

“The Forest Is Their Laboratory”: Representations of Medicine and American Indians
in Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company Advertisements

By

Juliet C. Larkin-Gilmore

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School at Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

August, 2016

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Arleen Tuchman, Ph.D.

Daniel H. Usner, Ph.D.

Introduction

“Doc” John E. Healy and Charles “Texas Charlie” Bigelow never referred to their Indian patent medicine company as a “business.”¹ Since their early ventures in 1879, their publications advertising “Kickapoo medicine” stated the publishers were “Healy and Bigelow, Indian Agents” or the Kickapoo Indians themselves.² To announce the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company (KIMC) as a business would undermine the “natural” antidote to overcrowding, pollution, and modern industry it claimed to provide. Like all patent medicine companies in the nineteenth century, the KIMC promised its white, middle-class American customers the opportunity to heal themselves without a physician.³ But Healy and Bigelow’s *Indian* patent medicines also offered an escape from the rising threat of an overcivilized, modern life at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company was one of the most famous patent medicine companies, taking part of its share of the millions in revenue patent medicines earned annually to hire “hundreds” of Indian performers to travel the country in about 75 different troupes.⁴ Success came in part from KIMC’s ability to define its salves and solutions as a “safe” alternative to regular medicine. Particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the patent medicine industry grew exponentially. In 1860, patent medicine generated \$3.5 million annually. By 1900, annual revenue had risen to \$70 million. Likewise, patent medicines were

¹ I assume there was very little Indian input into these medicines and, like other patent medicines of the era, the medicines consisted mostly of alcohol and innate herbs. Further investigations into the origin of KIMC’s remedies, however, could provide a better understanding of American Indians’ roles in patent medicines.

² This paper deals solely with KIMC’s publications from the 1880s and 1890s available in the Ayer Collection at the Newberry Library. Further research into the others will hopefully expand what is said here. Since the publications often repeat articles, I feel confident that these selections most likely speak to the larger collection of publications in the 1880s and 1890s.

³ KIMC continued into the first decade of the twentieth century, this paper will focus on their earlier publications prior to the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

⁴ James Harvey Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America before Federal Regulation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 192-3, KIMC averaged at 75 simultaneous touring troupes.

28% of the drug market in 1880, but by 1900, they accounted for a whopping 72%.⁵ Patent medicine companies were both shapers of and products of their time and as such we can attribute their remarkable achievements to several factors. First, cheaper printing and larger distribution networks led to a truly mass media and the burgeoning field of advertising.⁶ Second, patent medicine companies tapped into a popular Gilded Age psychic shift in the mainstream American populace toward “magical self-transformation,” an ideal based in laissez-faire economics, bootstraps, self-reliance, and Protestant regeneration.⁷ They offered to cure the soul via the body and to democratize corporeal healing via the market.⁸ Third and likewise, heavy competition in the medical marketplace between regular (or orthodox) and sectarian practitioners—such as homeopaths and eclectics—created opportunities for others willing to criticize regular medicine.⁹

The nineteenth century was an era of great change in the medical field; in particular, perceived threats from popular sectarian practitioners like homeopaths and Thomsonians led regular physicians to professionalize by standardizing practice, education, licensing, and membership in order to corner the medical marketplace.¹⁰ Within regular medicine changes were also taking place as empirical science based on observation and clinical pathology replaced

⁵ Eric W. Boyle, *Quack Medicine: A History of Combating Health Fraud in Twentieth-Century America* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Press, 2013), xvi-xvii, 18.

⁶ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 100. For more on mass communication see: Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890- 1940*, (New York: Vintage Press, 1999), Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), and Steven Hahn, *Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1900*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁷ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (Harper Perennial, 2009), 7, 56-7.

⁸ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 56.

⁹ Boyle, *Quack Medicine*, 2-3, 7, 12.

¹⁰ Boyle, *Quack Medicine*, Ch. 1. For a legal history of the first restrictive licensing laws with criminal punishments, see James C. Mohr's study of *Dent v. West Virginia* (1889) in *Licensed to Practice: The Supreme Court Defines the American Medical Profession* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2013). For an older but synthetic history of medicine, see Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 21-2, 95-108, 127. See also Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Ch. 4.

rationalist interpretations of the body.¹¹ By mid-century, empiricism forced many regular physicians to reconsider the “heroic” therapies (like purging and bloodletting) that had defined their practice in the past. The result was not a complete turnabout by physicians. Rather more subtle alterations such as more moderate dosing and more vigorous emphasis on the *strengthening* power of drug therapies and patient continued to seek out drugs with visible effects on their bodies.¹² Moreover, physicians returning from Germany with a new rationalist perspective on health based in laboratory medicine helped to reorient some medical practitioners from “what medicine could not do” to what it could accomplish.¹³ In this climate, patent medicines undermined physician authority by deriding orthodox physicians, advertising fast relief and medical advice directly to patients, *and* utilizing a language steeped in laboratory science and its discoveries.

Most significantly, patent medicine companies were sponges for orthodox medicine’s language and discoveries. They quickly adopted encouraging findings like bacteriology and medical advancements in serums and synthetic chemicals, purporting that their medicines contained the same ingredients.¹⁴ They also copied medical journal articles and went so far as to advertise *in* these journals.¹⁵ But patent medicines’ chameleon-like behavior did not go unnoticed by regular physicians. In the 1880s and 1890s, the threat from patent medicine companies was immense as they inundated the medical marketplace with so many drugs that it became increasingly difficult for physicians and patients to know which medicines were

¹¹ John Harley Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective and Against the Spirit of System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) and Charles E. Rosenberg, “The Therapeutic Revolution: Medicine, Meaning, and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century,” reprinted in Morris J. Vogel, Charles E. Rosenberg, eds., *The Therapeutic Revolution. Essays in the Social History of American Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1979 [1977]), 3-25. See also Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 67-70, 76, 180-1.

¹² Rosenberg, “The Therapeutic Revolution,” 16-18.

¹³ Warner, *The Therapeutic Perspective*, 94, 235-7.

¹⁴ Boyle, *Quack Medicine*, 18.

¹⁵ Boyle, *Quack Medicine*, 4-5, 10-11.

laboratory-tested.¹⁶ While the American Medical Association lacked the funds to successfully combat patent medicine companies until the twentieth century, individual critics published exposés, which in turn helped to standardize medical education and licensing.¹⁷ Although more virulent backlash against patent medicines occurred after 1900, KIMC's advertising language reveals they took seriously these early cries of quackery.

The company also appropriated Native American imagery for its advertisements and packaging, a tactic based in broader late-nineteenth century popular appeal for the “Wild West.” “Indians” in popular entertainment proliferated in this era in the form of Wild West shows and dime novel Westerns. Native conflicts with the U.S. Army and their “defeat”—epitomized by the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre—signaled a shift in the U.S. narrative, one that assumed pacification came with a likelihood of more violence.¹⁸ American Indians became, awkwardly, people of the past. In Wild West shows, like the KIMC's own traveling performances, American Indians were therefore hired to perform historical events from the past and portray indigenous people as “savages” of either the violent or noble variety.¹⁹ Advertisers like KIMC followed suit by incorporating American Indians on trade cards and packaging labels.²⁰

KIMC printed advertising pamphlets in a variety of formats including a newspaper, “encyclopedias of valuable information,” and lengthier publications about “life among the Indians.” Yet the publications' contents remained uniformly busy and chaotic. Healy and

¹⁶ Boyle, *Quack Medicine*, 18.

¹⁷ Boyle, *Quack Medicine*, 12-14.

¹⁸ Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 96-103; Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 62-4. For instance, at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Buffalo Bill Cody hired many of the Lakota leaders from Pine Ridge Reservation where Wounded Knee took place.

¹⁹ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 13.

²⁰ See John Rosenberg, “Barbarian Virtues in a Bottle: Patent Indian Medicines and the Commodification of Primitivism in the United States, 1870–1900,” *Gender and History* 24, no. 2 (August 2012): 368-388; Kevin C. Armitage, “Commercial Indians: Authenticity, Nature, and Industrial Capitalism in Advertising at the Turn of the Twentieth Century” *Michigan Historical Review* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 70-95; Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 62-3. Deloria imagines Cody to be a popular promoter of the pacification of the West narrative, similar to Frederick Jackson Turner.

Bigelow printed tales of first contact between Europeans and Indians, and descriptions of “Indian” life and legends, next to pithy sayings, baby and flower name meanings, tables of measurements, and the company’s origin story.²¹ There were also lessons on the body, and descriptions of diseases from the “Kickapoo Family Doctor” along with their Kickapoo Company medicine cures.²² Perhaps not surprisingly, there is little evidence KIMC ever hired any American Indians who identified as Kickapoo and the stereotypes of American Indians they presented in print “reduced [them] to images.”²³

The use of American Indian imagery as foil to the modern, industrial nation set aside for white Americans features broadly in the scholarship on Indian advertising and patent medicine companies. As the twentieth century approached, racial anxieties about white weakness, masculinity, and overcivilization became tangible, and were reflected back on the white populace in advertisements.²⁴ One such reflection was Indian patent medicine, which offered American Indians—connected to nature and living in the past—as the literal “antidote” to all that was wrong with the modern age.²⁵ Using a timeworn trope, patent medicine companies depicted American Indians as attuned to nature (in contrast to Enlightenment rationalism) and therefore the perfect purveyors of safe, medical remedies.²⁶ Scholars in this vein have argued the ability to use Indian imagery to sell harmless medicines was tied to the increasing pacification of American Indians in the nation. Thus, the end of the Indian Wars and confinement on

²¹ John E. Healy and Charles F. Bigelow, *Life and Scenes Among the Kickapoo Indians: Their Manners, Habits and Customs*, (New Haven, CT: Healy & Bigelow, 189u), Ayer 251.K31.H43.189-, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, 11-2. Texas Charlie became ill on the frontier where a group of Kickapoo Indians took him in and cured him. The story goes he then convinced them to join him in CT and prepare Kickapoo remedies for the public.

²² For example, Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 4, 10, 12, 18.

²³ Jeffrey Steele, “Reduced to Images: American Indians in Nineteenth-Century Advertising,” in *Gender and Consumer Culture*, Jennifer Scanlon, ed. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000): 109-128.

²⁴ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 7.

²⁵ Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), Ch. 4 and Rosenberg, “Barbarian Virtues in a Bottle,” 369.

²⁶ Steele, “Reduced to Images,” 116.

reservations in the late nineteenth century helped to shift public sentiment from seeing American Indians as violent enemies to helpless victims.²⁷ Empathy in turn neutralized fears and helped KIMC to commodify Native imagery.²⁸

Intervention

This mode of scholarship has helped me to understand KIMC's representational imagery and marketing techniques. However, scholarship on American Indian populations in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in North America has led me to another interpretation of Indian patent medicines that does not fully resign to the idea that American Indians in KIMC's advertisements were simply "reduced to images" and uniformly relegated to the past.²⁹ These scholars persuasively argue that turn-of-the-century discursive efforts to make American Indians into exclusively historical actors failed. Like other people living in the United States, many American Indians survived and succeeded by entering the capitalist system and adopting some white, Christian ideas and values. This tactic also allowed Native people to keep their families together and protect many of their ancestors' beliefs and ways of life.

I expand this analytic lens to include printed advertisements. This essay will not attempt to answer the question of how much power KIMC's Native employees had over their representation. But it will seek out similar efforts by non-Natives to manipulate time in order to

²⁷ For an example of reformist outrage, see Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881).

²⁸ Four of the most influential articles on the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company are: Steele, "Reduced to Images," Armitage, "Commercial Indians," John Rosenberg, "Barbarian Virtues in a Bottle," and Jane Marcellus, "Nervous Women and Noble Savages: The Romanticized 'Other' in Nineteenth-Century US Patent Medicine Advertising," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no. 5 (2008): 784-808.

²⁹ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*; Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indian Work: Language and Livelihood in Native American History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009); Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the US Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

control Native representation—and the failures of such an approach—that are evident in KIMC’s imagery. KIMC appropriated three styles of thinking and writing—those of medical science, sectarian practice, and ethnography—in order to cultivate trust in their medicines and perspective on health and the body. Like other patent medicine companies, KIMC mimicked the language and recent discoveries of medical science in order to prove its authority through a discourse familiar to its customer base. However, to distinguish their products from orthodox medicine, KIMC also adopted sectarian critiques of medical science and boasted the “Indianness” of their products to market its medicines as safe alternatives to the “poisons” of regular medicine. Moreover, ethnographic writing allowed KIMC to distinguish its products from other patent medicines. Their publications illustrated indigenous knowledge and culture, in part for entertainment, but also to demonstrate mastery over American Indian bodies and knowledge. Many of the articles discuss Native peoples living in the past, a popular trope. Yet, KIMC’s ethnographic sketches also brought their Native workers into three dimensions to say these men and women live rich, at times sensational, lives are the same ones who make your medicine. The fact that KIMC purported American Indians made their products disallowed the notion that they existed solely in the past.

Two examples of how KIMC elevated medical pluralism while fumbling with temporality frame the latter half of this paper. The first example consists of two images and accompanying articles and they center around the idea of the laboratory. In the first, KIMC depicted Kickapoos in loincloths standing outside their tipis stirring a cauldron of “Sagwa” over an open fire. The accompanying text read, “the forest is their laboratory.”³⁰ In the second image, we see KIMC’s supposed New England factory, an encampment of tipis enclosed within factory

³⁰ John E. Healy and Charles F. Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, (New Haven, CT: Healy & Bigelow, 1890) Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, catalog number Ayer 250.L68 1890, 7.

walls.³¹ Through this example, I will investigate the relationship between representations of primitivity and modernity in KIMC's laboratory/factory. The second example is the story of an "Arrapaho [sic] Medicine Man" who is superstitious in ineffective—unlike the Kickapoos—and who is likened to the physician. Through this KIMC article, I examine how a crowded medical marketplace helped KIMC argue to for medical pluralism, one that emphasized Indianness—and stereotypical associations with nature—to counter claims of quackery and emphasize its trustworthiness.

Through an explication of these and other KIMC publications published in the 1880s and 1890s, I argue these advertising materials carried a complex and contradictory argument about when in time and which medical practitioners could exist. In particular, they revealed a deep connection between American Indians and medical science and a concomitant dualism of attesting to Kickapoos' modernity and denying it. In other words, Healy and Bigelow wanted to appropriate Indian tropes *and* science while remaining a gatekeeper between the Indians of the past and the science of the present. However the barrier between the two was more porous than scholars have observed and by making claims such as "the forest is their laboratory," KIMC actually imbued American Indians with modern expertise.³² The tensions evident in the images the company painted illuminate its continual problems with temporality and boundary-keeping between white consumers and Indian producers and between regular physicians and their own products. Such problems belied Native pacification exemplified the "simultaneous contradictions" Philip Deloria has identified between "the lingering possibility and the new impossibility of violent outbreak" following the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890.³³ I argue the

³¹ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 12.

³² Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 7.

³³ Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 35 (as well as Plenty Horses execution of Lt. Edward Casey in January 1891).

company's blended appropriation of scientific language and American Indian imagery associated American Indians *with* the modern, "civilized," industrial producers of the present in the process of selling their drugs. As such, their efforts to alienate indigenous knowledge from real indigenous people failed.³⁴ In response, KIMC argued to expand the boundaries of legitimate healing to include Kickapoo remedies, but not without difficulty.

"The Great Indian Laboratory": Temporality in KIMC Advertisements

Time was a critical battleground for the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company in its struggle to prove its products were appropriate salves for the modern era. On the one hand, KIMC wrote, "The forest is their laboratory" and "theirs is a science of nature," squarely positioning Kickapoo practices and knowledge within a framework readily associated with late-nineteenth century medical research.³⁵ As noted, a common strategy among patent medicine companies was to adopt the language and format of pharmaceutical and medical studies in scientific journals to feign validity.³⁶ KIMC took it a step further by reimagining American Indians within distinctly western, scientific spaces. Its publications utilized terms "laboratory" and "science" in ways that served to devalue orthodox iterations of those ideas while seeking to expand the boundaries of laboratories and what counted as science.

On the other hand, laying claim to laboratory and scientific spaces for the Kickapoos was problematic for the company because it blurred the line between producer and consumer, primitive and civilized, Indian and white. To minimize racial anxieties that might develop from placing Indian and white minds and bodies on equal standing, the company chose to incorporate

³⁴ Rosenberg, "Barbarian Virtues in a Bottle," 369-70. Mass production and circulation made Indian patent medicines available in the first place.

³⁵ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 7; Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 8.

³⁶ Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires*, 157-9.

into their depictions stereotypically primitive imagery and emphasize American Indians in history whenever possible. As such, KIMC's advertisements placed American Indians in the liminal space between primitive and civilized, living in the past and the present. Beginning with the image of the company's "Great Indian Laboratory," this section explores how KIMC depicted the relationship between American Indians, medical science, and time in its advertisements in order to highlight the problems the company faced in building trust while positioning the Kickapoos vis-à-vis the company's customers.

Many KIMC publications boasted the company's Connecticut "Great Indian Laboratory" was a place that produced natural remedies for the overly civilized white body but was itself modern and scientific. Asserting both required a balancing act. Descriptions and illustrations of KIMC's factory-laboratory exposed the company's claims to science via Kickapoo knowledge and labor as well as efforts to moderate potential indigenous power that could stem from associations with modernity. KIMC depicted its laboratory as a campground of tipis enclosed within—as well as on top of—the walls of a typical factory on a city block.³⁷ Customers dressed in western clothing flock to the front doors. The image of the factory placed American Indians in a very contemporary and cosmopolitan space. The Kickapoos no longer existed in a distant West, far away from civilization. Instead they were just outside New York City, working in a laboratory, although they had brought their tipis.

Primitive imagery associated Native peoples with the past, a necessary complement to KIMC's modern laboratory and its proximity to one of the largest American cities. Several images show American Indians stirring kettles of medicine outside their tents, dressed in

³⁷ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 12.

buckskins.³⁸ The company also printed lengthy stories featuring first contact between American Indians and Europeans. Of note, “The Indians our Forefathers met were remarkable for their healthy appearance and superb physical development.”³⁹ KIMC attempted to demonstrate the Kickapoos’ historically “superb” characteristics were due to the same natural recipes in KIMC’s products. The company also had to prove that its medicines were safe for white customers and it chose to play with Native temporality—here emphasizing their historical, not their contemporary bodies—to distance the producer from consumer.

Healy and Bigelow often used representations of healthy American Indians in the present tense to demonstrate their medicines’ continued efficacy and then mediated the tension that arose from contemporaneous white and Indian bodies. For instance, the ideal Indian body, *Life Among the Indians* described, was “in figure tall and dignified, distinguished in appearance, with luxuriant hair, piercing eye, a compound countenance of generosity and daring, teeth white and strong as ivory, limbs supple, and closely knitted joints, youthful in carriage, and apparently never growing old...”⁴⁰ While these characteristics represented health, something all people would like to attain, the company emphasized American Indians’ supposed arrested development to erect a boundary between these bodies and those of their customers. “Frozen” in history and innocent youth, Healy and Bigelow’s ideal native body could then be safely consumed via KIMC products, transforming its patrons into figurative cannibals. On another symbolic level, Healy and Bigelow offered up American Indians as the icons of the United States’ past in their most “distinguished” and “strong” form.⁴¹ Furthermore, an article titled “Indians and Health”

³⁸ John E. Healy and Charles F. Bigelow, *The Red Men: Vol. 1, No. 1*, (n.p.: Published by the Kickapoo Indians, n.d.), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, catalog number Ayer 1. R41. See also, Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 13, which is described in detail in section III of this paper.

³⁹ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 4.

⁴⁰ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 11.

⁴¹ Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians 1880-1920*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 99 on Indians as symbols of “heroic” past. Virgil J. Vogel, *American Indian Medicine*,

contended the Indian body remained healthy because it "...maintains an immunity from disease by keeping the system continually in repair through the happy medium of these simple remedies...which will not only cure but prevent disease."⁴² Descriptions like this of Indians' immaculate health from "these simple remedies," now available for purchase from KIMC, worked in two ways: first, they used the Indian body as proof of their efficacy and second, they highlighted behavioral differences between Indians and whites.

Spinning a more recent history, Healy and Bigelow constructed an origin story for their company. Directly opposite the image of the Great Indian Laboratory in *Life and Scenes* is another image titled "First Manufacture of the Kickapoo Indian Remedies in the East."⁴³ In it, what appears to be a white man stands lazily, slouched over a rock, while the arm of an off-stage "Kickapoo"—revealed as Native by the dark shading of his skin—lifts a bottle to the white man's nose. Center stage, two kettles—labeled Indian Sagwa and Indian Oil—boil while groups of "Kickapoos" stand over them. From the buckskins to headdresses to tipis, the scene stereotypically depicts the company's first Indian laborers. An accompanying article describes the early history of the company in which "Texas Charlie" Bigelow was "snatched from the jaws of death" by Kickapoo remedies. He thus convinced the tribe to move East with him and produce their medicines for a white, Northeastern market.⁴⁴ The contrast between this image and the adjacent laboratory created a microtrajectory of "progress" for the company: from a crude encampment to modern factory-laboratory. But this route to advancement meant that American Indians were along for the ride—and possibly responsible for it—and that they too had

(Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, Civilization of American Indian series, v. 95, 1970), 146-7 and Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires*, 185 have both pointed to the links between American botany, patent medicines, and patriotism. It would be reasonable to include American Indians as well. Young contends patriotic icons (eagles, the Constitution, Uncle Sam) on patent medicines drew analogies between US military protecting the nation's borders and patent medicines protecting American bodies.

⁴² Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 11.

⁴³ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 13.

⁴⁴ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 11-12.

“progressed.” In order to sever some of those associations, KIMC maintained similarities between the images, such as the tipis.

The Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company also used time to bridge spatial distances between whites and American Indians. Its advertisements boasted the products’ natural ingredients brought East from the Southwest of the country where they grew freely.⁴⁵ These root and herbal ingredients, KIMC explained, were “transshipped to the Great Indian Laboratory in New York, where they are carefully prepared by the Indians themselves, put up by Indian hands, and forwarded to all parts of the country under the management of the Kickapoo Indians.”⁴⁶ Highlighting another form of authenticity, the company here also emphasized that “Kickapoo” Indians controlled the knowledge of the recipes and the production of the medicines. This movement of ingredients (and Kickapoo Indians) from West to East and throughout the United States illustrated the power of “authenticity” over vast spaces. The Kickapoos’ knowledge and ingredients were supposedly helpful to sick white Americans and therefore had the power travel great distances.

Healy and Bigelow also used prolonged proximity to stress the trustworthiness of American Indians and distinguish their products from others.⁴⁷ Unlike other patent medicine companies, they claimed, KIMC’s “Kickapoo” Indians made and sold the company’s products.⁴⁸

Patent medicine sellers, Healy and Bigelow argued, swindled customers in town after town by,

⁴⁵ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 10 describes regions where ingredients are found and harvested. For more on space and health in the early twentieth century, see Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). Mitman argues asthma inhalers and antihistamines have offered allergy sufferers the ability to “escape from place” without relocating since the late twentieth century. If we expand Mitman’s focus to consider KIMC’s patent medicines, the company’s packaging reveals similar promises made a century earlier. In fact, KIMC’s medicine shows, and Wild West shows more generally, were successful in part because they brought the drama of western conquest to white Americans’ front doors.

⁴⁶ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 14. Similar passage (although not identical) in Healy and Bigelow, *The Red Men*, 15.

⁴⁷ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 122.

⁴⁸ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 14. It remains unclear if KIMC employed any American Indians associated with the Kickapoo nation.

“coming among you, making a great display. Flooding the city with advertisements, disposing upon false statements of as much of their medicine as possible and then departing for parts unknown...” Instead, Healy and Bigelow contended Kickapoo Indians stayed among their customers after sales transactions since, “they have nothing to fear, because they are doing legitimate business and are giving many times more than an equivalent for the money they received.”⁴⁹ KIMC’s publications argued American Indians were honest because they were unfamiliar with the ways of contemporary quacks.

Yet Native proximity to whites had to be limited. One sign of KIMC’s uneasiness with Kickapoos living just outside New York City is evident in the various iterations of the Great Indian Laboratory’s name sketched into the banners in the above image. In *Life and Scenes*, the banners across the building read “Kickapoo Indian Agency.”⁵⁰ The term “agency” referenced the name for federal reservation offices in Indian Country, insinuating the company was sanctioned by the Office of Indian Affairs and that officials policed the Kickapoos inside the factory walls.⁵¹ In the same publication, fifty pages later, the same image appeared although in this instance the building was “Kickapoo Indian Wigwam,” a title that referenced primitivity, as do the tipis themselves.⁵² By blending symbols of indigenous primitivity with those of the industrial, scientific, Gilded Age, KIMC tempered the Kickapoos’ power over their knowledge and products, as well as their mobility.

⁴⁹ John E. Healy and Charles F. Bigelow, *Almost a Life, or, Saved by the Indians: A Truthful Story of Life Among Our Western Indians*, (New York: Healy & Bigelow, 1879), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, catalog number Ayer 439.A45 1879, 22.

⁵⁰ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 12.

⁵¹ It was not uncommon for the OIA to allow entertainers or anthropologists to become temporary guardians for American Indian performers, so while Healy and Bigelow were not “agents,” the OIA at least tacitly condoned their company’s employment of Native people. For other examples see Raibmon, *Authentic Indians* regarding Franz Boas and other guardians of the Kwakwaka’wakw performers at the Columbian Exposition. See also Jerry Lonecloud’s memoir about his life as a performer for the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company. Jerry Lonecloud, “Here’s What I Remember,” in Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Tracking Doctor Lonecloud: Showman to Legend Keeper*, (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2002), 62-4.

⁵² Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 72, also Healy and Bigelow, *The Red Men*, 9.

Another tactic of KIMC, like other patent medicine companies, was to adopt regular medical language to promote American Indian remedies. In doing so, KIMC tapped into the growing “private side of public health.”⁵³ Beginning in the nineteenth century, sanitary science and germ theory alerted the middle-class, white public to the invisible dangers in their homes and in their own bodies. In response, anxiety and guilt over protecting one’s family led many middle- and upper-class whites to purchase new sanitary products for the home.⁵⁴ These consumers also came to view bodies, including their own, as dangerous sites of pollution and contagion.⁵⁵ KIMC exploited the “private side” of health crises by marketing the company as a friendly “family doctor” and providing American Indian cures for the invisible world of disease-causing germs. In a full-page advertisement, the company marketed its Kickapoo Worm Killer as “the great cure” for “our unbidden guests” including worms, microbes, bacteria and germs.⁵⁶ The worm killer advertisement adopted new discoveries in medical science while simultaneously providing an alternative cure, one that sympathized with the new anxieties of many Americans. KIMC offered physical, mental, and spiritual health in variety of ways of knowing the body. Through microbes and other “unbidden guests” in the body, KIMC’s advertisements illustrated the pluralistic healing epistemologies operating in the late nineteenth century in which American Indian healing could be just as relevant as medical science—and the two were intertwined.

Healy and Bigelow further stressed the link between Kickapoo medicines and white, metropolitan ailments by strategically contrasting worrisome late-nineteenth century diseases

⁵³ Nancy Tomes, *Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7.

⁵⁴ Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, for example, indoor plumbing, 51-2 and fly eradication, 99-100.

⁵⁵ Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 57. In her discussion of the “first gospel” of germs, during the 1870s and 1880s, sanitary science and germ theory merged smoothly into a coherent theory of disease, the body, and the environment. Tomes argues the outside environment was seen to provide “natural disinfectants,” however overcrowding diminished their efficacy.

⁵⁶ John E. Healy and Charles F. Bigelow, *An Encyclopedia of Valuable Information: If There Is Anything You Wish to Know, Enquire Within*, (New Haven, CT: Healy & Bigelow, 1894), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, catalog number Ayer folio RM671.K53 1894, no page numbers, front endpage.

like scrofula, croup, and diphtheria with images of healthy American Indians.⁵⁷ For example, in *Life Among the Indians*, a depiction of an “Indian Sugar Camp” appeared opposite blurbs about rheumatism and scrofula.⁵⁸ Such an editorial choice implicitly and explicitly stated that American Indian medicines allowed them to work hard—in line with the Protestant ethic—and also revealed that they existed contemporaneously with modern ailments of the industrial age. But unlike white Americans, American Indians were healthy. *Almost a Life, or Saved by the Indians* boasted, “Dyspepsia is almost unknown among the Indians, yet with the white population in all parts of the country, it is one of the most common diseases...this disease is so prevalent [because] no cases are cured by our modern physicians...The Indians’ never failing remedy for this disease is SAGWA.”⁵⁹ KIMC implied that “modern physicians” were failing the public by providing inadequate remedies while the Kickapoos had the cure. In *Life and Scenes*, KIMC listed the conditions and diseases that Kickapoo Indian Oil could cure—rheumatism, neuralgia, toothache, catarrh, and diphtheria to name a few—next to an image of a Native American in a headdress and animal skins dress holding a pipe in one hand and raising a bottle of Sagwa in the other. The caption read “Found at Last.”⁶⁰ Coupling indigenous people in the role of “savior” to modern ailments presented the reader with a cause-effect relationship between white, industrial pains and indigenous knowledge and products. Yet the stereotypically primitive settings and attire in which KIMC dressed its two-dimensional Native spokespeople spoke to the simultaneous acts of temporal connecting and distancing the company utilized to alleviate the awkwardness of a competing and successful, and therefore possibly legitimate, Native lifestyle for its white customers.

⁵⁷ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 51 kidney diseases, 56 scrofula, 60 croup, and Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 11-12.

⁵⁸ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 56-7.

⁵⁹ Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 10-11.

⁶⁰ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 49.

While it is difficult to ascertain how consumers interpreted the temporality of American Indians in KIMC advertisements, cross-cultural medical exchange in North America was nothing new. Early colonists feared that a new environment could harm them physically and spiritually, but also believed that the local environment would cure local ailments.⁶¹ As such, these immigrants became interested in the strange botanical landscape of North America and the dearth of European-trained physicians and general bodily vulnerability led many to pursue indigenous healers and treatments.⁶² The staying power of indigenous natural knowledge was influential enough that until the 1870s (the height of the Indian Wars), white healers sometimes imitated “Indian” doctors and their success paved the way for Indian patent medicines.⁶³ KIMC reiterated this trusting relationship in an article titled “History Repeats Itself.”⁶⁴ The article briefly told the story of Indian Removal and white westward expansion across the Rockies. It lamented that even in their sweeping westward movements, white Americans could not gain Indian knowledge of local natural therapies. Considering typical, mid-century logic on the porous and geographically-specific relationship between climate and body, “The white man in crossing the plains...when sick or lame has to seek some Indian village for relief.”⁶⁵ But the article rejoiced that now some “medicine men” were traveling to American cities, providing the

⁶¹ For more on early American perspectives on the relationship between bodies and local environments, see: Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006) and Martha L. Finch, *Dissenting Bodies: Corporealities in Early New England*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). See also Philip Levy, *Fellow Travelers: Indians and Europeans Contesting the Early American Trail*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007); Christopher M. Parsons, “Plants and Peoples: French and Indigenous Botanical Knowledge in Colonial North America, 1600-1760,” (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2011); Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Sara S. Gronim, *Everyday Nature: Knowledge of the Natural World in Colonial New York*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

⁶² Vogel, *American Indian Medicine*, p. 111.

⁶³ Vogel, *American Indian Medicine*, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 71.

⁶⁵ Rosenberg, “Therapeutic Revolution,” 15; Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 71.

same cures to urban dwellers. The case of the traveling medicine men in “History Repeats Itself,” revealed that American Indians, and their knowledge, could transgress the same racial-temporal boundaries as whites.

However as “History Repeats Itself” contended, Kickapoo medical knowledge was very old, and so the company saw an opportunity to play with the dichotomous relationship between timelessness and current fashions to distinguish its products from those of regular medicine. While the Kickapoos might live and produce in the present, the company argued, their knowledge stemmed from nature, a perfect symbol of deep, unchanging history. Nature provided KIMC with a defensible position from which to define its medicines in opposition to biomedicine’s allopathic “poisons” that worked well with late-nineteenth century fears of overcivilization.⁶⁶ KIMC’s approach to regular medicine was as follows:

Instead of treating disease as is the fashion, by the administrating of insidious and deadly poisons such as Calomel, Arsenic [...] and a legion of other hurtful drugs, commence at once and throw all such physic to the dogs, and cleanse the blood and purify the system by adopting the curative agencies of nature, as the Kickapoo Indians do.⁶⁷

Healy and Bigelow urged their potential customers to discard physicians because their “harmful drugs” were a fashion, fleeting and untested.⁶⁸ Contradictory to this claim but equally compelling, KIMC elsewhere contended, “the old remedies of the M.D.’s are like the old-fashioned stage coach—very slow, not at all sure, and mighty uncertain if they ever reach their destination...”⁶⁹ According to Healy and Bigelow, regular medicine was a fad *and* old-

⁶⁶ Vogel’s 1970 monograph *American Indian Medicine* supports this by contending that historical and persistent distrust of regular medicines aided patent medicine companies of the era. Vogel, *American Indian Medicine*, 113. See also Rosenberg, “Barbarian Virtues in a Bottle” and Armitage, “Commercial Indians.”

⁶⁷ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 10. Imagery of contamination and blood, and the pervasiveness of blood purifiers in patent medicines are fascinating, but not fully explored in this essay. Elsewhere, I hope to tease apart two types of “tainted” blood: one steeped in scientific racism and blood quanta, and a second in germ theory.

⁶⁸ Elsewhere are quotations that suggest proven efficacy: Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 14. “Indian Sagwa is the safest and best of all cathartics, and no more potent remedy for the liver was ever produced by medical or chemical science.”

⁶⁹ Healy and Bigelow, *The Red Men*, 13.

fashioned, and thus rendered twice unmodern and unsuitable for the public. These passages reveal how the company mobilized nature and time to further define the boundaries of its own legitimacy. Likewise, if the way forward with physicians was more “deadly poisons,” then it was up to the Kickapoos to lead white Americans to new healing practices into the twentieth century. In other words, this advertising strategy transformed American Indians and their “timeless” knowledge into a figurative and literal lifeboat for the modern era.

The “Arrapaho” Medicine Man: Medical Pluralism and Kickapoo Exclusivity in KIMC Advertisements

The Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company had to address competing forms of healing in its publications, and indeed those formed a critical framework for its advertisements. Like fellow patent medicine companies, KIMC railed against regular medicine, often borrowing language and arguments from sectarian medical practices like homeopathy and Thomsonianism. In particular, KIMC emphasized clashes between allopathic “poisons” and natural, “harmless” remedies similar to claims made in the publications of sectarians like Samuel Thomson from much earlier in the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ As we have seen, KIMC also borrowed heavily from regular medicine, everything from its spaces (laboratories) to its newest theories (germs). But the company’s advertisements intimated that its customers would never fully trust American Indians and so it did not argue for total exchange of white, regular physicians for Indian healers and their system of knowledge. To strengthen public confidence in their producers, Healy and Bigelow adopted an ethnologic style to differentiate between Native Americans—reasoning only

⁷⁰ Samuel Thomson, *New Guide to Health, or, Botanic Family Physician: Containing a Complete System of Practice, upon a Plan Entirely New; with a Description of the Vegetables Made Use of, and Directions for Preparing and Administering Them to Cure Disease; to which Is Prefixed a Narrative of the Life and Medical Discoveries of the Author* (Boston: E.G. House, 1822), 6 and 196, for example.

Kickapoo medical knowledge was legitimate. The result of so much appropriation was an argument for the opening of the professional boundaries of medicine while tightening the boundaries around acceptable indigenous bodies and knowledge.

One advertisement in particular introduces us to KIMC's interpretation of medical pluralism and Kickapoo exclusivity. In its publication, *Almost a Life, or Saved by the Indians*, KIMC recounted the tale of an "Arrapaho medicine man" who lived "many years ago." This man would treat every patient in the same manner, regardless of the ailment, by "beating upon his tom-tom, yelling hideously and dancing wildly about the patient, until he was either frightened to death or recovered of natural causes." The article likened modern physicians to the "Arrapaho" medicine man:

The physician of to-day, whether he understands a case or not, puts on a wise and knowing look and at once prescribes poisonous pills and powders, which like the old Arrapaho Indian doctor either kills the patient, or leaves him to recover by an effort of nature. The great Medicine Men of the Kickapoos ridicule both.⁷¹

Healy and Bigelow described modern physicians as charlatans, distributing "poisons" without any real knowledge of how to treat the body. The similarities between this passage's denigration of physicians and that of Samuel Thomson's 1822 publication, *A New Guide to Health, Or, Botanic Family Physician*, are uncanny. Like KIMC, Thomson lambasted the current medical education system for creating "fashionable doctor[s]" who learned theory, but not practice, and even then only "how much poison can be given without causing immediate death."⁷² The idea of letting nature "run its course" was popular among nineteenth-century practitioners in the United States.⁷³ Likewise, Healy and Bigelow implied that the physician was usually ignorant as to the cause of illness, quick to prescribe heroic methods, but in the end was at the mercy of nature.

⁷¹ Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 11-12, also in Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, p. 135.

⁷² Thomson, *A New Guide to Health, Or, Botanic Family Physician*, 6.

⁷³ Therapeutic nihilism, while popular in Europe, never gained traction among physicians in the U.S. See Rosenberg, "The Therapeutic Revolution."

Therefore, KIMC contended, customers should look to those who had harnessed the secrets and power of nature for answers. Moreover, the company used Samuel Thomson's legal disputes as an example of regular physicians' rivalry and jealousy for unorthodox healing.⁷⁴

The crowded marketplace Samuel Thomson had helped to create often aided KIMC to attract customers, yet the company refuted labels "quack" and "patent medicine" with such fervor that it must have felt under attack. Sectarian practitioners like Samuel Thomson clearly offered a defensive strategy. KIMC hurled accusations of quackery and deception at regular medicine. In an article titled "A Mistaken Notion," Healy and Bigelow wrote, "it is a mistaken idea that many have that medicine cures diseases...

They *remove the cause* and then the system heals itself, if the blood is properly vitalized and purified...Be not deceived then by thinking medicines cure. They do not, although we commonly express ourselves in that manner.⁷⁵

KIMC not only stressed "purified" blood's great value to good health, which Indian Sagwa could conveniently provide, but also appropriated the principles of irregular therapeutics when hinting physicians deceived the public with allopathic drugs.

Unlike Thomson and other sectarians, KIMC stressed the "Indianness" of its products. In their 1890s publication, *Life and Scenes*, Healy and Bigelow wrote, "don't allow your prejudices against Patent Medicines to prevent you giving [Indian Sagwa] a fair trial. Remember and don't forget Kickapoo Indian Sagwa is not a patent medicine."⁷⁶ As they implicitly signaled to American Indians' older proprietary claims to their medicine, Healy and Bigelow revealed their awareness of growing concerns with patent medicines.

⁷⁴ Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 8-9. The article seems to refer to Thomson's 1809 trial for the murder of Ezra Lovett, but it is not so specific, stating instead "Because he was successful, the hatred of his old school rivals became so intense that he was accused of witch-craft, arrested and put on trial for his life [and acquitted]."

⁷⁵ Healy and Bigelow, *An Encyclopedia of Valuable Information*, no page numbers, article titled "A Mistaken Notion."

⁷⁶ Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 30.

Moreover, KIMC viewed American Indians as a fitting shield against accusations of quackery. For instance, in an article titled “Honesty Not Bigotry” in its 1890 publication, *Life Among the Indians*, KIMC wrote:

It is not an infrequent occurrence among educated (?) physicians, to hear them cry Quack! Quack!! Quack!!! When referring to any particular sort of medicine or mode of medical treatment outside of their own school, which they may regard with ridicule as interfering with their professional rights and practice. And probably no class of people ever had this opprobrious epithet so often thrust in their faces, as the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Men.⁷⁷

Noticeably, Healy and Bigelow did not refer to the *company* as the target of these “opprobrious epithets,” but rather cunningly redirected them to the Kickapoos. This way, KIMC could claim credit for the Kickapoo remedies’ benefits without accepting the criticism. The quotation also mimicked sectarian critiques as the company questioned regular medicine’s intensifying boundary-work of raising educational standards while contextualizing accusations of quackery from regular physicians within a framework of senseless professional exclusion.

“Honesty Not Bigotry” can also be read within a broader anti-intellectual appeal to “self-help” and folk medicine grounded in American culture since the colonial era.⁷⁸ In *An Encyclopedia of Valuable Information: If There Is Anything You Wish to Know, Enquire Within*, KIMC likened its medicines to the empiricism of agriculture, stating, “there is nothing artificial in Indian medicine. It is the genuine product of nature, just like farming, based on practical

⁷⁷ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 60.

⁷⁸ In particular, James Harvey Young’s 1961 classic monograph, *The Toadstool Millionaires*, contends patent medicines did just this. Young *The Toadstool Millionaires*, vii, see also Part One. For a brief history of patent medicines and regulation in the “golden age” of European quackery (the 18th century) see Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present*, (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 284-287.

See also Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, chs. 1-3. Two publications in particular contain tables of measurements, farming guidance, world facts, almanacs: John E. Healy and Charles F. Bigelow, *Enquire Within for Many Useful Facts Relating to Your Health and Happiness: A Book for Everybody*, (New Haven, CT: Published by the Kickapoo Indians, 1885), Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, catalog number Ayer AY64.E57 1885 and Healy and Bigelow, *An Encyclopedia of Valuable Information*, no page numbers. Tables on farming advice were printed opposite of “Kickapoo Medicine Men” portraits.

observation and practical experience. Book medicine is like book farming—bad.”⁷⁹ Lauding experience over a “book” education, this advertisement also attempted to differentiate higher education from practicality found in nature.

Almost a Life, or Saved by the Indians, the fictional account of anthropologist Frank Cushing’s time with the southwestern Zunis, linked anti-book/pro-experience education with the Kickapoos.⁸⁰ After lauding the scientific methods of the Indians, Cushing gushed, “Hardly is there an Indian maiden or youth of ten summers but who knows more of botany than any of your graduates of the best schools in the country...”⁸¹ For KIMC, Native *children* were more knowledgeable than regular physicians. But in a larger sense, KIMC was also painting all Americans Indians as children by insinuating they did not work to learn botany. Rather, their botanical knowledge, “may have come to them intuitively, why not since their Creator knew that their sick people ought to be cured, and they had no other means than those supplied by the verdant fields, and by the spicy woods.”⁸² A supernatural explanation worked to diminish representations of superior indigenous knowledge and control.

KIMC both created and grappled with tensions between American Indians’ and regular physicians’ knowledge and culture, and ultimately drew similarities between the two—a tactic that proved just as necessary to KIMC’s strategy as painting differences. KIMC attempted to demonstrate the overlap between orthodox medical knowledge and that of the Kickapoo Indians under its employ in *Almost a Life, or Saved by the Indians*. According to KIMC, Frank Cushing reported that ““There is just as much method in the manner in which the Kickapoo or the Zuni Indians treat their patients as in the mode of practice pursued by the Educated City

⁷⁹ Healy and Bigelow, *An Encyclopedia of Valuable Information*, no page numbers, article titled “Kickapoo Indian Sagwa Obeys Nature’s Laws.”

⁸⁰ This story is also in Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes* beginning on 71.

⁸¹ Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 8.

⁸² Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 8-9.

practitioner.”⁸³ The company emphasized familiar healing techniques in order to shorten the chasm between regular medicine, which was familiar to its customers, and Kickapoo medicine, which was not. An article titled “The Philosophy of Expansion and Contraction” exemplified this strategy. “It is well known fact among physicians,” the blurb began, “that any excruciating pain caused by the expansion of the muscles, nerves and fibres of the body can be relieved by the application of pounded ice.”⁸⁴ While leaving unanswered the theories behind orthodox medicine’s approach to “expansion and contraction” they demonstrated that indigenous knowledge could explain it:

Why is this so? We will tell you....It is the knowledge which the untutored Indian Medicine Men have of this principle of expansion and contraction that doubtless caused them to discover a remedy in the juices of plants, combined, which will generate cold, by evaporation; hence Indian Oil, the sovereign remedy for all pains and inflammation.⁸⁵

As this case illustrates, adopting and rejecting medical science was a popular technique in KIMC advertisements to reorient the consumer toward medicinal alternatives within a familiar conceptualization of healing. Here, KIMC argued the Kickapoo Indians treated pain similarly to regular doctors. Moreover, KIMC’s “Indian Medicine Men” could best explain physicians’ coveted, and secretive, practices. Thus, medical science and Native healing knowledge were not all that different. Moreover, while physicians used external remedies to treat pain, the article argued, the Kickapoos’ superior observational skills and botanical knowledge aided in the formulation of an *internal* medicine, an oil more convenient and “sovereign” than ice.

Considering the context of Indian assimilation policy in the late-nineteenth century, KIMC followed suit by emphasizing similarities between Native and orthodox healing methods. By the 1880s, incensed white, Christian reformists pressured the federal government to adopt an

⁸³ Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 8.

⁸⁴ Healy and Bigelow, *The Red Men*, 6 and Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 154.

⁸⁵ Healy and Bigelow, *The Red Men*, 6 and Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 154.

assimilationist policy to, as they saw it, free Native Americans from reservation squalor and ignorance. The movement's leaders saw Indians victims, not "savages"—stuck in an antiquated way of life, but not without hope to be assimilated into the white populace with the proper guidance.⁸⁶ The assimilationist movement shifted policy from efforts to pacify and contain American Indians on reservations to breaking up reservations into individual allotments and annihilating Native culture via imposed western education.⁸⁷ Yet federal assimilation laws also limited Native peoples' autonomy and many remained wards of the United States, revealing that deeper prejudices still flourished in the nation.⁸⁸ In this light, Healy and Bigelow pretended to be Indian agents whom the Office of Indian Affairs had permitted to care for Kickapoo workers in their service, attempting to cloak their business with an air of officialdom.⁸⁹

Yet, as the "Arrapaho" story illuminated, KIMC also set other Native healers as the foils to the Kickapoos. While the "Arrapaho" medicine man was a quack, Kickapoo Indians, they argued, "alone are the custodians of their secret."⁹⁰ KIMC asserted the Kickapoos, out of all American Indians, had "discovered" the valuable medicines the company now sold and, for previous generations, had passed their medicinal knowledge to other American Indian communities.⁹¹ KIMC's publications erected boundaries between American Indians in order to sharpen the company's edge over the competition and to assert its products' quality.

Healy and Bigelow's position on the high value of *some* indigenous knowledge mirrored work in the burgeoning profession of ethnology. Healy and Bigelow also strove to act as experts

⁸⁶ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, Chs. 1-2.

⁸⁷ For literature on boarding schools, see: K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: the Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1998).

⁸⁸ Allotment is usually exemplified by the Dawes Act of 1887. Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 70-81.

⁸⁹ In Bigelow's origins story of the company, he says the Kickapoo chief allowed him to take five medicine men with him to New England, "who were put entirely under my charge, the Chief having appointed me Indian Agent." Healy and Bigelow, *Life and Scenes*, 12.

⁹⁰ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 11.

⁹¹ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, 11 and Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 8.

on American Indian culture and knowledge when they adopted the language of ethnology.⁹² Ethnography (the study of one culture) and ethnology (the comparative study of cultures) offered a professional position from which KIMC would judge Native peoples against one another, in order to ultimately proclaim Kickapoo knowledge the most efficacious and sound. For instance, *Life Among the Indians* contained 14 two-page articles addressing topics like war recruitment (“Striking the Post”), death (“The Death Whoop,” “Indian Burial”), hunting and food production (“Shooting Fish,” “Kickapoo Indian Woman Dressing Buffalo Skin,” “Indian Sugar Camp”), and ceremonies (“Medicine Dance of the Winnebagoes,” “Dog Dance of the Dacotas”). These ethnographical-type articles were both salacious and technical. For example, “The Death Whoop” relived a heroic Indian warrior’s last breaths, while “Medicine Dance of the Winnebagoes,” specified wigwam building materials and dimensions.⁹³ Displaying a supposedly intimate knowledge of American Indians—and not just Kickapoo Indians—served to demonstrate mastery of indigenous culture and medical knowledge. KIMC would then use Non-Kickapoo Native healers, like the “Arrapaho” Medicine Man, to act as foils and prove the Kickapoos superiority.

Healy and Bigelow also ventriloquized other Native peoples to invent praise for Kickapoo medicine and to construct a hierarchy of Native people. Most explicitly, Frank Cushing exclaimed, ““The Zuni’s [sic] know many medicines, but none so good as the Kickapoos make!...The Zunis almost worship this medicine [Sagwa].””⁹⁴ But this “fact” was really a double ventriloquizing act as Frank Cushing’s voice was also brazenly appropriated in the tale “Frank Cushing’s Story: How the Great Indian Sagwa Saved the Life of the Famous

⁹² The Smithsonian Institute’s Bureau of Ethnology focused its gaze on American Indians following its establishment in 1879.

⁹³ Healy and Bigelow, *Life Among the Indians*, “The Death Whoop,” 12-3, “Medicine Dance of the Winnebagoes,” 27.

⁹⁴ Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 8.

Ethnologist.”⁹⁵ Cushing was an archeologist and early ethnologist with the Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology beginning in 1879 and one of the first to practice participant observation.⁹⁶ His connection to Healy and Bigelow was dubious, nonetheless they saw an opportunity to hitch their company to a rising star.

Conclusion

Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company advertisements beg the question why the company saw it necessary to adopt ethnology to sell their products and a lot of the answer boils down to trust. Certainly, new studies and publications on Native Americans held the potential to entertain the masses if distilled into a palatable form. But more than that, KIMC seemed to cultivate distrust through the contradictory nature of its claims. In particular, the company utilized Native imagery because American Indians were foreign and their “natural” remedies could be used as a defense against critiques of quackery. But arguing “natural Indian” medicines were what white, Eastern Americans needed to survive the modern world clashed with over a century of stereotypical Indian “savages,” and those representations could not be erased overnight.

Ultimately, KIMC’s advertisements were mostly defensive in nature, sometimes against outsider critiques, but often against the logic of the company’s own claims. As the “Arrapaho” medicine man story and the persecution of Kickapoo medicine men in “Honesty Not Bigotry” revealed, KIMC was anticipating and reacting to escalating attacks from regular physicians. In both instances, American Indians were deployed to protect the company from direct critique. Through such defensive maneuvering, the company drew differences and similarities between Native healers and physicians. The differences rested on the Kickapoos’ “natural” medicines

⁹⁵ Healy and Bigelow, *Almost a Life*, 5-10.

⁹⁶ J.W. Powell in W.J. McGee, et al. “In Memoriam: Frank Hamilton Cushing,” *American Anthropologist* 2, no. 2 (April 1900): 363-64.

and allopathy's "poisons." More subtly, the company contended Native and regular healing were less opposed in methodology than it might seem. Both used similar theories of the body to heal it, for instance the use of cold to treat inflamed muscles. Such reasoning could attract customers by promising familiarity among the strange and offering explanations behind physicians' methods. The result was an argument for medical pluralism in which Kickapoo remedies could work alongside, and even replace, regular medicine.

Calls for medical pluralism, however, required another strategy to bolster trust in American Indians: manipulation of time. First, KIMC played with time to mark orthodox physicians as "old fashioned" and too "fashionable," in both cases poor excuses for qualified practitioners. Second, KIMC boasted its "Great Indian Laboratory" allowed the Kickapoos to use modern methods to make their natural medicines for the industrial age. But it also meant they would live in close proximity and contemporaneously with white Americans. In order to cure modern ailments authentically, real, living Native producers would need to make their medicines for white Americans suffering from modern diseases. In response, KIMC had to emphasize the Kickapoos' primitivity as well as their timelessness and history—anything that would disassociate them from the present moment.

The result of KIMC's advertisements was a dizzying array of contradictions: modern yet primitive, superior to regular medicine yet relying on its logic and framework to prove its products' efficacy. Throughout the hundreds of pages of text and images, one can see the circular logic that steered the company's strategies. For instance, claiming Kickapoos were scientific and modern meant they could become too powerful and live too closely to white Americans. So, the company emphasized their primitivity history. But the Kickapoos were still needed in the present to deflect criticism coming from regular physicians, so KIMC adopted ethnology to differentiate

between “good Indians” and “bad Indians.” By reasoning the Kickapoos were the former, and the American Indians with the best medicine, they rendered them worthy of inclusion in the realm of legitimate healing. This position again brought the Kickapoos into temporal and spatial proximity with white Americans.

In the end, the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company was willing to argue any which way to sell its products. In the process, they appropriated not only the language of regular medicine, sectarianism, and ethnology, but also egregiously from American Indian—and Kickapoo in particular—cultures, representing them in ways that “reduced them to images.”⁹⁷ But the company’s business strategy also created a space where American Indian culture and knowledge was legitimate. To have a public platform for indigenous culture—however misrepresented—was an astonishing development during an era in which all things Native were being annihilated across the nation. There was nothing “Kickapoo” about Healy and Bigelow’s venture, but there was also nothing easy about appropriating Kickapoo and Native images to sell KIMC products. Instead, the power of indigenous peoples and knowledge, and white anxieties about them, forced the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company into an endless dance of maneuvering and contradictions.

⁹⁷ Steele, “Reduced to Images.”

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