

Fort Lipstick and the Making of June Cleaver: Gender Roles in American Propaganda and Advertising, 1941- 1961

Samantha Vandermeade
North Carolina State University

2015 Winner of the James Madison Award for Excellence in Historical Scholarship

On May 14th, 1963, a woman from Brookline, Massachusetts wrote a letter to Betty Friedan. Hers was not the only letter; many women reached out to the author of *The Feminine Mystique*. This landmark critique of mid-century American housewifery and domesticity drew a widespread and immediate response from readers following its February 1963 publication. Some were desperate to express their dissatisfaction, despondency, and disappointment. Others wanted to thank Friedan because the book had given them solace and succor. Some said it galvanized and emboldened them; others said it encouraged and inspired them. The letters brim with emotions of every kind.¹

The woman from Brookline spoke harshly of herself and those like her in the letter. “My feeling of betrayal is not directed against society so much as at the women who beat the drums for the ‘passionate journey’ into darkness...My undiluted wrath is expended on those of us...who put on our black organza nightgowns and went willingly, joyfully, without so much as a backward look.” We do not know much about the letter writer from Brookline. Her name was expunged from her letter. She does not identify herself other than to say that her life “spans two eras”—the “ebb of feminism” in the immediate postwar years and “the rise of the mystique.”² What we do know is that she was one of the hundreds of thousands of white, middle-class, educated, American women who busied themselves with the tasks of homemaking during the late 1940s and 1950s. It is easy to feel her frustration in the letter. She blamed herself and her peers, the women who “beat the drums” for the renewed traditionalism and domesticity of the early Cold War era. However, more was at work in the postwar female experience than simply black organza nightgowns and foolish women.

Government propaganda and corporate advertising during the 1940s and 1950s made a concerted effort to mitigate the increased sexual, economic, and social freedoms of women engendered by the circumstances of the war years. In the 1940s, American women of all races, classes, and ages struggled to support their country, their families, and themselves during World War II. In the 1950s, women attempted to navigate postwar America amidst fears of economic

¹ Letters to Betty Friedan can be found in the Friedan Manuscript Collection, Schlesinger Library Manuscript Collections at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 188-203. May’s book cites over 25 different letters sent to Betty Friedan in the wake of the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*.

² Woman from Brookline Massachusetts to Betty Friedan, May 14 1963, quoted in Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 188.

depression, changing sexual mores, and communism.³ Meanwhile, government agencies and advertising firms worked together to promote an image of perfect femininity that remained unattainable for most women. However, this government-regulated definition would set the standard of acceptable femininity for years to come.

While Rosie the Riveter and others like her became the picture Americans often associate with women in World War II, advertising firms and the government deliberately created Rosie and her fellows to reinforce female participation in the war effort only through their pre-ascribed dichotomous roles as either socially tamed sexual objects or mothers. Then, as the war drew to a close, advertising campaigns and government propaganda used the same images of hyper-feminized women to support a cult of ultra-domesticity and to enforce heteronormative gender roles in order to bolster capitalism, consumerism, and traditionalism among the American public in the face of the Cold War.⁴

Since the cultural turn in the 1970s, a number of prominent historians have examined women in the work force during the 1940s and 1950s.⁵ Several works exist on the effect of 1950s traditionalism on the gender and sexuality civil rights movements of the 1960s, and other scholars have written about cultural semiotics within propaganda and advertising.⁶ Despite the sprawling historiography of these three separate topics, scholarship on their intersection remains almost non-existent. Melissa A. McEuen's *Making War, Making Women* proffers the most comprehensive study to date on the intersection of feminine sexuality, nationalistic patriotism, and propagandistic advertising. Her exploration of the physicality of patriotic duty and femininity and the social expectations of women's appearance, sexuality, and personality proves indispensable to any study of this kind. However, McEuen stops short of examining the transition from wartime culture to postwar ideology.⁷

³ Scholarship on this subject can be found in May, *Homeward Bound*; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, the Noonday Press, 1992).

⁴ For the purposes of this research, references to "war years," "wartime," or "World War II" denote the time during which the United States was actively engaged in World War II: December 8, 1941 (Congress approves President Roosevelt's request to declare war on Japan) through September 2, 1945 (V-J Day; victory in Japan). When I use the term "postwar," this refers to any time after September 2, 1945.

⁵ For a description of wage-earning women across the twentieth century along with an economic and ideological analysis of gendered labor division, see Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*. For an examination on the impact of federalism, racial diversity, geographic mobility, and economic fluctuations on women's equality, see Rosenberg *Divided Lives*.

⁶ A deconstruction of the ways in which Cold War ideology intersected with the sociocultural politics American life in the 1950s can be found in May, *Homeward Bound*. Several insightful works on 1950s traditionalism include: David Johnson *Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Joanne Meyerowitz's "How Common Culture Shapes Separate Lives," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (March 2010); Donna Penn, "The Sexualized Woman: The Lesbian, the Prostitute, and the Containment of Female Sexuality in Postwar America," in *American Sexual Histories*, ed. Elizabeth Reiss (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2012). For an analysis on cultural semiotics within propaganda, see Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during WWII* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1945-1945* (University of Georgia Press, 2011). For works that should inform any study of visual culture and wartime symbolism, see Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Michael C.C. Adam, *The Best War Ever: American and World War II* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁷ Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*. McEuen's book ends in 1945 after the United States

McEuen, like most scholars, chooses to study women during World War II *or* women during the Cold War. This pigeonholing of female experiences into either a wartime or postwar framework ignores the importance of the role social and cultural attitudes played in facilitating the shift from one era to the other. None of the scholarship listed above thoroughly tackles the transition between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War; each author chooses their ground on either side of that pivotal transition.

Likewise, many scholars of the 1950s stay largely within the bounds of that era, although some have taken pains to reach back into World War II in order to inform their studies of postwar femininity and domesticity. Susan M. Hartmann and Donna Penn are especially adept at weaving analysis of earlier developments into their arguments about the 1950s. Nevertheless, these scholars often fail to account for the effect of advertising, propaganda, and media on the renewed traditionalism of both the war and postwar years. In a study of this kind, however, one must examine the postwar implications of wartime conditions to truly deconstruct gender, femininity, and social expectations in advertising and propaganda during both decades.

This article analyzes gendered labor, traditionalism and its sociopolitical implications, as well as the cultural semiotics embedded in advertising and propaganda while maintaining a bridge between a wartime and postwar conceptual framework. The research reveals that throughout the 1940s and the 1950s, government agencies and advertising firms busily created, maintained, and developed a specific brand of femininity. The concerted efforts of the advertising agencies, in tandem with government propaganda agencies, presented the American public with ubiquitous images of certain kinds of femininity. These images then became such a common part of everyday American life that their characteristics and hallmarks entered into the social consciousness. Americans began to accept advertising and propaganda images as indicative of a larger social construct of American femininity. Print media, created by the government and advertising firms, then set about both sanctioning female patriotism and influencing societal norms during both World War II and the Cold War. Government agencies and advertising campaigns bolstered the gendered and sexualized female roles that many Americans believed would help win both wars. Rosie the Riveter quickly gave way to June Cleaver. But one was no less socially and culturally constructed than the other.

The assumption that Americans dispensed with heteronormative enforcement of gender roles and sexuality in lieu of a more socially and economically equal society during the war years is patently false. It seems reasonable that the emergent nature of the war would have resulted in the postponement of marriage, a lower birth rate, or increased independence for single women; after all, the Great Depression had produced such changes. However, this was not the case.⁸ In

dropped the atomic bombs in Japan. McEuen briefly describes the legacy of wartime American women as archetypes and the extent to which their actual history was overshadowed by “the chimera of nostalgia” (215). She briefly references the postwar era’s “grand narratives of extraordinary...courage” and claims that the everyday lives of women are “render[ed]...invisible” in the postwar nationalist narrative. However, this discussion comes in a four-page epilogue that leaves the reader still puzzling the postwar implications while they move on to McEuen’s last two pages, which contain her reading of the famous May 22, 1945 photograph in LIFE magazine of an “Arizona war worker writ[ing] her Navy boyfriend a than-you note for the Jap skull he sent her” (216). To the extent that McEuen deals with postwar culture, she poses a number of questions about the legacy of wartime women.

⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*, 50. May argues that contrary to the Great Depression—which caused dips in marriage and childbirth rates—the war brought increases in young marriage and childbirth.

the wake of the Depression, most Americans intensely focused on creating secure, safe, and prosperous families and homes. Birth and marriage rates did not peak in the 1950s; they reached an all-time high earlier, during the war years.⁹ While a small minority of women riveted, many hundreds of thousands more married and had babies. Yet, despite this exponential growth in domesticity, the predominant and contradictory image of wartime women in the media during the 1940s was a young, white, middle-class patriot. She was a blonde-haired, pink-lipped, and she supposedly suspended her domestic goals in order to support a nation at war.¹⁰

This image fell far short of representing most female wartime workers. The women who most frequently entered war-supporting jobs were working-class wives, widows, divorcees, single mothers, and students who took a war production job less out of patriotic fervor than from economic necessity.¹¹ The education of most war workers evidenced this. Only 10% of workers in war production jobs had attended college; 54% had not even graduated high school. Additionally, between 10% and 19% of female war workers were African Americans. In Baltimore, black women comprised more than a third of the wartime work force.¹² Despite these figures, female workers never comprised the majority of the wartime workforce, even at the height of the war. By the end of 1943, women constituted only 40% of workers in the aircraft industry, 34.2% of ammunition workers, 10.6% of steel workers, 10% of shipping personnel, and 8% of railroad workers.¹³

While these numbers belie cultural images of women flooding the workplace, when combined with the upheaval and chaos of the war, they fostered social anxiety about the new roles of women. Concern about women in the workplace did not grow in a vacuum, however. Women's wages nearly doubled during the war, allowing them more spending power and more social mobility than ever before.¹⁴ High levels of internal migration during the war and overseas service in positions such as military personnel, nurses, and USO performers meant that women often traveled "unsupervised" or in the company of men.¹⁵ The military dispersal of condoms among servicemen (but *not* among servicewomen) and the phenomenon of "Victory Girls"—women who expressed their patriotism by having sex with soldiers and sailors before the men went off to war or while they were on leave—added to growing social anxiety over declining "morality."¹⁶ Unmarried men and women were likely not having any more or any less sex during the war than in the decade before or after. However, in times of chaos and uncertainty, American

⁹ May, *Homeward Bound*, xiv-xv.

¹⁰ See Melissa A. McEuen's work, including *Making War, Making Women*. McEuen writes extensively about how advertising employs skin color during World War II. She also discusses how things like tender hands, a pleasant aroma, and proper attire in advertising signals things about a woman's status, class, patriotism, and femininity.

¹¹ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 19.

¹² Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 20. These statistics were calculated by participation over the course of the entire war (1941-1945).

¹³ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 21.

¹⁴ Rosenberg *Divided Lives*, 128. According to Rosenberg, wages for all women rose 38% during the war. However, it is important to note May's assertion that black women's wages during the war were less than half of white women's wages--\$246 annually as opposed to \$568 annually. May, *Homeward Bound*, 58.

¹⁵ Kara Dixon Vuic, "Look, but Don't Touch: Women as Military Entertainment" (lecture, UNC Chapel Hill, NC, January 24, 2014).

¹⁶ Rosenberg *Divided Lives*, 128. For more information on Victory Girls, military standards concerning sexuality and promiscuity, and prophylactics during the war, see Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

society often returns to traditional values or beliefs, including the policing of sexuality.¹⁷ Changing circumstances beyond the workplace contributed to male frustration with female freedom and general social anxiety about what wartime conditions would mean for the future of the nation.¹⁸

The presence of women in the military brought these collective fears to the forefront, and servicewomen became targets for citizens lashing out against female freedom. Before 1942, a number of laws and regulations prohibited women from serving in the military. However, after special dispensation from President Roosevelt eliminated these restrictions, women raced to join the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAC) and the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). By the end of the war, over 150,000 women had served as WACs, and over 88,000 had served as WAVES.¹⁹ As these numbers indicate, women eagerly desired to serve their country in military capacities. Yet, the armed forces continued to worry about the WACs' and WAVES' public image. Additionally, male GI's and servicewomen's loved ones in particular often vehemently opposed female service.²⁰ Many saw military service as synonymous with promiscuity and lack of integrity. One GI disparagingly remarked, "You join the WAVES or WAC, and you are automatically a prostitute in my opinion." One article snidely referred to women's divisions in the military as a "Fort Lipstick."²¹

Despite the ostensible freedom and equal opportunity Roosevelt's dispensation potentially offered, life as a female member of the military carried its own unique set of burdens, discriminations, and humiliations. The armed forces confined white WACs and WAVES to low-level "women's work," and these women most often served as office personnel. Military regulation relegated black women to "mopping floors and emptying waste baskets," and black nurses could only treat black servicemen. Additionally, female officers could not issue orders to male personnel, married women were not welcome, and menopausal or pregnant women were immediately discharged. Many Americans, like the GI mentioned above, could not imagine female military personnel serving any purpose other than to grant sexual favors to servicemen.

Pervasive rumors circulated stateside that implied WACs and WAVES staffed brothels for officers. Around 90% of servicemen bought into these rumors. Army regulations stated that female medical personnel, all considered officers despite the limitations on their freedom and authority, could not sexually fraternize with enlisted men. One scholar goes so far as to imply this caused sexual frustration and "some rape cases." While the scholar may be exaggerating in this case, women in the military certainly incurred their fair share of wrath, abuse, and resentment.²² Lastly, not only did many label servicewomen "whores," no small number of

¹⁷ May, *Homeward Bound*, 81.

¹⁸ More information concerning social and cultural upheaval during the war can be found in May, "War and Peace: Fanning the Home Fires," in *Homeward Bound*; McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*.

¹⁹ MSU Denver Camp Hale, "Women & World War II," <https://www.msudenver.edu/camphale/thewomensarmycorps/womenwwii/>; Naval History and Heritage Command, "World War II Era WAVES," <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/prs-tpic/females/wave-ww2.htm> (accessed March 1, 2014).

²⁰ Adams, *The Best War Ever*, 85-86.

²¹ Adams, *The Best War Ever*, 86.

²² Adams does not provide statistics or evidence for the claim that the "sex-starved atmosphere" led to instances of rape. The paragraph making these claims does not contain a footnote, and the book does not contain endnotes or specific source information. The book includes only a series of bibliographic essays, organized into segments corresponding to Adams's chapters, discussing sources that the Adams found helpful. There is no mention in the bibliographic essay for chapter four ("The American War Machine," which contains the paragraph on page 86 about rape cases) of the source providing information on rapes in the military. I assume he found some evidence

politicians, military officials, and members of the public also criticized them for taking rear-echelon positions that would otherwise have been available to men. Essentially this meant that for every woman who joined, a man was sent to the front lines. Some women shied away from service positions if they thought their presence sent “one of the boys” to die.²³ Government recruitment certainly did not reflect this reality and instead promised women that enlisting was “for your country’s sake today, for your sake tomorrow” and that servicewomen’s “eyes have seen the glory.”²⁴ It seems unlikely WACs found any glory at the bottom of wastebaskets or in reams of office paper.

However, no matter what their race, the vast majority of American women did not serve in the armed forces. Most did not take part in any facet of war effort; at the end of the war, only 37% of all total women, and only 26% of all wives worked.²⁵ Millions of women continued to work in civilian jobs unrelated to the war effort, keep house for their husbands, or attend schools and universities. Even those women who did work in war-supporting jobs were most often relegated to “pink collar” jobs and never saw the inside of a naval vessel or a steel factory. However, the male labor shortage caused by the war did allow women to branch out into higher-risk, higher-paying, and more challenging jobs. Many women filled previously “masculine” jobs and became gas-station attendants, truck drivers, and postal workers. While wages for women rose significantly during the war, gender discrimination in the workplace continued throughout the decade.²⁶

In the face of such social upheaval and disregard for traditional female roles (after all, who in 1940 could imagine a woman working as a gas station attendant, much less wearing a military uniform?), advertising firms and government agencies in charge of propaganda engaged in a concerted and coordinated effort to reinforce traditional gender roles in the face of these collective fears. The military required servicewomen to always give extra care to their appearance and warned women not to appear in public in uniform. Public relations personnel went out of their way to portray servicewomen in a favorable, and more importantly, feminine light in advertisements and posters.²⁷ The advertising agencies continued to do what they had always done: portray women in sexualized and objectified—albeit socially tamed—ways.

Despite these concerns over women in the workplace, the advertising industry and propaganda divisions embraced the fact that women had arrived to the workforce and planned to stay—at least for the time being. Throughout the war years, images of female workers flooded the media. However, these images were intensely racist, sexist, and profoundly unrepresentative of the experiences of wartime American women. Mainstream advertising or propaganda never featured black women. Advertisements for black-specific products provided the few exceptions. Propaganda forgot them almost entirely.²⁸ Advertisements and propaganda most often depicted white, middle-class women, and they did so in very specific ways. Almost universally, advertisements and propaganda portrayed women as either socially tamed sexual objects or as

somewhere that backed up his argument, but it is not clear in his book from where that evidence came.

²³ Adams, *The Best War Ever*, 84-87.

²⁴ U.S. Army, 1944, “For your country’s sake today, for your sake tomorrow,” Recruitment Poster, Smithsonian Institute, <http://amhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/collection/object.asp?ID=566&back=1>; U.S. Army, circa 1943, “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory,” WAC Recruitment Poster, cited in McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 38.

²⁵ MSU Denver, Camp Hale, “Women & World War II”; Rosenberg *Divided Lives*, 131. Rosenberg’s numbers reflect the percentage of women who worked in any capacity, not only those who labored in war-supporting jobs.

²⁶ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 18-59.

²⁷ McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 143-149.

²⁸ McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 20-31.

mothers. Both reinforced heteronormative domesticity, socially proscribed femininity, and male dominance.

The socially tamed, sexualized woman appeared in everything from soap advertisements to recruitment posters for the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAC). In a 1942 ad for Proctor & Gamble (the manufacturer of Ivory Soap), a young, blonde WAC holds a telephone receiver and smiles. Her hair is perfectly coiffed, her skin is clear, and her teeth are white and straight. Her cheeks are very pink, either from the liberal application of rouge or from blushing at whatever the soldier on the other end of the telephone said. She is indisputably beautiful. In the background of the image, two men stand at attention, holding rifles with bayonets attached. Another WAC consults with one of the soldiers over a piece of paper, presumably an important military document. The image is both highly feminine and highly militaristic (masculine) and therefore problematic. Seemingly to counteract the harshness of military life, the girl appears well taken care of, well groomed, and—most importantly—girlishly feminine. Below the image, the ad contains three smaller images of two pretty civilian women using the product and an image of a baby. Together, these smaller images remind the viewer of the primary subject's delicate femininity, baby-like skin, and awaiting life as a pampered woman—all qualities that are maintainable in spite of her military service. The ad is entitled "Keep Your Beauty on Duty."²⁹

An advertisement commissioned by the General Tire and Rubber Company in order to sell war bonds depicts a more sexualized woman than the Ivory girl. In the ad, "This Christmas—Give War Bonds," the primary subject hides a bond behind her back. The woman stands half turned away from the viewer, her hips cocked to the side, and her bosom prominent in profile. She purses her lips and winks over her shoulder. She sharply cocks her eyebrows, sports dark red lips, and wears high red heels; everything about her screams sex. However, she is "tamed" by her husband, just inside another room. He looks older than the woman, smokes a pipe, and happily stuffs war bonds into one of five Christmas stockings; this is clearly a mother, no matter how beautiful or flirtatious she seems. With this knowledge, the viewer's perspective transforms. The woman is not flirting with the viewer; she is inviting the viewer to participate in the surprise she is about to give her husband.³⁰

²⁹ Proctor and Gamble, 1942, "Keep Your Beauty on Duty," Advertisement, Women's Home Companion, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH0904/.

³⁰ General Tire and Rubber Company, 1943, "This Christmas, Buy War Bonds," Advertisement, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_W0316/.



"For Your Country's Sake Today, For Your Country's Sake Tomorrow," *Smithsonian Institute*

In both of these advertisements, the creators walked a very fine line between creating a sexualized figure that men can see as wives or sweethearts and proffering a reincarnation of a sexually, socially, or economically free woman. Many war-era ads clearly conveyed the dangers of the overly sexual woman.³¹ In one government-commissioned poster, designed to raise awareness of sexually transmitted disease, a female "juke joint sniper" stares ominously out from the shadows. The woman's face and figure testify to her dangerous nature. She is dark-skinned—a blatant signifier of low class, low birth, and low morality in 1940s iconography. Her heavy brow overshadows glaring eyes. Her red lips are dark, thick, and sharply drawn in a sneering twist. However, she also has some of the hallmarks of the desirable: she has blonde hair (despite her dark skin), she looks thin and shapely, and there's a hint of cleavage at the top of her dark blue décolletage. Her troubling features problematize her alluring desirability. She provides a warning to men about women who might *seem* desirable, but have been tainted by their sexual promiscuity. She is an image of the "wrong" sort of woman.³²

Images of mothers were much less problematic than images of sexually available women because they proved much less threatening to the status quo. Universally, mothers appeared as sacrificial patriots. They willingly gave their sons to the army and their daughter to the factories. They were often painted as melancholy, but not depressed; willing to sacrifice, but not overly proud of it. They were propagandistic, but not problematic. Many advertisements and propaganda posters used the mother figure to elicit support, instill guilt, and kindle patriotism.

³¹ May, *Homeward Bound*, 59-60.

³² Unknown, 1942, "Juke Joint Sniper," Public Service Announcement, cited in McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 51.

In one of the most blatantly guilt-driven propaganda posters, a ragged mother holds an infant while an older child clings to her arm. Neither child looks unhappy nor seems neglected; this would stray dangerously close to depicting a bad mother (another fixation during the 1940s and 1950s). However, the children do not look particularly merry either, demonstrating an appropriate level of wartime emotion. The mother's expression is somber and stoic. The poster reads: "I gave a man! Will you at least give 10% of your pay in War Bonds?"³³



"Juke Joint Sniper," *US National Library of Medicine*

³³ Unknown, circa 1940s, "I gave a man!" Propaganda Poster, designed by Valentino Sarra, College of DuPage Art Collection, http://www.cod.edu/art_collection/art_ww2igave.htm.



"I Gave a Man!" *Northwestern University*

In another government-sponsored poster advertising war bonds, a mother longingly gazes into the distance while cradling a man's coat. The ad reads, "I was putting away Bob's civilian clothes..." Next to the ad, multiple paragraphs tell the story of a mother packing up her son's belongings after he goes off to war. With, "a catch in [her] throat," the mother writes, "my heart told me the same story that millions of mothers already know," implying that her son may not come back. Unlike the mother in the first ad, however, this one declares that there is "no use trying to fool myself that I 'gave' my son. He *went*, like millions of others, to do his duty towards the country we all love: our America."³⁴ While this mother rejects the label of a sacrificing maternal figure, the trope remains constant: the moral compass of a mother longing for her son or her husband directs her to be long-suffering, supportive, and patriotic for her boy and for her country.

These images occur again and again throughout advertising and propaganda. They prove so ubiquitous as to be tiring. Women continuously appeared as socially tamed sexual objects (i.e. soon-to-be wives and mothers) or as sacrificial mothers. They also appear almost universally as middle-class. The ragged mother in "I Gave a Man" wears a nice sweater and has neatly coiffed hair. Her children seem clean and well-dressed. Her nails are painted and she wears a diamond ring. Bob's mother writes of shoetrees, sports jackets, and sweaters. She wears pearls and a nice watch. Even the almost-too-sexual woman winking over her shoulder and hiding a war bond from her portly, pipe-smoking husband stands amidst multiple signs of comfortable prosperity, such as the roaring fireplace and a cheerful Christmas wreath. Her husband's pipe, waistline, and

³⁴ U.S. Government, 1943, "I was putting away Bob's civilian clothes," Advertisement, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_W0130/.

pinstriped robe indicate his economic success. In these images, patriotism and prosperity engage in cyclic cause and effect; one precedes the other.

In addition to equating patriotism with responsible prosperity, government propaganda and corporate advertising conflated femininity with a certain kind of patriotism. Images portrayed good mothers, sisters, wives, and sweethearts as eager to aid the war, willing to sacrifice their male loved ones, and symbolic of all that is sacred and worthy of protection. Three types of women appear over and over in advertisements and posters from the war: mothers, sweethearts, and military girls. However, femininity was implicit in every image of each of these stereotypes. Mothers seem nurturing, hardworking, and sacrificial. Sweethearts look fresh-faced, beautiful, and loving. Military girls provide a patriotic variation of the sweetheart; they seemed spunky and strong, but ultimately looked like potential wives who ventured away from traditional female roles only out of necessity and patriotism. Traditional femininity incorporates all of these characteristics. In over three hundred advertisements, none of the women appeared aggressive, forceful, or domineering. Rather, they look submissive, romanticized, and extremely feminine. These images provided an ideology in which hyper-feminine women were something worth fighting for. Femininity, then, became patriotic in and of itself. Yet, femininity also motivated masculine patriotism.³⁵

As the war began to wind down, however, propaganda and advertisements began shifting how they used these definitions of femininity and motherhood. Images began depicting “good mothers” as not *only* sacrificial and patriotic, but also dutiful to their families. Mothers must return to the home to care for their husbands and children whom they necessarily neglected during wartime emergency. Additionally, whether women were single or married with children, patriotism no longer meant just serving one’s country in time of need; it required women to respect the (male) GIs returning home and give back their jobs to men.³⁶

One of the best examples of this blatant effort to push women back into the home through advertising imagery can be found in an Adel Manufacturing ad. Published in the *Saturday Evening Post* on May 6, 1944, the ad pictures a small girl standing next to her mother, who sits astride a bicycle. The girl wears clothing identical to that of her mother—denim overalls, a white collared shirt, and a striped scarf holding up her hair; they are dressed as working girls. The girl stands in three-quarter profile, looking up at her mother expectantly, asking “Mother, when will you stay home again?”

The mother’s body language provokes interest. She smiles, but her expression is not exuberant. Rather, she looks slightly melancholy, as if her daughter’s disappointment pains her. She leans towards the girl, her arm resting on the bicycle, as if she feels weary or is preparing herself for a long discussion. Below the girl’s almost accusatory question, the ad answers for the mother: “Some jubilant day mother *will* stay home again, doing the job she likes best—making a home for you and daddy, when he gets back.” The advertisement goes on to say that mother is learning how important it is to have mechanical precision in all things, and that in the postwar world, she will want appliances “with the same degree of precision, and she will get them when

³⁵ This research cites twenty-seven separate ads that reinforce this theory about femininity in advertising. However, the author consulted over 300 advertisements, all of which reinforce the stated theories.

³⁶ Rosenberg’s *Divided Lives*, May’s *Homeward Bound*, Honey’s *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, and Adams’ *The Best War Ever* all discuss the necessity of women returning to the domestic sphere in order to “make room” for returning GIs in varying degrees of detail. Rosenberg’s and May’s work are particularly useful. Rosenberg’s work discusses women’s difficulty retaining their economic and social gains, no matter how limited they were in the first place. May’s work discusses the newly discovered postwar need to combat communism with the nuclear family system of capitalist father, domestic mother, and suburban affluence and security.

Adel converts...to products of equal dependability for home and industry.”³⁷ In an impressive display of advertising suavity, the ad manages to guilt mothers for working outside the home, praise women for their short-lived careers as patriotic workers, reinforce the idea that all women find the most fulfillment as housewives and mothers, imply mother is only working until “daddy” returns home, and—most importantly—sell current Adel products while reminding consumers that Adel will provide top-quality civilian items after the war ends.

Even girls who had no plans to give up employment altogether were persuaded to make way for returning GIs. Smith-Corona published an ad in the *Saturday Evening Post* the same year that encouraged women to give up manufacturing jobs for clerical, “pink collar” work. In the ad, a woman’s hand holds a work identification badge from “Metal Manufacturing Company.” The badge reads “bench assembly” and contains her ID number. The ad reads in bold letters, “When it becomes a souvenir...” The advertisement goes on to tell women that since they have “earned the right to choose work you enjoy,” they should learn to type on a Smith-Corona typewriter. To convince young women of the benefits of learning to type, the ad says that “for women who plan marriage, typing brings contacts with the world outside,” implying that learning to type will allow them to find husbands. Lastly, one must note that a pretty young woman wearing a military style cap smiles enigmatically back at the viewer from the picture on the badge; even in an ad primarily focused on a hand holding an object, selling a product still requires a pretty face.³⁸

There is no mention—in this ad or any other—of women “earning the right” to continue working in manufacturing or in any other traditionally masculine fields. Additionally, the advertisement implies that women will only need to know how to type long enough to meet a handsome husband in whatever office in which they find employment. Despite this repetitive stereotype of the workingwoman quitting her job to become a middle-class housewife, over 75% of female workers in 1944 wanted to stay in the labor force, and they wanted to keep the jobs they had during the war.³⁹ However, by and large, these women did not get their wish. In 1943, 45.3% of female workers worked in high-paying production jobs; by 1946, only 25% of female workers worked in production positions. By 1947, men had reestablished the employment status quo and most women labored as “clerical workers, operatives, domestics, and service workers.”⁴⁰

Though many women hoped that the freedoms of wartime would translate into lasting social change in the 1950s, the war—and wartime advertising and propaganda—underscored women’s roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers just as much as it expanded female labor. The government urged women to return home not only to provide work for the GIs returning from doing their patriotic duty, but also because family life was quickly becoming the foundation of democracy, Cold War domestic policy, and American social expectations. The concerted effort of advertising and government propaganda to push women back into the home was just as much about preserving a place for men as it was keeping women in theirs. As America transitioned from wartime to a peaceful yet uneasy Cold War, advertisements featuring female

³⁷ Adel Manufacturing Company, May 6 1944, “Mother, When Will You Stay Home Again?” Advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*.

³⁸ Smith-Corona, November 4 1944, “When it become a souvenir...” Advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*.

³⁹ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 23. The author arrived at this statistic by synthesizing information from the U.S. Women’s Bureau’s *Women Workers*; the New York State, Department of Labor Reprints, *Post-War Plans of Women Workers in New York State*; *Women in Industry and Minimum Wage Series*, August 1945; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Women in Industry,” *Monthly Labor Review* 59 (September 1944).

⁴⁰ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 24.

independence (limited and narrowly-defined as it was) gave way to ads that defined femininity and gender roles within new parameters of nuclear familial security and consumerism.⁴¹

As World War II came to a close in 1945, and the Cold War entered full swing in the years following, the American government and the public increasingly began to see consumerism and materialism as weapons in the fight against communism. American citizens had a duty to support their country, and in the process, embrace consumerism. Thousands of Americans took advantage of the GI Bill, new government-subsidized suburbs, and the economic boom to enter the middle class. With this upward mobility, Americans saw “a huge increase in discretionary spending power.”⁴² After years of personal deprivation from the Depression and then the war, Americans became wholehearted consumers. In the midst of this process, female beauty truly became a “business.”⁴³

As experts, newspaper columnists, and magazine writers dispensed advice to women on how to “please” their man, maintaining beauty became part and parcel of being a good wife—or a good potential wife. Companies capitalized on these circumstances and marketed female beauty products as what women “deserved,” or perhaps what they desperately needed. Dorothy Gray Salon went so far as to imply that if you didn’t maintain a skincare regime, you would begin to look older than your husband and consequently lose him to another woman.⁴⁴ A shampoo ad advertised that “[you can] be his dream girl tonight.”⁴⁵ Advertisements for everything from beer to shampoo, housecleaning products to mixers, framed consumerism within a cult of the “good wife.”⁴⁶

According to advertising of the 1950s, beauty and a certain bodily standard proved absolutely necessary to successfully catching and, more importantly, *keeping* a man. More and more products sought to instruct women on how to either attract or please a husband. Unsurprisingly, more often than not, there was a sexual component to the ad. One company headlined their product with the line, “so humiliated when she realized the cause of her husband’s frigidity.” The ad shows a pretty dark-haired young woman looking down at a book with a horrified look on her face. The advertisement instructs readers how to order a book about feminine hygiene. A douche company commissioned the ad.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Susan M. Hartmann, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994); May, “The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home,” in *Homeward Bound*, 143-162.

⁴² May, *Homeward Bound*, 143; 147-149.

⁴³ Sweetheart Soap, 1949, “Beauty is my business,” Advertisement, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH1142/.

⁴⁴ Dorothy Gray Salon, 1951, “Does Your husband Look Younger than You Do?” Advertisement, *New York Herald Tribune*, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH1920/.

⁴⁵ Lustre-Crème Shampoo, 1951, “Tonight, show him how much lovelier your hair can look...” Advertisement, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH0576/.

⁴⁶ Schlitz Beer, 1952, “Don’t worry, darling, you didn’t burn the beer,” Advertisement, <http://breakingcopy.com/milk-pms-campaign-pulled/>; Lustre-Crème Shampoo, 1957, “Tonight show him how much lovelier your hair can look...” Advertisement; Lux Liquid Detergent, 1957, “Get out of the kitchen sooner,” Advertisement, <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/227ads.html>; Kenwood Chef, 1961, “The Chef does everything but cook—that’s what wives are for!” Advertisement, <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/basho002/basho1/2008/10/>.

⁴⁷ Zonite Products Corp., 1950, “So humiliated when she realized the reason for her husband’s frigidity,” Advertisement, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH0213/.

Contrary to popular belief, society during the 1950s did not *repress* sexuality.⁴⁸ Instead, it sought to *contain* it, much like American foreign policy sought to contain communism. Overwhelmingly, Americans supported early marriage as a way to contain premarital sex. A large percentage of Americans believed that both men and women should enjoy healthy, frequent, marital sex.⁴⁹ However, while most Americans did not stigmatize the possession of sexual urges, they did believe those urges needed to be harnessed to strengthen the nuclear family and create new little Americans. Elaine Tyler May argues that women in the 1950s practiced “sexual brinkmanship,” in which women—hyper-aware that marriage began at a young age and promised financial and social protection and prosperity—set out to “catch a husband” or “snare a male” by engaging in everything up to, but not including, sexual intercourse. While walking this fine line between promiscuity and virtue, a young woman had to provide all the “appropriate signals to promise sexual excitement in marriage.”⁵⁰ “Allure” became key.

Many hundreds of advertisements in the 1950s reflected sexual brinkmanship and the need for sexual satisfaction. In a Phillip-Morris ad for cigarettes, a dark-haired man looms over a petite, ginger-haired young woman. We can assume they are husband and wife. She is prim, her lips hiding a small smile and her pinstriped shirt and green neck-scarf indicating respectability. She attempts to pin the man’s cuff as he leans over her, his lips close to her forehead, smiling enigmatically. He holds back a pack of cigarettes, as if he denies her one until she does as he asks. The advertisement reads “greatness means so much,” underscoring the man’s masculine authority and power. At the bottom of the ad, the text reads, “gentle for modern taste.” The man’s power and virility contrasts with the woman’s prim gentility. However, she is not entirely innocent; her hips thrust towards the man, and she smiles flirtatiously.⁵¹

In an ad for Lifebuoy Health Soap, a virile shirtless young man asks a dark-haired beauty, “can’t you gals see beyond your nose?” He seems perplexed as to why she won’t pay him any interest. With her back turned to him, the young girl raises a bar of Lifebuoy to her nose. She glances sideways beneath a pair of glasses, a close-lipped smile insinuating her flirtatious nature. The ad implies that, should the young man control his body odor with the health soap, the girl would be more than happy to give him the attention he craves.⁵² In these advertisements, the

⁴⁸ Many Americans believe the stereotype that the 1950s repressed sexuality. While scholars like Elaine Tyler May have refuted this stereotype, many cultural texts continue to perpetuate this idea. For example, in the 1998 film “Pleasantville,” time-traveling teenagers from the 1990s reintroduce sexual activity to a previously ultra-conservative, repressed 1950s town. Additionally, a blog article in Ms. Magazine discusses what 1950s psychiatrists called marital “frigidity” in women and argues, “these medical experts attempted to contain women’s sexuality.” While the article smartly quotes Elaine Tyler May and does not strictly argue that women’s sexuality was wholly repressed, it does argue that a certain kind of repression influenced women and how they engaged in sex in the 1950s. The article about the film can be found at: “Media and Pleasantville,” <http://www.jhu.edu/anthmedia/Projects/pleasantville/WManningAnthro/Conclusions.html> (accessed April 21, 2014); the Ms. Magazine article can be found at: “What Was(n’t) So Great About the 1950s? Part II: Sex!” Ms. Magazine, , <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2010/07/23/what-wasnt-so-great-about-the-1950s-part-ii-sex/> (accessed April 21, 2014).

⁴⁹ Alfred C. Kinsey, et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders, 1948); Alfred Kinsey, et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders, 1953).

⁵⁰ For specific quotation, see May, “The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home,” in *Homeward Bound*, 105. For May’s entire argument on sexual brinkmanship, see May, “Brinkmanship: Sexual Containment on the Home Front,” in *Homeward Bound*.

⁵¹ Phillip Morris, 1956, “Greatness Means So Much,” Advertisement, <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/227ads.html>

⁵² Lifebuoy Health Soap, 1954, “Can’t you gals see past your nose?” Advertisement, *American Weekly*, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH0989/.

images hint at the female subject's sexuality but operate distinctly in the realm of mere suggestion.

The sexuality inherent in these ads reflected American preoccupation with sexual satisfaction—but only within the confines of marriage and, perhaps more importantly, procreation. As in the 1940s, white, middle-class suburban Americans set the moral standards and expectations of the 1950s. However, Americans from all economic, social, and political backgrounds contributed to what we now call the Baby Boom. The average number of children per woman rose from 2.4 to 3.2 between the 1930s and 1950s. Advertisements echoed this jump in childbearing and child rearing. Throughout the 1950s, ads about motherhood, parenting, and children cropped up everywhere. During the postwar years, Americans began to see the nuclear family as an entity capable of meeting the needs of all its members. Americans elevated childbearing to a near-spiritual duty. Most Americans viewed men and women without children as pitiable, selfish, or even deviant.⁵³ Advertising and media images of men and women during the 1950s overwhelmingly portrayed them as mothers and fathers.

Advertisements illustrated “good” mothers and fathers in interesting ways. Fathers were hard-working capitalists; they often left home for their jobs, but when they returned home, they were authoritative, overtly masculine, and attractive. Mothers were dedicated homemakers; they lived always at the beck and call of both their children and their husbands, and unfailingly remain patient, docile, and pretty. Women were defined by their relationship to the other people in their home. Even their beauty existed as a complement to a handsome husband or pretty children.

In many advertisements, undertones of affluence abound. In an ad for Capital Airlines, a father carries a small girl onto an airplane. Her mother follows closely behind, smiling and speaking to the girl, who hides her face shyly. The advertisement reads, “she will fly before she walks.”⁵⁴ In another airline ad, the text goes on to say, “all the important people fly nowadays” and shows a small, blonde-haired, blue-eyed boy sitting in an airline seat. As his mother looks on, a stewardess pins wings to his overalls. In yet another ad linking “good” families with “good” consumerism, a mother and daughter sit in an armchair, presumably at a car dealership. The mother looks out a plate-glass window at a brand new Dodge-Chrysler. The father leans over the chair, staring at the car as well. Only the little girl looks towards the viewer, a broad smile on her face.⁵⁵

Advertising's “Mother” and “Father” lived affluently and translated this wealth into opportunity and support for their offspring. Consumerism and materialism affected parenthood. The family existed as a contained entity to be protected, revered, and fed—monetarily, emotionally, and physically. Containment, in all its interconnected meanings, became the mantra in more than one part of American life.

During the 1950s, Americans elevated homemaking to an art form. Popular culture saw motherhood as the ultimate goal and fulfillment of female sexuality. It was also supposed to be the primary source of a woman's identity. Marriage simply provided the vehicle one took to arrive at motherhood.⁵⁶ This shift in popular opinion changed how women raised their daughters

⁵³ May, *Homeward Bound*, 121-123.

⁵⁴ Capital Airlines, 1952, “She will fly before she walks,” Advertisement, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_T1084/.

⁵⁵ Dodge-Chrysler, 1949, “Your eyes are windows,” Advertisement, Smithsonian Institute, http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/collection/object_615.html.

⁵⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, 125.

during the 1940s and 1950s. Games, toys, and advertisements designed to train young girls early in the art of homemaking abounded. Additionally, girls who did not wish to be homemakers or to submit to a husband one day clearly had “neurotic tendencies.”⁵⁷ Acceptance into the broader culture required conformity to socially regulated femininity.

Concern with women’s mental health and disposition also grew in the postwar years. An ad for Trix cereal, published in 1957, aptly illustrates this point. A young girl, sporting a pink frilly pinafore and pigtails with pink ribbons, pouts at a kitchen table as her mother pours a bowl of Trix cereal in front of her. The advertisement reads, “When a woman’s five, she needs love—and a little applied psychology.” The ad goes on to say “even young ladies need...Trix to change their morning outlook from grim to gay.”⁵⁸ The ad’s language emphasizes that all girls are future women...and therefore future wives and mothers. Likewise, a 7-Up advertisement claims that “a good disposition helps to build a happy home” and shows a housewife smiling gaily next to a bottle.⁵⁹ The link between a healthy mind, a healthy home, and proper femininity is clear.

As these daughters grew up, their experiences as young adults differed from that of their mothers. In the postwar years, white women were twice as likely to enter college as their mothers but were much less likely to complete their degrees. Instead, they often found husbands in college and then dropped out to become housewives and mothers. Furthermore, the very nature of female education changed. The number of home economics courses offered at colleges surged. Vocational guidebooks and college counselors echoed the message that college simply provided an opportunity to enter an affluent marriage.⁶⁰ An Elizabeth Arden ad, published at the end of 1944, anticipated this trend. The ad reads, “the smart college girl majors in beauty.” The text goes on to say, “the college girl who applies herself to better looks as diligently as she applies herself to chemistry or athletics is going to have honors as long as she likes.”⁶¹ An ad for a sanitary napkin cries, “college girls learn something *not in the books*” [emphasis in original]. This ad implies that avoiding chafing is a far more useful accomplishment than a college degree.⁶² Perhaps unsurprisingly, black women, unlike white women, completed their degrees 90% of the time. Black women expected to be employed—like their mothers and grandmothers—and could not depend on a middle-class marriage to save them from lives as workingwomen.⁶³

The consumer-oriented dream of suburbia played a large part in Cold War politics—and advertising. In his famous 1959 “Kitchen Debate” with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow then Vice President Richard Nixon argued that American superiority and eventual Cold War victory would be accomplished not by military supremacy but through the secure, abundant life that capitalism could offer. The portrait Nixon painted was an attractive one; however, when Americans began identifying the American dream as one built on the unequal partnership between a providing husband and a home-making wife, they made certain assumptions about

⁵⁷ May, *Homeward Bound*, 70; 132.

⁵⁸ Trix Cereal, 1957, “When a woman’s five, she needs love—and a little applied psychology,” Advertisement, <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/227ads.html>.

⁵⁹ 7-UP, 1945, “A good disposition helps build a happy home,” Advertisement), cited in McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 199.

⁶⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, 68-70.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Arden, August 5 1944, “The smart college girl majors in beauty,” Advertisement, *New Yorker*, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH1370/.

⁶² Moddess, 1947, “College girls learn something not in the books,” Advertisement, *McCall’s*, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_BH0294/.

⁶³ May, *Homeward Bound*, 68.

women. Within this logic, independent women became somehow “un-American.” Women supposedly no longer had to dabble in the affairs of men and could instead cultivate their beauty in the hopes of attracting a capitalist, hard-working husband. Women could be fulfilled as housewives, now that modern appliances lightened their workload.⁶⁴

As the Cold War progressed, consumerism became the antithesis of communism. Americans believed “virtuous” consumerism would defeat communism, enrich their family life, and make husbands and wives happy. Government propaganda reinforced that capitalism would eventually defeat the specter of communism, even should the worst eventuality—nuclear war—come. In a government propaganda poster meant to assuage citizen’s fears of mutually assured destruction (MAD), a man and a woman stand on a ridge looking out over a suburban landscape. The man is dapper; he wears a dark suit, he has slicked back his hair, and he carries a gentlemanly hat. The woman’s blond hair is neatly curled, her blouse and skirt are unwrinkled, and her purse is clean and expensive-looking. They are clearly affluent and likely look out over their own neighborhood. Emblazoned above them are the words: “After total war can come total living.”⁶⁵

Advertising played to these dreams of peace and prosperity by equating consuming with suburban success, Cold War victory, and female domesticity. Unfortunately, this trifecta of the American Dream remained inaccessible for many Americans. While white, middle-class America set the standards and expectations of capitalism, consumerism, and traditionalism in the 1950s, they by no means constituted the majority.

However iconic the culture of the wartime 1940s and the postwar 1950s was, it did not maintain its cultural power forever. By the end of the 1950s, the beginnings of several movements percolated in the background. The generation of women who wholeheartedly embraced domesticity, traditional gender roles, and homemaking proved more an aberration than leaders of a new kind of womanhood. The efforts of advertising and propaganda would only go so far towards fitting them to a Procrustean mold. The daughters of the 1950s generation, the Baby Boomers, were far more like their grandmothers than their mothers. The white, middle-class, female Baby Boomer generation would defy domesticity, enter the public sphere during turbulent times, and grapple with politics, economics, and activism in a way that resembled their grandmothers’ public engagement in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. They rejected their mothers’ lifestyles, filled with housekeeping and baby-making. These Baby Boom children grew up amid 1950s affluence, but they reached adulthood during the 1960s and 1970s, tumultuous years that brought serious questions about the 1950s American Dream and the Cold War.⁶⁶

The sons and daughters of the 1950s generation created a counterculture and a new women’s liberation movement. The women of the 1960s and 1970s questioned the images that flooded over them from radios, television sets, and print media. They redefined what womanhood could mean and interrogated assumptions about beauty, marriage, femininity, labor, and female politics. The seeds of these revolutions, however, began to sprout in the late 1950s.

⁶⁴ May, *Homeward Bound*, 144-150.

⁶⁵ U.S. Government, circa late 1950s/ early 1960s, “After total war can come total living,” Propaganda Poster, <https://wikis.nyu.edu/ek6/modernamerica/index.php/AmericanPowerAndCulturalHegemony/NuclearPower#anchor13>.

⁶⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, xvii.

Women like Lois Rodgers, Diane Nash, and Rosa Parks participated in, and sometimes led, civil rights protests and movements. White, middle-class women were not the only ones engaging in social activism and questioning cultural assumptions.⁶⁷

The 1960s and 1970s brought new strides for women in advertising. Ads more often portrayed women as strong, fierce, and independent. Twelve short years after the Phillip-Morris ad, “Greatness means so much,” another cigarette company published an ad featuring a dark-haired woman dressed as a superhero. The ad reads, “We make Virginia Slims especially for women because they are biologically superior to men. We’ve come a long way, baby.”⁶⁸ However, another ad from the late 1960s reads “Keep her where she belongs” and shows a nude woman on the floor.⁶⁹ A Chevrolet advertisement from 1988 depicts a sultry woman striding across a parking lot and reads “Because the one who gets there first, wins.”⁷⁰

Many of these later movements had their roots in the female imagery of the 1940s and 1950s. Advertising and propaganda in the 1940s crafted and bolstered female patriotism, feminine domesticity, and sacrificial motherhood within socially acceptable parameters. Women in advertising in the 1940s existed as either socially tamed sexual objects in their roles as sweethearts, wives, and military girls or as sacrificial mothers. In the 1950s, women took on a more simplistic role as happy, beautiful, consuming housewives/mothers. Advertising firms deployed this image over and over again to reinforce the dichotomies between capitalism and communism, permissible marital sexuality and aberrant behavior, victory through traditionalism and anarchy through divergent lifestyles. As the Baby Boomers came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, they would challenge these images and assumptions and forge a new way of looking at female imagery.

Our letter writer from Brookline, Massachusetts, was—if nothing else—not alone. Her suburban life was defined, like so many others’, by a culture created in no small way by advertising and propaganda. Corporate advertising and government propaganda shaped, in a very real way, how Americans viewed women, wives, mothers, and homemakers. Advertising also changed how Americans talked about the American Dream, the Cold War, and suburbia. It engaged in a concerted effort with the U.S. government throughout World War II and the Cold War to shape, contain, and channel femininity and womanhood within socially acceptable parameters. Advertisements in the 1940s and 1950s did not just sell products. Propaganda posters did not just illustrate a point about American society, politics, or foreign policy. They sold a lifestyle. They marketed nationalism and patriotism. They defined femininity and masculinity. They helped to create an era. They convinced women to buy black organza nightgowns.

⁶⁷ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

⁶⁸ Virginia Slims, 1968, “We’ve come a long way, baby,” Advertisement, Stanford University’s Clayman Institute for Gender Research, <http://gender.stanford.edu/news/2012/stanford-researchers'-cigarette-ad-collection-reveals-how-big-tobacco-targets-women-and>.

⁶⁹ Unknown, circa late 1960s, “Keep her where she belongs...” Advertisement, http://blog.lib.umn.edu/meyer769/psy_1001/2012/02/advertising-between-1960-2012-how-much-have-consumers-changed.html.

⁷⁰ Chevrolet, 1988, “Because the one who gets there first, wins” Advertisement, http://pzrservices.typepad.com/vintageadvertising/vintage_sexist_advertising/.

