising parody as the structuring form of the argument, Ballyhoo was able to create a humorous and critical argument against Hoover’s taxes in a form that was familiar to its readership. President Hoover and the vacuum are one. Couching Hoover’s words within the advertising copy, the argument vilifies the president—“It bleats, ‘Prosperity is just around the corner’...as it sweeps...as it cleans ON A CUSHION OF HOT AIR.” The notion that prosperity was imminent, a common and oft-repeated sentiment of Hoover and his administration, seems completely contrary to the scene depicted below the copy. Indeed, how can one prosper when one is broke? Ballyhoo argued that Hoover’s optimistic proclamations are nothing more than “hot air” that has very little credence with the population.

The text box on the left edge of the image suggests that Hoover’s targets are misplaced and misguided. It notes that Hoover repeatedly brings out the vacuum—quarterly on the 15th of the month—to bleed the citizens dry. This is perhaps a reference to the Revenue Act of 1932, which increased income taxes across the board based on level of income. While the largest tax increase was imposed on the wealthiest citizens, all workers were affected by the tax increases. Of particular note, as mentioned in the Prohibition chapter, is the notion that this policy will not affect the bootleggers involved in the illegal trade of alcohol. Hoover was portrayed as being more sympathetic to the bootleggers and criminals than he is with the working citizens of the
United States. Hoover was symbolically sacrificed as a scapegoat who was in cahoots with an undesirable portion of the population—the bootleggers. Hoover’s unwillingness to take action against bootleggers and his inaction toward quelling the increasing animosity over repealing Prohibition placed him in a villainous position. He cared less about the well-being of the population than he did about the criminal class. Hoover continued to contribute to the Great Depression by misplacing his priorities and taking money away from citizens rather than solving the real problems at hand. While *Ballyhoo* continued to employ scapegoating in its evaluation of the Great Depression, it is a slightly different form of scapegoating than was used with Prohibition. Though critical, *Ballyhoo*’s scapegoating of Prohibition and its advocates was less harsh in tone than its treatment of the Depression. Whereas the police and politicians ignoring public outcry over Prohibition were seen as ignorant and hapless, the scapegoats of the Depression are more sinister, unfeeling, and calculating. This sentiment is reflected in another image from the preceding chapter.

In Fig. 15, Hoover is cast as a stubborn schoolboy who refuses to acknowledge the economic detriment that Prohibition is causing. The national deficit was extraordinarily high, a major contributor to the Great Depression. Hoover again was cast as a scapegoat, but one who could easily reverse the trend toward depression by taking swift action against Prohibition. These two images portray President Hoover as a staunch opponent to the American public, a callous politician oblivious to the common people’s struggle. In both cases Hoover is depicted with a scowl on his face, and the circumstances of each image illustrate direct opposition to public concerns. This is noteworthy, as it positions Hoover as an enemy of the people. Rhetorically vilifying the president serves two functions. First, it positions the president as separate from the public. For a public that is suffering real-world, day to day hardships, Hoover’s reluctance to act,
despite his privilege, speaks volumes. Second, Hoover was characterized as a detriment due to his inactivity. His lack of movement on public policy, despite the growing sentiments of the public, actively contributed to deepening the economic depression. As the image illustrates, the answer to the Depression was as simple as solving a grade school math problem. Yet, Hoover looks on scornfully, ignorant of the truth. As *Ballyhoo* continued to vilify and scapegoat Hoover, Hoover became ever more synonymous with the Depression.
Fig. 15: “Don’t Be A Dummy!” *Ballyhoo*, March, 1932, 16-17.
Kenneth Burke asserts that “the scapegoat represents the principle of division in that its persecutors would alienate from themselves to it their own uncleanlinesses. For one must remember that a scapegoat cannot be ‘curative’ except insofar as it represents the iniquities of those who would be cured by attacking it.” In Burke’s illustrative example, he describes the logic that followers of Hitler utilized to justify widespread anti-Semitism. Transference of unfavorable characteristics of oneself to a sacrificial scapegoat serves to mark a clear division between different groups. With Ballyhoo, the scapegoats shoulder the weaknesses and desperation of the citizenry, as they are the most visible and likely targets of ridicule. The separation between the wealthy and destitute, the powerful and powerless, and the deceitful and honest provides justification for scapegoating.

In its treatment of the Great Depression, Ballyhoo not only vilified and scapegoated famous politicians, but also groups of people deemed responsible for exacerbating the Depression. One group that was continually placed in a position of ridicule was the wealthy. Marked with identifiers of wealth and prosperity such as tuxedos, top hats, money and automobiles, the wealthy during the Depression were subject to scapegoating as they represented an antithesis to the economic struggles of the majority of citizens during the period. Many of the images depicting the wealthy in Ballyhoo portrayed them as snobby and oblivious to the very real economic devastation that surrounded them. Again, the form of scapegoating differs from that of the Prohibition scapegoats. The “haves” during the Depression were portrayed as just as ignorant and unsympathetic as the politicians. This provides a stark contrast between the general public suffering from the effects of the Depression and the wealthy who are weathering the economic storm without much trouble.
Fig. 16 illustrates the division illuminated by scapegoating the “haves.” The wealthy man, marked with a top hat, tuxedo with coattails, and smoking a cigar literally sits on the shoulders of a working class man, his chauffeur. The chauffeur, donning his work uniform, has replaced the wealthy man’s automobile. The joke is that the wealthy man is making sacrifices by getting rid of his car, but not increasing unemployment by keeping his chauffeur. However, the image demonstrates the perceived disconnected logic possessed by the wealthy during the Depression in the eyes of the working class. These images of the wealthy produce perspective by incongruity. As might be obvious, a chauffeur would never “be” the vehicle, but rather drive it. The wealthy man continues to enjoy his cigar with a smug look on his face as the chauffeur sweats and toils to carry his employer to his destination. The subjugation of the working class by
the wealthy was a common theme of critique in *Ballyhoo*. The wealthy and business owners took advantage of the less economically blessed citizens to profit from their fears. Burke argues that “the scapegoat is a concentration of power” which can be imbued with good or evil.26 *Ballyhoo* concentrated power on the wealthy as a means to critique the immense disparity between the economic classes during the Depression. The wealthy were ridiculed, depicted as no longer having the many luxuries that they once had; yet at the same time they were still leaps and bounds better off than the majority of the population. Posing the wealthy as a target allowed viewers to commiserate and share a common foe during hard times. Not only that, it vilified the wealthy as a hindrance to recovery.

Another telling illustration of the division produced by scapegoating the wealthy is displayed in figure 17. Again, the incongruity is clear. Two wealthy businessmen, again symbolically marked with tuxedos and top hats, are depicted on a street corner, presumably in New York City, riding on rollerskates. The caption reads, “I see stocks hit a new low today.” Neither of the two gentlemen shows any signs of despondence or concern. To the contrary, they seem unconcerned with the matter. This image might be read one of two ways. Like the previous image with the chauffeur, one might infer that the men have economized by using roller skates to travel rather than using an automobile. Another way to read this image is to see the scene as one of outright mockery of the Depression. Two wealthy men are roller skating leisurely as the stock market continues to fail during catastrophic economic times. In either case, the wealthy were depicted as out of touch with the economic situation, because they were not significantly affected by the Depression. Certainly they were not affected to the extent that the middle class and lower class were affected.
Ballyhoo’s scapegoating of the wealthiest class served a dual function. First, it served to separate the economic classes. The wealthy could not relate to the problems of the working class and were out of touch with reality. Second, it showed that the wealthy were not very concerned with the repercussions of the Depression. If we take the second reading of the roller skating image to be true, leisure came first in the eyes of the wealthy, leaving the majority of the population to deal with economic turmoil alone. This notion had real-world economic implications, as the wealthy business owners and investors embodied a primary role in economic recovery.

Fig. 17: “I see stocks hit a new low today.” Ballyhoo, December, 1931, 22.
Ballyhoo depicted the rich as out of touch and unconcerned with the economic turmoil faced by the vast majority of Americans during the Depression.

The wealthy were scapegoated as enemies in Ballyhoo. They were depicted as out of touch and at fault for many of the problems associated with economic failure. Herbert Hoover was also scapegoated for not providing enough assistance and for accomplishing too little with regard to economic recovery. Part of this lack of action came from his opposition toward repeal of Prohibition, but his tax policies and lack of economic stimulation also contributed greatly. Hoover and the upper class were representative scapegoats for the entire Depression.

Visual Topoi and Realist Critique

While scapegoating was an often used and successful form of critique of Depression era social and political mores in Ballyhoo, it was not the sole form of critique. Another major theme of critique concerns the real world effects of economic desperation. Depictions of homelessness, failing business, the population’s fear, and the like littered Ballyhoo throughout its run. Ballyhoo capitalized on many of the visual topoi of the Depression in employing this line of argument. The arguments resulting from these depictions provide a more somber tone and demonstrate the very real effects of the Great Depression.

One feature within Ballyhoo that demonstrated the somber tone well is a section sarcastically titled “Happy Thoughts.” The section provided short quotations from well-known figures that seem to be out of line with reality. For instance, the first happy thought comes from Arthur Brisbane, a famous newspaper editor of the era. “We still have everything we had in 1929.”27 This statement obviously does little to quell the anxiety over the devastating economic conditions still present in 1932. Clearly, a prospering nation would look toward a future with
much more than had been present three years prior. Another happy thought comes from Roger Babson, an entrepreneur and business theorist: “If statistics tell anything, they show that business has turned the corner.” While obviously major figures wanted to display an air of optimism about the economic crisis, *Ballyhoo* argued that these attempts were unfounded or at the very least insincere. Perhaps the most heinous of the happy thoughts comes from Henry Ford: “The depression is a wholesome thing in general.” To call the Depression wholesome was to alienate an entire population. It marked a clear division between the wealthy and the overwhelming majority of those suffering the throes of the Depression. Finally, and perhaps most telling of *Ballyhoo*’s stance on the Depression is a quote from W.S. Gifford, Chairman of Unemployed Relief: “I find it pleasant to be hopeful.” The seemingly out of touch sentiments of these upper echelon figures situated *Ballyhoo*’s critique in a somber and subdued tone. These “Happy Thoughts” are a great example of perspective by incongruity. The tone of the quotations is optimistic and positive. However, the reality of the economic situation suggests that each of the quotations is insincere, and perhaps disrespectful. Put plainly, these were not happy thoughts at all; they were depressing. Whereas with Prohibition *Ballyhoo* took a very clear stance against the policy and alienated particular figures as scapegoats, with regard to the Depression the critique was broader and less focused. While the wealthy were posited as scapegoats, *Ballyhoo* recognized the complexity of issues that led to and maintained the Depression.
Fig. 18: “Smilette” *Ballyhoo*, November, 1931, 6.
In the same vein as the “Happy Thoughts” feature, *Ballyhoo* put a humorous spin on the sentiment of optimism. Fig.18 takes on the popular form of a print advertisement, yet with an obvious ulterior motive. The device advertised appears to be a sort of rubber band that is inserted into both corners of the mouth, while the cord wraps around the back of the head. The device forces the user to smile as it forces the mouth open. The copy in the advertisement suggests that we “Smile away the Depression” by wearing this contraption. This image is a reaction to many of the statements that politicians were making during the time about the potential for economic recovery (such as the “Happy Thoughts” mentioned earlier). Frederick Lewis Alan, editor of *Harper’s Magazine*, echoed the sentiment of frustration with Hoover’s optimism arguing that Hoover “refused to recognize that the causes of the depression were organic and deep rooted, and, under the illusion that everything would be all right if they kept repeating that sentiment long enough.”

The advertising parody was a common rhetorical form in *Ballyhoo*, and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

When arguing via realist images, *Ballyhoo* utilized a sort of meta-perspective by incongruity. Realism and incongruity tend to fight one another, but the way that realist critiques fit within *Ballyhoo*’s larger agenda presents an incongruous portrait. *Ballyhoo*’s modus operandi was to present humorous, critical images, often in illustrated forms, as a means of identifying with its audience on the important issues of the early 1930s. Yet, inclusion of realist imagery and drawings doesn’t seem to fit. This is where the incongruity appears. That is, printing realist images and critiques was not meant as a joke; rather, it foregrounded the severity of the Depression through strategic irony that contrasted vividly with other content. The incongruity was not so much in the content of the images, but of the content of the whole magazine.
Topoi: “The Forgotten Man,” Breadlines, and Homelessness

Ballyhoo offered several visual topoi as a means of arguing the severity of the Depression. One of the most common topoi was that of the “Forgotten Man.” Images included under this distinction include the homeless, jobless, hungry—those at the very bottom of the barrel, those most in need of relief.

Fig. 19: “Success.” Ballyhoo, March, 1932, 24-25.

Fig. 19 is illustrative of the narrative of real-world effects that Ballyhoo constructed about the Depression. Lining the sidewalk of what appears to be a representation of Central Park in
New York City are scores of downtrodden men on benches, forgotten men. Some of the men are reading newspapers, presumably browsing the classified ads for job opportunities. Each face has a look of concern, fear, or disdain. Perhaps some of these men are now homeless; they are presumably all jobless. In the center of the frame is a police officer carrying a wreath that has just been taken down that reads “Success” across its sash. The irony of a success wreath marching through the sea of unemployed citizens presents a strong visual incongruity. Even the police officer appears to appreciate this irony, as his face displays a look of concern as well. The buildings in the background of the image also display markers of success in the form of advertisements for retail products, including what seems to be a version of a Coca-Cola advertisement. Thus, success literally lords over these downtrodden men while it walks right in front of their faces simultaneously. *Ballyhoo*’s critique of advertising and consumer culture will be examined in the following chapter, but it is worth noting here that the advertising industry was one of, if not the primary target of *Ballyhoo*’s ire. It was no mistake that the giant advertisements appeared to tower over the unemployed in the park. The success of the advertising industry was a point of contention that coincided with the Depression. Depictions of the “forgotten man” were powerful because they were so common in the era. The average working class citizen in New York City in 1932 would no doubt be able to sympathize with this image, as it was likely a scene witnessed daily on the street. To include this topos in *Ballyhoo* was natural.
Another image, Fig. 20, represents this strategy of ironic juxtaposition very clearly.

Fig. 20: “100% American,” *Ballyhoo*, May, 1932, 41.

Contrary to most of the critical images *Ballyhoo* published, “100% American” features an actual photograph, still illustrating the “forgotten man” topos. The visual topos of the breadline was another common trope in *Ballyhoo*. In the photo, we see a seemingly never ending line of people waiting to receive food from a relief truck. The sheer number of people pictured in the photo is astounding, as the line reaches beyond the frame into perpetuity. The most striking feature of the image, however, is the skyline. As with the “Success” image in Central Park, the skyline in the background of this image features a number of successful brand names and advertisements. Signs touting clothing, coffee, candy, and other wares tower above the poor
waiting populace. The bright lights and neon signs of the brand name products stand in glaring contrast to the despondent, dark line of welfare recipients waiting below. The image marks a clear separation between the success of big business and the failure of working class citizens. The caption, “100% American,” provides additional sting to the already critical photograph. The caption suggests that the American way of doing things is to place advertising and big money business before the welfare of its citizens. While thousands wait in line for food handouts, the big corporations still run their neon lights and conduct business as usual. The idea that this is representative of “American” values goes against the prevailing notion of America as a prosperous and democratic nation.

Fig. 21 depicts another tangible effect of the depression—homelessness. The image depicts a public park that is now home to many homeless. The benches and grassy areas are now beds for the homeless. These effects are attributed to the president, as the title of the parody is “Hotel Hoover: American Plan.” This is another example of Ballyhoo’s penchant for appropriating advertising tropes for critical motives. This strategy was employed perhaps most clearly in the following image, a parody of a print advertisement.
The “Hotel Hoover” is a representation of a Hooverville, a makeshift living space for the extremely poor or homeless during the Depression. The American Plan is a take on the form of hospitality that includes meals with the price. However, the use of the term in this case simply referred to Hoover’s (non)plan which led to widespread economic devastation. Hoover as a scapegoat, coupled with the literal picturing of the effects of the Depression, combine to form a strong claim about the ineffectiveness of America’s recovery from the Great Depression. Tying
Hoover to the Depression took many different forms. David Kennedy states that “Tarpaper-and-cardboard hobo shantytowns became ‘Hoovervilles.’ Pulled-out empty trouser pockets were ‘Hoover flags.’...A joke circulated that when the president asked for a nickel to make a telephone call to a friend, an aide flipped him a dime and said, ‘Here, call them both.’” The “Hoover Hotel” is not far from this line of ridicule. Thus, the scope of Hoover’s scapegoating was far and wide. His ineptitude was the basis of many of the visual topoi of the Depression.

Failed Businesses

The failing or failed business is a frequent topos in Ballyhoo. Many images in the magazine, due in large part to the magazine’s aversion to advertising, focused on advertising-related business and the downfall of retail businesses. A popular theme within Ballyhoo’s treatment of failing business was the going out of business sale image (Fig. 22).

Fig. 22: “Four Absolutely Final Sales,” Ballyhoo, July, 1932, 26.
As the Depression deepened, businesses failed to make ends meet and many went bankrupt. *Ballyhoo* presents an interesting take on this phenomenon. While demonstrating that the Depression was causing many business owners to close their doors, *Ballyhoo* simultaneously critiqued those business owners for attempting to dupe the public. In the above image, the store owners contemplate having four clearance sales rather than the standard two. The argument *Ballyhoo* makes is that businesses will do anything they can to lure business their way, even if those means are deceptive. Perhaps this is an inherent argument that business owners are partly to blame for the Depression due to their attitude toward customers and misguided business practices. After all, the business owners show the markers of wealth (business suits, snooty grins, etc.).

Fig. 23: “I was never so busy in my life!” *Ballyhoo*, September, 1932, 36.
Fig. 23 is another example of Ballyhoo’s sentiment toward business practices during the Depression. The sign maker claims not to feel the effects of the Depression as he is busy creating going out of business signs for failing businesses. The closing of business is a key topos in Ballyhoo’s repertoire. Yet, in an attempt at irony, Ballyhoo poses one particular business that is still booming, that of the sign maker. The depth and magnitude of the Depression was such that it infiltrated all classes to some extent. Ballyhoo’s strategic irony and parody served to document and challenge the status quo.

Conclusion

The struggles that the everyday citizen faced during the Great Depression cannot be overstated. The extent to which the American population felt the throes of unemployment, hunger, and constant fear varied, but each citizen faced the Depression in some form or fashion. Ballyhoo treated the Depression as it treated most political affairs, with a combination of finger pointing, poking fun, and questioning leadership. The magazine’s critical edge provided readers with a series of arguments which ultimately combine to critique the political and economic elite for their actions both before and during the Depression.

Much like its treatment of Prohibition, Ballyhoo used the rhetorical strategy of scapegoating in order to put a face on the problem. In the case of the Depression, there were two faces—the wealthy and Herbert Hoover. The wealthy were continually depicted as out of touch with reality, or at least out of touch with the majority of the population. Tuxedos and top hats represented the antithesis to the rags and tatters that many poorer families were forced to live with during the Depression. Because greed and poor economic decisions were viewed as the
primary catalysts for the market crash and ultimately the Depression, it is no surprise that Ballyhoo places the blame on the wealthy. The vast majority of American citizens were not involved with the stock market at all, and this fact was not lost on the population. Questions about how the stock market crash could contribute to and cause such an immensely powerful Depression abounded. Thus, pitting the wealthy against the working class seems a logical strategy if Ballyhoo wishes to point the finger at a particular group. This strategy worked in part because of the stark difference in income between the wealthy and the working class. Again, while the wealthy invested in the stock market, citizens bought groceries and struggled to pay mortgages. Poking fun at the wealthy provided readers with one possible scapegoat at which they could direct their anger. The juxtaposition of cartoons depicting the ridiculous behaviors of the rich with the somber images of men in unending bread lines created a rhetorical divide between the classes. This divide was clear cut in the magazine, and there was a clear bias in favor of the working class.

The scapegoating of Herbert Hoover was a continuation of a long tradition of presidential mockery. Presidents have always been the target of political cartoons and other forms of parody. Of course, not every instance of political cartoon represents scapegoating, but in many cases the strategy is used to call attention to problems associated with the president. This was the case with the images of Herbert Hoover in Ballyhoo. In the context of the Great Depression, images that mocked Hoover became markers of public opinion toward the president and his policies during the Depression. For Kenneth Burke, scapegoating represented a process of a catharsis of sorts. When one scapegoats an individual or group, it synthesizes the sins and transgressions of a larger population or problem and associates this mass with an individual. In the case of Ballyhoo, scapegoating happened both visually and verbally. Visually, Hoover was depicted as a tyrant, a
stubborn, feminized schoolboy, and a villain. His facial expressions, clothing, and demeanor suggest a negative perception of the president. *Ballyhoo* complemented its visual critique with copy that contributed to the overall argument made against the president and his policies. It did so with a humorous tinge due to the nature of the magazine. The president was, of course, an easy target because of his national prominence and political power. However, it seems Hoover was also a victim of bad timing, as his reputation was fairly solid prior to the onset of the Depression. Thus, Hoover was scapegoated not so much for his beliefs or partisanship, but rather for his attitude during the first years of the Depression. He was criticized both for his unhelpful policies, like the Smoot-Hawley tariff, as well as his perceived inaction. As the Depression roared on with no foreseeable end, people began to criticize Hoover for not acting strongly enough to stave off the Depression. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Ballyhoo* made numerous arguments and pleaded for Hoover to repeal Prohibition as a way of boosting the economy; however, Hoover’s inaction on Prohibition became a major point of contention. The strategy of scapegoating was a cathartic attempt to place blame elsewhere, allowing readers to feel less responsible for and perhaps escape from the realities of the Depression.

Apart from placing blame on the elite, *Ballyhoo* also argued that government involvement in stemming the Depression was lacking through depiction of the harsh realities of the Depression. This was an interesting strategy given that the majority of material in the magazine was devoted to punchline driven humor and parodic juxtaposition. In its treatment of the Great Depression, *Ballyhoo*’s second approach was more direct and mirrored reality. The images of men standing in breadlines, lining the benches of public parks, searching for employment, and appearing in general downtrodden comprised this second rhetorical strategy. The variety of forms is also notable with regard to this strategy. On one hand we have drawings
of men sleeping on park benches, such as in the “Hotel Hoover” image. On the other hand we have actual photographs of men waiting in charity breadlines, as with the “100% American” image. The use of multiple rhetorical forms suggests a strong commitment to making this kind of critique. Using the photographs and more realistic images provides viewers with a more serious image of the real effects of the Great Depression. The somber acknowledgment of the Depression’s effects is better illustrated through more realist imagery. Despite this strategy, these images’ inclusion in Ballyhoo placed them firmly in a framework of humor. Thus, perhaps one drawback to the inclusion of these images amid the multitude of cartoons and illustrations is that readers might see them simply as another joke as opposed to a more critical message about the severity of the economic situation.

Overall, the critiques of Depression era politics provide a compelling argument against those presumed in power. However, the visual representations of the Depression are only partial. For instance, we never see instances of poor rural citizens in the Ballyhoo images. Due to the nature of the magazine, and its primarily urban audience, we are left with an incomplete picture of the Depression’s widespread devastation. This is not to fault the magazine, as it certainly had an audience to cater to, but rather to point out one limitation that the critique might have had. Looking back from a twenty first century perspective, one notices the omission of such content. Again, Ballyhoo represents one faction of the rhetoric of 1930s America. Other visions are portrayed through landscape photography, film, and music. Ballyhoo’s take on the Depression presented both a realist view of the Depression’s effects and provided readers with targets to ridicule for their actions during the Depression. It is important to include this depiction in the scholarship on Depression era rhetoric.
Notes

6 Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, 38.
8 Houck, “Rhetoric as Currency,” 175.
17 “Increase is Noted,” E6.
24 Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 91.
26 Burke, A Grammar of Motives, 408.
27 “Happy Thoughts,” Ballyhoo, May, 1932, 11.
28 “Happy Thoughts,” Ballyhoo, 12.
29 “Happy Thoughts,” Ballyhoo, 12.
30 “Happy Thoughts,” Ballyhoo, 12.
32 Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, 91.
Chapter Four: “NOW—All the Crap in the World at your Fingertips!”: Ballyhoo’s Attack on Advertising

Fig. 24: “The Advertiser’s Ten Commandments.” Ballyhoo, November, 1932, 6.
As foreshadowed in earlier chapters, *Ballyhoo* had a very unique relationship with advertising. Editor Norman Anthony had a personal vendetta against the kind of advertising that treated consumers as dupes and preyed upon the masses. The Ten Commandments of advertising (Fig. 24) provided the *Ballyhoo* readership with a humorous and telling statement on the magazine’s relationship to advertising. The faulty claims, the overstatement copy, and the manufactured diseases and social suicides produced by advertisers crossed the lines of good taste, and *Ballyhoo* took them to task for doing so. *Ballyhoo* used the advertising parody in a number of contexts to produce perspective by incongruity, but no context as prevalent as attacking the advertising enterprise itself.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, modern national advertising rose to prominence as a means of selling products and ideas to the public. As Charles McGovern argues, advertisers “offered a vision of consumption and consumers based on a premise of personal transformation and social distinction through accumulation and spending.” As American companies began to advertise their products more fervently on a national scale, many consumers became increasingly frustrated with the outcome. So while the vision of transformation through spending and accumulating goods may have been valid, there was also a contingent that found this vision tiresome and misguided. Bombarded by advertising from newspapers, magazines, and radio, consumers faced an enormous change in the way that everyday products were marketed and used. For many, the advertising industry embodied a pest-like persona, preying on the masses.

The role of the magazine in the emergence of consumer culture cannot be understated. Historian Theodore Peterson notes that “sometime in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the modern national magazine was born.” While non-national magazines have been in
circulation since the early days of the American republic, the contemporary magazine periodical emerged less than 150 years ago. With a decrease in mailing costs and magazine entrepreneurs’ lowering of prices, the magazine became an accessible medium to a mass audience. With growing circulation numbers and expanding ranks of magazines on wide ranging topics, the periodical magazine industry took form. Of course, with the growth of magazine popularity came the shift in focus on some magazine creators’ parts from personal endeavor to big business. This trend can be correlated in its rise with the enormous growth of advertising during this period. Because magazines, as opposed to newspapers, relied on a more geographically diverse population, national advertising stood as a significant portion of a magazine’s revenue, despite initial resistance to the proliferation of advertising. Historian James Norris notes that by 1900 “advertising in popular magazines often exceeded a hundred pages an issue.” As advertising became more common in magazines, the graphic quality of magazines increased as well. Photography and art grew in abundance in the pages of national magazines, particularly so in conjunction with the increase in advertisements.

The relationship between art and advertising is well examined by art historians and media historians alike. Michele Bogart examines the associations between art and advertising in a number of different venues, ranging from illustrations, to the rise of photography, to specific corporate advertising campaigns. Her thorough study of advertising traces various media of art and their influences and staying power in the advertising world. Her study does not, however, allude to the many critical discourses advanced by critics toward advertising; artists utilized magazines to launch varied forms of critique of consumer culture and advertising. Joan Gibbons posits a more critical understanding of advertising’s relationship to art in her book Art & Advertising. Her work acknowledges the relationship between advertising and art as being co-
constitutive and establishes ground for the critical function of art as anti-corporate. It is within this framework that I situate Ballyhoo’s critique of consumer culture and advertising. While not necessarily anti-corporate, Ballyhoo provided a vision of advertising and consumerism that did not simply accept the practice as a positive and productive endeavor. Rather, the magazine actively critiqued the use of faulty and overstated advertising claims, lampooned the more ridiculous advertising campaigns, and challenged the validity of the entire enterprise of advertising, from the profession to the products. By employing parody copiously, Ballyhoo created perspective by incongruity, providing readers with a critical take on the emerging phenomenon of national advertising.

Thou shalt not have for thyself any unpleasant breath, any cough, any film on thy teeth, any athlete’s foot, or the likeness of any disease that is in Heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth.⁸

The above declaration appeared in the November, 1932 issue of Ballyhoo magazine as part of a parody of the Ten Commandments of the Holy Bible, entitled “The Advertiser’s Ten Commandments.” The commandments follow a series of fake advertisements entitled “Why Don’t the Churches Advertise?” Aside from the many individual advertisement parodies and various stories and jokes against advertising, Ballyhoo often employed humorous sections such as this, including “What if Colleges Advertised.” With an initial run from 1931-1939, Ballyhoo consistently poked fun at and drew attention to the emerging consumer culture of the twentieth century, and the astounding speed of growth and breadth of subject associated with it. As American Studies scholar Margaret McFadden argues, Ballyhoo offered an often scathing critique of emerging consumer culture in the United States by parodying advertisements,
magazines, advertising executives, and the very products advertised during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{9} Published amidst the economic woes of the Great Depression, \textit{Ballyhoo} often decried the policies of the president and lawmakers alongside its humorous stories, cartoons, and advertisement spoofs. Ironically, \textit{Ballyhoo} fared remarkably well during the Depression, attaining a press run of nearly two million copies within six months of its release.\textsuperscript{10} The clash between economic strain and advertisers’ increasingly inflated and frequently faulty claims about products opened a unique space for the kind of critique that \textit{Ballyhoo} provided.

While consumer advocacy groups and organizations such as Consumer Research, Inc. existed during \textit{Ballyhoo}’s run, the magazine introduced an exciting and unique form of critique that was unavailable in the more rational forms of consumer critique available at the time; its format—the humor magazine—also potentially opened consumerism and advertising critique to a much larger audience. \textit{Ballyhoo} perhaps also struck a deeper nerve with consumers, giving the less politically active populace a chance to voice its displeasure with the over-commercialization of society. The plethora of new products and the increasing variety of emerging brands left consumers with more choices (or at least the illusion of more choices) in consumption than ever before. Often, in attempting to market a specific brand, advertisers used techniques that were questionable and even deceptive in order to differentiate products that contained essentially the same materials as all of the other brands. \textit{Ballyhoo} provides a critique of these techniques by employing both visual and verbal rhetorics in its critiques of advertising and consumer culture. I argue that \textit{Ballyhoo} constructed this rhetorical campaign by employing various persuasive techniques, primarily parody in the service of creating perspective by incongruity, to shine a spotlight on advertising and consumer culture. Capitalizing on consumers’ disfavor of shady advertising techniques and the general dissatisfaction with the saturation of consumerism,
*Ballyhoo* became a space for the expression of consumer critique at pivotal time in the history of advertising. In this chapter, I will demonstrate *Ballyhoo’s* critical power by focusing in on two specific rhetorical strategies employed by *Ballyhoo* that crossed over parodies of all commodity groups. These strategies represent some of the most pervasive parodic arguments advanced by *Ballyhoo* during its run. Within these categories of critique, several commodity groups take shape.

From 1915-1929, the commodity groups of automotive, drug and toilet, and tobacco were among the top five categories in terms of advertising dollars spent in national periodicals. This is significant, as these products were featured prominently in *Ballyhoo*. Modern national advertising was still unfamiliar territory in the early twentieth century, and advertisers wielded a new kind of power over the public. With nothing to compare with, citizens had no choice in the matter of what content went into advertisements. During this period, automobiles were also relatively new, and thus advertisers had an information advantage in that respect, as well. With hygiene products, the market was expanding. So many new companies were beginning that it became hard to differentiate among them. Again, advertisers had the upper hand, able to make claims that much of the public would not be qualified to challenge. Within these categories, I will illustrate two of the most salient rhetorical strategies employed as parody by the magazine—the use of fake testimonials/spokespeople and the technique of visual disconnect. With an eye toward the times, *Ballyhoo* launched a critique that was both timely and popular; the critique was also directly confrontational to specific products and corporations.
Consumer Activism in the 1930s

Roland Marchand calls *Ballyhoo* an “unlikely depression phenomenon [that] offered vivid evidence of a latent public skepticism of all advertising.”\(^{12}\) This skepticism is well noted in the history of consumer culture, as evidenced by the abundance of scholarship surrounding advertising and consumer culture in the early twentieth century. The emergence of consumer culture at the turn of the century brought unparalleled amounts of choice to consumers. As Gary Cross notes, by 1900 America had already become the wealthiest nation in history and “American consumer society rose on the solid base of increasing purchasing power.”\(^{13}\) Faced with new resources and increasing amounts of free time with which to consume, the United States began to embody its new role as a consumer society.

Of course, along with the “freedoms” afforded consumers at the turn of the twentieth century came an increased drive to market and sell products to this base by advertisers. Indeed, between 1928 and 1931, advertising expenditures in periodical publications fluctuated between 166–203 million dollars nationally, more than any other time in previous history.\(^{14}\) Given the need for advertisers to distinguish their products from other similar products, and corporations’ statuses as oligopolistic entities, often advertisers made claims that were untruthful or exaggerated in order to give their clients an edge. One *New York Times* letter to the editor asked for a boycott of companies commissioning “offensive” advertising. It states, “The uninformed are sometimes alarmed by mere words. This is a mental state encouraged by certain of the billboard men.”\(^{15}\) Not surprisingly, many consumers objected to advertisers’ use of false claims and overstated copy. As Inger Stole notes, “[a]s national companies grew and operated in more oligopolistic markets, consumers could barely discern tangible differences between products.”\(^{16}\) As advertisers began to try to outdo each other, their claims became more and more
questionable. Thus were born the consumer movements of the 1930s. Even advertising executives were forced to consider their practices for fear of legal action. For instance, in 1932 a committee was formed by top advertising agencies, under the direction of the Association of National Advertisers, to “hold court” over issues of unseemly advertising practice. It was noted that “[w]hile admitting that advertising may have some imaginative and dramatic leeway, the committee held that advertising has at the same time an obligation to itself and the public, and should not violate good faith or business morals.” Thus, as national advertising became more prominent, many agents, including the industry itself, were forced to deal with the uncertainties that came with the growing practice of advertising.

Consumers’ Research, Inc. and Consumers’ Union were two of the prominent players in the consumer movements of the 1930s. These organizations devoted attention to the rights of consumers and to the critique of advertisers. Consumer Research, formed in 1926, and Consumers’ Union, which came later in 1936, offered quite radical critiques by suggesting the need for regulation of how advertisements were to be written. These organizations conducted trials and tests to determine whether or not products that were advertised by various media sources actually delivered on their promises. They are perhaps best known for their product research, in which they tested products for safety and to compare results to advertising claims. These organizations did the groundwork on many of the products tested, but also took the results and their fights into the houses of legislation. Their approach was a rational one, aimed at effecting change at the governmental level in order to assure the safety of products and fairness in advertising. These organizations distributed publications detailing the results of the tests they performed and promoting certain products above others. They would recommend some products over others and urge consumers not to buy products that were deemed unsafe or insufficient.
Normally in digest form, *Consumers’ Research Bulletin* often criticized products and advertisements that did not stand up to the tests conducted by the organization’s researchers. In fact, because the results were so critical, Consumers’ Research, Inc. published two versions of its bulletin—one of which carried with it a non-disclosure agreement, for fear of lawsuits.\(^{18}\) The circulation of these publications was fairly wide, yet due to subscription constraints, they did not reach as many eyes as other periodical publications at the time. Even so, the advertising industry’s reaction to these groups suggests the nerve struck by any form of advertising criticism. In some cases, advertisers blamed the shady advertising practices on the severe economic crisis of the time: “these unfair practices are due in a large manner to the present ruthless competition, a natural result of the depression. When business is fighting for its life, standards are apt to go overboard. Advertising is then misused.”\(^{19}\) Specific groups were also targeted as especially at fault for unethical advertising; one such group was physicians, who were not so subtly asked to “refuse endorsement to unethical practices that concern health of the public.”\(^{20}\) With mounting pressure from consumer advocacy organizations, consumer dissatisfaction with advertising methods, and ire for and from specific groups, the advertising industry faced much popular opposition. It is within this context that the mounting critique of consumer culture and the excellent reception of publications such as *Ballyhoo* can be best understood.

To begin, let us examine a parody advertisement from *Ballyhoo*. Personal hygiene was a main category of advertisement parodied by *Ballyhoo*. Shaving products were spoofed quite often in the pages of the magazine. Consider the following parody advertisement for the “Slick Shaveless Razor” (Fig. 25).
One is immediately confronted with a man with a substantial beard and moustache, contrary to the image one would associate with razors and shaving. The other image on the page is that of an awkward contraption of a razor, presumably with no blade. These two images initially indicate to
the viewer that a product is being parodied. The name of the popular Schick brand razor has been changed to reflect this intention, as Slick Shaveless Razor indicates. Rather than showing an image of a cleanly shaven man, perhaps being caressed by a woman as in many traditional razor advertisements, this ad spoof reverses the traditional razor advertisement by depicting a man who does not shave, but rather uses a “shaveless” razor, which allows his beard to flourish.

The copy boasts: “The Shaveless Shave is Here! No Blades, No Brush, No Lather, No Skin Irritation, Not Even a Shave!” Many of the catch phrases employed by razor advertisers touting the new features of razors are appropriated to humorous effect. This ad parody implicitly discourages consumption to some degree. It suggests that one need not buy a razor to shave one’s face, but rather should go with a “shaveless shave.” It also suggests that men can dispose of their neckties because they will no longer be able to wear them due to the size of the beards they will grow. While the spoof does advertise a wacky razor for purchase, it does so only for comedic effect. The primary effect of this advertisement parody is the lampooning of real advertisements that promote falsely innovative technologies in order to dupe the consumer into buying unnecessary products. The contraption pictured in the fake advertisement looks difficult to manage and perhaps even dangerous to use. This adds both to the comedic effect of the parody as well as the critique of advertising claims.

The above parody is representative of the multitude of advertising parodies employed by Ballyhoo in 1931-1932. While the parody may seem relatively innocuous, it is situated as an exemplar of Ballyhoo’s critique of consumer culture and advertising. In the following section, I analyze the rhetoric of Ballyhoo’s advertising critiques by examining two particularly salient rhetorical strategies: the fake testimonial, characterized by the use of made-up spokespeople and visual disconnect, characterized by a major intentional gap between the text and image
presentation. In each case, a critique of overstated and hyperbolic advertising claims is presented. I analyze how Ballyhoo created and sustained a powerful critique of consumer culture by employing these key rhetorical strategies. Ballyhoo’s advertising critiques created perspective by incongruity by employing multiple rhetorical strategies.

The Fake Testimonial/Spokesperson

One of the most common rhetorical strategies advertisers employ to gain favor for their products is the use of spokespeople. In some cases, and certainly so in contemporary advertising, celebrities and famous figures are tapped to provide endorsements for certain products. Yet, this is not a practice limited to contemporary advertising, and the testimonial is not limited to the famous. Doctors, mothers, athletes, and countless other groups are called upon to provide support for products and services that they see as dependable and worthy of patronage. Yet, in the early 1930s, the practice of product endorsement was a relatively new endeavor which brought with it some reservations about authenticity. Ballyhoo capitalized on these reservations by creating advertising parodies that parodied many of these endorsement groups.

Ballyhoo took the strategy of using spokespeople in a different direction than that of most advertisers. The following example makes reference to a commonly known public figure of the time, an ironically unpopular public figure in the eyes of Ballyhoo—one of the architects of Prohibition, Andrew Volstead (Fig. 26):
The Darbasol parody features a fake testimonial by Andrew Volstead, of the famous Volstead Act, which initiated the policy of national prohibition. Notably, as examined in Chapter Two,
Prohibition was a topic that permeated every issue of Ballyhoo, from the magazine’s inception through the policy’s ultimate repeal. At first, the reader notices the famous figure of Volstead in word and image. Rather than simply using the name recognition of Volstead, and his reputation, the image in this advertising spoof plays also on the imagery of Prohibition by adding cartoons to his face depicting gangsters, a speakeasy, and police bribery. This has the dual function of creating identification with both Volstead and his relationship to the unpopular policy.

The spoof really has little to do with shaving cream at all, but plays upon the popular technique of using name recognition and celebrity appeal to sell products. Of course, in this case, the celebrity used is somewhat infamous, presumably even more so to the readers of Ballyhoo, for being instrumental in the Prohibition legislation. Volstead is portrayed as an unhappy man, until he uses “Darbasol.” His fake testimonial asserts that “After a shave with Darbasol I feel as happy as the day I put over the Volstead Act—well, almost as happy, anyway.” The parody also sarcastically describes Volstead as a “merry, merry fellow.” The largest type in the spoof reads: “Popular faces are shaved with DARBASOL,” again appropriating the technique of star power used by advertisers to sell products. Also, this ad contains another popular element employed by real advertisers—a tie in with a radio program. In this case, the fake ad asks viewers to listen to fake “station D.R.Y. and hear Andrew and his Hill Billies sing rollicking old drinking songs and ballads.” D.R.Y. is an obvious reference to Prohibition advocacy, again reminding readers of Volstead’s association with the policy. Thus, all of the most popular features and techniques used by real advertisers to promote products and programs were parodied in the pages of Ballyhoo as well.

The strategy of implementing fake testimonials served Ballyhoo’s ultimate rhetorical goal of creating perspective by incongruity. In the case of Volstead above, this worked on multiple
planes. First, one would not associate Andrew Volstead as a celebrity endorser. As a politician, and one that was especially unpopular with Ballyhoo’s audience, the thought of placing authority in his hands is incongruous with readers. That is, the audience would not associate Volstead’s endorsement with something positive. Second, the use of a politician in general as a spokesperson seems out of place. Movie stars, radio personalities, and athletes provide the majority of endorsements, so a politician is out of place in this context. Finally, Volstead’s fake endorsement, “After a shave with Darbasol, I feel as happy as the day I put over the Volstead Act—well, almost as happy, anyway” flies in the face of the readership as well. Most of Ballyhoo’s readership would have lamented the Volstead Act and its consequences, so an endorsement from its originator is unlikely to be well-received. The goal of creating this fake testimonial, then, was to establish an antagonistic relationship toward advertising while simultaneously reinforcing Ballyhoo’s disfavor of Prohibition. As advertisements of the day mirrored the format of the “Darbasol” ad, Ballyhoo readers would have made the connection between the two and discovered the underlying themes presented therein.

Continuing in this vein, the December 1932 issue of Ballyhoo features a section entitled “The Advertisers Go Straight!” in which various products were given the parodic treatment through advertisements that used “straight talk” as the primary strategy, as if the advertisers decided to be honest with the consumer (Fig. 27). This also played on the notion of brand advertisers’ inability to merely state their products’ properties. In order to distinguish a brand from all the others, they had to convince customers that their products were superior, despite the fact that most products contained essentially the same materials.
O.K. Tooth Paste

Will not cure pyorrhea. It will not give you a beautiful smile. It will not cure bad breath . . . but . . . By Golly . . . it will clean your teeth!

However . . . why pay 25c for a tube of tooth paste? Go to the corner drug store and buy 6c worth of chalk, powdered soap, add a little glycerine and water, and you've got a high quality tooth paste. But . . . if you're too lazy to go to all this trouble . . . use O.K. TOOTH PASTE

Mrs. Poopdyke Manners, Society leader of South Bend, has saved enough money on our tooth paste to buy her husband a new pick and shovel. She hasn't brushed her teeth since her wedding, when the best man knocked them all out.

25¢ per tube

Fig. 27: “O.K.” Ad Parody. *Ballyhoo*, December, 1932, 3.
The copy in this fake advertisement essentially reverses all of the outlandish claims that advertisers of the time often made. Firstly, the toothpaste is given the brand name O.K., which immediately establishes its mediocrity. Rather than applying some prestigious or catchy brand name to the product, the advertisers have “gone straight,” telling consumers that the product in question is simply O.K. Indeed, the immediate claims made by this advertisement deny the miraculous effects that many other toothpaste advertisements of the time make: curing bad breath, providing a beautiful smile, curing disease, etc. This strategy makes perfect sense given the difficulty advertisers were running into with regard to medical claims and inflated copy material.

The O.K. ad spoof also discourages consumption. The advertisement goes so far as to suggest other products that one might purchase in order to build a product that would work just as well as the one being advertised. This poses a threat to the entire consumer industry which has built its legitimacy on using such advertising strategies.

Importantly, the spoof also provides the testimony of “Mrs. Poopdyke Manners,” who saved enough money to purchase tools for her husband by not buying O.K. toothpaste. One common strategy in Ballyhoo’s repertoire was the creation of fake characters to endorse products. While the names aren’t always as ridiculous as “Mrs. Poopdyke Manners,” the claims that the “celebrities” were making were indeed quite ridiculous. The humorous implementation of such outlandish testimony served an important rhetorical function in Ballyhoo. Contemporary advertisements often used testimony of mothers, wives, doctors, celebrities, and other “trustworthy” characters. Yet, Ballyhoo’s employment of parodied versions of these characters called into question the validity and ethicality of using endorsers as a means to sell products. Mrs. Poopdyke Manners is not a well-known authority figure on toothpaste, but rather a common
housewife who saved money by making her own toothpaste. Her ingenuity is saving her family money, and it is taking money away from corporations that produce toothpaste. Thus, the testimonial did not promote a product, but rather discouraged consumption.

Within the backdrop of excessive and outlandish advertising claims, the *Ballyhoo* method of lampooning ads stood as a unique form of consumer activism. While primarily billed as a humor magazine, *Ballyhoo* became an important and successful tool for critiquing advertising and consumer culture in the 1930s. Even in most humor magazines during the 1930s, advertisements were abundant. *Ballyhoo* attracted significant attention from advertisers, and not only negative attention. Within two years of the initial publication, advertisers were asking to have their brand names mocked in the pages of the magazine. Dental hygiene advertisements was but one of many categories of products targeted by *Ballyhoo*. The magazine received requests for advertising from some of the very companies that were being targeted by *Ballyhoo*’s critiques.

By drawing on consumers’ familiarity with advertised name brands, *Ballyhoo* was able to capitalize on consumers’ dissatisfaction with shady and invasive advertising techniques through mocking those techniques in the pages of its magazine. As the parody advertisements show, advertising in the 1930s was a force to be reckoned with, and *Ballyhoo* took a critical position toward the practices of advertisers by attacking specific strategies within the original advertisements. Challenging the authority of the celebrity endorsement was but one of the ways that *Ballyhoo* forwarded a rhetorical attack on faulty advertising techniques.
Ballyhoo’s varied cast of fake characters were often called upon to endorse products or act in comical situations in the magazine. The fictional Zilch family appeared very frequently. In a
parody of the Lucky Strike cigarette brand, *Ballyhoo* offered Ducky Wucky cigarettes (Fig. 28). The parody in this advertising spoof is quite clear throughout. For one, at the top of the ad, it reads “Cream of the Crap.” This obviously has a denigrating effect on the product being advertised. The parody also features the testimony of Sophie Zilch, a member of the fictional Zilch family that graces the pages of *Ballyhoo*, stating that she “can’t afford to take chances with [her] verce (voice).”²¹ Billed as a singer, Sophie is a spokesperson for Ducky Wucky cigarettes, yet admits that she does not actually smoke cigarettes. Thus, her testimonial is not endorsing consumption of this product, but rather discouraging it. As a performer, smoking cigarettes would affect her voice and her career. In the bottom left corner of the spoof, the copy admits that the “celebrity” was not paid, and is therefore suing the advertiser. Her testimony also alludes to the notion that she is endorsing the product solely for the money, even though she does not actually use the product. The image serves as a sort of anti-testimonial, discouraging the consumer from purchasing the product. This is a common recurrence *Ballyhoo*, though the celebrities are oftentimes members of the fictional Zilch family.

Perhaps the most direct attack against Lucky Strike Cigarettes, other than the parody of the name, is the appropriation of the “toasting” phenomenon. Several advertising campaigns in the 1930s claimed that their tobacco underwent a process of toasting, which gave the tobacco a better flavor and made the taste smoother. Many critics take fault with this process, arguing that essentially all tobacco was toasted to one degree or another. Critics of tobacco advertising argued that claiming the toasting process as something new and original was deceptive and simply a ploy that advertisers used to increase sales. In the Ducky Wucky spoof above, the author plays on this notion by asserting that the tobacco is “boasted.” “Boasting is a secret advertising process which keeps you thinking Ducky Wuckies are the nuts. It’s our protection against that
harsh irritant, falling sales.” This advertising spoof appropriates many of the claims of cigarette advertisements of the time, including the toasting process and the absence of harsh irritants. It also critiques the motives of advertisers, asserting that such claims are made not in the service of the consumer, but rather as a way to prevent falling sales. The testimonial by Sophie Zilch is ironic then, as she is not boasting about the product at all. The similarity to the Lucky Strike advertisement is quite obvious, as each specific component of the original advertisement is appropriated differently into the fake advertisement. This was the case with many of the advertising spoofs that appeared in *Ballyhoo*. Particular elements of the original advertisements were replaced with humorous or critical images/text in order to complete the joke or parody.

The use of fake and/or ironic testimonials in *Ballyhoo* signals a somewhat combative rhetorical strategy. Particularly in the case of Sophie Zilch’s testimonial, the characters providing the testimonials are doing quite the opposite. They don’t use the products, they aren’t celebrities, indeed they don’t even want to endorse anything. Argument by authority is cleverly employed by advertisers even when the authority may not be valid. *Ballyhoo* breaks down this argument by removing the warrant. These people are not to be trusted, and therefore testimonials in general are not to be trusted. In form, the parodies closely mimic magazine advertisements and the strategy of the endorsement. In content, the opposite is true. *Ballyhoo*’s rhetorical keenness stemmed from its ability to subtly identify deceptive practices and creatively counter-argue within the same format.

*Visual Disconnect*

The most obvious rhetorical strategy, and perhaps the most effective at creating perspective by incongruity, is the persistent use of disconnect between what is expected and what
is seen—the visual disconnect. By visual disconnect, I mean that there is a discernible, visible break with what the image displays and what the text reads. The reader is faced with a dilemma regarding whether to believe the image or the text. This is not a surprising strategy on Ballyhoo’s part, as comics and humor venues have executed jokes and spoofs using visual disconnect liberally. Yet, in the critique of advertising and consumer culture, Ballyhoo carved a nice space for itself with this strategy.

By far the most prevalent targets of advertising parody in Ballyhoo were hygiene products. From toothpaste to shaving cream, from vanishing cream to hand lotion, Ballyhoo lampooned well-known, brand name products for their outlandish claims and shady advertising techniques. For example, one spoof attacked Kolynos brand dental cream, a popular brand of the 1930s (Fig. 29):
While the Kolynos advertisement promised to make teeth three shades whiter in three days, 
*Ballyhoo’s “Killynos Dental Cream” promises to make teeth eight shades whiter in eight days.

The copy at the header of the advertisement is comparable to the copy on any number of 
advertisements during this time period. The key differences in the parody of the advertisement 
are the images and the copy at the bottom of the page. The parody works in a number of ways. 
First, in order to obtain audience recognition, Ballyhoo has very slightly altered the brand name 
of the dental cream, so as to both identify with the viewer and to shine a negative light on the 
product, or at least the advertising of the product. Would you want to apply a product with the
word “kill” to your teeth? Presumably not, which is the very point of this parody. The statement in the center of the page is perhaps the most obvious indication of this spoof’s intention. This fake product promises to remove “Stain, Enamel, [and] Teeth,” the last two of which would be contrary to the intended effects of using dental hygiene products. “Killynos” boasts a powerful new formula, which is also one of the staple advertising techniques used by advertisers during this time period. However, this formula includes “Hooey,” or nonsense, as one of its chief components. Thus, this advertisement parodies not only the Kolynos brand name, but also questions the methods used by advertisers to promote such products. Part of the formula which makes this fake product so impressive is Hooey, which translates into nothing, or nonsense.

*Ballyhoo* on many occasions lamented the overabundance of advertising hooey that clogged and crowded magazines and radio programs.

The visual disconnect offered in this fake advertisement plays a key role in establishing the spoof’s success. Whereas, in general, advertisements for dental creams and toothpastes depicted attractive characters with sparkling smiles, the “Killynos” ad showed a bald, older man in various stages of tooth loss. Rather than showing progressively whiter teeth, this spoof showed the opposite, the decay and loss of teeth altogether. Set up in the familiar guise of a toothpaste advertisement, this parody implored the reader to take a second look. That is, the familiar format of the magazine advertisement was appropriated to new meaning. The man in the image is happier with each tooth lost. The sole purpose of toothpaste is to protect one from tooth loss, and the visual provided in this image suggests just the opposite. That the purpose of an advertisement would be the degradation of a product rather than its celebration is a significant and inventive concept in the 1930s. Particularly during the Great Depression, Americans were skeptical of the products they purchased, given that the purse strings were tight. *Ballyhoo* seemed to recognize
this skepticism and the skepticism over commercialization in general, and focused its attention toward critiquing the methods by which corporations and advertisers misled and misinformed through advertising.

To further establish this point, consider the following advertising spoof, again for a dental hygiene product:

Fig. 30: “Blisterine” *Ballyhoo*, September, 1932, 30.

Fig. 30 clearly functions as a parody of the Listerine toothpaste brand. By simply modifying the brand name to read Blisterine, the product is transformed into something that is associated with the Listerine brand, but clearly quite adverse toward it. Indeed, associating an oral hygiene
product with blisters connotes an almost visceral response; blisters are to be avoided by taking care of oneself, by keeping hygienic. The attack on the brand name is but one of many strategies implemented by this parody. Upon viewing the ad, one is confronted with an image of false teeth, clean and apparently smiling. Herein lies the visual disconnect. Viewers expect to see a smiling face with healthy teeth, yet they are confronted with disembodied, fake teeth. The absence of a face is awkward with regard to toothpaste advertisements, which is a key indicator of this advertisement’s mimicry. The image also brings to mind the “chattering teeth” gag toy, which might be a nod to the absurdity of the ad and/or a self-referential admission of parody. The copy in the image brings the parody full circle. The ad suggests that the consumer should not buy Blisterine toothpaste, but rather forgo buying any toothpaste at all in favor of buying a set of false teeth. The stab at advertising manifest in this parodied ad works on two levels. For one, this ad poked fun at other toothpaste advertisements that claimed to save the consumer money or to have miraculous effects. Secondly, the advertisement discouraged consumption. Rather than vying for a product, the ad went so far as to suggest other ways to spend one’s money (false teeth, scotch). The advertisement posed an indirect critique of advertising by implementing a ridiculous situation (buying teeth rather than caring for one’s own teeth) into a commonly accepted form (a magazine advertisement with traditional features). The Blisterine advertisement spoof certainly made light of dental care in a number of ways. It also contributed to the visual rhetoric of advertising during the 1930s by making a connection between the Listerine brand and the humorous and pointed message that the spoof is advancing, thus drawing on the collective memory of the population.
Fig. 31: “Old Colds” *Ballyhoo*, August, 1931, 1.

Fig. 31 a clear example of the visual disconnect. Old Gold Cigarettes are parodied mostly in name in this advertisement. The copy of this spoof seems to focus on the major claims tobacco advertisers make with regard to their products. The phrase, “keep kissable,” permeated throughout many of the fake advertisements in *Ballyhoo*. It was part of a series of running gags in which witty catch phrases were attached to a number of different products, even if the phrase did not make sense within the spoof’s context. This was yet another attempt on the part of *Ballyhoo* to point out the ridiculous measures and over the top language that often accompanied
advertisements of the time. Of course, in this case the copy is combined with an image of a child’s bottom, begging the question of what is to be kept kissable. Rather than a scene of a happy couple that is unhindered by cigarette breath, the viewer is faced with a naked child’s hind side.

In this spoof, the copy claims that the Old Colds brand cigarettes took the consumer into account by omitting harsh irritants and unseemly ingredients. In this case, even tobacco is omitted from the cigarette. While many advertisements for cigarettes claimed products’ freshness and freedom from irritants, Old Colds mocks those ads by claiming its product is free from tobacco. It claims “No Tobacco to Taint the Breath…or Scratch the Throat,” drawing on two consumer fears constructed by advertisers: bad breath and harsh irritants. Maladies such as bad breath and body odor were often used by advertisers to convince the audience that their products were needed. By constructing advertisements to reflect the lack of harsh irritants and the promise of no bad breath, cigarette advertisers handily possessed the remedies to their self-constructed “sicknesses.” This is perhaps a response to legislation of the time which prohibited advertisers from claiming medical advantages for their products where they had not been proven beforehand.

A key factor to the success of the visual disconnect as a rhetorical approach is that it is applicable across all forms. It works just as well when critiquing faulty claims about cigarette breath as it does for whitening teeth. Automobile advertisements were abundantly parodied in the pages of Ballyhoo. This is not surprising given that advertisers spent significant amounts of money advertising new automobiles. As with the other categories of advertising spoofs, Ballyhoo’s take on the automobile advertisement was critical and humorous. In a section of the
magazine entitled “What the Advertisements Will Look Like If the Depression Gets Any Worse,” Ballyhoo offers the following mock ad for the “New Puick,” Fig. 32.

![Mock Ad for the "New Puick"](image)

**Fig. 32: “New Puick” Ballyhoo, September, 1932, 47.**
This “Product of General Depression” mockingly provides an alternative to a regular automobile, which might be too expensive to purchase in a time of economic strife. Presumably, the Depression was not the easiest period in which to sell cars. Branding this vehicle a product of “General Depression” hints at the dissatisfaction of citizens with regard to advertising while simultaneously making an appropriate cultural reference to the economic troubles of the nation.

The ad perhaps pokes fun at the propensity for advertisements to hone in on consumers’ senses of dignity and fortitude—“Town and Country car for the Gent of Moderate Means.” Clearly the product being advertised in this spoof is not a car, but rather a motorized scooter of some sort. The spoof goes on to list characteristics of the vehicle that also hint at the unlikelihood of this product’s existence. The “Shatter-proof glass” is non-existent because the scooter does not require glass. The ad also promises front wheel drive, for which there is only one wheel. Finally, the price for the “Puick”—“Make us an offer,” gives the reader a sense of the ridiculous nature of this product.

The “Puick” spoof is particularly telling of the times as it not only spoofs a popular automobile brand, Buick, but also provides a reference to the financial hardships of the Great Depression. As we saw in Chapter Three, this was a common and unsurprising feature of Ballyhoo’s repertoire. Because the magazine circulated during a period of economic troubles, the material within the magazine often incorporated specific references to the Depression. The ad also promises “Fifty miles to the pint,” as a signifier of potential savings on gasoline, something that we can relate to even today. In general this spoof both made a clear sociopolitical statement about the severity of the Depression, while simultaneously speculating how the advertising industry might capitalize on the misfortune of consumers and adapt their advertising messages accordingly. The image accompanying the text makes the parody clear. Rather than advertising a
car, the product advertised is actually a fictional scooter that would be impractical for most families to use as an automobile. However, desperate times call for desperate measures, so this advertisement taps into such a mentality in order to critique not only the way that advertisements are carried out, but also the general tenor of life during the Great Depression. The almost caricature of a man looks ridiculous on the scooter, adding to the visual disconnect.

The following ad spoof follows in the same vein. Rather than parodying a specific brand of automobile, this spoof takes a humorous approach to the Depression by suggesting that one might feed off the benefits of another motorist’s automobile by using the “Zilch 8 Free Wheeling Attachment” (Fig. 33).
Fig. 33: “Zilch 8” *Ballyhoo*, October 1931, 6.

The premise of this advertising parody is quite simple. Rather than paying for the things that would normally be necessary to run an automobile, you can use the Zilch 8 to freeload off of other motorists. Again, this fake advertisement makes direct reference to the economic depression. “Here is the car for Hard Times!...it has no engine...uses no gas...no oil!” The image accompanying the text depicts a very happy customer latching his Zilch 8 onto the rear bumper of another automobile. There is a comical depiction of a device that an opportunist might use to get a free ride, connecting the two cars and allowing one to coast and benefit from the other’s
gas. This spoof draws on readers’ sense of the times and the financial hardships of the Depression. While a humorous take on saving money, the spoof makes a statement about the current state of affairs by demonstrating commonly held experiences that readers of the magazine would be able to relate to without very much extrapolation. Ballyhoo continually relied on the collective memory of its readership in order to make its spoofs both understandable and poignant. As one of the most highly advertised groups of products during the 1930s, automobiles unsurprisingly drew the attention of the Ballyhoo crowd.

Conclusion

In its critique of advertising, Ballyhoo most clearly displayed its use of perspective by incongruity. In each of the advertising parodies printed in the magazine, Ballyhoo appropriated at least a small portion, and at times the entire form, of real advertisements. Parody relies upon perspective by incongruity to a large degree. If one does not recognize the original form that is being parodied, it is likely that the parody will be misunderstood. For an audience that was used to seeing a large portion of its magazines’ content devoted to advertising, Ballyhoo represented a counterbalance. While the magazine contained a number of advertisements, the advertisements were not real and served the opposite purpose of a normal advertisement. That is, rather than selling a product or service, Ballyhoo’s advertisement parodies asked consumers to reflect upon their perceptions of the advertising industry. Providing incongruous information in the common rhetorical form of the advertisement allowed Ballyhoo to express its anti-advertising sentiments in a way that was familiar to its audience, yet would cause them to double take. The rhetorical framing of these arguments in the form of parody is an effective way of producing perspective by incongruity. This sort of “a-ha!” moment is the purpose of perspective by incongruity, and
indeed of parody. When the reader is able to crack the code and recognize the incongruity, new meaning can be achieved. For an audience that was inundated with a fairly new form of communication in advertising, Ballyhoo provided an outlet to push back against what many saw as an invasive and deceptive practice.

The strategies employed by Ballyhoo were most effective when they directly confronted specific targets. This was achieved through the use of parody, when the magazine directly mocked specific product claims and reversed their messages to make a statement. However, there are some limitations to the effectiveness of using parody as a rhetorical technique. For instance, one always runs the risk with parody of simply reminding the viewer of the original product. That is, if the parody of a particular product is so similar in form to the original advertisement, the parody runs the risk of simply reiterating the brand name and the parody loses its sting. This is true of parody in general, as recognition of the original form is paramount to understanding the newly created artifact. However, this becomes even more pronounced when we look at parodies of popular advertisements. Because advertisements are so pervasive in society, and viewers of Ballyhoo no doubt would have access to the kinds of advertisements being parodied in the magazine, the parody might not stick out in the mind of the reader, but rather simply remind the reader of the original brand. Of course, Ballyhoo assumed that the reader would be able to pick up on the parody and make the association that the original is being mocked, but there is always the risk of misrecognition or simple dismissal.

Yet, Ballyhoo was positioned uniquely in the nascent debate over the role of consumerism in the United States. Often, humor and absurdity are at the forefront of criticism, and Ballyhoo’s perspective shined a critical light on the perceived ills associated with advertising in the early 1930s. Ballyhoo created absurd advertisement parodies as a means to highlight the
absurdity of the whole system of advertising. Combined with the emerging efforts of Consumer Research, Inc. and other advocacy groups, a network of naysayers was able to launch critiques of faulty advertising claims and harmful consumer practices. Indeed, I would argue that *Ballyhoo* was an important precursor to similar critical voices of today. For instance, *Adbusters* magazine has taken the advertising parody as one of its main forms of critique. The form is very similar, though obviously updated in quality and color, to that of the parodies in *Ballyhoo*. Thus, *Ballyhoo* is an important moment in the historical timeline of advertising and consumerism critique.

Another potential obstacle to rhetorical effectiveness was the venue of the parodies. Housed in a humor magazine, the parodies of advertising and consumer culture might be read simply as jokes meant for enjoyment. Despite Norman Anthony’s stated intentions of giving advertisements the critique they deserved, the readership may have read the magazine as an object of humor alone and dismissed the critical message therein. Again, this is a struggle for most forms of parody. Taken as a humor magazine alone, the critique of consumer culture takes a backseat to the punch lines. However, read in the context of the times and with an eye toward the state of advertising, the parodies contained in *Ballyhoo* provided an often scathing critique of the advertising industry and its practices.

Interestingly, the parodies do not include depictions of consumers at fault. This is an important omission, as it provides perspective on *Ballyhoo*’s message. The consumer is not to blame, but rather the corporations and advertisers that support them. In each of the parodies discussed in this chapter, when consumers are depicted, they are shown mockingly using the fake products, acting as celebrities endorsing the products, or suffering at the hands of the products. *Ballyhoo* places the blame on the businesses and advertisers.
Notes

3 Peterson, Magazines in the Twentieth Century, 1.
10 McFadden, “WARNING,” 125.
11 Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President’s Committee on Social Trends (New York: Whitley House, 1934), 874.
14 Recent Social Trends, 872.
18 Stole, Advertising on Trial, 24.
Chapter Five: Conclusion: “You Can Fool Some of the People Some of the Time”

*Ballyhoo*’s success during a time of severe economic hardship demonstrated the popularity of a particular form of popular criticism. While more systemic critiques of political wrongs and consumer culture, and particularly advertising, were handled in the legislative and judicial hands of the government, *Ballyhoo* issued its critique through pop culture.

In demonstrating the rhetorical prowess of *Ballyhoo*’s critical humor, this dissertation makes a number of contributions. In Chapter Two, I illustrated how the magazine’s critical treatment of Prohibition allowed its readership to commiserate and collectively place blame on the political leaders responsible for creating and maintaining a detrimental social policy, one that not only failed socially and practically, but that also placed even more strain on an already devastated economy. Kenneth Burke’s notion of the scapegoat provides us with one way of understanding *Ballyhoo*’s stance on Prohibition. Taking the frustrations and laments of the public and transferring those woes onto tangible subjects, such as Hoover and Volstead, symbolically asserts the public’s anger toward the government and its policies. *Ballyhoo* thus presented a sustained argument in favor of repeal of the Prohibition Amendment through scapegoating. *Ballyhoo*’s use of scapegoating created perspective by incongruity, through which readers could see past the dominant political narratives and occupy a new space of dissent. *Ballyhoo* challenged the authority of public leaders and questioned the abilities of those in power to properly maintain and govern the law. Combined with another rhetorical theme, common sense appeals, *Ballyhoo* took a very clear stance on the national issue and provided readers with an outlet to vent its frustrations and have a few laughs while doing so. In this case, perspective by incongruity was created by breaking down the complexity of legislating and maintaining Prohibition and making its effects the center of debate. This change in perspective enabled
readers to easily understand the issues and take a stand. In the waning years of Prohibition, Ballyhoo’s stance became representative of the majority public opinion.

In Chapter Three, I argued that Ballyhoo maintained a consistent critique of the Great Depression as it continued to deepen in severity and duration. Indeed, it had no choice. As the Depression deepened, nearly every tier of American society suffered. The magazine once again relied heavily on the strategy of scapegoating, positing Herbert Hoover and the economic elite as villains to be scorned for their actions. By marking a clear divide between the common man Ballyhoo reader and the wealthy and politically powerful upper class, Ballyhoo again made an argument that placed blame wholly on the latter. However, the creators of the magazine also realized that placing blame alone was not overly productive. The magazine presented a more realist argument as well, showing the real world effects of the Depression through images of homelessness, hunger, and unemployment. These two strategies combined to create perspective by incongruity, painting a picture of the Depression that took into consideration multiple angles and provided a comprehensive picture of disdain toward the president and those in a position to effect change. Ballyhoo contrasted the rich and poor, revealing the irony of the Depression’s effects. It also gave readers a force to collectively blame.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I argued that Ballyhoo provided a sustained critique of consumer culture and advertising. This is Ballyhoo’s most unique contribution. By providing an often scathing critique of advertising in all of its forms, Ballyhoo became a very early form of consumerism critique that would become more popular as the century moved on. Utilizing parody as the primary rhetorical mechanism through which to produce perspective by incongruity, Ballyhoo struck a nerve with its audience, which was fed up with the overabundance of advertising jargon and overstated claims of the era. Ballyhoo presented one alternative to the
more pragmatic forms of consumerism critiques that were happening in organizations like Consumer Research, Inc. and Consumers’ Union. The humorous approach was more accessible and reached a broader audience, perhaps increasing its import. This is another place where *Ballyhoo* disrupted the popular narratives surrounding advertising by deconstructing the artifacts. The advertising tropes of testimonials were broken down and appropriated inversely. The miraculous claims of advertisers were cut down and made frivolous. This deconstruction of effective advertising strategies proved an effective means of critiquing a growing nascent industry and reflecting popular outrage over unfair claims.

Using humor and the rhetorical strategies of scapegoating, parody, common sense appeals, and visual disconnect, the magazine constructed perspective by incongruity, giving readers a critical look at the most pressing issues of the early 1930s. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say that *Ballyhoo* succeeded in deconstructing popular rhetorics of the early 1930s. The very format of the magazine gave license to critique in a way that fed from the larger public rhetorics on Prohibition, the Depression, and consumer culture. As Margaret McFadden argues, “Comic texts are often viewed as offering consumers a brief escape from their real-life problems and anxieties. This common sense notion that comedy is ephemeral and not serious creates a safe place from which to launch significant political, cultural, and ethical critiques and to persuasively articulate alternatives to dominant ideologies and values.”1 That *Ballyhoo* could accomplish such a feat during the 1930s is significant, as this strategy of critique remained a prominent form throughout the twentieth century and continues into the present. It is difficult to assess just how many imitators *Ballyhoo* influenced, but the mark that the magazine has made on humor magazines is clear. *Mad* magazine, starting in the 1950s, also used this form of comedic parody and generous use of irony to critique various forms of popular culture, advertising
included. *Mad* popularized the advertising spoof throughout its run and continues to publish them even today. Many of the same attributes that *Ballyhoo* made popular in the 1930s carried through in *Mad* magazine in the 1950s and afterward. Aside from the advertising parodies, *Mad* continually ran features similar to those in *Ballyhoo*. For instance, *Mad* would run recurring features such as “Mad’s Look at Advertisements” or “Mad’s Look at Celebrity Endorsements.” *Ballyhoo* similarly ran features such as “The Advertisers Go Straight” and “Epitaphs for Ad Men.” Thus, the format of the magazines are much the same and are often associated with one another in terms of format and content, though *Mad* took a much broader look at popular culture than perhaps *Ballyhoo* did. Regardless, *Ballyhoo*’s influence on future humor magazines is undeniable.

More contemporarily, *Adbusters* magazine provides a similar form of consumer critique, through its critique is not necessarily as based in humor. The magazine has published various advertisings spoofs and parodies, but the goal of the magazine is decidedly more political than humor-driven. *Adbusters*, as an organization, is dedicated to curbing hyper consumerism and critiquing consumer culture in a number of ways. *Adbusters* not only provides a humorous take on advertising and consumer culture, but also drives toward a more systemic change as well. However, the magazine clearly has remnants of the type of critique offered in *Ballyhoo* magazine with regard to advertising parody.

One could also look to different media for examples of this type of critique. For example, television shows such as *Saturday Night Live* and *Mad TV* often recreate television advertisements in a humorous, parodic manner. The advertising spoof is a popular recurring segment in many of these humorous variety shows. Thus, it stands to reason that the advertising spoof or consumer cultural critique of today has its roots in the early twentieth century, or
perhaps even earlier. That this form has survived for such a long time is a testament to the power of such a format.

*Ballyhoo’s* influence on the politics of the 1930s is difficult to assess. The only data that we really have available is the information regarding the sales numbers of the first year of the publication. While its run was relatively short-lived, *Ballyhoo* magazine was a popular publication that carried critical intentions. Advertisers reacted in a number of ways to the magazine, from demanding retractions of parodies to requesting advertisements in the magazine. The popularity of *Ballyhoo* during the Depression signaled a growing distrust of advertising methods among the consumer base in America and growing frustrations over Prohibition and the Depression. The cartoons, stories, and advertisement spoofs in the magazine materialized a visual critique of advertising to a fairly large population of Americans during the 1930s. In doing so, *Ballyhoo* stands as an important artifact in the history of popular culture in the United States, and stands as an early indication of the existence of a visual rhetoric of consumer critique.

*Ballyhoo* inhabits a unique moment in American history. The combination of Prohibition, the Great Depression, and the rise of advertising in the 1930s opened a space for a magazine like this to flourish when many magazines were going under due to the strain of the economic crisis. That *Ballyhoo* survived from 1931 to 1939 is a testament to its reception and suggests that it struck a chord with its readership. The arguments presented in the publication provide a critique of leadership and a check on authority that has become a staple of humorous critiques even today. *Ballyhoo’s* legacy may never be fully understood by popular culture or even in the scholarly community, but I hope that this dissertation gives *Ballyhoo* a place in our collective memory.
Ballyhoo also provides us with a very specific view of the 1930s in America. The humor of Ballyhoo illustrates that, at least in some cases, people were able to keep a sense of humor about them during even the hardest of times. Yet, even with the plethora of jokes and funny cartoons, Ballyhoo harnessed a particular energy of the era that is striking. Within the form of the humor magazine, Ballyhoo provided its readers with perspective by incongruity on Prohibition, the Depression, and the rise of advertising. Ballyhoo’s vision of the 1930s shows a nation that is undergoing many changes, enduring economic stress, and fighting back against policies and politicians it saw as negative.

Scholars fall on both sides of the fence regarding the rhetorical potential of parody and humor. Those such as Linda Hutcheon and Robert Hariman laud parody for its political potential. Fredric Jameson, Christine Harold, and others see parody as an impotent strategy for challenging dominant discourses. However, I argue that the potential for parody and critiques through perspective by incongruity lies along a spectrum, as opposed to two opposite poles. These strategies cannot be wholly ineffective, or else the practices would have died out long ago. They cannot be totally ineffective, because dominant discourse still prevails, despite the presence of such practices. What I want to suggest is a view of perspective by incongruity that takes into account specific contexts and cultural milieus; only by examining particular artifacts within their idiosyncratic contexts can we begin to formulate considerations of effect and potential.

When we consider the specific context, for instance, of consumerism and advertising critique, various components come into play. For one, we must consider, at the most basic level, the form of the image. That is, the compositional features, both verbal and visual, must be taken into account. Popular culture and collective memory provide a foundational toolbox from which to draw. The majority of artifacts discussed in my dissertation take the form of print
advertisement parodies and one frame cartoons, which have maintained a remarkably consistent visual and verbal form over the course of the twentieth century and into the present. Of course, this both assists and hinders the creators of this content in a number of ways. It draws recognition from viewers of a familiar form that has been turned upon itself, yet it also runs the risk of reinstating the original message. The form is consistent, despite the effect.

Second, it is important to situate each rhetorical artifact within its historical moment. A publication such as Ballyhoo in the 1930s should be considered within the social milieu of the time, when Prohibition was in full effect, the Depression was marching on, and widespread national advertising was beginning to take shape. Prohibition weighed heavily on much of the population, as it affected individual freedom as well as business. The Depression affected everyone regardless of wealth level. The rise of advertising brought with it a sense of fear and skepticism on the part of consumers, just as it brought new and interesting products and opportunities. Understood within this context, these strategies may not have served as revolutionary modes of opposition, but they do provide evidence of growing concern over the effects of some of the most important events of the decade.

Third, these strategies must be understood in terms of Ballyhoo’s target audience. One must determine the intended audience of the visual rhetoric in order to assess its potential power. Who is likely to “get” the parody? Why do incongruous images raise awareness of political problems? Will people relate to a scapegoated Herbert Hoover? Clearly, magazines have particular audiences in mind. This is evidenced from the proliferation of niche markets. There is conceivably a magazine for every market. For Ballyhoo, the audience was urban, working class men, an audience affiliated with a particular set of political values and with collective similarities. While obviously publications wish to reach the broadest possible audience base,
realistically they cannot reach everyone. Thus, the humor magazine becomes an interesting venue for critiques based in parody and appropriation. Visual forms of incongruity must be recognizable to the audience in order for the parody to work.

Fourth, visual rhetorics of incongruity must be seen not only as a form of negative critique, but as a dynamic, evolving practice capable of multiple forms of critique. One of the most common reasons for denouncing the power of parody, evidenced in the works of Jameson and Harold, is the assumption that parody works primarily through negative critique. While often parodists will use parody as a way to challenge a specific idea, event, or product, there are multiple planes of meaning that might be implemented. For instance, many of the *Ballyhoo* advertising parodies do not point negatively toward the original product advertisement on which the parody is based, but rather use the common, familiar form to draw attention to a larger political issue, such as the Prohibition or the silk boycott. This is the case in many of the parodies in the other magazines as well. In a sense, parody serves a sort of pointing function, using familiarity to draw attention toward its target.

Finally, the staying power of rhetorical strategies of incongruity such as parody, and specifically in the context of anti-consumerism and anti-advertising discourses, must be understood as a sign of the significance of such practices. This is not to say that it is an important concept simply because it has been around for a long time. The consistency with which parody has surfaced in discourses of anti-consumerism and critiques of advertising specifically speaks to its importance as a practice within those discourses. That critiques have continually returned to the form of parody signals a general sense of success, or at least acceptance, of such practices in particular contexts. *Ballyhoo*’s contribution to this success was in its form, its content, and its timeliness.
Notes


“’Hunger March’ of 14 to White House Fails as Police Seize Group, Including 3 Russians.” *New York Times*, November 28, 1931, 1.


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