



# MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO,

Christian fundamentalists invented cereal to promote a healthy lifestyle free of sin. Little did they know, their creation would eventually be used to promote everything from radio and cartoons to Mr. T and tooth decay.



*Post's*  
**GRAPE=NUTS**  
BRAND  
**FLAKES**

Get "The Explorer's Ring"  
THAT TELLS TIME  
See back of package

12 Ounces - Net Weight - 340 Grams

MADE FROM WHEAT, MALTED BARLEY, SALT, AND YEAST; THIAMINE ADDED. MANUFACTURED BY POST CEREALS DIVISION, GENERAL FOODS CORP., BATTLE CREEK, MICH. MADE IN U.S.A.

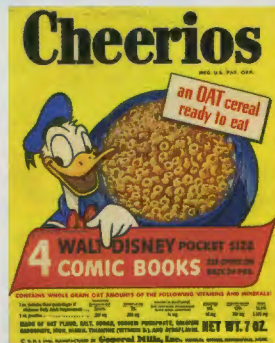
## MEAT IS MURDER (ON THE COLON)

DURING THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY, most Americans subsisted on a diet of pork, whiskey, and coffee. It was hell on the bowels, and to many Christian fundamentalists, hell on the soul, too. They believed that constipation was God's punishment for eating meat. The diet was also blamed for fueling lust, laziness, and rampant masturbation. To rid America of these vices, religious zealots spearheaded the country's first vegetarian movement. In 1863, one member of this group, Dr. James Jackson, invented Granula, America's first ready-to-eat, grain-based breakfast product. Better known as cereal, Jackson's rock-hard breakfast bricks offered consumers a sin-free meat alternative that aimed to clear both conscience and bowels.

While Jackson's innovation didn't appeal to the masses, it did catch the attention of Dr. John Kellogg. A renowned surgeon and health guru, Kellogg had famously transformed the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan into one of America's hottest retreats. Socialites from the Rockefellers

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to the Roosevelts flocked to “The San” to receive Kellogg’s unorthodox treatments. But shock-therapy sessions and machine-powered enemas weren’t the only items on the agenda. Kellogg also stressed such newfangled ideas as exercise and proper nutrition. It wasn’t long before he started serving bran biscuits similar to those of Dr. Jackson—only now with the Kellogg name on them. To avoid a lawsuit, he changed the name of the cereal by one letter, dubbing it “Granola.”

By 1889, The San was selling 2 tons of granola a week, despite the fact that it was barely edible. The success inspired Dr. Kellogg and his brother, W.K., to produce more-palatable fare. After six years of experimentation, a kitchen mishap by W.K. yielded the breakfast staple known as cereal flakes.

#### MAKING RED BLOOD REDDER

IN MANY WAYS, the cereal flake is the perfect consumer product. It’s easy to produce, easy to sell, and surprisingly lucrative. To this day, cereal comes with an eye-popping profit margin of 50 percent. These merits became clear to Charles Post, a failed suspender salesman who moved to Battle Creek in 1895. Post began selling knock-off versions of Kellogg’s products with a twist of his own—advertising. At the time, advertising was associated with snake-oil salesmen and con artists. But Post, who had a background in

sales, didn’t mind drizzling a little snake oil on his product. He published pamphlets with titles such as “The Road To Wellville” and claimed his cereal, Grape-Nuts, could cure appendicitis, improve one’s IQ, and even “make red blood redder.” By 1903, he was clearing \$1 million a year.

Across town, Dr. Kellogg refused to sully The San’s reputation with heathen advertising, and his profits suffered as a result. W.K., however, had no such qualms and set out to emulate Post. In his first national campaign, he told women to “Wink at your grocer, and see what you get.” (Answer: a free box of Kellogg’s Corn Flakes.) Within a year, he’d sold 1 million cases of cereal. With the leading cereal makers embracing such unabashed hucksterism, it was clear that cereal’s connection to its fundamentalist roots had come to an end.

#### THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL ACROSS AMERICA, the eyes of investors lit up with dollar signs, and would-be cereal barons descended on Battle Creek like locusts. By 1911, 107 brands of corn flakes were being made in Battle Creek alone.

But the cereal business had one major drawback—there was little substantive difference between brands. To stand out from the crowd, manufacturers realized that they had to focus more on the outside of the box than on what was



inside. Some tried decorating their products with adjectives, creating names like University Brand Daintily Crisped Flaked Corn. Others competed to appear the healthiest. Tryabita, for example, was infused with celery flavor because, well, it *sounded* healthy.

But the real winner was a cereal called Force. Its mascot, Sunny Jim, was a strutting, top-hatted gentleman who became so popular in newspapers and magazines that other cereal makers rushed to create their own mascots. For a cereal called Elijah's Manna, Charles Post even tried putting a picture of the prophet on the label. Although the product was eventually pulled, one industry ground rule had been established: Every box needs a character.

Before long, cereal makers had an insatiable appetite for finding the right mascot, regardless of the cost. During the Depression, Post Toasties decided to use cartoon animals on its boxes and paid its cartoonist \$1.5 million in the first year. That artist was Walt Disney, and he used the earnings to build the Disney empire.

**FACT** Like the elusive fifth Beatle, there was a long-lost fourth member of the Snap, Crackle, and Pop gang. His name was Pow. In the 1950s, he was supposed to represent Rice Krispies' explosive nutritional value. Sadly, four proved to be one cereal gnome too many, and Pow was given the pink slip.

**FACT** In 1955, the character Sergeant Preston of the Northwest Mounted Police and his trusty dog, Yukon King, informed their radio audience that every box of Quaker Puffed Rice would contain a deed to 1 square inch of Alaskan real estate. Aspiring real estate tycoons promptly snapped up 21 million boxes. A decade later, a wannabe Donald Trump presented Quaker with 10,800 deeds. They should have been worth about 75 square feet, but Quaker's lease on the land had already expired.

# FACT'N CRUNCH



**FACT** Tony the Tiger beat out several other spokes-animals to become the mascot for Kellogg's Frosted Flakes. Newt the Gnu and Elmo the Elephant were top contenders, but they never made it into stores. Katy the Kangaroo, however, was displayed right next to Tony. The tiger swiftly clobbered the kangaroo in sales, and Katy was relegated to the bargain bin of history.

# Cracking the Color Code

Leo Burnett, one of advertising's earliest proponents of motivational psychology, worked with Kellogg to tailor cereal boxes so that their colors appealed to kids and parents. His stated mission was to turn the cereal aisle of the grocery store into a form of visual entertainment, like a magazine rack. He even hired *Life* magazine's Norman Rockwell to illustrate the covers. Here are two examples:

COLOR SCHEME	 <p><i>"A rip snortin' cereal - a rootin'-tootin' snack - Shot with sugar!"</i></p> <p><b>Kellogg's SUGAR CORN POPS</b></p> <p>GUY MADISON on "FBI 500 Sheriff," and the Texas Buckaroo, in the RED HILL RANCH SHOW</p> <p>NET WEIGHT 5 OZS.</p> <p>MADE BY KELLOGG COMPANY, BAYLOR, ILLINOIS, U.S.A.</p>	 <p><b>Kellogg's CORN FLAKES</b></p> <p>THE ORIGINAL - <i>Kellogg</i></p> <p>They go fast better get a space</p> <p>NET WEIGHT 5 OUNCES</p> <p>Norman Rockwell</p>
TARGET MARKET	<p><b>Bright</b></p> <p><b>Kids</b></p>	<p><b>Light/Pastel</b></p> <p><b>Moms and Dads, to purchase for their kids</b></p>
PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE	<p>The yellow box is designed to be "cheerful, inspiring, vital."</p>	<p>The white box conveys a product that is "pure and clean."</p>

## TV NATION

TELEVISION TOOK ADVERTISING FOR SUGAR CEREALS TO A NEW LEVEL, and the master of the new medium was an ad man named Leo Burnett. He invented TV programs specifically designed to entertain children and sell Kellogg's products. Much like Skippy a decade before, Burnett's characters would turn to the screen in the middle of a show and pitch the merits of a particular brand. There was nothing subtle about it. Howdy Doody, Roy Rogers, Andy Griffith, Rin Tin Tin, the Beverly Hillbillies, Yogi Bear, and Fred Flintstone all became television icons because they were good at selling cereal.

Also at Burnett's urging, cereal companies invested heavily in early television technology. (They still do; cereal is the second-largest advertiser on television today, behind automobiles.) The financial backing let them shape the medium to suit their needs—namely, adding color. Burnett was one of the earliest believers in motivational psychology and understood that colors appealed to kids and moms subliminally [see sidebar]. When color TV became a reality, he persuaded Kellogg to use anthropomorphized cartoon animals as mascots. He thought animation would make for

better, more colorful commercials. The first mascot they produced was Tony the Tiger, whose meteoric success was followed by hundreds of other cartoon icons.

Burnett's advertising style was so effective that cereal sales continued to rise every year, unlike most products at the grocery store. After a while, parents and child psychologists became concerned that the ads were a little *too* effective. In the late 1960s, consumer advocates claimed that using cartoon characters to target children was overly manipulative, if not unethical. Eventually, in 1990, they forced Congress to pass a law banning TV characters from pitching directly to children in the middle of a show. Protective measures aside, cereal had strayed far from its wholesome origins. While Dr. Jackson's dream of displacing pork chops from the breakfast table had become a reality, his cereal wasn't what it used to be. Bitten by the fangs of consumerism, Granula had transformed into Count Chocula in the course of a century. 🐾

**AUTHOR NOTE:** IAN LENDLER IS THE AUTHOR OF *ALCOHOLICA ESOTERICA: A COLLECTION OF USEFUL AND USELESS INFORMATION AS IT RELATES TO THE HISTORY AND CONSUMPTION OF ALL MANNER OF BOOZE* (PENGUIN, 2005).