Caroline Robinson Jones: Advertising Trailblazer, Entrepreneur and Tragic Heroine

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While the advertising industry has been noted for its historical lack of diversity, people of color have made significant contributions to the profession. This paper draws upon archival material housed at the Smithsonian Institution to examine the career of the late Caroline Robinson Jones, once considered the foremost African-American woman in advertising. A pioneer in the field, Jones was the first black woman to serve as a vice-president in a major U.S. advertising agency and later established a respected agency bearing her name. Despite her successes, an examination of her experiences suggests that she often confronted significant racial and gender barriers which may have constrained her achievements.

DIVERSITY IN THE ADVERTISING BUSINESS: AN OVERVIEW

The advertising industry is recognized as exerting important social, political and economic influences on society, contributing over $200 billion annually to the U.S. economy and employing about 600,000 people. At the same time, the profession has been noted for its historical lack of diversity (Kim 1997). In 2000, The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians accounted for only 2.9%, 2.8% and 2% of professional advertising positions, respectively. This is a paradox as the industry has increasingly embraced “multiculturalism” as a marketing orientation and seeks diversity among its professional ranks (Kim 1997). The significance of diversity has also been addressed from a public policy perspective. In recent years, policymakers, trade groups and civil rights organizations have initiated efforts to increase the ethnic representation of the workforce, provide internship opportunities to young people of color and increase opportunities among minority suppliers of advertising services (American Advertising Federation 1998, Hayes 1999, Teinowitz 2000).

Historical scholarship concerning “minorities in advertising” has mostly been limited to studies of ethnic portrayals in advertisements (Stern 1999) and marketing strategies aimed at minority consumers (Cui 2001), with little emphasis on the people behind the executions. With the exception of limited discussions provided by Fox (1984), Dates (1990) and Walker (1998), scholars have largely overlooked the roles of minority professionals in advertising. At the same time, only a small number of minority individuals have achieved significant levels of professional success in the advertising business and information relevant to their professional development and opportunities is rather scarce.

Purpose

This paper concerns the professional life of the late New York City advertising pioneer Caroline Robinson Jones, who has been called a “role model” and the “preeminent black woman in advertising” (“Caroline Jones: More...” 1988; Vagoni 2001). Jones represents a deviation from the norms traditionally associated with the advertising business, and her career is typically described as a “success story” (Fleming 1996). A review of Jones’ career highlights reveals the following:

She was the first black person trained as a copywriter in the history of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency in the 1960s (“Caroline R. Jones, a Glance...” 1968).

She was the first black woman appointed vice-president of a major advertising agency, Batten Barton Durstine and Osborn (BBDO) in New York City in 1975 (“Caroline Jones is an advertising pioneer” n.d.).

She was the first and only black woman to win the prestigious Advertising Women of New York “Advertising Woman of the Year” award in 1990 (“Advertising Woman of the Year” 1990).

She was the only black person profiled by the Wall Street Journal in its influential “Creative Leaders” trade advertising series (“Charisma is Caroline” 1990).

She was a co-founder of several entrepreneurial ventures, which were significant in terms of their contributions to the industry beginning in the late 1960s (“Black Creative Group” 1973; “New Black-Owned Affiliate” 1977; “Zoo Story” 1970).

She is among only four black women in history to have established and run a viable advertising firm bearing her own name (“Black and Female...” 1987).
Jones' life also coincided with several major cultural shifts in the U.S., including the Civil Rights movement and racial desegregation, the feminist movement, and the embrace of multiculturalism as a marketing paradigm. While Jones' accomplishments have received attention in the trade and black press, information pertinent to her career development is relatively obscure and there has been no scholarly attempt to address her significance. Two socioeconomic models are pertinent to a study of Jones' career. Davis (2002) uses the Economic Detour model described by Butler (1991) to explain how entrepreneurial opportunities for minorities in advertising have been largely circumscribed by race. Butler (1991) developed a "Heuristic Model of the Theory of Economic Detour" which proposed the following six stages of business development: 1) societal hostility (in the post-Civil War era) 2) prompted governmental interventions (such as Jim Crow laws) and local customs 3) which resulted in the relocation of black firms away from the central business district (i.e., away from general consumer market opportunities) and 4) into a "one-race" market for customers. 5) These phenomena had the effect of decreasing the total amount of business opportunity available and prompted a significant decline in the total number of black firms over time. 6) Conditions responsible for this decline eventually resulted in the complete removal of black entrepreneurs from the competitive marketplace. Davis (2002), examining the collective development of black-owned advertising firms over time, concluded that their experiences were consistent with those described under the heuristic Economic Detour model. In addition to the Economic Detour theory, Amott and Matthaei (1991), in a multicultural economic history of women in the U.S., present a model which suggests that societal norms, along with interrelationships between race and gender, present constraints which limit career and work opportunities for women of color. They argue that society creates gender, race and class hierarchies, and that individuals are constrained by the resulting social practices and institutions. While a cursory examination of Jones' career indicates unprecedented achievements for an African-American woman, a closer examination reveals significant constraints, as well, consistent with the Butler model and Davis' and Amott and Matthei's conclusions.

Jones appeared to sense her significance in American history, and perhaps wanted her role examined more thoroughly. To this end, Jones donated her personal and business papers and artifacts to the archives of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution in 1996. The purpose of this paper is to use these archival resources to examine Jones' career and to explain her significance to the advertising industry. Her experiences are also pertinent to a general discussion of the challenge of diversity in the advertising business.

CAROLINE JONES, ADVERTISING TRAILBLAZER

By the time Jones had established her own firm and won the 1990 Advertising Woman of the Year award, she reported that she was often asked, "What's it like at the top?" Her thoughtful reply:

"It's like climbing a mountain...I've often said [sic] with your bare hands. And when you reach the summit, scraped, bleeding and bruised from the jagged rocks you look around - it's lonely sometimes...and cold sometimes...but you can also feel the sunshine." (Advertising Woman ... " 1990).

A native of Benton Harbor, Michigan, Jones was the eldest girl among ten siblings and was recognized as a leader early on ("Product of Benton Harbor" n.d.). In terms of traits and character, various sources describe her as tall, attractive, dependable, resourceful, energetic, dynamic, charismatic, a risk-taker and a perfectionist. She was the first of her family to attend college, winning a full scholarship to the University of Michigan where she majored in English and Science. A look at her professional experiences reveals the jagged rocks she encountered along with the sunshine.

"Any Monday Morning": Jones at the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency

Jones' entry into advertising occurred by happenstance. Prior to her graduation from the University of Michigan in 1963, Jones attended a campus recruiting seminar hosted by the J. Walter Thompson company and, in her words, completed an application for "some kind of advertising agency" ("Caroline R. Jones, a Glance..." 1968). Traveling to New York City that summer to investigate teaching offers, Jones visited the agency and within two days was offered a secretarial position. Apparently Friday turnover among the secretarial ranks was so high that the personnel director assured her that a position would be available "any Monday morning." In a speech draft that Jones prepared some years later, she writes that she encountered a series of "pre-existing "female-oriented stereotypes" immediately at Thompson, noting that racial stereotyping would come later ("Images and Stereotypes..." n.d.). Although Thompson was considered the largest and most progressive advertising agency of the era, all women, regardless of educational background or experience, started as secretaries. Jones was strongly encouraged to accept the offer by two black women journalists who hosted her during her New York visit, arguing that they "couldn't have paid for a job in advertising" when they finished college ("Caroline R. Jones, a Glance..." 1968). During that era, in fact, entry into the industry was so difficult that one insider
published a book titled *How to be Black and Get a Job in the Advertising Agency Business Anyway* (Sharp 1969). Despite her father's objections and twice failing Thompson's mandatory typing test, Jones accepted the job, and its "woman's salary" of $75 per week ("Images and Stereotypes..." n.d.). Within three weeks, she was assigned as the secretary to Arnold Grisman, the Creative Director for the agency's largest account – Ford Motor Company. A few weeks later, she was encouraged to pursue the very competitive try-outs for Thompson's famed Copywriter's Workshop, a training opportunity offered annually to female employees. Unaware that this opportunity offered practically the only escape from a secretary's existence, she competed successfully among 200 other women and was among 18 accepted as copy trainees in 1963 ("Images and Stereotypes..." n.d.). Later, when assisting in writing a special publication commemorating the 100 Year Anniversary of Thompson, she was shocked to learn that she was the first black woman ever trained as a copywriter at the agency. She also learned that while copywriting was considered an acceptable career option for women, they were shunted from non-creative account management positions, which were key to management opportunities.

Despite completion of the Copywriter's Workshop, Thompson was slow in providing Jones copywriting opportunities. Instead, she was trained as a researcher in the newly established Consumer Research Department, where she was responsible for conducting door-to-door interviews, supervising transcribing typists and managing daily operations. After a year in Research, incensed at seeing secretaries obtain writing assignments, she threatened to leave. She was finally offered a copywriter's position on the Prince Matchabelli fragrance account which, she says, "was headed by one of the nicest women in the agency" ("Caroline R. Jones, a Glance..." 1968). This assignment underscored another norm at Thompson - that female copywriters were assigned to work on "women's products" while men were assigned to "men's products." During her five-and-a-half years at Thompson, she honed her copywriting skills on such national brands as Chesbrough-Ponds, Lux Liquid, Lady Scott, and Murine International.

While most of Jones' work at Thompson concerned mainstream consumer products, she was also sensitive to the potential of multi-ethnic marketing opportunities and to the viability of the black consumer market. Believing fruitful opportunities for multi-ethnic marketing to exist in the cosmetics segment, she submitted a report for Copywriter's Workshop indicating the variety of skin tones among "non-European women" ("Copywriter's workshop" 1965). She also encouraged the inclusion of ethnic models in ads. However, Jones was dissatisfied with the agency's tendency to exclude blacks from most advertisements, even in group settings. She was angered when Alberto-Culver refused to include ethnic models in ads for a new hair coloring brand called "For Brunettes Only," believing most black and Hispanic women to have dark hair. These experiences, and issues over compensation prompted Jones to seek opportunities outside of Thompson. Outspoken and critical, she wrote an essay summarizing her tenure at the agency:

"As I look back on my career at J. Walter Thompson, I feel that I have been associated with a greater variety of advertising activities than most young writers. Yet as I look around me and into the future, I feel I am at the crossroads of my career. Ironically, for having been faithful to my company, I have fallen behind in salary. I like my work and my surroundings, and I feel that it is unfortunate that traditionally in advertising, companies are remiss in rewarding their own, and it is indeed those people who choose to move around and 'get all they can' who get ahead in this game" ("Caroline R. Jones, a Glance" 1968).

**Caroline Jones, Vice President**

Jones' appointment as Vice President and Creative Director at Batten Barton Durstine and Osborne (BBDO) in New York in 1975 sealed her stature as the first black woman to hold such a position in a major mainstream advertising agency. Yet, evidence suggests that her experience at BBDO was bittersweet. Recruited by James (Jim) Jordan, then President of BBDO, Jones was told, "we need someone good who can help on accounts committed to black advertising" ("Caroline Jones is an advertising pioneer" n.d.). Jones' appointment generated intense publicity and numerous accolades. Yet, inside BBDO, Jones claims that she was often alone and ostracized, which she attributed to envious co-workers including an immediate supervisor ("Caroline Jones Advertising" 1989). In a magazine interview Jones stated, "Some whites wondered how I could possibly come in as a vice president ("Caroline Jones, a heroine..." n.d.); in another, she complained that some viewed her $40,000 salary as "excessive" (Jakobson 1985). She explained that publicity actually worsened her situation:

"To be black and female is always to be noticed, and standing out in a crowd is not always good in corporate life. There were people who had been there for years and who were not profiled, as I was, in magazine and newspapers stories" (Jakobson 1985). "A great many people resented my coming to BBDO. I was shocked at the degree of hostility that my appointment aroused. But, despite the obstacles, I did some things there that I am very proud of" ("Caroline Jones, Advertising Trailblazer" 1982).

For example, Jones helped Campbell's soup develop an emotional advertising appeal aimed at black consumers, using the rationale "food is love." Where Campbell's traditional approach had been to depict the
product exclusively, Jones convinced the client that people (black models) had to be shown enjoying the soup in familiar settings. This approach was so successful in courting black consumers, that Campbell’s adapted the concept into its general market advertising, using white models. Jones also did notable work for Armstrong carpets and, with the support of Jim Jordan, did promotional work for the NAACP’s 1976-77 national membership drive and the National Urban League. Despite Jones’ notoriety at BBDO, her tenure there was rather brief. She left BBDO in 1977, the last time she would be employed by a mainstream agency. Jordan, while disappointed, was supportive and complimentary: “I’ll always be a Caroline Jones fan,” he said. “She has maintained a first-rate reputation in the industry” (“Caroline Jones: a heroine...” n.d.).

CAROLINE JONES, ENTREPRENEUR

Jones’ career path was characterized by a zig-zag pattern of positions with large mainstream advertising agencies interspersed with several entrepreneurial efforts oriented toward advertising and the black consumer market. With respect to the latter, Jones’ efforts were consistent with those of about 25 other black entrepreneurs who, capitalizing on opportunities created by Civil Rights legislation and related socioeconomic shifts, and benefiting from mainstream firms’ lack of knowledge and experience regarding black consumers, established a spate of advertising firms around 1970 (Davis 2002).

Early Entrepreneurial Efforts

Zebra Associates

After departing J. Walter Thompson, Jones helped co-found Zebra Associates and served as its vice-president and co-creative director between June 1969 and October 1971. Zebra was unique in that it was black-owned, but had a racially integrated staff, hence, the name “Zebra.” Newsweek magazine noted that Zebra commenced just three weeks before the premiere of the popular 1969 movie Putney Swope, a farce about a black man running an advertising agency. The film’s premise underscored the perception of black advertising professionals at the time, yet, Zebra’s principals insisted their endeavor was quite serious (“Zoo Story” 1970). Zebra’s clients included Clairol, Polaroid, the Bronx Zoo, Fabricators, Inc. and a number of small black companies. By 1972, it was the second largest among all black-owned advertising firms, billing $4.7 million (Davis 2002).

The New York press indicated that, at Zebra, Jones was the first black female vice president in the advertising business (“Rising from...”1988). During her tenure, Jones was named one of the “Foremost Women in Communications” in 1970 and won her first creative advertising awards, including a Clio for a Polaroid radio commercial in 1971 (“Black Creative Group... “ 1973). Despite these successes, Jones left Zebra late in 1971, unhappy. By now married several years and the mother of a young son, work-home conflict prompted Jones to take a personal leave of absence. In a letter of resignation in October to Raymond League, Zebra’s President, Jones wrote:

“I am very sorry that I can no longer continue with Zebra after these 2 ½ years. I sincerely feel that the quality of the creative department was no longer up to the standards that I, as a professional, felt they should be. Consequently I felt overworked and underpaid, but more importantly, frustrated in my attempts to give Zebra the finest advertising possible” (“Termination of Employment” 1971).

Years later, in a newspaper interview about her life and time at Zebra, Jones also spoke directly on her perceptions of racism, a topic she tended to avoid.

“We got a lot of attention,” she said, referring to the establishment of Zebra, “but there was resistance on the part of the mainstream agencies whose billings would have to be cut in order for clients to redirect some of their budget to minority consumers. We didn’t know there was such racism in the business until a black agency got started. The same people who wished us well were stabbing us in the back” (“Rising from...” 1988).

The Black Creative Group

After a stint as a senior copywriter for mainstream agency Kenyon and Eckhardt during 1972-73, Jones co-founded the Black Creative Group (BCG) in 1973 with Kelvin Wall, a former vice-president of marketing for Coca-Cola USA and Harvard Business School lecturer. Wall and Jones had previously been associated through Zebra Associates and Kabon Consulting, an advertising consultancy where Wall had been President. BCG’s mission was to work with advertising agencies on a project basis to conduct research, determine positioning and develop creative for the black consumer market. Recognizing increased competition among black agencies for assignments, along with increased sophistication in pursuing black consumers, a BCG press release stated:

“Superficial, non-strategy approaches relying primarily on Black models and cool Black talk, no longer work... Segments of the [black consumer] market differ among each other as well as from segments of the white market” (“Black Creative Group Formed... “ 1973).
Quality research was a hallmark of BCG's work and Jones and Wall also lectured at trade meetings on effectively reaching black consumers. One was a presentation at an Advertising Age annual creative conference in July 1974 in New York City titled "Strategic Approaches to the Black Market" which focused on black perceptions of banking, photography and alcoholic beverage consumption ("Ad Age 17th Annual Creative Workshop" 1974). Jones, who often sought out opportunities to enhance her visibility and reputation, was recruited from BCG to the vice-presidency at Batten Barton Durstine and Osborne (BBDO).

Mingo-Jones Advertising, Inc.

In 1977, Jones was recruited from BBDO by Frank Mingo to establish one of the most significant entrepreneurial ventures the industry had ever seen. Mingo, another industry pioneer who had been the first black account executive at J. Walter Thompson and a former management supervisor at McCann Erickson, was one of a handful of blacks with significant management experience in mainstream agencies. Another early partner was Richard Guilmenot, who held an MBA and also had been a vice-president, like Jones, at BBDO. The trio brought an unprecedented level of mainstream experience to a black-owned agency. Advertising Age reported, "Mr. Mingo has earned a solid general marketing reputation" ("Interpublic moves..." 1977) and a press release touted Mingo's MBA degree from Northwestern and credited him with supervising the introduction of Lite Beer from Miller Brewing at McCann Erickson - the most successful new product introduction in the history of beer marketing ("New Black-Owned Affiliate..." 1977). With great promise, Mingo-Jones-Guilmenot set out to redefine "minority" advertising at a time when many black-owned agencies were failing (Mitchell 1979). Suggesting that the early 1970s black agency "golden era" - based largely on social responsibility concerns rather than bona fide marketing issues - had ended, Mingo commented, "The white guilt market is at a very low ebb now. You've got to earn all your accounts" ("Ethnic expertise..." 1981). Mingo explained that the agency's goal was to seek mainstream assignments and not engage in tokenism. Mingo later stated, "We position ourselves as a first-class agency - as professionals, not as blacks. We happen to be black" ("Their Marketing Homework..." 1982).

The establishment of Mingo-Jones Advertising (Mr. Guilmenot left the partnership early on) was unique in another regard - its affiliation with the Interpublic Group of Companies, where Mingo-Jones would purchase from Interpublic media, research, accounting and billing services while retaining independent ownership. While Advertising Age suggested that the affiliation provided Mingo-Jones with "the strongest start any black-owned shop has ever had," some critics viewed the reliance on Interpublic as a form of "white paternalism" and prompted rumors of Mingo "being a sharecropper on the Interpublic plantation" ("Interpublic move..." 1977; "Interpublic's opener" 1977).

Despite the early controversy, the relationship with Interpublic, which held the McCann-Erickson agency, provided access to the Miller Brewing client; Mingo-Jones' first account was a $1,000,000 assignment for Miller High Life oriented toward black consumers. Mingo-Jones quickly became regarded as one of the hottest shops on Madison Avenue, developing an impressive roster of accounts including Miller Brewing (Miller High Life and Miller Lite), Goodyear Tire and Rubber, Walt Disney Productions, Pepsi-Cola (Pepsi and Mountain Dew brands), Seagram's, Westinghouse Electric, Liggett and Myers Tobacco (Omnibrand), the National Urban League and Kentucky Fried Chicken. While the majority of their assignments were oriented toward black consumers, a number held "crossover" appeals to multiple markets and were subsequently adapted for general market campaigns, such as Disney - "Discover Disney--More Magic than Ever" and Westinghouse Electric - "Engineering your Future. And Ours" (Jones 1979). A 1979 slogan for Kentucky Fried Chicken - "We Do Chicken Right!" - ironically developed by an unnamed freelance student/intern at Mingo-Jones, was promoted by Jones to the client for a local New York black-oriented promotion. The slogan was credited with prompting a brand turnaround in the local market and was so engaging that Kentucky Fried Chicken subsequently ordered its general market agency, Young and Rubicam, to incorporate the phrase into all of its national advertising of the mid-1980s. In 1981, Mingo-Jones was selected to introduce the Omnim cigarette brand to the general test market, rather than the black consumer market ("L&M picks..." 1981).

Despite its general market intentions and the backgrounds of its principals, in 1982, at its five-year anniversary, Mingo-Jones found that the majority - 60% of its assignments were still oriented toward the black consumer market, with another 10% directed at the Hispanic market. [The following year, the agency officially formed an Hispanic subsidiary - Mingo-Jones-Carrido - which did Spanish-language ads for Anacin, Goodyear and Kentucky Fried Chicken ("Mingo-Jones forms..." 1983)]. While Advertising Age applauded the agency's performance and reputation ("Their Marketing Homework...") 1982), a New York Times article concluded that the firm had fallen short of its goal to build a business based primarily on significant general market advertising assignments ("Advertising: Minority Marketing..." 1982). Mingo explained:

"It's tough to break through the perception of us as a black-only agency" ("Black owned agency aims..." 1985). "It was hard to swallow the fact that, although I had handled $100 million accounts for big agencies, some people were inclined to question my ability to handle a $3 million account because I have a black face" ("Ethnic expertise..." 1981). Jones added, "They
choose to see use as black only. If we win a creative shoot-out, they’ll [prospective clients] have another excuse to award the account to another agency. It frustrates you, but you can’t let it embitter you” (“Black-owned agency aims...” 1985). Mingo concluded, “The ad business is not so different from society at large. There isn’t any overt racism, but stumbling blocks are still placed...” (“Black-owned agency aims...” 1985).

Departure

The aforementioned issues not withstanding, Jones shocked the advertising world late in 1986 when she abruptly left Mingo-Jones to form her own company, Creative Resources Management, later renamed Caroline Jones Advertising. By now, Mingo-Jones had been built into a $40 million-plus enterprise, ranking it among the top two or three of all black-owned agencies. While close-lipped at the time of her departure, Jones later told Crain's New York Business, “I felt that I was doing a lot of work and not getting the rewards” suggesting that she and Mingo clashed on traditional account versus creative issues as well as compensation issues (“Black ad agency redefines...” 1987). An undated memo from Jones to Mingo around 1984 indicates problems related to compensation at least two years prior to Jones’ departure:

“My contributions to Mingo-Jones, in my opinion, far exceed the present $65,000. I am, without question, the most hard-working and producer of the most consistently-quality [sic] work in the agency...My department is also recognized as the ‘reason to go to Mingo-Jones’ and never has the creative work been the reason for our termination. Creative Directors at my level and less make a great deal more than the $150,000 I am requesting” (“Salaries and other compensation” n.d.).

Other sources also indicate that Jones desired greater independence, along with greater financial rewards in her departure from Mingo-Jones. “One of the reasons I left Mingo-Jones is because I thought I could do better. I thought I could make more money and have fewer people tell me how to do that” (“Advertising and Television Whirl...” 1988). There was also the suggestion that she found Mingo to be overbearing and perhaps chauvinistic. She told Newsday, “Men just don’t listen. I wasn’t sharing in the [agency’s] success” (“Black and female...” 1987). While not criticizing Mingo directly, Jones later said, “I just find that women work harder than men. People at my old company [Mingo-Jones] would agree to that” (“Black ad agency redefines...” 1987). She also maintained that Mingo-Jones was a “housewife agency” which I believe to be true, at least to some extent. However, Mingo-Jones was a major competitor in the industry, and they...

involved in feminist issues might see things differently” (“Black ad agency redefines...”1987).

Caroline Jones Advertising/
Caroline Jones, Inc.

Whatever her reasons for the breakup with Frank Mingo, Jones was now on her own, taking none of Mingo-Jones’ clients, confident that “my reputation will bring me new accounts” (“Jones off, running...” 1987). A major believer in the power of reputation, especially in an industry where “we promote our clients, not ourselves” (Jones 1987, 36), Jones advised:

“No matter how many times you change jobs or agencies, your reputation will go with you. So take care of it, build it and never forget it’s your most valuable asset — more valuable than a big salary, more durable than an impressive title, more meaningful than any creative awards” (“Caroline Jones Advertising, Inc.: the Right Moves” 1991).

Taking advantage of her reputation and industry contacts, Jones established her agency with financing arranged through Leo-Arthur Kelmenson, a former colleague at Kenyon and Eckhardt, now known as BJK&E, held by Lorimar Telepictures (“Black and female...” 1987). Initially, Caroline Jones Advertising was 40% held by Lorimar until Jones bought out that interest a short time later. The objective of the new agency was to break out of the ethnic-only mode, although Jones acknowledged that she must build her firm by first pursuing black and Hispanic-oriented assignments (“Black and Female...” 1987). The agency’s credentials stressed professional management, commitment to research-based communication strategies and included case studies which indicated qualitative results of past campaigns. As president of the agency, Jones now spent much of her time recruiting and advising clients, writing for trade publications, engaging in public speaking, and networking at industry-related events. She also served on the Board of Directors of numerous organizations. By her own admission “happily divorced” since 1974, she usually attended functions alone, often the only black person present (“Caroline Jones is an advertising pioneer” n.d.). She also spent significant time hiring and mentoring young women, speaking at colleges and encouraging people of color to consider careers in the advertising business. In 1992, a 4-year Dean’s Merit scholarship in her name was established at the University of Michigan for minority students interested in advertising careers.

Within the first five years of the firm’s existence, Jones built up an impressive client roster, earned awards in nearly all of the industry’s major competitions and employed a staff of 22. Clients included American Express, Anheuser-Busch Companies, Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, DeKuyper’s Peachtree Schnapps, E & J Gallo, Greyhound,
Kenmark Optical (Billy Dee Williams Eyewear), Lorimar, Partnership for a Drug Free America, Prudential, Ryder, Tone Soap, Trump Organization (real estate development and community relations) and Western Union. The firm billed about $8 million dollars in 1987 and trade reports suggested that Caroline Jones advertising was billing in excess of $25 million by the end of 1991 ("Caroline Jones Advertising, Inc.: the Right Moves" 1991), although internal documents indicate that billings were closer to the $12-13 million range ("Agency Fact Sheet" 1994). A significant proportion of the accounts were oriented toward corporate affairs advertising and public relations efforts.

During this same period, Jones experienced significant rewards as well as challenges. She was presented with two major honors in 1990. The Advertising Women of New York named her its “Advertising Woman of the Year” and the Wall Street Journal featured her in its prestigious “Creative Leaders” trade advertising series, which saluted significant individuals in the advertising business and presented their views on the industry. In both cases, she was the only black person ever so recognized and was greeted with abundant favorable publicity. Despite these successes, a trade article noted her difficulty in breaking out of the black market niche. “When I walk in the door to pitch an account, people automatically think black advertising.” Jones told a reporter, indicating that the problem was ingrained in the industry (“Caroline Jones Advertising” 1989). She explained that the problem was exacerbated by client interest in courting Hispanic and Asian consumers, which siphoned dollars away from the black portion of “minority” advertising budgets. She addressed the niche issue in the Wall Street Journal’s “Creative Leaders” feature, commenting on what she called “caste-typing”:

“As a member of a double minority – female and Black – I’ve learned the biggest problem in America is the existence of castes within society, business and advertising... Some might think there’s been progress. But look around advertising today and you’ll find there are fewer Black men or women than in the 1970s. Even more disturbing, there’s not much talk about equal opportunity... Caste-typing by color or sex or nationality injures everybody; especially the businesses that are deprived of the enormous talent and energy minorities can provide” ("Charisma is Caroline" 1990).

Jones also found herself at the center of a controversy – this one concerning the promotion of alcohol and tobacco products to minority consumers. Around 1990, an uproar ensued over R.J. Reynolds’s plan to market a cigarette brand – Uptown – specifically aimed at black consumers, a move critics called exploitive. A widespread public policy debate followed as to whether legislation should be enacted to protect minorities from such product promotion, and Jones found her views publicized in the New York Times, and on national network and local news programs. While not condemning the advertising of such products, she argued that too narrow a range of products was aimed at minority consumers and that advertisers should expand the variety of products promoted to minorities ("Live at 5" n.d.).

Around 1993, Jones would encounter her most formidable foe yet: a diagnosis of breast cancer. Although the archival documents make no reference to the disease or its treatment, her illness and rumors about it probably had a negative impact on her firm. While the archival records indicate that Jones kept meticulous files of correspondence, agency records, research reports, publicity, etc. only three items appear in the "Publicity" file for 1993. In June and August of that year, Jones is pictured with very short natural hair, in contrast to the lengths and texture indicated in previous years, suggesting cancer treatments. In addition, where Jones had tended to handle most of the agency’s correspondence, in 1993, an abundance of correspondence is handled by Angela Spears, Director of Public Relations for Caroline Jones Advertising. Internal documentation indicates that the agency lost nearly half its billings between 1992 and 1993, falling from $12.6 million to $6.4 million ("Agency Fact Sheet" 1994). Between 1991 and 1994, the agency lost several key clients, including Ryder, Prudential, Western Union and the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, which had been the agency’s largest account ("Agency Fact Sheet" 1994). By late 1993 and into 1994, the firm would have difficulty paying its bills, according to correspondence with various creditors. In a letter printed in a local trade paper dated December 12, 1994, Angela Spears confirms that Caroline Jones Advertising has filed for bankruptcy protection, adding, “we’re confident the current status is temporary” (“Jones agency retains...” 1994).

By 1994 and 1995, Jones had returned to work, feverishly pursuing new business, under the new name Caroline Jones, Inc., as Caroline Jones Advertising was “subject to Chapter 7 proceeding and is in the hands of a trustee” Jones told a creditor ("Ms. Farnese Haynes" 1995). Jones sent out numerous letters of solicitation to prospective clients, hired a white New Business Associate to pursue general market assignments, registered with firms seeking diversity among their suppliers and exhorted her staff to be very aggressive in courting new business. In a staff memo, she emphasized the gravity of the firm’s situation:

"PLEASE KEEP TRACK OF YOUR CONTACTS, KEEP CALLING OR WRITE UNTIL YOU GET SOME RESPONSE... TRY TO LAND AN ACCOUNT WITH BILLINGS 3 TIMES YOUR OWN SALARY... THANK YOU. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT TO OUR SURVIVAL [sic] ("New Business Letters..." 1995)."
The Romance of Marketing History

On a more personal level, an examination of her life and career indicates that shifting social tides, such as desegregation and the women’s movement, along with her personal characteristics, aided Jones in her groundbreaking roles.

On the subject of diversity in advertising, if Jones’ career can be viewed as a barometer, then it must be concluded that progress in the advertising business for women of color has been slow and tortuous. Jones apparently had the traits, education and motivation to stake out a “successful” career in advertising. She seemed able to create and take advantage of opportunities and was recognized by mainstream entities for doing so. Yet, in a number of ways, Jones can be viewed as a tragic heroine. In addition to the breast cancer, society seemed to present insurmountable obstacles. For example, she, along with many other women in advertising, was pigeonholed early in her career as a “creative type,” as opposed to one who could also manage general business affairs as well. She also believed – relative to her productivity and responsibilities – that her compensation suffered throughout most of her career. These experiences are representative of the types of constraints discussed by Amott and Mattei (1991) relative to economic opportunities for women of color. The “ caste-typing,” as Jones described it, which made it nearly impossible for entrepreneur Jones to attract non-minority oriented assignments, is consistent with enterprise development under principles of the Economic Detour model (Davis 2002). In essence, this model indicates that minority advertising entrepreneurs find that they must specialize in minority niche markets in order to have reasonable opportunities for business viability; “mainstream” opportunities are not made available at levels which would sustain the enterprises. If Jones, who had education, training, contacts and significant experience in mainstream firms, along with valuable personal characteristics, was not able to break away from these gender-race constraints, then opportunities for less-experienced women of color in advertising are diminished. In sum, study of Jones’ experiences is quite instructive for young people considering advertising careers, with particular lessons for women of color.

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