

# Women's VU *m* Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

V A N D E R B I L T U N I V E R S I T Y

VOLUME XXI:3 NOVEMBER 1998

## WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

### Mom: the tender white meat you can trust

by ALISON PIEPMEIER

Here's an experiment: Sit in front of your television for an hour or so one afternoon. Watch commercials. Really. You probably think you see enough commercials anyway, but this time pay attention to them. Ignore the shows, and instead, get the real entertainment. While you're watching, ask yourself some questions: Was that a woman's hand I just saw putting the brownies on the table? If mom's the last one home, why is everyone waiting for her to fix dinner? Why does that woman's voice sound so concerned about germs on the countertop? Have I yet heard a man's voice asking, "How will I ever get this greasy shirt clean?" Did they just say "Dr. Mom"?

Whenever my students analyze ads, I ask them to remember a point that media analyst Susan Douglas made when she visited Vanderbilt a few years ago: Advertisers spend literally billions of dollars determining the most effective way to change our behavior — to make us buy their products. Every color, every word, every nuance in every television commercial and print ad you see has been meticu-

lously analyzed for greatest impact. As Douglas explains, "The mass media are not simple mirrors, reflecting 'reality' to us. . . . [A]ds are not reflections of the world; they are very careful, deliberate constructions."

#### Lingering stereotypes

Because the advertisers are spending this much time and energy to affect us, we must become careful cultural critics and try to analyze the world around us,

Consider virtually any commercial for food — from Toll House cookies to Stove Top Stuffing. These ads generally feature families, families who are hungry and/or bored and in need of help. Who comes to save the day? Mom — with, of course, the aid of a certain product like Pillsbury pizza dough or Taco Bell Home Originals. The women in these commercials are generally thrilled with the fact that they've satisfied their families. If you had never encountered human beings before

and used commercials to tell you about American life, what would you think? You'd be convinced that nothing warms a woman's heart faster than cinnamon rolls for the kids, that extra-soft toilet paper and non-scratch scouring powder are key to her every-

day happiness. You'd learn that women love to serve their families and that they gain fulfillment from menial household tasks. The messages these commercials convey about men and women can be insidious, things you might not notice unless you stop to think about them. For instance, the other day I was going about my busi-



"While the articles in this magazine often argue that taking care of the home and family should be an equal-opportunity endeavor, the ads rarely reflect this sentiment."

Ads from *Good Housekeeping*, October, 1998

especially ads. And what we will find if we analyze current commercials and ads is that the stereotypes of women's roles and women's place haven't changed much in the last 50 years.

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*continued on page 2*



## Mom in advertising *continued from page 1*

ness humming a line from a commercial I'd seen while watching *The Today Show*: "But no matter where you go, one thing every mom knows, everybody loves the taste of Kraft." So it's mom who knows this, is it? Mom feeds the family, buys the salad dressing, and it's her job to know what they want and to provide it.

Occasionally these days you'll see a commercial with dad fixing dinner, but dad is invariably a terrible cook. I'm thinking of a commercial which features a portly man attempting to make a cake, gluing the crumbling pieces together with frosting. He's a mess. It's clear he shouldn't be in the kitchen at all. If dad

things are women's work.

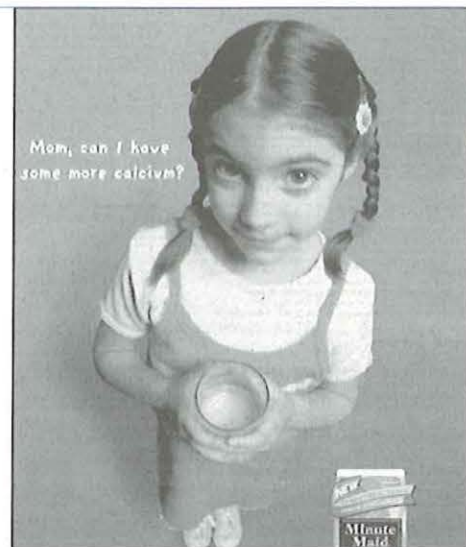
The ads shown on the preceding page reinforce the idea that household work — feeding and caring for the family — should automatically fall to mom. These ads, taken from the October issue of *Good Housekeeping*, feature happy, contented women and their children; fathers are entirely excluded from these images. These ads do more than suggest that caring for the family is women's work; their slogans say it directly:

"Choosy moms choose Jif," "The Brand Moms Have Trusted For Over 100 Years," "Mothers have known about it for years." While the articles in this

magazine often argue that taking care of the home and the family should be an equal-opportunity endeavor, falling to both parents, the ads rarely reflect this sentiment.

The title for this essay emerged from a class in which I had my students analyze a series of daytime commercials. A commercial for pork came on, featuring the slogan, "Pork — the tender white meat you can trust." One student raised his hand. "If we were going to write a slogan for all these commercials," he said, "it should be 'Mom — the tender white meat you can trust.'" Besides being funny, he was absolutely right. In most commercials mom is tender — supporting her family. She's white — racial diversity is rare. She's meat — an object, not someone with her own subjectivity or personality. And, of course, you can trust her — she'll feed you what you like, keep you entertained and healthy, and always be at your beck and call.

Obviously, one ad isn't going to



*Guess who comes to save the day? Mom, of course.*

change your life. It isn't going to undercut the gains women have made, and I'm not suggesting this. But we, as consumers, aren't faced with one ad. We're inundated with advertising on television, on billboards, on the radio, in virtually any publication we read, and many of these ads portray women and men in reductive, stereotypical roles while purporting to show us what our world looks like and how it could be better with their product in it.

My students often protest, "These ads keep being made because they work." To that I reply, let's make it our concern to keep them from working. Let's realize that as consumers we have the power of choice. We can learn to decode the messages in ads, to see through the sales pitch and to identify what they're really saying to us. We can choose how we spend our money. We can talk back to offensive ads, literally speaking out against them and voting with our dollars. It's important for us to keep our minds from being colonized by reductive, stereotypical images of women and men. We don't have to be passive vessels for this junk.



**“If we analyze current commercials and ads, the stereotypes of women's roles haven't changed much in the last 50 years.”**

is ever able to succeed, it's only because of the product he buys, and the underlying message here is that men are comical when they try to cook or do other household duties. In other words, those

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*Alison Piepmeier is pursuing a Ph.D. in English at Vanderbilt and has served as a graduate teaching assistant for "Images of Women," a popular course offered by the Women's Studies Program. Piepmeier describes her study of women in advertising as a "tangential interest" to her specialty — 19th-century American women.*





# Letters to the future

When members of Students for Women's Concerns (SWC) met for a retreat on a recent fall weekend, they shared stories and set goals for their group. Now affiliated with the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance, SWC works to raise awareness of women's issues on campus and to achieve a more egalitarian society. Bronwen Blass, co-president of the organization, says peers often ask SWC members why they think feminism is needed today and exactly what it is they hope to gain.

To help them envision the future they are working to achieve, students at the retreat were asked to write letters to the next generation. If they hoped to be parents, the students addressed the letters to their future daughters. These letters, excerpts of which are reproduced here, envision a world enhanced by feminism.

Dear Future Daughter,  
I hope that by the time you arrive, the world will be a better place. I hope that you will have choice in every aspect of your life. I hope that if you wish to play a sport, your team is supported and funded equally with all other sports. I hope that you are encouraged by all of your teachers to pursue any subject and to make your voice heard. I hope you are encouraged to run for positions of leadership throughout your life. I hope that you will assume leadership roles and always try to look at the world through new eyes in order to make creative and positive changes. I hope that you will be taught and truly learn from a very young age to love your body — that your body is beautiful — not something to be ashamed of.

Dear Wonderful One,  
I envision your world to be such that you can do or be anything you desire. No one will place expectations on how you should live simply because you have the glory of being a woman. I envision a world for you where you need not be bombarded with unrealistic body images, where there'll be no reason to question whether a woman can be president, or a CEO, or a firefighter, and yet will also not be judged for choosing to devote herself to motherhood. Yours will be a world where an "f" on the sex blank of a survey will not necessitate economic disadvantage and where men will expect to participate in a fair egalitarian division of labor. I envision all these things with great hopes for you as well as unconditional love, support and pride.

Love,  
Mom

Dear Daughter,  
Be assertive. I can only hope that someday it will be completely accepted as the norm that a woman will speak her mind.  
Be anything you want to be. There will always be people to support you, and it's OK to challenge those people who don't. It is ladylike to prove them wrong!

My Dear Daughter,  
I want this world to honor your body and your soul, to shield both from the lurid images and fatal messages sent to girls today. You are strong and you can make change — big or small — in every place you choose. There are many good works to be done; the world and I place them, with faith, in your hands.



# Nancy Ransom honored with Werthan Award

Nancy A. Ransom, who served as director of the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center from its founding in 1978 until her retirement in 1997, has been selected to receive the Mary Jane Werthan Award.

The award is presented annually to honor an individual who has contributed significantly to the advancement of women at Vanderbilt. It is named in honor of Mary Jane Werthan, the first woman to serve on the Vanderbilt Board of Trust. The prize includes a cash award of \$1,000.

When Ransom began as director of the newly organized Women's Center in 1978, she had only a desk, a chair, and a part-time position. She nurtured the growth of the center for 19 years, developing a program that has served as a model for other universities. Along the way, she fought many battles for women at Vanderbilt, starting with the need for an on-campus child care center. After several years of effort, the first day care center opened in 1983.

Several of those who nominated Ransom for the award also noted her extensive community service work with such organizations as CABLE, Planned Parenthood and Women in the Nineties (WIN).



**NANCY RANSOM**  
Award recipient

## Margaret Cuninggim Lecture

The Mary Jane Werthan Award will be presented prior to the Margaret Cuninggim Lecture Thursday, Nov. 5, at 7:30 p.m. in Wilson Hall, Room 126. This year's lecturer is Lucia Gilbert, who will address changing perception of gender.

## The universal language of symbols

Artist Victoria Boone began creating symbols as a young girl, so her parents could not decipher the secrets in her diary. Her interest in symbols has evolved into a system of artistic expression, in which symbols and icons represent individuals and basic human experiences.

"A Universe of Associations: Symbolic Paintings by Victoria Boone" will be on exhibit at the Women's Center through Dec. 28. Boone will be honored at a reception at the center Nov. 2 from 4:30 to 6 p.m.

The exhibit includes 14 paintings that use symbols to elaborate on the universal concepts of love, friendship, family, heaven and hell. Boone says she came to examine the bonds of friendship more closely after a tornado slammed into her East Nashville home and studio in April, ripping off the roof and forcing her out of the house during four months of repair work. One of her paintings, "House or Home?" shows a small red house with a huge tornado swirl overhead.

Most of Boone's work uses vibrant colors of acrylic and oil painted onto wood. One striking piece is "Heaven, Hell or Purgatory?" in which different symbols for each place are suspended on a stark black-and-white background. For most who view the painting, Boone says, it is easy to tell at a glance which symbol represents hell. Reactions like this prove that symbols can be a universal visual language.

Boone has had paintings chosen for several juried exhibits, including the Annual All-Women Fine Arts Exhibition in Huntsville, AL.



Victoria Boone at work in her studio.

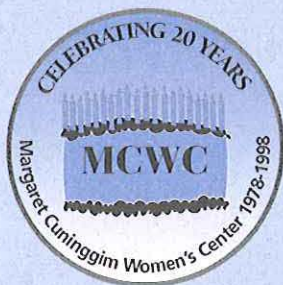




# November 1998

**M** Margaret  
Cunninggim  
Women's Center

## Calendar of Events



**PLEASE SAVE AND POST**

For more information on the events listed, call 322-4843.

### Monday, November 2

**Artist's Reception** for Victoria Boone, whose work will be on display at the Women's Center through December 28. 4:30 to 6 p.m. *Cuninggim Center*. See article, page 4.

### Tuesday, November 3

**Creative Life Planning Group** meets to hear "How to be a Highly Effective Woman," part five of a seven-part series led by Bonnie Brown. Group meets every Tuesday; new members welcome. Noon to 1 p.m. *Cuninggim Center*.

### Thursday, November 5

**Shifting Perspectives: Locating Gender in Context** is the topic of the 1998 Margaret Cuninggim Lecture by Lucia A. Gilbert, an award-winning scholar of the psychology of women. 7:30 p.m. *Wilson Hall, Room 126*.

### Monday, November 9

**Book Group** meets to discuss *February Shadows* by Elizabeth Reichart. 5:15 to 6:15 p.m. *Cuninggim Center*.

### Wednesday, November 11

**Brown Bag Lunch for Lesbian and Bisexual Women.** Monthly meeting for faculty, staff and graduate students who identify as lesbian or bisexual. For information, contact Melinda Brown at 322-6285 or [brown@library.vanderbilt.edu](mailto:brown@library.vanderbilt.edu). 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. *Cuninggim Center*.

**Elizabeth Higginbotham**, professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Delaware, speaks on "The Intersection of Race and Gender and its Impact on the Working Lives of African-American Professional Women." 7 p.m. *Wilson Hall, Room 126*.

### Thursday, November 12

**Women and Investing Series.** Rosemary Lombardy of J.C. Bradford is the second speaker in our series. 5:30 p.m. *Cuninggim Center*.

### Friday, November 13

**20th Anniversary Celebration.** You're invited to join the festivities as the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center marks the 20th anniversary of its founding with refreshments and fun. The winner of our t-shirt design contest will be announced at this event. Open to all members of the university community. 4 to 6 p.m. *Cuninggim Center*.

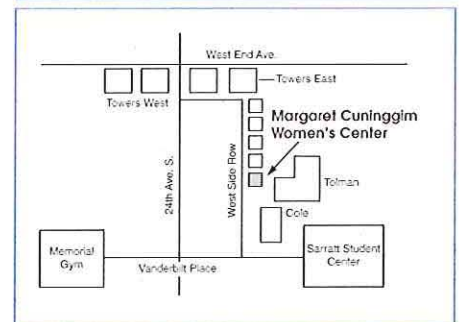
### Thursday, November 19

**Reducing Stress: A Guided Imagery Experience.** This lunch-hour seminar on dealing with stress will be led by Karen Silien of the Psychological and Counseling Center and Linda Manning, director of the Women's Center. Registration is required; call 322-4843. Noon to 1 p.m. *Cuninggim Center*.

**School Daze: Good or Bad Hair.** Ever wonder how black women can style their hair in many different ways? The owner of Pearl's Pearl Braid Shop will talk about black people's hair, how to style it, and how to take care of it. Pizza and drinks will be served. Co-sponsored by the Women's Center and the Black Cultural Center. 6 p.m. *Community Partnership House Annex*.

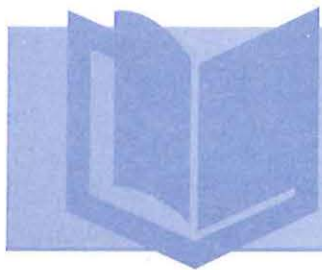


### How to find us . . .



The Cuninggim Center is located in the Franklin Building at 316 West Side Row.





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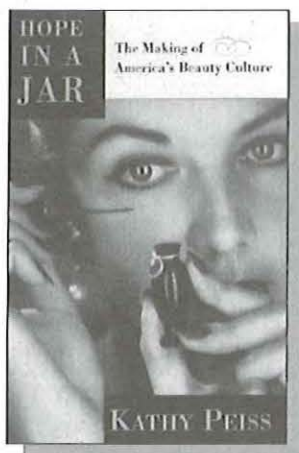
**BARBARA CLARKE**  
Women's Center librarian



# Hope in a Jar: the many faces of the beauty business

Historian Kathy Peiss examines the history of self-image and the beauty industry from colonial days to the present in *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 1998). Although women in recent decades have criticized the great emphasis placed on personal appearance, Peiss argues that the beauty industry also has positive effects.

Beauty rituals promote social interaction and bonding among women, many of whom claim that they use makeup to declare their freedom or as a means of self-expression. Many enjoy selecting and using cosmetics and helping others apply them. Over the years the beauty industry has provided employment to many women who needed the income and had few other options. Peiss, a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, notes: "Not only tools of deception and illusion, then, these little jars tell a rich history of women's ambition, pleasure, and



community."

Reproduced in the volume are many fascinating examples of advertisements that appeared in print from 1869 onwards. For hundreds of years women prepared health and beauty treatments at home and tended to hide the fact that they were attempting to improve their appearance. By the middle of the nineteenth century commercially-made cosmetics were becoming more common; some of these contained harmful substances like lead. At that time the most popular cosmetics for women were products designed to whiten or lighten the skin. Most

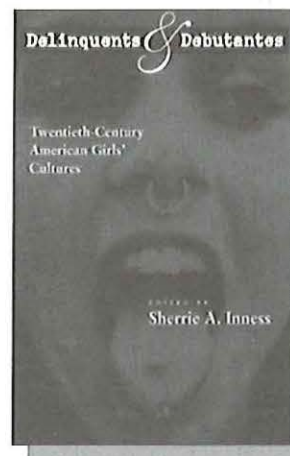
Victorians disapproved of other types of cosmetics; respectable women did not use them. In the early decades of this century the use of makeup became more common and eventually became acceptable for women from all backgrounds. Peiss also discusses beauty products produced by or for minority women and cosmetic use by men.

Some of the notable early female entrepreneurs in the beauty business are portrayed; most of the earlier cosmetics companies were founded and run by women. Once big business discovered that large profits could be made from makeup, large companies run mainly by men bought out most of the smaller women-owned businesses.

*Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures* (New York University Press, 1998) edited by Sherrie A. Inness aims to show how "a thorough understanding of girls and their culture is crucial to understanding our society and the place women have in it." Girls' culture is often considered to be unimportant and uninteresting, yet it plays a vital role in the socialization of half of the population. The editor, an assistant professor

of English at Miami University, shows the importance of understanding how females learn sex roles and how our society is structured on gendered lines.

Some selections illustrate how girls are shaped by the society around them, while others



discuss girls as consumers of culture. Although girls are inevitably molded by cultural forces many also question or rebel against them. Other chapters explore the experiences of young women of various ethnic origins and the attitudes of young girls toward literature written for them.

The 13 contributors focus on such topics as early Girl Scout manuals, girls' clothing as depicted in old Sears catalogs, young female criminals, board games, *Seventeen* magazine, American Girl dolls and other products, Mexican-American adolescent girls, and marriage and courtship literature for young people in Depression America.

### Dean Goodman's books donated to library

Dr. Lenn Goodman, a professor of philosophy, has kindly donated to the library 160 volumes on a variety of gender-related topics. The books, which belonged to his late wife, Dean Madeleine Goodman, will be kept together in a separate section of the library. Madeleine Goodman was the dean of the College of Arts and Science from 1994 until her death in 1996.





## HELP FOR CHILDREN & PARENTS:

### VU Counseling Center offers therapy for family problems

- Is your eight-year-old "acting out" because of a deep-seated problem — or just acting up, as all kids do?
- Is your ten-year-old son being bullied at school?
- Are you confused about your teenage daughter's new interest in witchcraft?

PARENTING IS BOTH A JOY and a challenge for most of those who experience it, and many parents find they need help somewhere along the way.

A relatively new place for parents to seek advice is the Vanderbilt Psychological and Counseling Center, which has recently increased its staff and services in the area of child and family counseling.

Dr. Rhonda Venable is one of three full-time psychologists at the center whose practice includes child and family treatment, as well as serving students.

Venable and other staff members offer help to such clients as families under stress, children with behavioral problems, and teenagers with substance abuse issues. Services of the Psychological and Counseling Center are offered to members of the university community: students, full-time faculty and staff, and their partners and families. Most services to students are provided free of charge.

Venable's career as a clinical psychologist has included a mixture of child and family treatment and adult psychotherapeutic services. Before coming to the center full-time five years ago, she piloted several child and family programs, often working with dysfunctional families and abusive parents.

At Vanderbilt, she has found a different set of family problems and parents who tend to be "very interested in being a part of their children's lives." Because of this, the whole family can be enlisted in seeking solutions. "We work primarily out of a family model that includes the child," Venable explains. "Almost without fail, we include the parents in the treatment process."

Many of the calls to Venable come from parents who are getting a divorce and want to proceed in a way that will be least disruptive to their children. In such a case, she says, the center might assign two therapists to work with the family, interviewing the parents and their children. A therapist might get the whole family together, letting the children express to the parents some of their concerns and fears: "When am I going to see you again?" or "Do you still love me?"

In other child/family cases, parents are informed by school personnel that their children are showing disciplinary or behavioral problems. In addition to providing therapy for the child and family, the staff of the Psychological and Counseling Center can serve as a liaison with the school. When a psychologist talks to the child's teacher or principal, it alerts the school to the fact that the parents are "interested and invested" in finding a remedy for their child's problem. "It helps get the child back on track and gives the school some reassurance" that the family is working toward a solution.

Even if a behavioral problem seems to affect only one child

in a family, therapists often work with the whole family group, including siblings. "It is a systems problem," Venable says. "It may be Johnny or Susie who is acting out, but it involves the whole family. What happens to the other children when Mom

and Dad are so stressed out about dealing with Johnny?"

In addition to divorce and disciplinary problems, family therapists at the center often deal with such issues as attention deficit disorder, adolescent rebellion, peer group problems, and anger management. One recent therapy group helped extremely shy children learn to be more assertive. Through role playing and videotaped review, the children made significant progress in learning to express themselves, at school and elsewhere.

While the Psychological and Counseling Center offers many forms of treatment, its staff does not prescribe medication or conduct formal

psychological testing for children, such as IQ, ADD or personality tests. Venable says the staff refers patients to local physicians when medications are needed.

Although children are often less than thrilled about the prospect of talking to a psychologist, Venable advises parents not to work at enlisting the child's approval. Initiate treatment anyway, and in most cases, the child will come around — eventually coming to appreciate the opportunity to talk with a willing listener.



**"Almost without fail, we include the parents in the treatment process."**



**DR. RHONDA VENABLE**  
Psychological & Counseling  
Center psychologist

To learn more about child and family counseling, or other services offered by the Psychological and Counseling Center, call 322-2571. The center is located on the 11th floor of the Baker Building.



# Announcements

- **Voices of the Ancients**, a weekend of teachings and a ceremonial visit with a Native American spiritual leader, will be Nov. 20-22 at various local sites. Ven. Dhyani Ywahoo is an elder of the Green Mountain Band of the Cherokee Nation, a recognized teacher of Tibetan Buddhism, and founder of the Sunray Meditation Society. She is the author of *Voices of Our Ancestors*, *Cherokee Teachings from the Wisdom Fire*. Her visit to Nashville is being organized by a group of people interested in the cultural, historical and spiritual significance of the ancient Native American sacred sites in the area. The weekend includes these events:  
**Public Lecture:** Friday, Nov. 20, 7:30 p.m. at Edgehill United Methodist Church. Cost: \$10. A portion of the proceeds will benefit community programs of the church.  
**Teaching/Workshop Session:** Saturday, Nov. 21, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Scarritt-Bennett Center. Cost: \$65.  
**Ceremonial Visit:** Sunday, Nov. 22, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Mound Bottom Sacred Site on the Harpeth River near Hwy. 70 South. Cost: \$25.  
For information, call Ann Williams at 292-3592.

- **The 12th Annual International Conference of Women in Higher Education** will be Jan. 2-4, 1999 in Charleston, SC. Speakers will include Dr. Claudia Limbert, CEO of Pennsylvania State University; Dr. Bernice Resnick Sandler, scholar-in-residence, NAWA (Advancing Women in Higher Education); and Dr. Jean O'Barr, director of Women's Studies at Duke. Preregistration is due by Dec. 1. Online registration is available at [www.nawe.org](http://www.nawe.org).

## Responding to the call

Kathy Masulis, program coordinator for DECISIONS, wrote *Women's VU* recently to say that "28 Vanderbilt women are participating in DECISIONS at the women's prison this fall! That's 1 faculty member, 2 staff, 3 law school students, and 22 undergrads. We're very grateful for their support, and appreciate your helping us inform the Vanderbilt community of our program." Volunteers with DECISIONS teach decision-making and life-planning skills to inmates at the Tennessee Prison for Women.



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