‘Ready-Made Housewife’: American Womanhood in Popular Media as Defined by Postwar Ideas of Technology and Modernity

by

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picnicking. Thank you, Emily, for our Sunday nights, the part of the week I look forward to most. And most importantly, thank you, Elan, for being my rock not just throughout this process, but always.
The image of the perfectly manicured red nails on the pale, unblemished hand model featured in these two advertisements above symbolizes what women’s work really was during the postwar period: more specifically, what the work of the ideal American woman was. During the postwar period, women’s work was considered first and foremost by society as housewifery, and the woman considered to most ideally exemplify this American concept of womanhood was the wealthy, beautiful, white housewife. The manicured hand present in both of these images is one ubiquitous in advertising during the post-World War II period; the left advertisement promotes Maytag dryers in the August 1961 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and the right advertisement promotes Coca-Cola in the May 1960 issue of *Ebony*. Both periodicals
experienced explosive popularity nationwide in postwar America, and the imagery in the ads pictured above, especially the hand present in both, illustrates some of the societal expectations presented to women by popular media in the aftermath of World War II, at the height of American international prominence and hegemony. The concept of the housewife is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a woman whose main occupation is managing the general running of a household. She is also expected to be married and a mother (or at the very least, expecting to become a mother). Historical scholarship on post-World War II American history does not often paint the housewife as a key figure both because it is unpaid, and therefore not recorded in official documents or records, and because it is often perceived as mundane work that does not impact anyone on a large scale besides the immediate family. However, despite its lack of coverage in academia, the image was heavily entrenched in postwar society; the vast majority of depictions of women in media were of housewives, beautified and cheerfully at their work. Women’s work encompassed much more than the dainty polished fingers belied, however. Their extensive, and often underappreciated work of keeping house and rearing children were masked by the glamorous appearance they were expected to maintain.

The manicured hand present in both advertisements symbolizes not only American expectations of women as homemakers, but also the masking of women’s work behind another veil created by expectation—women were expected

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to work, but also to remain beautiful during the process. Magazines, television, and other forms of popular media presented women doing housework while maintaining their appearances, promoting the idea that they were expected to complete housework, laborious chores like cooking or cleaning, while keeping their appearances well-groomed for their husbands. A woman’s duty as a mother was to raise her children, while her duty as a wife was to be attractive for and care for her husband. In addition, the skin tone of the hand, the pale peach tone characteristic of whiteness, also reveals the racialized gendering implicit in this imagery. This perfect woman, present in advertisements ranging from household appliances to makeup products all aimed toward female consumers, was white. As a result, the ideal American woman was a white housewife who used technologies in the postwar period to uphold American societal virtues of femininity and womanhood, as well as values of modernity and progress. Such women were expected not only to afford to forgo wage labor but also to purchase expensive appliances, which she would then wield with skill and competence to create a domestic sanctuary for her working husband and her children. To this end, my thesis attempts to answer the question of what the status of the American housewife was in the postwar period, and how her position within the home transcended the domestic sphere to be visible in the public sphere. What defines the concept of an American housewife during the postwar period, and what political and economic connotations did the position hold in American society? How did the housewife, a figure seemingly entrenched within the private sphere, represent American ideas of modernity during the Cold War era to become a
symbol of both technological and societal progress? And how did this exclusive idea of womanhood, based on specific racial and economic standards, influence the women who did not fit into this narrow mold of femininity? What did the housewife image indicate about racial tensions in the country?

I chose to study the housewife through the lens of advertising in women’s magazines during this period precisely because this method of popular media encompassed both economic and social expectations of women during the postwar period. The marketing strategy of these women’s magazines exemplified the idea of “Mrs. Consumer.” Both the companies promoting their products and the editors choosing what ads went into the magazines saw women as monolithic groups of consumers and expected them to purchase products in accordance with what American society defined the “ideal” woman: the housewife who used technology with skill and competence to accomplish her housework, from cooking to raising her children to maintaining her appearance for her husband.

With the rise of women’s history as a formal academic discipline during the late twentieth century, housewifery has received increasing attention as women who played active roles in influencing society and economy. American housewives in particular received attention because of the postwar rise of “separate spheres,” an ideology which framed a particular role of women in society, one that stated that their place was within the home and family while men belonged in the public sphere as workers and politicians. Its subsequent pushback from women dissatisfied with society's expectations for them triggered the beginning of second
wave feminism, a pivotal movement for women’s rights during the twentieth century.

Scholars have written books on the evolution of housework throughout history; Ruth Schwartz Cowan’s *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technologies* and Susan Strasser’s *Never Done: A History of American Housework* are both classic works of women’s history that demonstrate how industrialization and technological advances transformed housework, which has historically been performed by women and thus places housewives at the forefront of historical analysis. However, neither work discussed marriage or the women’s domestic lives in the home beyond their physical labor; nothing was stated about their marital duties toward their husbands, for example. Schwartz Cowan and Strasser focused solely on housewifery in its most fundamental sense: housekeeping and its related chores of cooking, cleaning, and general management of the household. Scholars of American history have continued to delve into the concept of the woman of the house, usually focusing on one specific aspect of labor to analyze. Sherrie A. Innes’s edited collection *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*, for example, takes this approach, and explores the idea that the culture of cooking in the United States passes down not only recipes for food, but instructions for women on how to behave in society–multiple essays discuss the food industry framing housewives as consumers. Racial nuances in housewifery in America have also been studied by scholars, such as Joanne J. Meyerowitz in her edited collection *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-
Meyerowitz discusses the racist assumptions deeply imbued within postwar concepts of womanhood, with mainstream popular culture almost always portraying women as white housewives, while black women encountered racist stereotypes like the “mammy” figure. However, my thesis will examine housewifery through a new lens, by studying how women took advantage of this ideal figure of the housewife, choosing when and how to conform to these standards and gain societal influence in their own right. This study combines individual aspects of these works by analyzing both the history of housework and its constituent chores, as well as the concept of the American housewife itself, to examine not just what the position of housewife physically entailed during the postwar period, but also how the societal construction of the American housewife demonstrated American values, like patriotism and modernity, and how women responded to these societal expectations.

Through my thesis, I seek to explore how American consumer culture designs this idea of the white American housewife to become a symbol of American modernity and prosperity during the postwar period, primarily through magazine advertising but also in other mediums like television and cookbooks. I examine how women of color are involved in this ideation, despite never being addressed directly by mainstream American consumer media. I argue that women, both white and of color, both conformed to and resisted this engineered image of the woman and the housewife by finding different avenues to express their own individuality and take control of their image and adherence to the male-authored societal standard of womanhood in the form of housewifery. White
women, in conforming to the idea of the “perfect” homemaker and wielding authority based on their competence and skill as housewives, capitalized on their ideal images by participating in commercial ventures like writing cookbooks.

Meanwhile, black women sought to gain economic advantage and uplift the black middle class by following some of these ideals, but not all, and “professionalizing” themselves, therefore making themselves respectable in society and also symbolic of American prosperity.

Upon the conclusion of World War II, the American economy experienced a revitalization after the Great Depression due to the war, which created millions of jobs for the poor and the unemployed. During the war, women joined the workforce in great numbers, as their husbands enlisted in the military and left them without incomes as well as families to feed. As a result, the majority of the country’s women independently worked for wages for the first time in American history. This proliferation of women in the workforce ended when the war ended, however. Soldiers returned home in droves, seeking warmth and comfort in the form of suburban houses, wives, and children, triggering American society, in the form of popular media, to push for the return of women to the sphere of domesticity. Subsequently, many women, especially the middle-class white women who had left their lives as housewives behind to join the workforce and support their households while their husbands were away at the warfront, left the world of paid labor to return to unpaid labor at home.² Media, most commonly in

the form of magazines, books, and television, promoted to women that their role in society was to seek fulfillment by being skilled, beautiful wives and mothers. By becoming these wives and mothers, women fulfilled a patriotic duty as well; housework became newly imbued with patriotic meaning during the postwar period, with beautiful women skillfully wielding modern technologies to create domestic havens which publicly demonstrated American prosperity and advancement to the world. By the end of the 1950s, the average age at which women got married was twenty years of age, and continued to drop. The physical return of women to the home was also visibly marked by the growth of suburbia and the white middle classes increasingly moving to the suburbs and creating insular communities.

Mass migration to suburban areas was a defining feature of American life during the postwar period. When the war finally ended, millions of veterans returned to America in search of housing, which triggered nationwide housing shortages.3 Because production of war materials had soared during the war, factories and companies all over the country found themselves looking for new production work, and many of these postwar companies set their sights on the rapidly expanding market of housing veterans. This fixation on the veterans’ housing market led to the proliferation of suburbs, which are primarily residential areas that most often border a metropole. The principles of assembly line mass production created the norm of the suburban single-family home surrounded by a

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yard, set in a neighborhood outside the urban core.⁴ These new developments were cheap, and with government support for primarily white veterans, homeownership became possible for many Americans. New suburbs in particular attracted remarkably homogeneous populations of middle-class white Americans, with the most numerous being nuclear families, in which the husband was the breadwinner and the wife the homemaker.⁵ As a result, suburbs essentially became small cultural centers, with the people residing in these neighborhoods living in their own little “bubbles” and conforming to rigid standards set by the community, and American society as a whole.

I have selected two women’s lifestyle and culture magazines, *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Ebony*, specifically because of how they represent these aforementioned rigid societal standards set by American popular media, which placed women simultaneously at the forefront of modernity and in the past, returning to Victorian ideals of separate spheres and housewifery. Both magazines promote a certain ideal way of life that best exhibits the greatness of the American lifestyle and country in the aftermath of World War II, with America having propelled itself into international stardom and hegemony after its role in the war to end all wars. The Cold War, a period of ideological and geopolitical tension between the U.S and the communist Soviet Union, ushered in a wave of competition centering specifically around technology, from household appliances to the Space Race. The modern kitchen, filled with advanced, labor-

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⁵ Jackson, 47.
saving technologies, became a symbol of American prosperity and the benefits of capitalism after the famous “Kitchen Debate” between U.S Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Chairman of the Council of Ministers Nikita Kruschev. America had built a model house for one of a series of exhibitions displaying each country’s technological prowess and achievements, and the two politicians’ lively discussion regarding the appliances in the kitchen of the American exhibition held in Moscow placed domestic technology at the forefront of American modernity.6 Consequently, the domestic sphere became a hugely important area that America sought to modernize, needing to bolster its economic and political domination of the world sphere with a modern, ideal society at home as well. As a result, new housewives were equipped with technologies that significantly transformed housework. These two magazines, though they both exemplify this new ideal woman, target two different demographics of readership that change their contents to reflect different expectations influenced by race and class. Ladies’ Home Journal seeks to teach women to aspire to be white, middle- and upper-class housewives, while Ebony, though it does also preach some aspects of this ideal American woman, chooses to uplift black middle class women and teach them how to be respectable black middle class professionals instead.

Through this thesis, I will examine the difference in these expectations and how women of different races and classes choose to respond to this ideal of the white American housewife, within the lens of these two magazines and their contents, including editorials but focusing primarily on advertisements. I look at

a variety of sources that are part of popular culture during this period to supplement the ads: a magazine advice column, television commercials, and cookbooks. I chose these sources specifically because they each comprise a different part of popular culture during the postwar period. The advice columns and television commercials, primarily written and narrated by men, who give advice to women on how to become the ideal woman via their interactions with their husbands, reveal societal expectations of women through the words of men. In addition, the wide circulation and massive popularity of both mediums, especially the magazines themselves being top-selling periodicals, speaks to the strength of these sources, as the media featured in these magazines were well-received all over the country, and therefore reflect societal standards for womanhood during this period very well. These magazines exhibit consumer culture not just by its most obvious facets, like advertising, but also in the form of “advice” columns about marriage in particular, thus revealing another way popular media indirectly promoted standards of womanhood without directly telling women to purchase products. Meanwhile, cookbooks are written by women, because women had the authority as the ones who actually knew how to cook and could instruct others with the background to back up their authority. Cookbooks provide a lens into the public voices of housewives, but the fact that the bestselling ones promote identical ideals to magazines despite being written by real women indicates the ubiquity of this concept of American womanhood among women themselves. These sources depict advice crafted and given by
both men and women, and how each gender looked at women and standards for womanhood.

The American health and lifestyle magazine *Ladies’ Home Journal* was first published by Curtis Publishing, and enjoyed great popularity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries among women all across the country. During the postwar period, the magazine reached its highest levels of circulation, and by 1944 it reached four million in circulation, and by the 1950s it was solidly the top selling magazine in the country. The fact that a woman’s magazine was the top selling periodical nationally provides a statistical example of the significance of women as consumers. The magazine’s target demographic consisted of upper and middle-class white women, who primarily resided in suburbs as homemakers. The proliferation of suburbia in the aftermath of World War II gave rise to a new “cult of domesticity” in American society, and popular media, with the *Ladies’ Home Journal* at the forefront, led the charge in establishing the concept of the ideal American woman. The ideal American woman was middle-class and white, and *Ladies’ Home Journal* explicitly referred to such women in both their advertisements and editorials, while noticeably ignoring both women of color and women of the lower economic classes. One in four married women worked for a living in 1949, with the number only increasing throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and yet these popular women’s magazines persisted in acknowledging and catering to only a fraction of American women.8

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Analysis of the geographic circulation of *Ladies’ Home Journal* reveals that its readership correlated significantly with both literacy rates and proximity to urban areas. The state of New York, with its high concentrations of white, educated and economically prosperous people, had the highest rates of circulation, while southern states in general had the lowest readership. These states tended to have the highest number of farms, as well as the largest families. It is likely that cultural differences between urban and rural areas contributed to the lack of readership; because the magazine targeted economically comfortable women, its content primarily discussed technologies such as hair setting spray and canned foods, which wouldn’t have been as widely available in the rural countryside. Stores were few and far in between, and hosted limited products. Farming households often had the largest families so that there would be more manpower; rural wives were likely too preoccupied with working on the farm and raising their huge families to have enough leisure time to buy and read magazines. Thus, low readership in such rural locations was to be expected.

In addition to the urban and rural cultural difference, race also factored into the geographic divide in readership, though it is hard to determine precisely the reason why readership was so low among the black population. Southern states had the highest numbers of African Americans, as well as the lowest literacy rates, in the country. It may be that less people read magazines in the south overall because of low literacy or a lack of accessibility. Curtis Publishing, the publishing company of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, had brazenly and explicitly

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9 Ward, 5.
10 Ibid., 6.
prided itself, in a note to its readers in the June 1930 issue, on the strength of its readership among “native white females,” while disparaging African Americans for being “subnormal” in buying ability.\textsuperscript{11} It is true that states with the highest percentage of homes with radios, fridges, electric lights, and other affluent technologies were located in the north and west, in areas also with the higher median incomes and higher rents relative to the rest of the country, and thus experienced the highest per capita readership.\textsuperscript{12}

However, African Americans clearly occupied at least some of the middle class, as black women-targeted magazines like \textit{Ebony} indicate. \textit{Ebony} was founded by black businessman and publisher John H. Johnson in 1945 as another lifestyle and culture magazine shortly after the beginning of the Second Great Migration and during the height of the growth of the black middle class, with the goal of raising awareness about black America and aid in the recognition of this newly emergent bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{13} The Second Great Migration was a mass exodus in America that saw six million African Americans flee the south in search of better opportunities in the north, and lasted intermittently between 1940 and 1970.\textsuperscript{14} As a result of these migrations, the number of black Americans working in clerical and technical fields, such as bank tellers, bookkeepers, cashiers, mail carriers, and railway clerks, nearly quadrupled between 1940 and 1950, largely due to “political pressure and the Fair Employment Practices Laws enacted” in

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal}, June 1930, 3.
\textsuperscript{12} Ward, 6.
eleven northern states and twenty-five cities. By 1950, African-Americans in white-collar jobs constituted more than twenty percent of the northern population. This burgeoning middle class made up the bulk of the readership, resulting in the magazine’s demographics concentrating among the middle class and literate in the northern states.

Within fifteen years of its founding, *Ebony* established itself as the most popular black periodical in the country. *Ebony* received some criticism for its upbeat nature and idealization of a black “bourgeoisie,” especially when compared to its more “serious,” activist peer periodicals like *The Crisis*. However, the magazine enjoyed a success unprecedented in the world of black periodicals. By the summer of 1960, magazine circulation reached 600,000, and for its fifteenth-anniversary issue in November 1960, over 800,000 copies were printed, with editors estimating that within a month the issue would have been read by over four million people all over the world. In addition, *Ebony* was the first black periodical in American history to attract substantial attention from white corporate advertisers, and as a result the magazine played a significant role in shaping national discourses on race and black respectability, especially in relation to white ideals of middle- and upper-classes and femininity. As a lifestyle magazine that sought to promote lifestyle and material accomplishments as a strategy for racial uplift (proving that the black middle class was prosperous

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15 Bloyd-Peshkin et al., 147.
16 Ibid.
19 West (2018), 506.
and refined in culture), these accomplishments often ended up mirroring those the white upper classes also promoted, at least in its advertisements. *Ebony* promoted a mix between products targeted toward black consumers, like black-owned Alaga syrup and skin-lightening cosmetics, and products clearly created by white-owned companies and targeting white consumers, like expensive household appliances, such as dryers and refrigerators, with the advertisements for these products featuring white housewives as models. *Ebony* deliberately selected each product they advertised, keeping in mind the political connotations of each product and how each one furthered their agenda to uplift the black middle class. For example, the periodical promoted Toastmaster, but not Aunt Jemima. Both are white-owned companies, but Aunt Jemima maple syrup has an equivalent product in black-owned Alaga syrup, whereas Toastmaster appliances do not, and this lack of a peer product meant that *Ebony* chose to run it and gain both economic and social capital from promoting a popular, white-owned brand.

*Ebony* advertises a similar range of products to white-targeted magazines like *Ladies’ Home Journal* with similar, albeit perhaps lower, price ranges. There clearly is a consumer market within this demographic, yet *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and other widely circulated women’s magazines, ignore them. It’s difficult to determine precisely why *Ladies’ Home Journal* ignored demographics other than their target audience of middle- and upper-class homemakers, but looking at the advertisements aids in building the assumption that it had strongly to do with the advertising companies that promoted their products in the magazine, rather than placing the blame solely on the magazine editors. The advertising industry found
its start in the United States in the 1830s, beginning with the Industrial Revolution. As steam power, railroads, and other such technologies, including manufacturing technology, made both the production and moving of goods cheaper, the advertising industry skyrocketed as companies increasingly found the need to market their new goods to a rapidly expanding buying public. The Civil War in the 1860s gave rise to new forms of mass communications, with a constant stream of new publishing innovations that followed the nationwide demand for war news. In the 1870s, publishers realized that the money was in retailers willing to pay large sums for attention for their goods, giving birth to the continued dominance of advertisements in American mass media.\textsuperscript{20} As more people became exposed to them regularly via their consumption of media, the values ads promoted became increasingly normalized and shaped popular culture. The advertising industry underwent something of a revolution in the early twentieth century, upon a breakthrough decision to focus on the wants of active, daily consumers, rather than basing their advertisements off of companies’ individual perceptions of their own ideal consumers. The concept of advertising psychology was promulgated during this period, and different advertising companies studied the spending habits of their own target demographics to determine what their ideal readers bought, and determined both the content and placement of their advertisements based on empirical studies; this focused study on consumers, who they were as people, and their subsequent spending habits, is

\textsuperscript{20} Juliann Sivulka, \textit{Ad Women: How They Impact What We Need, Want, and Buy} (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 2009), 29.
known as “market research.”\textsuperscript{21} One of the leading market research firms in postwar America, Social Research Inc. (SRI), used their pioneering work in focusing on social class differences as determined by behaviors, values, and consumption patterns to determine that a consumer’s “social-class membership” was the primary factor in their buying behavior.\textsuperscript{22} Type of income and occupation determined one’s social-class membership rather than income alone, which often blurred the lines between blue- and white-collar lifestyles.\textsuperscript{23} As a result, SRI ordered social classes into six ranked groups and determined that the middle two groups, the lower-middle (white-collar salaried) and upper-lower (skilled, blue-collar waged) classes made up the “middle-majority,” otherwise known as the target of mass-market appeals—in other words, groups in which the majority of American housewives belonged to.\textsuperscript{24} In the case of an enormous range of products, from cosmetics to household appliances to canned foods, market research determined that the ideal consumer is always female, and that consumption in general was a primarily feminine activity. As a result, targeted promotion toward women emerged, and melded with the idea of “Mrs. Consumer,” the concept of the housewife being America’s greatest consumer by shopping regularly to maintain her household.\textsuperscript{25} Women were the primary readers of \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal}. Advertisers knew their target demographic, and knew that their target demographic comprised the vast majority of the readership of

\textsuperscript{21} Sivulka, 90.  
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 597.  
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{25} Janice Williams Rutherford, \textit{Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency} (University of Georgia Press, 2003), 5.
popular American women’s magazines. Consequently, the advertisements found in *Ladies’ Home Journal* and * Ebony* exemplify this concept of “Mrs. Consumer,” the homemaker who engages in frequent shopping both as a form of frivolous leisure, and to transform her husband’s wages into beautiful and comfortable homes, meals, and children.

As a result of this targeted promotion toward the housewife, other consumer demographics, such as working women and women of color, fell by the wayside in popular women’s magazines like *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Companies in health, cosmetics, food, household appliances and other such lifestyle industries realized that homemakers made up the bulk of the spending in their respective industries. They studied the spending habits and lifestyles of these women in particular, and encouraged women to use their products to become the perfect housewife. They wanted every woman to aspire to become the perfect woman. Perfect women, with straight hair and slim waists and impeccable cooking skills, became the norm in advertisements during this period because advertising companies sought to sell to these women, and wanted other women to buy such products in the hopes of emulating these perfect women in the upper echelons of society. For that reason, there was no real incentive to use resources to market towards entirely different demographics of women, such as women of color and working women, when they could simply market towards their ideal group with the idea that other groups would emulate them.

Each chapter of the thesis is centered around one aspect of the housewife’s life, and discusses said aspect in relation to housewifery and its related
technologies. Chapter one, centered around household appliances, discusses how popular media engineers the societal ideal of American womanhood as one of white housewifery, aided by technological advancements such as telephones and dryers, meant simultaneously to improve labor while also proving America’s modernity and progress. Chapter two, which focuses on the beauty industry and the history of cosmetics, examines how the American mainstream beauty industry identifies beauty with housewifery, linking cosmetics products with less glamorous parts of being a housewife, like chores such as cooking. The black beauty industry, which rises concurrently, seeks to professionalize black women and uplift the black middle class, demonstrating how black women conformed to some mainstream ideals of beauty, but for their own social capital. The final chapter, with the household chore of cooking, cookbooks, and cooking technologies at the forefront, discusses how the household chore of cooking transformed over time as technology advanced, as well as how white women took advantage of their authority as housewives to commercialize their skill and write cookbooks that enjoyed enormous popularity nationwide. In addition, I examine racial depictions in advertisements across the three sections, studying how each separate category depicts race and how this aligns with America’s idealized view of white housewifery. Throughout the chapters, groups of women are demonstrated to create their own autonomy in crafting themselves as American women, choosing when and how to conform to becoming the ideal American housewife and using this perceived competence to gain economic and social influence.
Chapter 1: Engineering the Fantasy of the Home and the Housewife

Figure 1.0. Bell Telephone System

Advertising for household appliances during the postwar period, ranging from laundry detergent to refrigerators, almost ubiquitously portrayed a beautiful
woman as the manager of her household, using the specific appliance advertised to engineer a beautiful home for her husband and children. She did not create or design her own tools, but used them with skill and precision to create a perfect domestic haven, at least according to the advertisements. The advertisement featured above is one example of such a fantasy, from the April 1962 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and depicts an in-home telephone system. The phone system was designed so that the slim, blonde housewife was able to conveniently call from anywhere in the house, lessening her workload, Bell claims, as well as being designed to be feminine and attractive. She is shown calling from the bedroom and the kitchen, the primary rooms considered to be the housewife’s domain and place of work in the house—a woman did her toilette in her bedroom, satisfied her husband in the bedroom, and cooked for her husband and children in the kitchen. Her hair and makeup are perfectly done in each image, despite the fact that she was in the midst of doing chores. The advertisement’s design, with its pastel color scheme and pretty, white model housewife, was standard for the period, and depicted an image of the woman that we encounter over and over in the postwar period: the white, attractive, competent homemaker who flawlessly keeps house and takes care of her husband and children while also immaculately maintaining her appearance and femininity, with the help of household appliances. This manufactured image of the housewife demonstrates a fantasy that American consumer industries engineered and marketed via household appliances relentlessly during the postwar period.
In the postwar period, American society constructed and justified women’s status as homemakers; through their roles as mothers of the nation’s children and keepers of the nation’s homes, homemaking women were recognized as central to American greatness.26 World War II triggered a multitude of both economic and social advancements, especially in the United States, and the majority of women worked for wages during the war. American media used methods like advertising to disseminate the idea of the strong, patriotic woman who proudly showed her love for her country by joining the wartime workforce.27 This theme of patriotism in women manifests itself during American consumer culture during World War II in other technologies such as makeup trends during the war, as discussed in the next chapter on cosmetics. Women were portrayed as powerful and capable, yet simultaneously beautiful—breadwinners and significant contributors to the good of America, while still being “women” in the workplace, not just workers.

Upon the conclusion of the war, however, as veterans came home seeking peace and comfort in the form of wives, children, and picket-fence houses, popular media began pushing for a different ideal American woman.28 Media pushed women to be housewives and mothers, not only for these war heroes but to clear the workforce of women to make way for the floods of men who needed employment after the war. In light of such economic conditions, women became

27 Alice Kessler-Harris, Women Have Always Worked: A Concise History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 151.
considered to be first and foremost mothers and housekeepers, before workers or other such outwardly productive roles. By caring for her husband and children and keeping a good home for the family, she contributed to society by raising the future leaders and citizens of America, and in order to fulfill these duties to the best of her ability, she needed to purchase many “essential” aids, or household appliances such as freezers and vacuums, that will be discussed later in the chapter.

The chapter begins with a broad overview of the history of domestic technology, housework and the ideology of the “housewife,” beginning with the Agricultural Revolution, during which farmwork prompted people to adopt sedentary lifestyles. Farmers settled with their families in houses permanently, giving rise to a whole host of new household technologies within said houses. Moving into the Industrial Revolution, machinery and factories developed household tools into the mechanized appliances they are today, and the individual household became a unit of consumption that dominated the commercial sphere, specifically in household appliances, and this concept of households as consumers really came to a head in the twentieth century, especially during the postwar period. The history section concludes with a discussion of the rise of the ideology of “separate spheres” and the “housewife” during the postwar period. The resulting concept of “Mrs. Consumer,” as housewives were the primary consumers in their households, came to the forefront of the domestic technology advertising industry.
The second section of the chapter discusses the depiction of housewifery and marriage during the postwar period, analyzing an advice column published in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, the most popular women’s magazine published during this period, and how it demonstrates some common dynamics of households during this period. The stories in the marriage column, along with the advice given by its (male) counselors, illustrate the idea that the concepts of housework and the housewife were both manufactured and promoted by media; as the conflicts featured in the column demonstrate, women often did not conform exactly to the housewife ideal, and this pushback led to marriage troubles. Women who protested against doing the lion’s share of housework, or even women who wanted to work outside the home, are presented as those needing counseling to save their own marriages.

Finally, the chapter ends with an analysis of advertisements for household appliances published in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, whose target demographic was upper- and middle-class housewives, and in *Ebony*, whose target demographic was middle-class African Americans. To conclude the chapter, I examine how women are depicted in these advertisements, and how these representations reflect the widespread societal view of housewifery and womanhood during this period as one of the wealthy, white class. The chapter aims to demonstrate that commercial depictions of American women via popular media during the postwar period reveal the societal ideal of American womanhood as one of white housewifery supported by household technologies that require economic prosperity. Women of color are conspicuously absent from popular media.
targeting housewives, like relationship advice columns and advertisements for household appliances, and the placements of these commercial depictions of housewifery in white- versus black-targeted magazines, like *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Ebony* respectively, indicate that while the mainstream marketing industry pitched the white homemaker as the ideal American woman, people of color did not necessarily uphold the same ideals for women, and instead promoted this image more to gain economic advantage by selling these popular images. Overall, the ideal American woman during this period was one of modernity and technological prowess, and her skill and competence, and consequently value, as a woman was determined by this definition of white, wealthy housewifery.

**A Brief History of American Household Technology, Industry and “Mrs. Consumer”**

Because the concept of “housework,” and by extension the “housewife,”
did not exist until industrialization in the nineteenth century, the postwar idea of “Mrs. Consumer” and the idea that women were the primary consumers in society was a revolutionary idea that spotlighted women in the consumer industry for the first time in American history. Until very recently in human history, the household had been a major center of production, because essentially all work was done within the house. With the advent of agriculture throughout the world, women converted unprocessed plant and animal material into food and clothing within the home, cooking and spinning and weaving. In America specifically, until the eighteenth century and the Industrial Revolution, during which machinery was invented and replaced much manual labor, society was agrarian.
Most families were primarily agricultural and produced the majority of what they used within their homes, with the house acting as both factory and educational institution and less as a place of rest and leisure. Every member of the family, from father to mother to grandparents to children, contributed to the economic production of the house. Everyone farmed, with even the littlest children helping with weeding and picking fruit. As a result, the word “housework” did not exist before industrialization, when the separation between “home places” and “work places” solidified in the nineteenth century to create the doctrine of “separate spheres.”29 Even before this distinction, however, women have historically done both such outdoor labor on the farm, as well as the indoor labor, like cooking and cleaning, sewing and laundraing. In addition to such everyday physical work, women nursed and educated their children, ensuring that they, too, developed into healthy, productive laborers able to work and make their own livings for their own future families.

During the period following the Civil War but before the Industrial Revolution in America, wives and mothers had very little free time because of how labor-intensive household chores tended to be, especially after the Civil War abolished slavery. Matriarchs of middle- and lower-class families, who couldn’t comfortably afford long-term, full-time servants, took over the majority of the housework; even if they did hire help, these servants often didn’t stay for very long. Servants did exist in the preindustrial era, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and girls routinely worked in service for households before

marrying. However, with the vast tracts of land available in America, young people often worked for only a short number of years before buying their own homesteads. Chores were not only laborious but also time-consuming. Washing and drying clothes often took multiple days to complete. Bringing water into the house, lifting and scrubbing heavy wet clothes, and hanging heavy wet clothes up to dry were all processes that took much time and labor, the bulk of which was left to the mother, with occasional help from her children when they weren’t working on the fields. Soap for the washing was often made by hand, as well, to cut costs. Three meals had to be prepared a day, in large quantities so that the family had enough energy to work outdoors, and keeping up the wood fire was tedious as well as dangerous. Foods like meat and fruit needed to be preserved for the winter, and milking and churning were daily, unending chores. Wives undertook most of the chores that comprise “housework” in modern language, and because the house was the center of production, women were considered not to do “housework,” but simply “work.”

With the Industrial Revolution came mass production, mass distribution, and the creation of a national market that brought new technologies to American homes, culminating in the emergence of the concept of housework, as well as a redefinition of the relationship between the home and the economy. ³⁰ Labor in households all across the country, in both the countryside and in cities, underwent fundamental changes. As people left their households to work in cities, their wages returned to the house, giving it capital to purchase new goods. People

stopped producing at home in favor of buying commercial household items produced by the machinery that resulted from industrialization. This development laid the foundations for “Mrs. Consumer” in the twentieth century, as women increasingly became associated with the home, and therefore the purchasing of appliances and other household goods, including items like butter or soap which they had previously manufactured themselves. Household appliances became increasingly widespread and transformed housework on a large scale. For example, the process of making clothes during this period underwent a revolution. Some scholars argue that American industrialization began in the New England textile industry, because essentially the entire process of making clothes, from spinning and weaving cloth, to designing, cutting and sewing garments, all moved to the factory, bringing the factory system to the United States and “[furnishing] the laboratory wherein were worked out industrial methods characteristic of the nation.”31 Before industrialization, women had made most of the nation’s cloth in their homes, cultivating flax and raising sheep for their materials, then spinning the wool into yarn and weaving the yarn into coarse fabrics at home, on their homemade spinning wheels and looms.32 Textiles were one of the most significant at-home technologies to move away from the home upon the Industrial Revolution and the ensuing migrations of rural workers to cities. Ready-made clothes increasingly transformed the figure of the housewife into one of glamor and meticulous appearance as well; house-dresses and clothing worn by homemakers in the home during their work became increasingly elaborate and

31 Strasser, 126.
32 Ibid.
less suited for harsh manual labor, reflecting a change in aesthetics that will be discussed in detail in the next chapter on cosmetics and beauty culture.

There were multiple reasons for this shift away from production in the home. First, many rural households moved to the cities for work opportunities, and found that production simply wasn’t possible in a smaller urban home. For example, for cloth production people simply couldn’t raise flax and sheep in urban environments, especially in the tiny apartments and tenement housing that many less affluent people, the ones who would’ve felt the need to make their own cloth at home, occupied. Secondly, households found that making items like soap and clothing at home was more expensive in terms of both money and time; often, store-bought goods were cheaper and of higher quality. By 1900, industrialization had cheapened textiles, and most people bought ready-made fabric and men’s clothing. Some people, like immigrants newly arrived in the country and flocking toward cities for quick work, simply didn’t have the time, nor the capital to continue the production they had been doing in their home countries.

Many rural households continued to operate under the same principles of household production that had guided them pre-industrialization, but this demographic steadily decreased in size as more and more people moved to cities for work in factories and other urban centers. In addition, utility systems like water, gas, and petroleum became increasingly widespread, and the foundations

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33 Cowan, 42.
34 Ibid.
35 Strasser, 126.
36 Ibid.
for modern household technologies were laid. For example, by the end of the nineteenth century, running water was a standard convenience in urban households, including the very poorest, who at least had a tap. Thus, the physical labor that had resulted from hauling water into the house for laundry or making candles for light evaporated, and women’s labor in the household became less outwardly obvious.

This photograph (Photo 1.2), titled “Housewife” and taken by American sociologist and photographer Lewis Hine sometime between 1922 and 1938 in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, illustrates the daily life of an urban housewife in the early-twentieth century. The image depicts a woman pumping water into a
bowl right outside her house. A tub for laundry and a bucket filled with apples sits next to the water pump. Brooms are propped up against the wall. This domestic scene displays tools for the chores of laundry, cooking, and cleaning all in one setting. Neither the woman, nor her house look particularly wealthy, her appearance and clothing plain and the walls of her house somewhat dirty, demonstrating the fact that even the lower classes had regular access to appliances like water pumps, which provided running water. The woman in the photograph serves as a stark contrast to the model housewife in the opening image of the chapter, reflecting not only the probable difference between a housewife’s lived experience and an advertisement portraying an idealized view of one, but also the difference between the pre-war and post-war conceptions of the housewife. Both women have access to appliances, but the appearance of the urban woman in the early twentieth century indicates that her housework is laborious and does not allow her to maintain a meticulously groomed appearance, unlike the model suburban housewife, whose dress and makeup indicate the opposite.

Gas and electric companies developed methods to bring modern fuel to families. As a result, the Industrial Revolution saw the individual household becoming the ultimate consumption unit in the nineteenth century. The housewife emerged at the forefront of this consumption in the twentieth century, as demonstrated by the concept of “Mrs. Consumer.” Advertising, both in general

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38 Rutherford, 126.
and for household goods, began to rise concurrently, and heavily promoted a middle- and upper-class-centric view of “separate spheres,” specifically targeting housewives and attempting to hone their ability for “intelligent consumption.” Advertisers pushed the idea that a housewife’s role was not just to buy goods. Her decisions in purchasing expressed her household’s standard of living and defined its social status; she singlehandedly sustained her family’s standard of living through intelligent purchasing goods and transforming them into use for healthy and moral families. Manufacturers and advertisers, in order to sell their products, took on the job of “educating” these “Mrs. Consumers,” teaching them to buy their products to keep her household prosperous, and often asked for their input via surveys on the development of said products, using this input in advertising as evidence of the quality of a product.

The urban middle class proliferated during the nineteenth century as a result of industrialization, and with them came the doctrine of “separate spheres,” an idea that would re-emerge and significantly craft the idea of the “housewife” later, in the postwar period. The ideology of “separate spheres” first began to appear in popular literature around the 1820s, at the same time that the earliest factories arose. There were two parts to the message. The first part of the message sanctified the home. In a developing urban industrial society, only the home could preserve certain values essential to society: “sympathy, honor, and

40 Glenna Matthews, “*Just a Housewife*: the Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 188.
41 Strasser, 181.
virtue,” according to the 1830 issue of *Ladies’ Magazine*, an early influential American women’s magazine that combined with another magazine to become *Godey’s Ladies’ Book*, the most widely circulated American women’s magazine before the Civil War, in an article describing the “sanctity of the home.”

Outside the home, men experienced the unloving, harsh new industrial order, surrounded by machinery and pollution and in the company of only other men—this was the “men’s sphere.” They needed a haven to escape to, one that would provide comfort and security after a long day’s work. The second part of the message was that women belonged at home, to provide this sanctuary that men desperately needed. A woman’s duty was to keep the home as a haven, and because of this duty the house was considered the “woman’s sphere.” According to the doctrine, only the inherent qualities and virtues of a woman could purify a home, and thus she was expected to devote most, if not all, of her time to keeping a household for her husband. As this ideology permeated American society, women were increasingly instructed and influenced to aspire to become housewives; society, in the form of the consumer industry especially, sought to teach women that they themselves wanted to marry well, have children, and become housewives.

Men and unmarried young women left home in increasing numbers to work in the labor force, while married women, if their households could afford it, stayed at home to do labor that was no longer actively productive—they were not single-handedly producing food or clothes or other household supplies anymore.

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42 Strasser, 181.
43 Ibid.
but purchasing such goods. The middle-class housewife took care of her husband, children, and perhaps other family members who lived with them, preparing them for productive labor by feeding them, laundering their clothes and tending to both their physical and emotional needs. For wealthier households, housewives often had hired help, and her duties were more “managerial,” but still just as time-consuming. An upper-class woman’s matriarchal duties included planning meals, supervising her children’s educations, and directing servants in the maintenance of the house.\textsuperscript{44} In accordance with the “separate spheres” idea, the household increasingly became sacred, pure and serene and secure, a reprieve for a working man to return to after a long day making money. It was the housewife’s duty to maintain this sacred space, to be the guardian of the domestic haven, and many women pursued this ideal while being constantly bombarded with advertisements in all forms of media, from magazines to radio to television, promoting products to be bought to help women achieve this perfect home.

Industrialization continued well into the twentieth century, and as more and more technologies were developed, housework changed shape. Before World War II, according to a study conducted by John B. Leeds, the economist who pioneered “family budget studies,” between 1912 and 1914 housewives spent an average of fifty-six hours per week doing housework.\textsuperscript{45} This housework alternated between “manual” labor, such as cooking, baking, sewing, and tidying rooms, and “managerial” labor, such as ordering groceries, supervising servants,

\textsuperscript{44} Palmer, 22.
\textsuperscript{45} Cowan, 159.
teaching children, and managing household accounts. Domestic servitude was still prevalent during this period, and middle and upper-class women hired help to deal with the heavy labor considered inappropriate and demeaning for their station, like scrubbing floors, washing windows, and hauling laundry; these poorer women, who worked for their livings, presumably were also exposed to the societal programming that told women to aspire to be housewives, but were usually born into lower classes that dictated that they would be forced to provide for themselves, as they often could not marry into upper classes. Servants became increasingly scarce both as appliances proliferated and poorer women chose to work in factories or offices. As a result, upper-class women continued to maintain their perfect households, but increasingly with their own labor, with new appliances aiding them.

As the twentieth century progressed, consuming became a national pastime as more people had greater incomes than ever before. By 1928, men earned about $92 million, an unprecedented number, while women spent $52 million on food, clothing and shelter. In the same year, 1,2500,000 couples married, 2,500,000 babies were born, 400,000 high school students graduated, and 2,000,000 families moved into new houses, with each event prompting housewives all over the country on major shopping sprees. To capitalize on these “Mrs. Consumers,” who held 80 to 90 percent of the American retail dollar

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46 Cowan, 158.
48 Ibid.
in her pocket, the industry targeted these women through advertising.\textsuperscript{49} As a result, advertisements for new household appliances like refrigerators, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners proliferated in the first half of the twentieth century, with brief breaks during World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. The Great Depression, triggered by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, witnessed housewives all over the country losing stability as husbands lost their jobs, and as a result purchasing significantly less by both buying cheaper goods like foods, and spending less on luxuries like appliances and other technologies. The economy slowly recovered throughout the 1930s and incomes rose, with American joining World War II in 1941 finally marking the end of the depression as American industry devoted its resources to producing wartime goods and stimulated the economy to pre-depression heights. During the years following each war, however, the return to civilian life saw women returning to the household, and these advertisements, primarily found in women’s magazines circulating nationwide, revealed the societal expectation of the housewife in the mid-twentieth century, that women needed to be educated to be efficient and productive, so that she could provide a model household for children, husband, and friends, and she could only accomplish this through intelligent consumption.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{49} Ogden, 157.  
\textsuperscript{50} Palmer, 22.
The image above was taken by American photographer Jacques Lowe in 1957, titled “Ithaca Kitchen: Before and After (After-Putting Frozen Food to Cook).” In contrast to the photograph of the lower-class urban housewife presented earlier in the section, the housewife pictured in this photograph is of the new postwar era, an era of rapid technological progress compounded by intelligent consumption. The woman is in an indoor kitchen, heating frozen food,
presumably retrieved from the refrigerator next to her, on an electric stove. This woman is cooking with the latest appliances and technologies, and her coiffured, well-dressed appearance belies the changing of housework during the postwar period into one that requires more technological prowess and intelligence than manual labor (an idea especially exemplified by the chore of cooking, which will be discussed in the third chapter). Her hands are not manicured, however, indicating that she uses her hands regularly for chores, and therefore is not a model representing an idealized image of housewifery and its glamors, but an ordinary woman doing mundane, daily labor. She represents the average housewife, still surrounded by shiny appliances and modern technology but still needing to do significant work herself.

The portrayal of the housewife in magazines and advertising directed toward them underwent a significant change as well, during the years following World War II. As women were encouraged to purchase appliances like washing machines that would save them significant time and labor, the women depicted in the advertisements for said washing machines became increasingly coiffured and manicured. The post-World War II housewife, with all of the amenities and appliances available to make her home picturesque with little manual labor, demonstrated an ideal of beauty, elegance and effortless work ethic. By becoming “Mrs. Consumer” and practicing intelligent consumption, purchasing products that would maintain not only the beauty of her house but her own

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physical beauty, the American housewife was the picturesque domestic goddess, providing her husband, back from a long day’s work to a well-rested, beautiful, energetic, and, most importantly, competent wife. The following section analyzes real-life, though still heavily moderated and edited, depictions of this housewife dynamic, and how real women experienced the lives American media promoted so heavily to them.

“Can This Marriage Be Saved?” and the Portrayal of Housework in *Ladies’ Home Journal*

Popularly claimed during the postwar period as *Ladies’ Home Journal*’s trademark feature, the column “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” featured monthly one couple on the brink of divorce or undergoing serious relationship issues. Promulgated in 1956 and quickly becoming *Ladies’ Home Journal*’s most popular feature, the column explained couples’ problems from both perspectives, the solutions they adopt after undergoing rigorous marital counseling, and finally the status of the marriages a couple of years into the future. Women’s work, from housework and women being dissatisfied with the division of household chores to salaried work and women wanting to work outside the home, were extremely common issues that often made up the bulk of many couple’s conflicts with their marriages. Every column devoted a section to explaining the mission of the monthly advice column; “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” sought to “[teach] husband and wife to talk out the differences of opinion that arise in every marriage,” via marital counseling provided by the American Institute of Family Relations (AIFR), a nonprofit organization dedicated to “giving more than a
thousand individual consultations each month.” The message, written by AIFR founder and president Paul Popenoe, went on to explain that in addition to providing counseling, the organization provided training in marriage counseling to “hundreds of persons, largely clergymen, who are called on to deal with such problems.” The vast majority of marriage counselors during this period, especially those employed by the AIFR, were men who were, more often than not, religious and advanced in age. “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” exemplifies this skewed gender demographic of counselors. Each column named the head counselor of the case featured that month, and every counselor listed between 1956 and 1962 was male. All of the advice dispensed in this column conferring relationship advice was from a male perspective, and gives further insight as to how the perception of the housewife was formulated by men in the postwar period.

The popularity of the column is such that a 1992 article in the Wall Street Journal proclaimed it “the most popular, most enduring women’s magazine feature in the world.” The column began in 1956, the decade marriage counseling began to take off. The profession of marriage counseling finds its roots in late nineteenth-century America, during the first wave feminism movement, which fought not only for civic rights like voting, but also for wide-

52 “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” Ladies’ Home Journal, October 1961, 37.
53 Ibid.
ranging issues like the sexual and professional liberation of women. Marriage and family counseling, in its beginning stages, was a vehicle chiefly for convincing American lawmakers to make it easier for women outside the home to work outside the home, pursue careers and thus enhance their own personal satisfaction. Paul Popenoe, the president and founder of the American Institute of Family Relations, the first marriage counseling clinic in American history, was a pivotal figure in the founding of the profession of marriage counseling, and throughout the 1940s and 1950s remained indisputably the leading figure in the field. He began his career interested in eugenics, the study of improving the human race by selectively mating people with specific desirable hereditary traits, and considered marriage and family counseling an extension of eugenics. He championed significant first wave feminine issues as a result, by proclaiming that a healthy America needed fulfilled women, albeit within the home. He transformed marriage counseling by pushing against the profession’s origins of promoting women’s independence, instead turning it on its head by counseling married families to keep the wives at home and maintain ideal environments for husbands and children instead. By 1929 he was known nationwide as a national expert on heredity, eugenics, marriage and the family, and founded the AIFR that same year. By 1962, the AIFR grew to have a staff of seventy and boasted over 100,000 clients, and Popenoe’s views on marriage disseminated throughout the country via newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

56 Ibid., 15.
57 Ibid., 15.
Popenoe’s stance as a eugenicist colored his views on marriage and family maintenance, and this eugenicist view is prominent in every “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” column. Popenoe believed that marriage counseling could boost family size among the so-called “fit classes of society,” and urged marriage counselors to increase birth rates among the best kinds of people by discouraging divorce. In the vast majority of opinions, divorce was a disaster for the nation and for the individuals involved—desirable people tended to marry other desirable people and needed to continue to do so, and as a result divorce would only needlessly separate said couples and increase the chance of these people mating new, less desirable people.\textsuperscript{58} Because of this strong stance against divorce, he placed as much emphasis on the personal fulfillment of the wife as he did the husband, a view unusual during the postwar period. To Popenoe, “the home must be given first place in the life of both men and women–otherwise the survival of a nation is endangered.”\textsuperscript{59} Contrary to the advertising in \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal}, which promoted the image of a housewife who derived pleasure first and foremost from housekeeping and childrearing, Popenoe’s counselors at times did recommend for the wife to obtain employment, to remain happy and fulfilled in her life—happy, accomplished women reared the best children in the best homes. More commonly, however, “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” stories resolved with the wife quitting work, becoming a better housewife and staying at home with their children, an idea that permeated postwar popular media. The stories

\textsuperscript{59} Popenoe as quoted in Stern, 194.
presented by the column serve to demonstrate the fact that the housewife was a concept that women didn’t naturally adopt; society created and encouraged it.

Every “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” column featured the perspective of both the wife and the husband, and every woman mentioned in her story the role housekeeping has played in being a good wife to her husband. In the December 1962 issue, 38-year-old Julia, described by the column as the “sparkling-eyed, slim-waisted wife of a modestly prosperous manufacturer,” was an upper-middle-class housewife and mother-of-two who feels neglected by her husband and has an affair with another man. The column’s first words regarding Julia are positive descriptors of her physical appearance; her pretty facial features and slimness immediately depict her as a woman who had achieved societal standards, as a beautiful housewife, yet she was still unsatisfied, and therefore in need of professional help. She lamented that her life at home was terribly dull, devoid of both attention from her husband and any external stimulation from outside the home. While raising the children, she could tolerate the “dullness of [her] existence,” probably because she was busy with housekeeping and childrearing. She described this period of her sons’ childhood as the time of her life when she was “necessary, useful.” To demonstrate that she was “as well as the average wife,” she said that she “planned and cooked good meals, [she] superintended the boys’ homework, cheered their athletic triumphs, acted as a den mother, attended meetings of the PTA.” All of the activities that made her to be what she

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60 “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” *Ladies Home Journal*, December 1962, 32.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
considered a good wife revolved around housekeeping and childrearing, ideas suitable for being featured in *Ladies’ Home Journal* and aligning with the message the magazine sought to distribute nationwide—that women belonged in the home and that their value as mothers and wives relied on primarily on their ability to keep house.

Julia asserted that she typified the ideal woman during this period in American popular media, bolstering the idea that being a good housekeeper and mother were indeed desires that many women during this period fostered. In addition, Julia’s testimony reveals that at least some women wanted to be recognized for their efforts in achieving these desires, and that these women were well aware of the pressure society placed on them to conform to this specific, and often unattainable for poorer women, ideal. The column did, in fact, mention that Julia felt that her life as a housewife was dull, but went on to explain in the counselor’s advice section that she felt dull because her husband didn’t pay her enough attention. A woman’s personal fulfillment, in the eyes of Paul Popenoe and his marriage counselors, did matter to an extent, but this episode demonstrated that for a housewife, there are always external factors, such as the lack of companionship of a husband, that influence such dissatisfaction. A housewife did not feel bored or dull at home simply because she was a housewife; her lack of fulfillment in her life was a result of some specific issue or problem that arose on occasion, not from unhappiness with her life as a housewife in general.
The column did not shy away from frankly discussing labor in the household, and in particular featured a number of complaints about how wives felt that the distribution of household work was unfair and old-fashioned, that husbands left all of the household chores to the wife without relief; in this case, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* did not, in fact, seem to advocate for women, even housewives whose primary duty was domestic labor, to shoulder all of the burden alone, as appliance advertisements may suggest. In a number of issues, the distribution of housework features as one of the main components, with wives complaining that their husbands didn’t do enough around the house, and that the lion’s share of the work was left to them to do alone. The heaviest-slash-outdoor chores, like bringing out garbage bins and mowing the lawn, seem to be the primary avenues for complaints—men did not do their chores or had to be nagged into doing them, and therefore these women felt justified in complaining about them not pulling their weight around the household. However, some men did not subscribe to the idea of doing any chores at all, and so the division of labor in a house did not seem to be a well-established societal standard, but on a household-by-household basis, depending on how progressive the man was in terms of helping around the house. In the June 1960 issue, thirty-four-year-old housewife Ivy lamented that her husband, Tod, was “too darned lazy to mow the lawn or prune the shrubs unless [she raised] a rumpus.”63 Meanwhile, Tod admitted to his laziness in his own section, but then claimed that Ivy “knew what she was getting

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63 “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1960, 142.
into when she married [him]”—that Ivy knew that Tod wouldn’t pitch in at home because all matters regarding the house, including the yard, fell to her.

A similar problem arises in the March 1960 issue, in which twenty-three-year-old Rita complained that her husband Jack never helped with chores: “I thought Jack should pitch in and help with the cooking and cleaning, as my father does.” In this case, Rita complained not about the “stereotypical” men’s chores that other women discussed earlier, but about household help in general, further illustrating the idea that the gendering of household chores during this period was not standardized. Jack went on in his section to counter that Rita’s father was a “milquetoast” man who took over the domestic work of the house in deference to her strong-willed mother, and that “I am a man and I intend to behave like a man in marriage.” Jack firmly believed in gender roles in which the wife took care of housekeeping and the man was the breadwinner of the house, a mindset common during this period, especially among the readership of the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Noticeably, Ivy complained about her husband refusing to help with periodic chores, while Rita resented her husband for refusing to cook and clean, both daily tasks that required constant taxing physical and mental labor. The advice remained the same for both situations, despite the disparity in expectation for each man; the marriage counselors advised each wife to temper their expectations for their husbands. For Ivy, she became less aggressive and nagged less about getting household chores done, while Rita committed to cooking and cleaning daily after realizing that her parents’ domestic arrangement was unusual.

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65 Ibid.
and that she couldn’t expect her husband to adhere to such a peculiar dynamic.

Though the columns did indeed put the dissatisfaction of these housewives on display for the public to see and potentially empathize with, the resolutions of these wives’ issues indicate that ultimately these stories, and the magazine itself, still promoted the idea that domestic work was the domain of women, and that while men can, and often should, expect not to be waited on hand-and-foot in their house, they still should pitch in with the housework on occasion—namely irregular chores like yard care or household machinery maintenance.

Housework isn’t the only source of dissatisfaction mentioned in “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” and many columns depicted both wives worrying about their appearances and husbands complaining that their wives’ have let themselves go, demonstrating Ladies’ Home Journal’s emphasis of the duty of a housewife not only to maintain her home but also her appearance for her husband. In the September 1961 issue, Gail caught her husband of twelve years, Guy, cheating on her with a secretary named Alice, “the new blonde in his life.” 66 Gail went on to disparage Alice’s physical appearance: “Alice is only moderately pretty, as old as I am or older.” 67 After immediately fixating on Alice’s looks, Gail commented derisively that while she’d done her best to be a good wife, that she was a good housekeeper and cook whose mother-in-law praised her for the way she manages the household, ultimately she knew she was not “wildly glamorous,” and that she was a “bean pole.” 68 She was skilled enough at housework that the mother of her

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
husband, in theory the most critical woman in her life, acknowledged her competence, but she considered herself unattractively thin and not beautiful, and therefore felt inferior as a wife. She went on to describe everything she had done to make up for her lack of attractiveness—she put her husband’s wishes and his welfare above her own, and even entertained his mother and aunts faithfully every Sunday for twelve years, catering to their individual diets and listening patiently to their nagging. Gail felt deficient in her role as wife because of her self-perceived imperfect appearance, and sought to make up for it by being the best housekeeper she could be, exemplifying the idea that one of the most important duties of a housewife is to maintain her beauty for her husband. It was not enough to be merely a good housekeeper, as evident all throughout *Ladies’ Home Journal* in its advertising as well as its editorials; a wife needed to remain attractive for her husband, lest he stray to other women the way Gail’s husband did. Because of this emphasis on women maintaining their appearances, cosmetics, including makeup and hair products, became an essential part of the housewife’s toolbox, the collection of technologies she needs to do her job, during this period, which will be explored in the next chapter.

The dynamic between paid and unpaid labor at home is also an issue that frequently appears in the advice column; often, the employment of the wives was a source of friction for the couple. For example, Rita in the March 1960 issue held an office job, and was resentful that her husband was forcing her to keep it: “To tell the truth, I loathe working . . . When I dreamed of marriage as a little girl,

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69“Can This Marriage be Saved?” (September 1961), 24.
I didn’t see myself as a career wife.” She went on to emphasize the fact that it had been Jack’s idea, not hers, for her to continue working. Much of her dissatisfaction with her marriage was related to her disliking her monotonous job, and the fact that her husband forced her to work but refused to help her with household chores. Rita’s discussion of her childhood dreams of marriage represent a specific societal perspective, an upper-middle-class woman who dreamed of a marriage that would provide for her and allow her to keep house for her husband, who would be the sole worker in the relationship. It’s not farfetched to assume that this story is one of many deliberately selected by *Ladies’ Home Journal* for public viewing, to promote the idea that women should aspire to be housewives. Although the columns didn’t explicitly push for women to purchase appliances, in describing the women’s daily lives, the columns often detailed what tools the housewife used to do her job. It’s telling, then, that the marriage counselor’s advice to the couple was for Jack to get a better job and Rita to quit hers; their marriage was saved because they chose to adopt the ideal dynamic pushed by the magazine, with the woman adopting the role of housewife, aided by her appliances.

In the opposite vein, some of the stories discussed the wife wanting a career for herself, while her husband wanted to be the sole provider and have her stay at home. These stories and their conclusions, all ending with the woman staying at home and often also having children, are also indicative of the societal expectation promoted by the magazine that women can achieve self-fulfillment by

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70 “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1960, 84.
becoming homemakers and mothers. The October 1961 issue featured successful engineer Tim and part-time accountant Beth, a couple married fourteen years. Until she’d met Tim, Beth said, she’d “intended to be a spinster . . . a glamorous career woman, free and unencumbered.”71 Once she fell in love with Tim and married him, she steadfastly held to her beliefs, albeit on a somewhat more minimized scale. Tim had managed to convince her to stop working during her first and only pregnancy, and she nursed for three months before hiring a housekeeper and going back to work. The couple’s friction revolved around Tim believing that Beth cared more about her job than him and their family. One of the primary sources of argument was about a house Tim wanted to buy. He complained that he’d had a top architect draw up plans for his dream house, which “includes one of those ‘dream kitchens’ for Beth,” and she’d only “smiled vaguely” and that with her lack of interest “she made it painfully clear that her work, routine accountancy which she thinks of as a career, was more important to her than anything else on earth, more than being a wife and a mother.”72 He disparages her job and feels neglected that his wife is working instead of staying at home and taking care of him and their children. He even created a “dream kitchen” for Beth, the part of the house that was solely the wife’s domain and one she was, in theory, happiest and most fulfilled in because it was in the kitchen that she accomplished the majority of her household work. The kitchen is the woman’s primary place of work within the home, and, for housewives, is their primary place of work in general and where they spend the majority of their day

71 “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” Ladies Home Journal, October 1961, 32.
72 Ibid.
every day—by designing Beth her own kitchen, Tim tried to encourage Beth to leave the office and return to the home, where she belongs and where she should be fulfilling her duties as work. In addition, this space that he felt that she belonged in was a space that he designed, despite her being the one to use it. Even in the household space specifically designated for Beth, she did not have any influence or authority in its design or creation.

The aftermath explained in the counselor’s section of the column reveals that after communication, Beth finally realized how much it would mean to Tim to have a stay-at-home wife and stopped working. The couple built and occupied the house of Tim’s dreams and, finally, started trying for another child. The conclusion to their story suggests that Beth was the primary person in the wrong in this relationship; by wanting a career, she neglected her husband and family and in order to repair their marriage, needed to realize that she couldn’t have both a career and a family without forsaking one or the other. Popenoe’s eugenicist methodology when it came to counseling is most obviously present in this case.

A woman needed to be fulfilled personally in order to raise the best kind of people for a better America, but her personal happiness could not detract from this duty to family. A woman was a wife and mother first and foremost, and to be at her best as a wife and mother, she must be a housekeeper, without external factors like employment to distract her from her primary duty. Tim and Beth even resolved to have another child, further promoting Popenoe’s idea, based on eugenics, that desirable couples must continue to have children and pass on their genes. While “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” can be seen as perhaps progressive
for choosing to run stories that feature housewives and employed wives resenting their positions in life, *Ladies’ Home Journal* ultimately demonstrates that they are in fact promoting a view of women which insists on them fulfilling their duty as women by being the perfect housekeeper, attractive and skilled and always willing to abide by their husbands.

**Household Appliances as Advertised in *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Ebony***

![Eureka Princess Vacuum Cleaner](image)

**Figure 1.4. “Eureka Princess Vacuum Cleaner”**  

The advertisements present in *Ladies’ Home Journal* in the postwar period exemplify this ideal of the domestic goddess who was bolstered by technology to
maintain a modern, well-kept household that represented the greatness of American technological development and prowess. The October 1961 issue featured an advertisement for the new Eureka Princess Vacuum Cleaner. The new vacuum cleaner was “for the lady with neither time nor closet space to spare . . . in features per dollar, here’s the savingest cleaner ever!” Both the vacuum’s utility and its economic practicality were emphasized—the ad focused only on the technology, with no female model in sight. It had a multitude of new features: new extra-large dust bag, new flip-top lid, new deep-cleaning rug nozzle. According to the advertisement, the Eureka Princess was the most practical, cost-effective vacuum on the market today, and this language is utilized specifically to draw both wealthy and not-so-wealthy housewives in, as both the primary spenders and primary housekeepers of their households. This appliance was one that not only was cheaper, but worked better at cleaning and was easier to use, thus validating the homemaker as a well-informed and articulate person who not only made intelligent purchases for her household, spending her husband’s money wisely and transforming the good into use for a healthy and moral families, but also carried out technical work skillfully, even with a cutting-edge device with multiple attachments. It also served to be affordable for the housewives who were aspiring to the wealthy ideal promoted by the magazine; the language of the ad makes the appliance accessible both to the wealthy homemakers and to those aspiring to be wealthy homemakers, by claiming that the product is affordable for everyone. In addition, the ad also sought to emphasize the feminine appearance

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74 Palmer, 22.
of the new vacuum by labeling it “Princess,” imbuing the otherwise menial household appliance with connotations of both femininity and high social class and confirming the fact that women were expected to purchase it, use it, and also feel like they were embodying upper class ideals. A woman’s choices and decisions in buying expressed her household’s standard of living and defined its social connections, so purchasing this vacuum would give a housewife social capital, by showing that she ran not only a clean and modern, but easy, no-fuss household, providing an environment for both soothing and refreshing her husband and children as well as freeing up time otherwise spent on menial activities like vacuuming. The housewife could have the leisure of pursuing other fulfilling activities with the time she saved, such as making more elaborate meals for her family or helping her children with their homework.

An advertisement for a clothes dryer in the same issue, the October 1961 *Ladies’ Home Journal* (Photo 0.1), exemplifies this idea of the competent, attractive housewife physically, by including an illustration of the woman meant to use it. The Maytag dryer was revolutionary, the ad claimed, because you “choose both [gas and Maytag] together and you get all the modern features in a dryer you can *count on* to perform.”75 Like the Eureka Princess vacuum, the advertiser focused on both the utility and economic value of the product. The appliance’s dependability was its main selling point, and the housewife could be assured she was making a smart purchase by buying a dryer that not only has modern features, but those that work both consistently and save time. Most

prominent in the ad, however, was not the text describing its features but the mother and her child pictured in the center of the page, taking fresh laundry out of the dryer. The woman’s hair was perfectly colored and curled, her makeup, complete with red lipstick, was impeccable, and her fingernails featured a red manicure, a motif present in advertising all across women’s magazines and the woman-targeted products advertised in them. She wore a pink, fitted dress and yellow pumps. The woman was a housewife, well-experienced with laundry, but her appearance belied a woman who did very little, if any, physical labor; her manicure indicated that she did not do hard labor that would be revealed through wear and tear on her hands, and her fitted dress and pumps indicate that she was not very mobile. The woman looked fondly down at her daughter, who is pictured below her, presumably learning to do women’s work as well by either observing or helping her mother. The woman was a loving, practical mother and wife, whose excellent purchase produced the clean sheets that her daughter was admiring, and who was teaching her daughter to do the same and become an excellent housewife herself.

In another advertisement in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, the homemaker was emphasized explicitly as being the standard for quality measurement, indicating how heavily the advertising rhetoric of household appliances targeted housewives. The February 1962 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal* featured an advertisement for Frigidaire Refrigerators, which claimed to be “homemaker rated.”76 “Thousands of women tell [Frigidaire] what they like and what they don’t like,” allowing the

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company’s engineers and home economists to create refrigerators that were “designed by engineers–but planned and proved by women!”77 The words women and homemakers are interchangeable in this advertisement. Women seemingly designed, or at least included their input, in these fridges by incorporating their feedback into the development of the products; the advertisement explicitly claimed that the fridges are approved by homemakers. The advertisement addressed these women and homemakers by proclaiming that their product took into account their opinions to create an “ingenious,” “dependable,” and “practical” product.78 Housewives needed to purchase appliances they could rely on, because they did the majority of the housework alone, assisted only by machines, and who better to trust than fellow housewives who all desired the same economic value and convenience.

In contrast to Ladies’ Home Journal, Ebony advertised few household appliances, featuring mostly cosmetics advertisements for women. This tendency is rather surprising considering Ebony’s proclaimed dedication, since its inception in 1945, to uplifting the black middle class. After industrialization, poor housewives had primarily been rural or black or both, and thus lacked access to amenities, public health measures, and appliances. For example, in a rural black population of two hundred tenant farmer households in Tennessee in 1934, only eight could afford electric service despite the area being considered progressive in rural electrification, and none had running water despite 83 percent of all urban

77 “Frigidaire Refrigerators.”
78 Ibid.
and non-farm residences in the area being electrified at the time. After World War II, black Americans experienced a surge in the middle class, and household technology during this period was advertised nationwide as ways to markedly improve a family’s war of life. *Ebony*’s decision to minimize advertising for household appliances indicates perhaps an uplifting not simply of the black middle class in the postwar era, but of black women who worked for wages and weren’t primarily housewives, as evident in the hair and cosmetics advertisements featured in the magazine, which more often than not depicted women as working women. Images of black housewives were few and far in between in *Ebony*, reflecting the black women’s community during the postwar period as being one of uplifting the middle class, taking pride in women working professional roles and therefore being competent and independent of men’s help in a way that directly contrasted white women’s aspirations to marry and keep house, which could only be done with a man.

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79 Cowan, 85.
Despite this tendency, a few household technology advertisements did make it; the Toastmaster appliances ad in the May 1960 issue was a prominent ad targeted toward housewives. Toastmaster was one such white-owned company that *Ebony* originator John H. Johnson chose to advertise in his magazine, claiming that bringing white and black companies together on one platform was an advancement of the civil rights movement. The Toastmaster advertisement in *Ebony* was also found in *Ladies’ Home Journal* (notably the January 1961 issue); it featured a white couple, a housewife clad in an apron happily pouring her husband coffee at the breakfast table. This imagery is particularly subservient on
the part of the woman; she stood while serving her seated husband, who was leisurely reading the paper. The advertisement worked hard to show that the woman enjoyed serving her husband, who was dressed in a suit and appeared to be ready to leave for work to earn the money that provides the couple with their beautiful home. The language used in the advertisement directly addressed housewives: “our steam and dry iron [offer] all the ‘most-wanted’ features housewives seek in an iron, according to a comprehensive survey of homemakers.”80 This ad, in its entirety, could be seen in a *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping* or any other white-housewife-targeted magazine of the period. Though infrequent, *Ebony* clearly did advertise the white, beautiful housewife ideal, but notably did not address black women as housewives. The magazine was not immune to pushing commercial visions of American women, the white, attractive housewife, but advertising these products was less to promote this idea of the ideal woman, and more for both economic and social purposes. Johnson chose to promote white-owned companies’ products for both the fees these companies were willing to pay, as well as integration of white and black consumers. However, homemakers depicted in the advertisements in his magazine were nearly always white, while black women who promoted feminine products like makeup were always depicted in offices and other places of work. This distinction will be further discussed in Chapter 2, when I look at how cosmetics ads depict black women first and foremost as professional women.

Interestingly, the technology *Ebony* did choose to advertise in their pages with great frequency was not household appliances, but male-associated technologies like radios and cars. Each issue featured multiple advertisements for cars, and music systems like radios and record players. The language that dominated advertisements for such technologies always addressed men, and men always dominated the images in the advertisement. None of these advertisements depicted women, unless as accessories. For example, the February 1960 issue featured an advertisement for Chevrolet cars. Strikingly, an interracial couple was featured; no other companies or advertisements featured any couples of different races in any issue of *Ebony* from 1960 to 1962. In the ad, a black man and white woman lounge, picnicking in front of their parked Chevrolet car.\(^8\) The woman was not obviously a housewife or even a wife; the relationship seemed to be a casual one between two young people. The car is certainly the focus of the ad, taking up two-thirds of the space in the ad, but the presence of the interracial couple indicates a deference to white people and in this case specifically a white woman, which is notable because of American societal standards of white women being the ideal woman during this period. The editors of *Ebony* may have included this advertisement featuring an interracial couple to further the integration agenda discussed above. However, when examining the imagery, one can infer that the race and sex of each character is deliberately selected. By upholding a white woman as a prize, the advertisement reflects the idea that a black person needed to work to have a relationship, whether it be romantic or

friendly, with a white person, and that these relationships were desirable; there
was a power imbalance, one that indicated that black people need to be more
impressive, whether it be in a nice suit or a flashy car, to be with white people. If
a black man bought a Chevrolet, he could perhaps land a white woman, though
notably not a housewife. Perhaps the white housewife, the ideal American
woman, was still too lofty to aspire to via such a public means like nationwide
magazine advertisements.

**Conclusion**

The Industrial Revolution ushered in a new societal expectation, for
women to stay at home and keep house while men worked outside the home and
brought home wages. This mindset continued throughout the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries until the world wars, which had unprecedented numbers of
women working outside the home out of necessity. When the men returned home
from the war, they expected peace in the form of wives and children and well-
kept houses, and American popular media began propagating “Mrs. Consumer”
and the idea that women’s roles were to be housewives and mothers; however, the
women who ascribed to these ideals were most often white and middle- to upper-
class, and therefore able to afford to live such a lifestyle.

The content in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, from its columns to its
advertisements, reflected this demographic, addressing and uplifting white
wealthy women as fulfilled homemakers, while *Ebony* sought to inspire black
women as not only wives and mothers, but as their own independent beings
capable of earning their own livings and occupying professional spaces in society.
Both magazines did, in fact, insinuate through their advertisement placements that economic prosperity was required to become the ideal American woman, but in different manners; white homemakers needed money from their husbands and families to become “Mrs. Consumer” and purchase the technologies needed to be both attractive and competent, and therefore successful, while black professional women needed money to uplift themselves in society and firmly establish the prosperity of their race. Technology in the form of household appliances allowed upper-class white homemakers to accomplish their work with both skill and grace that allowed them to maintain their appearance, while black women also witnessed and presumably purchased such technologies, but did not center their womanhood around the work that these appliances allowed them to do. As a matter of fact, black women experienced the opposite, and sought work of the opposite nature, despite being bombarded with such media. However, we see little evidence of this pushback in published media. At least some white women did publically attempt to fight back against the idea of the housewife and being forced to work only within her home, and media did give these women a platform, as evident in the “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” column. However, we see no public written evidence of black women doing the same, despite them much more visibly rejecting this idea by choosing to depict themselves in advertisements a certain way. In this way, white homemakers ultimately did manage to carve out their own public voices because they conformed to the ideal of the housewife in the first place (which will be discussed later in chapter three, about homemakers writing and publishing their own cookbooks).
The designs of both the relationship column and the appliance advertisements reveal how entrenched housewifery is in technologies; women are expected to be beautiful, and the makeup the housewife models wear in the appliance advertisements nods to the following chapter on cosmetics, which discusses the role beauty culture and its technologies play in crafting the image of the American homemaker. The next chapter will discuss the history of beauty products, including hair and makeup, and the role they played in idealizing white housewives. I will also examine women of color and their depictions in popular media revolving around beauty in the next chapter as well, specifically looking at black-targeted hair-straightening and skin-bleaching products, to show how women of color were treated in the overall discussion of housewifery and the ideal American homemaker during this period.
Chapter 2: Applying Americanism on Women via Beauty Culture

Figure 2.1.  Noxzema cream.

Though perhaps not as widely acknowledged as a technology the way appliances like washing machines and vacuums are, cosmetics were another
essential modern technology that housewives wielded with skill and purpose as part of their housework. The advertisement featured above was from the January 1962 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and promoted Noxzema skin cream, a medicated skin cream that acted simultaneously as cleaner, moisturizer, and concealer. The skin cream itself occupied only a small portion of the display, with the majority of the advertisement dedicated to displaying the model using it, a conventionally attractive white woman wearing a face full of makeup. Her hands were also emphasized, being placed on her face, and their delicacy and red manicure are reminiscent of the red-polished fingernails seen in other advertisements during the period as discussed in the previous chapter about appliances, as well as in the next chapter about food. The model is a quintessential example of how white women were portrayed in advertising during the postwar period, representing what Americans saw as “beautiful” during this period, and how women were expected to adhere to these ideals as part of building American identity during the postwar period. It must be noted, however, that this white model was not adopted as an aspirational figure by African American women, who instead promoted cosmetics as a way to be respectable and professional, rather than beautiful. Glamorous housewives were essential to the white American nation-building project, and cosmetics and beauty culture were marketed by mainstream white-owned companies as being essential to housewives fulfilling their duties as American women, while black companies approached black women by promoting respectability politics.
The second chapter begins with an overview of the history of cosmetics, from its archaeological remains to modern-day synthetic products, and societal trends in its usage and perception in America up until the postwar era. I discuss not only the manufacturing and purchasing of makeup and beauty products, but also how makeup became “beauty culture” and ultimately both a political and economic institution, as women’s appearance was increasingly politicized during the twentieth century. The second section of the chapter analyzes television commercials of cosmetics during the postwar period, examining both the products themselves as well as the imagery displayed in the commercials; I selected television as a medium to analyze beauty culture because of its dominance as an avenue of popular culture during this period, surpassing both magazines and radio in terms of advertising revenue. The chapter’s final section discusses makeup advertisements in both *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Ebony*, looking at how each magazine selected the products and companies to promote, and how these advertisements reflected the politicization and racialization of beauty culture; they portrayed women as white housewives with a specific appearance as a result of this politicization, using specific products to achieve this appearance. I assert that depictions of women in makeup advertisements during this period in both television, which reached a much larger and diverse audience, and women’s magazines, which targeted specific demographics, reveal the differing goals American beauty culture had in shaping the ideal American woman; mainstream beauty culture targeted women by asserting that cosmetics were vital to them fulfilling their essential roles as housewives by being attractive for their husbands,
while respectability politics played a big role in beauty culture for women of color, which sought to uplift women of color by allowing them to look professional for the workplace. Cosmetics as a whole was a modern technology that allowed women to pursue their chosen self-images while demonstrating American prosperity and modernity, with white women pursuing the ideal of the glamorous housewife, while black women chose to instead promote themselves as respectable workers.

**A Brief History of Cosmetics, its Technology, and American Beauty Culture**

Cosmetics, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as products applied to the body intended to improve or modify one’s appearance, have been a staple of diverse human cultures for millennia. Broadly speaking, people first began altering their faces, hair, and bodies using natural plant and mineral-based substances for religious or symbolic purposes. As societies advanced and economic classes became more defined, makeup and hair products, made of expensive synthetic materials and primarily intended for beautification purposes, in many cultures became associated most strongly with women. This overview focuses specifically on the technology of cosmetics, as well as avenues for its marketing, in America, as cosmetics became more refined and its usage steadily became an indicator of class, as well as fashion. The Gibson Girl, flapper girls, and Rosie the Riveter are all different images worn by American women via cosmetic and clothing styles during different eras, and all represent different

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societal expectations of women during their respective time periods. Print media, beginning with eighteenth-century recipe books and then nineteenth- and twentieth-century magazines, radio, and television, all impressed said societal expectations on these women, and became primary avenues of cosmetics advertising. Both the technologies of cosmetics and advertising molded the image of the ideal American woman, and during the postwar period when said ideal American woman was the beautiful white homemaker, the technology of cosmetics became essential to both her occupation and identity as a homemaker.

The first evidence of cosmetics, mineral pigments, in human history can be traced back to burials and cave paintings dating back to 140,000 years ago; these mineral pigments were used in the form of paints and powders and used both ritually and aesthetically.\textsuperscript{83} The Babylonians of around 2500 BCE are one of the first human cultures to leave documented evidence of using eye, lip and cheek paint, and cockleshells were used as receptacles for colored pigments, from green to red to black, throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages.\textsuperscript{84} Burnt animal bone was also prevalent, and served as a staple ingredient in hair powders, continuing into as late as the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{85}

The first evidence of the connotations makeup held in society became present during the Classical period—paintings on ceramics created during this period often depicted young women and male youths at their toilettes, and remaining writings also reveal the prevalence of makeup and hair products in

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
ancient Greece and Rome. Smooth, pale complexions became fashionable, and concoctions made of white lead, chalk and vinegar were often used to achieve this coveted whiteness. Hairstyles also became increasingly elaborate during this period, with fashionable curls requiring sophisticated hair oils and curlers. Women began to color their hair with pigments as well, seeking to emulate the blonde and ginger hair colors prevalent among the Germanic and British tribes, whom the Romans steadily made contact with via trade. However, it can be ascertained that such bodily modification via cosmetics, at least in excess, was not considered publicly appropriate in Greek and Roman society; multiple writings have survived from this period depicting prostitutes as wearing excessive makeup and scent, and thus being distasteful. The classical period can be seen as the first emergence of Western societal conventions regarding makeup, especially regarding the makeup of women. Cosmetics began to be associated with sex and promiscuity, a theme that would continue throughout European and American history, including the postwar period.

Following the Dark Ages, during which cosmetics and other luxury goods veritably ceased to be traded in Europe, the medieval period witnessed makeup being heavily associated with luxury and the upper classes, though the association with prostitutes and sexual laxity still continued as well. Rose oil, camphor, and kohl replaced mineral pigments, and both courtesans and royal court ladies used these products liberally to improve their beauty. This trend of makeup being

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86 Pointer, 33.
87 Ibid., 40.
88 Ibid., 75.
associated with primarily upper-class women and sex workers continued throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with cosmetics becoming increasingly elaborate and appearance-modifying. Recipes from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries survive, as Englishwomen during this period considered cosmetics preparation a branch of housework, not dissimilar to cooking or washing clothes, and passed this knowledge on via cookbooks, household manuals, and medical treatises. Wealthy women made cosmetics at home by identifying and gathering herbs, distilling their essences, and creating compounds that took the form of powders, paints, and potions. These cosmetic formulas allowed wealthy women to retain pale, soft complexions as well as add color to their eyes and lips. Such beautification methods became increasingly more elaborate, and set the upper class apart even more visually than before. Working women had little time to spare creating these elaborate concoctions, and had no use lightening their skin or reddening their lips when they spent their days doing heavy manual labor. As a result, whiteness by way of cosmetics became a visible, material marker of class, and this association proceeded to dominate American perceptions of race and skin tones throughout history into the present day.

Cosmetics arrived in America along with the English immigrants who would go on to found the United States of America in 1776; these women inherited the traditions of the Englishwomen on the continent, but blended with American Indian, French, Spanish, and even African traditions to create a

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80 Ibid.
uniquely American beauty culture. “Indian medicine,” in the form of Native American recipes using indigenous plants to treat skin problems, gained popularity among colonists, and French hair products were said to add a “lustre” to hair that English methods alone could not. Cultures amalgamated further as women compiled their own handwritten diaries and recipe books and passed them on to daughters and neighbors, who continued to add their own modifications. Recipes for cosmetics only began to be officially published in the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and concurrently, pharmacies and stores began to produce and sell makeup and hair products. For example, Mrs. Beeton, in her 1861 household manual *The Book of Household Management*, which advised housewives all over the colonies on how to keep house, recommended a recipe to stimulate hair growth:

Equal quantities of olive-oil and spirit of rosemary; a few drops of oil of nutmeg. Mix the ingredients together, rub the roots of the hair every night with a little of this liniment, and the growth of it will soon sensibly increase.

Maintaining one’s appearance, in this case through keeping one’s hair voluminous, was clearly considered part of the duty of a housewife and people were beginning to capitalize on this duty, as evident by this recipe’s presence in a

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91 Peiss, 13.
92 Ibid.
commercial book teaching women housekeeping. As a result, during this period cosmetics officially entered the American commercial economic sphere, although the majority of American women still didn’t wear visible face makeup regularly, instead seeking products to improve their complexions and achieve the white, genteel, “natural” beauty that continued to maintain popularity. Cosmetics only became mainstream after the Industrial Revolution, when production streamlined. This commercialization of cosmetics, when it had formerly been kept almost entirely in the home, reveals a distinct shift in the relationship between women and makeup. Because women are now purchasing makeup that is produced commercially, the relationship becomes an economic one. Women are now consumers of makeup, purchasing these products from men and businesses, thus losing the ownership they formerly had over it when they produced recipes and makeup at home, and this relationship continues with the advent of the beauty industry.

Scholars generally agree that the modern beauty industry emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century, arriving with the rise of industrialization, discretionary income, and urbanization in the United States.94 Broadly, the beauty industry encompasses products applied to the human body to keep it clean and make it look attractive, ranging from bath products and deodorants to color cosmetics and fragrances. Rising incomes and rapid urbanization in the United States led to not only health and hygiene concerns, but also appearance concerns, and both looking and smelling good through the help of

beauty products became a visible mark of the middle and upper classes. Via industrialization, cosmetics transitioned from being a handicraft industry, as it had been for millennia, to a factory industry. Said commercialization allowed makeup to be less expensive, as well as create mass-market firms with cheaper products marketed toward less wealthy clientele, which advertised makeup as a leveler that broke down earlier class distinctions marking feminine appearance. Coupled with the association between the use of makeup and immoral behavior breaking down in the United States, cosmetic usage became widespread among women across the country, for not only the upper classes but the middle and working ones, who sought to emulate status through the usage of less expensive makeup sold in pharmacies and smaller stores.

With the rise of the beauty industry in the early twentieth century came a boom in female entrepreneurship within the sector; working women and women of color, especially black women, were able to command authority in the beauty industry because of the history of cosmetics as falling under the woman’s domain, the household. Women were considered the experts on beautification and hygiene procedures, and therefore were able to lead, and even create, their own often very successful businesses. Elizabeth Arden is one such example of a woman who created her own beauty empire in the early twentieth century, through the help of industrialization. Elizabeth Arden, who was born in Canada and moved to Manhattan in her early twenties, was part of a wealthy, elite group of white women who sought to convert elite beauty culture into a modern industry; in 1910

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95 Jones, 127.
96 Peiss, 145.
she founded her company, the Elizabeth Arden Company, which produced makeup ranging from rouges to powders, and sold her cosmetics products in large department stores, with great success. Business owners did not have to be wealthy, or white either; Madam C. J. Walker is an example of a black woman who lifted herself from menial domestic labor work by taking advantage of her personal knowledge of skin and hair upkeep, and founded the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company, developing and marketing her own personal line of cosmetics and hair care products for black women.98

Concurrent with the advent of the beauty industry in twentieth century America was the rise of societal ideas of beauty focusing heavily on “whiteness,” with American beauty standards heavily emphasizing pale skin and smooth blonde hair. Print media like magazines proliferated as well, which featured advertisements strongly emphasizing these beauty standards and coaxing women to buy cosmetics to achieve such ideals. Such typically European traits had been coveted since at least the Greeks and Romans, as discussed previously, and blonde hair, white skin and red lips are well documented to be core attributes of Renaissance female heroines, and thus of Renaissance beauty.99 American beauty standards continued to showcase these standards passed down through European history, and commercial beauty culture completely ignored other ethnic traits as a result, solely marketing their wares toward women who sought to look as

97 Peiss, 66.
European as possible, and within that standard a specific type of European. This omission in the industry allowed for entrepreneurs like Madam C. J. Walker to carve their own niche into the commercial market, by targeting women who had distinctive skin tones and hair textures. As a result, a “black” beauty industry grew concurrently next to the mainstream “white” beauty industry, never converging and making contact, but always running parallel to each other.

Skin lightening and hair straightening cosmetics retained their places at the forefront of both white and black beauty industries, but represented different values of what pale skin and straight hair meant to each demographic of women. For white women, maintaining a beautiful appearance by wearing light makeup and coloring and straightening their hair was a marker of status. White women who used makeup wanted to look beautiful, because a woman’s looks afforded her status, a husband, and a good life. Meanwhile, black women who used makeup wanted to look not only beautiful, but professional and put-together.

Historically within the United States, because of its extensive history of African enslavement, white Americans, as well as some blacks, have perceived the features of black women, both enslaved and free, as physically unattractive and indicative of the animalistic and lascivious characteristics of Africans.  

Beginning with slavery, the white mistress was a powerful example of the white standard of beauty to slaves, especially female slaves, who carried these beauty standards with them, and passed them down to their descendants.  

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101 Rooks, 25.
many Black Americans, both before and after emancipation, associated light skin and straight hair with greater freedom, opportunity, and wealth.\textsuperscript{102} The commercial beauty industry subscribed to such ideals as expected, and white cosmetics companies marketed their products to black women by suggesting that only through changing their physical features could African American women achieve social acceptance in the white-dominated society of America.

Prominent black women, especially cosmetics entrepreneurs like C. J. Walker, pushed back against this ideation of white beauty, however, and sought to provide beauty regimes that would allow black women to “meet their own ideals as well as create opportunities for themselves.”\textsuperscript{103} Black women powdered their complexions and straightened their hair not to follow white societal expectations of beauty, but to feel “modern” and remove themselves from the stereotypical image of the black cook or laundress, an image that had plagued them for centuries. The most photographed African American women, especially in Washington D.C., often sported straight hair in a variety of hairstyles like pulled back into a bun or swept up into a pinup, which emphasized women’s faces much more. Black beauty culture continued to evolve separately from white beauty culture, with women seeking not to emulate mainstream commercial beauty standards, but to follow role models within their own niche demographic.

\textsuperscript{102} Lindsey, 60.  
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 70.
Commercial beauty culture in America, on the other hand, witnessed multiple iterations of ideal American women in the media over the course of the twentieth century. The Gibson Girl, an illustration of a white, well-dressed upper-class woman with fashionable hair, was created by Charles Dana Gibson and first presented in 1913 on the cover of Life magazine. Fellow illustrator Howard Chandler Christy famously claimed that this image of the “American Girl” united the best of western European characteristics to create the pinnacle of American society and progress. The Gibson Girl was the first visual stereotype of women in American mass media, and Gibson’s biographer emphasized the physical beauty of the Gibson Girl image, which was created by beauty products; she had

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105 Martha H. Patterson, Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915 (University of Illinois Press, 2005), 34.

106 Ibid.
pale, youthful features and elegantly shaped and colored lips, as well as elaborate hairstyles in contemporary fashions. She explicitly wore makeup and used products for her hair, thus reinforcing the idea that American women needed to use cosmetics to achieve the ideal American beauty. The Gibson Girl represented a coveted social status, the white upper class, and represented the popular American societal idea in the decades leading up to World War II that physical beauty was a measure of fitness, character, and Americanness. The Gibson Girl was only shown in proper settings and activities, such as playing tennis or sitting at tea, aligning with American ideals during this period of women’s roles being primarily mothers and wives whose duties were not only to take care of the country’s future children, but also to maintain their physical appearances as well.

While the Gibson Girl represented propriety, conformity, and social conservatism, the “modern girl” arose in the 1920s all over the world as part of a brief global revolution in manners and morals, amidst magazines and other popular media proliferating with images of the demure Gibson Girl. The “modern girl” took on different shapes and sizes in different countries; in America, the “flapper” girl was a common denomination. The term “flapper” originated in England as a description of mid-teen girls, considered to be in the awkward, lanky stage of childhood; American flappers adopted this name because they idolized boyish bodies as a rejection of stereotypically curvy feminine bodies.

108 Ibid., 40.
that were in vogue during the period.\textsuperscript{110} American flappers, both lauded and condemned, were young women now known in history for finding political inspiration in public spectacle by bobbing their hair, displaying their knees, and smoking and dancing brazenly in public.\textsuperscript{111} These modern girls protested the social conservatism represented by public images like the Gibson Girl, rejecting the role of dutiful daughter, wife and mother via visual eroticism and scandal. Emerging in the post-World War I period, young women experienced a surge of economic and societal independence as they took up jobs in place of men at the warfront. The flapper style symbolizes this newfound sense of modernity and independence; flappers cut their hair short and applied bright, garish makeup in public, often using cosmetics cases designed to look like cigarette boxes.\textsuperscript{112} Not every woman subscribed to the flapper aesthetic during the 1920s, of course, and the Gibson Girl image remained exceedingly popular in print media. However, the flappers do represent the historical trend that increasingly in the twentieth century, as part of a long-term economic trend, women were achieving more and more economic independence and working to support themselves and their families.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} Weinbaum, 10.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 50.
The advent of World War II sparked another trend in representations of the ideal American woman of mass media: the patriot. Images like Rosie the Riveter and other illustrations circulated by mass media during World War II always featured hardy women supporting their country, and they all shared one common feature: bright red lipstick. Cosmetics during the war years were frequently used to boost morale—patriotic red lipstick came to represent American pride, and women were depicted during this period almost exclusively as wearing

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Figure 2.3. Rosie the Riveter\textsuperscript{114}

*Source:* Norman Rockwell, May 29, 1943.


\textsuperscript{114} Norman Rockwell, 1894-1978. *Rosie the Riveter Post Cover.* May 29, 1943.


red lipstick. The cosmetics industry capitalized on patriotism by promoting beauty as an “American way of life,” and the American “made-up” woman became a symbol for freedom and democracy, a treasure which the American soldiers had to protect by fighting as hard as they could for their country and its women. Not only were women encouraged to look beautiful, through the use of makeup, to inspire their soldiers to win the war and come home, but they were also urged by clever marketers to aid the war effort themselves by using cosmetics that were practical for wartime. For example, lipsticks came with flashlights, and mascara became waterproof and lasted all day even during hard labor in factories. Mass media encouraged women to continue to uphold their femininity and beauty throughout their workday, which reinforced the idea that their beauty was an integral part of their patriotic duty. In addition, it also became a significant contributor to the rise of American consumer-capitalist culture and played an appreciable role in keeping the American economy moving during the war.

Commercial beauty culture increasingly adopted different political implications upon the conclusion of the war; women who had worked during the war were encouraged to return home and maintain their femininity by being the perfect wife and mother. Postwar magazines advised women to look glamorous for their husbands, and patriotic ideals of hardworking women in

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116 Ibid., 280.
117 Ibid.
bright reds and glamorous blondes disappeared in favor of feminine fashions, refined cosmetics and hairstyling aids that strongly conveyed that a woman’s place was firmly at home. The Gibson Girl image of well-dressed, made-up upper- and middle-class women re-emerged in the postwar period in advertising. A new form of mass media rose to prominence as well in the years following World War II: television and Hollywood films. As people returned to having more disposable income to spend after years of wartime shortages, Hollywood and the film and television industry exploded in prominence. The impact this new industry had on daily life in American society was far-reaching—glamorous movie stars and elaborate sets drew attention to appearance, clothing and self-presentation, thus stressing the idea that being beautiful was an important part of American daily life. Women in particular were encouraged to emulate these glamorous stars and improve their own appearances, by using cosmetics in particular. Movie and television actresses were elaborately made-up for the screen, and makeup artists spent hours thinning and redesigning eyebrows, lengthening eyelashes, dying hair, coloring lips and cheeks. Television in particular in the 1950s promoted a very specific image of women—the beautiful, capable housewife and mother—to female viewers. Makeup was considered essential to achieve this ideal, and cosmetics companies supported this idea by advertising their beauty products on television as methods of entering the world of glamorous modernity within their own homes.

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119 Pointer, 161.
121 Ibid., 180.
122 Ibid., 250.
period required not just a dedicated and skilled housewife, but a beautiful one. Throughout American history, looking beautiful for women has been associated with economic class as well as societal values like patriotism, and American women in the nineteenth created a unique beauty culture that combined all of these qualities and brought them into the home, thus reinforcing the idea that cosmetics and beauty was essential to the occupation of homemaker. As a result, cosmetics advertisements targeted housewives, which will be explored in the next two sections through the mediums of television and magazine advertisements.

**Television Commercials and their Advancement of Beauty Culture**

The field of advertising underwent a revolution during the postwar period with the advent of television, a new medium for communication that swept the nation. The development of the technology of television began in the 1920s but found itself temporarily arrested because of World War II, with America and its industries devoting the vast majority of resources through aiding the war effort. After the war concluded, Americans found themselves with much more disposable income and a desire for leisure, leading to television invading homes across the United States in the early 1950s.123 Television rapidly emerged as a new visual language all Americans could share, regardless of gender, race, or geography, and the advertising industry took advantage of the universality of television to expand their customer bases and bridge demographic diversity.124 By 1960, 90 percent of American households had at least one television set, and

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television overtook radio, magazines, and newspapers as an advertising medium.\textsuperscript{125} Television advertising contributed heavily to the standardization of American consumer culture, and examining specific television commercials for cosmetics in the 1960s reveals the extent to which commercials shaped societal expectations of women during this period. Women all over the country viewed these commercials, which told them that the ideal American woman was a beautiful, white housewife who needed cosmetics to maintain her beauty and fulfill her job as a housewife.

Figure 2.4. Revlon Colors Unlimited. 
Source: TVDAYS, 1:21 (June 13, 2022).

The television commercial for Revlon Colors Unlimited, aired in 1960 and marketing a line of twelve new lipstick colors all named after foods, represents the association makeup had with women: specifically, with feminine concepts like

\textsuperscript{125} Samuel, xv.
food, as cooking was considered one of the most important duties of a housewife. The Colors Unlimited line featured “twelve new kinds of lipsticks never dreamed after until now,” and the commercial represented these seemingly revolutionary new colors by using real women, all artfully positioned in a huge makeup palette and made-up in their respective colors.\textsuperscript{126} The women were only visible from the shoulders up, and their chests were wrapped in their respective colors and the excess fabric surrounding them was arranged to look like roses. Every woman was white, pale, and young, and they all had nearly identical, conventionally attractive facial features like high noses and large eyes. The uniformity of the women seems sensible, because they represented different versions of the same lipstick, but the fact that Revlon chose not to use the same woman wearing individual colors, but all different women, seems to represent the idea that all of these women used cosmetics to achieve a certain appearance, and therefore any woman could look like them. They all wore the same makeup look, their faces and necks powdered nearly white, eyebrows drawn dark and arched, and their lips lined into the same shape. These women were putting on display what cosmetics conglomerate Revlon, and the commercial cosmetic industry by extension, deemed to be the ideal beauty standard of the period. There were twelve different women who all look the same, both by using artificial means but also by possessing features that all look similar and are conventionally attractive.

The Colors Unlimited line subtly reveals another dimension of the perfect American woman angle commercial consumerism pushed during this period

toward women: housewifery. The commercial was narrated by a man despite only visually featuring women, demonstrating the authority men had over the product and its marketing, despite women being the consumers. In this commercial, aired on televisions nationwide and viewed primarily by women, a man dictated that the new lipsticks were exciting and attractive, while women mute model the product. Most tellingly, all of the names of the lipstick colors were all associated with food: grape icing, coffee sherbet, strawberry vanilla, and orange float, to name just a few. Reminiscent of sweet desserts, the lipstick names represented the association of women and food throughout history; since the beginning of society a woman’s duty had been to cook for her family, and this expectation was especially true during the postwar period, when women were expected and instructed to be housewives and provide for their husbands and children by taking care of the home. Cooking was seen as an especially important task, especially by the commercial industry, which intensely marketed goods like frozen, instant, and packaged foods to housewives, who were encouraged to be creative and make elaborate meals and desserts for their families. The names of the lipstick colors indicate the association with women and desserts, especially ones that were sweet, decadent and possibly more difficult or time-consuming to make, like sherbet and icing. Coupled with the male narrator, the commercial clearly, though indirectly, represents the association of the ideal beautiful American woman with housewifery. In addition, the male narrator’s voice had a “French” accent, and used French words and phrases like “voilà” and “à la carte,”

perhaps to add cultural capital to the product by insinuating that it had French influence, reflecting on the eurocentric cosmopolitanism often present in American beauty culture, such as in the magazine advertisements that will be discussed in the next section.

Another commercial that clearly tied makeup, femininity and housewifery together is the Max Factor commercial for “Hi-Fi Fluid Makeup,” aired in the 1960s. The commercial was once again narrated by a man, who addressed the viewer, clearly as a woman, directly: “for you, Max Factor created his Hi-Fi fluid makeup, a makeup that becomes a natural part of your loveliness.”128 The man was once again in a position of authority, telling female viewers how they could improve their appearance and become more beautiful. Similar to the first one, the man narrated while a conventionally attractive white woman silently modeled the product, not once speaking, but smiling and showing off her pale white complexion. Her makeup was nearly identical to the women in the Revlon Colors Unlimited commercial, with the same style of eyebrow and color palette. Despite the commercials promoting different brands of makeup as well as products, the women looked nearly identical in style, representing the fact that women’s beauty standards were standardized throughout the commercial cosmetics sphere. The association with housewifery, in addition, is particularly clear in this advertisement, with the commercial beginning with a woman, heavily made-up, hair meticulously coiffed and dressed in high-end clothing, leaving her large suburban home with a wicker basket in hand. Her home was clearly suburban,

broad and surrounded by trees with a lengthy driveway in front of the entrance that indicates the extensive size of the property. The lighting when she left her house, with the sun at its highest point in the sky, indicated that it was around midday—she was likely a housewife leaving home to run errands, because people usually went to their jobs much earlier in the day. Max Factor, therefore, clearly promoted the ideal consumer of their products to be housewives, and that one of the most important duties of the housewives was to maintain their appearance by conforming to beauty standards achievable via cosmetics.

Avon Products, Inc. was another company that heavily marketed its beauty products to women by using housewife imagery, and their 1960s commercial for Avon Calling, a door-to-door makeup peddling service that offered consultations in consumers’ own homes, provides yet another direct depiction of housewifery, but, unlike the Revlon and Max Factor commercials, with the added distinction of having women narrate the ads and advertise the products themselves. In the Avon Calling commercial, a woman narrated the advertisement because she directly taught the consumer to put on makeup, instructing her, “with the Avon automatic eye pencil,” to “soften your browline,” then “blend on Avon eyeshadow in a darling shade,” et cetera. She carefully guided the viewer through every step of the process of doing up one’s face, with an authority that would be absent if a white man were narrating the same process using the same words; after all, men did not wear makeup and therefore were not trusted as an authority figure and teacher the way women, who have experienced and mastered the craft, 

presumably had. The female narrator, once again a conventionally attractive white woman in the same manner as the Revlon and Max Factor models, then visited with another attractive woman in a kitchen. Like the Max Factor commercial, the lighting in the kitchen was very bright, indicating that it was the afternoon and that these women did not work outside the home. The women, heavily made-up and dressed in crisply ironed blouses and pearls, were seated at a small table in a kitchen flooded with light, with magazines, sewing implements, and cosmetics spread out in front of them. They appeared to be chatting with each other about their cosmetics, showing off their products to each other. These women were clearly housewives visiting with each other, and the fact that they spent time even outside of their homes comparing makeup demonstrated how ingrained cosmetics were into their lives and identities as homemakers.

Cosmetics commercials during this period appeared to exclusively address white women, but mentions of race and different skin colors appeared on occasion, primarily to either disparage or exotify them. For example, an educational film for high school students, produced and aired in 1960 that doubled as not only a makeup commercial but also a makeup tutorial, taught high school girls how to apply makeup. “Girls, your face is your fortune,” the female narrator, who meticulously directed each young woman in every movement of the brush or lipstick, declared authoritatively, “and you must make the most of it.”

The film immediately established the need for women to be beautiful, and that makeup was essential for a woman to achieve the full potential of her beauty.

130 Glamourdaze, “60s makeup tutorial for High School Girls: 4K Restored Film,” YouTube video, July 8, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M28jzd0Vz2w, [accessed March 1, 2023], 0:02.
Interestingly, the film addressed darker-skinned women, though not explicitly black women. The female instructor told one of the girls with darker coloring (albeit mostly her hair) that because she was darker than other girls, she must use a darker lipstick. The camera then panned to another girl, who was much paler and also blonde, and the instructor praised the girl, exclaiming, “now, there’s an attractive girl!”\textsuperscript{131} The previous, darker-skinned girl did not get a word of praise, and this difference in treatment is made even more stark by the abrupt transition to the more light-skinned, light-haired girl in the next cut. The film clearly demonstrated a societal preference for light skin and hair, despite not addressing colors in a noticeably derogatory way or referring to any other race. Only white women were featured in this film, but the tutorial instructions themselves could be applied to women of any color, because they did address skin color.

Cosmetics commercials that more directly and nefariously addressed and represented race were indeed present in mainstream media during the postwar period, and the television commercial for “Liquid Prell extra-rich shampoo” is an example of one of the more overtly racist commercials for beauty products that appeared on air. Unlike the pale, blonde models featured in the other commercials discussed above, the Liquid Prell model, who was pictured nude and shampooing her hair, was noticeably dark-haired and had darker skin than the others; her race was certainly more ambiguous than the Revlon, Max Factor, and Avon models. Her coloring immediately evokes a different image from the other women, indicating that the commercial seeks to “exoticize” women and offer

\textsuperscript{131} “60s makeup tutorial for High School Girls: 4K Restored Film,” 5:09.
them a different image from the demure, elegant ones usually encouraged. Right from the beginning of the commercial, the male narrator claimed that the shampoo “lets you become anything you want: a Balinese dancer, Pocahontas, the queen of the Nile.” Each figure was accompanied by gestures rooted in racist stereotypes, along with the bubbles of the shampoo making different shapes to reinforce these stereotypes; for example, the model imitated a Native American war cry, a stereotype associated with racism against Native Americans, and arranged the soap on her head to imitate a Native American headdress. Her facial expressions and movements were cheerful, as if she was playing a game; her actions were meant to be fun and humorous. The commercial concluded with her seductively saying, “take me to your pharaoh.” The intended audience for the commercial appears to still be female consumers, but unlike the other discussed commercials, focused on increasing a woman’s beauty via sex appeal. Once again, the male narrator encouraged the female viewer to look beautiful by purchasing and using the beauty product. However, the imagery of the dark-skinned, dark-haired woman both nude in a shower and directly flirting with a man, as seen in the last cut of the commercial, which shows the model seated with her legs crossed in an armchair and flirting with a faceless man, indicates a departure from the prim, blond housewife look advertised in the Revlon, Max Factor, and Avon commercials. However, despite this divergence in imagery, the fact that she is still very much a white woman in appearance makes it clear that

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133 Ibid., 0:27.
white women were meant to be role models, even when they represented qualities, like eroticism, which were not typically associated with ideal women. Prell sought to enhance a woman’s sexuality, but still emphasized that the sexuality was meant to attract men, thus continuing to play into the societal idea that a woman’s duty was to look attractive to please men, as well as the idea that whiteness was the desired, most attractive appearance.

Figure 2.5. Dippity-do.
Source: Saturday’s World, 0:06 (July 19, 2018).

Television commercials for cosmetics often shared similar imagery with advertisements in other forms of media, especially for domestic products in magazines; the delicately manicured hand with the red nails is an example that found itself featured in both mediums, indicating that these TV commercials also targeted housewives who carefully maintained their hands, and by extension their appearance. The TV commercial for Dippity-Do styling gel, aired in the 1960s,
spent almost half of its airtime exclusively focusing on a hand showing off the container of gel.\textsuperscript{134} The hand was pale, smooth, and blemish-free, with long manicured and painted nails. The female model continuously showed off the container of gel, moving it around and dipping into the gel’s contents with two fingers, smearing the gel and rubbing it on her hand, and the camera only captured this action from the wrist-down. It’s only when the woman actually put the gel on her hair that her face came into view. The flawless beauty of her hand indicates that the woman spent large amounts of time and money keeping their appearance pristine. The length of the nails demonstrates that the woman didn’t do much manual labor, or chose to sacrifice the quality and depth of her work for a glamorous appearance. This imagery of the perfect manicure was found extensively in magazine advertisements for products like convenience foods, which directly addressed housewives and their duties in the kitchen. The fact that nearly identical imagery of the hand is found in cosmetics commercials such as Dippity-Do indicates that a similar demographic, housewives who considered it their duty to maintain their appearance, was targeted by these cosmetics companies. The way the models in both food and cosmetics ads displayed their products, especially the emphasis on the manicured hand and its ubiquitous presence in such ads, reveals that this aesthetic of glamor and beauty dominated commercial representations of housewifery, including even the labor-intensive, less luxurious aspects like the chore of cooking, and this will be demonstrated by the analysis of imagery in food advertisements in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{134} Saturday’s World, “1960’s Dippity Do - Styling gel commercial,” YouTube video, July 19, 2018, \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUj9NRq3ys8}, [accessed March 1, 2023].
The phrase “beauty culture” was promulgated in and common usage throughout the twentieth century, and refers to the tools, methods, and business practices of altering and caring for women’s appearance. Beauty culture encompasses not only the hair, skin, and body cosmetics sold to and used by women but the advertising and marketing of the products as well. Advertisements have historically, especially during the postwar period, attached deep social and emotional significance to women’s appearances, and this rhetoric manifested itself in postwar beauty culture via advertising language that appealed to the emotions, especially of love and self-esteem, of women. Women were encouraged to be beautiful not only to attract men, but also to feel good about themselves, because they had achieved the American ideal and were representing their country and its prosperity and modernity.

Popular media in the postwar period continued to emphasize the image of the attractive, heavily powdered, perfectly coiffured woman that had gained popularity in the aftermath of the Great Depression and the duration of World War II; the attractive woman symbolized a gendered version of the “American way of life,” one based not on fascism but capitalism, a free society worth defending. Women upheld this way of life by purchasing products, therefore both aiding the economy as well as making themselves more glamorous, thus giving men the motivation to protect their attractive homes.


$_{136}$ Peiss, 239.
advertising industry, especially cosmetics firms, promoted this image heavily by claiming that American women were “beautifying themselves according to the ‘American Plan,’” a plan based on capitalism and embodying the opposite of communist and fascist regimes, in which women were perceived as not just dull and dowdy, but unable to afford the products that made their American counterparts luxurious and beautiful. Beauty was especially fixated on as a political matter because of its visibility; when one looks upon the streets of a city or country, the appearances of the people walking along the streets are immediately noticeable and obvious. Physical appearance played a huge role in the perceived prosperity and success of a country, and makeup was an effective and capitalist way to enhance appearances, because makeup needed to be produced and purchased. During the war, American politicians and journalists had worried that a nationwide shortage of beautiful women would seriously lower national morale, because soldiers needed something to look forward to bringing victory home to. As a result, glamorous women became the ideal during the war, and beauty culture became part of a larger nation-building project, used not only to uphold capitalist industry but to help craft an identity for America. In the aftermath of the war, as veterans returned home to the peaceful lives with wives and children that they had fought for, the attractive homemaker replaced the glamorous pin-up girl with a demure, well-groomed housewife.

Following World War II, the American cosmetics industry veritably skyrocketed; by 1948, 80 to 90 percent of adult women in America wore lipstick.

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137 Peiss, 239.
two-thirds wore rouge, and a quarter wore eye makeup on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{138} The promotion of cosmetics also reached new heights with the advent of suburbia, and formerly traditionally rural methods of advertising, such as door-to-door promotion, expanded into middle-class suburbia and rapidly increased cosmetics sales all over the country. Cosmetics use continued throughout the postwar period to vary geographically across the nation, with urban and suburban areas, most prominently in the majority-white northeast and west, experiencing the most usage while rural southern areas, with higher proportions of black Americans, experienced the least usage, and this distribution falls in line with the previous discussion of the \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal} circulation. One can infer that makeup was likely either less available or less affordable in rural areas where farming was prominent; farming women often didn’t have regular, easy access to stores to purchase cosmetics, and likely didn’t feel the purchase or wear much when their days were taken up by work both on the farm and in the house, though many kept a few products for special occasions, like weddings. Cosmetics were also more likely to be more in demand in urban areas where incomes were higher, where women had the disposable income as well as the social and economic status to consider makeup a necessity, rather than a luxury.

During the 1950s, makeup products and styles were advertised to women as a means of purchasing intangibles like love, popularity, and beauty, all primarily in the eyes of, or relating to, men.\textsuperscript{139} Female appearance was wrought with both emotional and social meaning in advertising during this period, and

\textsuperscript{138} Peiss, 248.
\textsuperscript{139} Walker, 3.
aimed to instill in women the idea that with the right products, any woman could become the ideal American woman: the white, beautiful homemaker, who took care of her home and fed her husband and children all without a hair out of place, or lipstick smudged. Advertisers often conflated beauty and competence to form the perfect, feminine housewife. A significant proportion of the advertising found in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, the leading women’s magazine, as well as the bestselling magazine overall, during the postwar period, was for cosmetics, and these cosmetics ads often appealed to women’s senses of self-worth based on their appearance. In her influential book *What Makes Women Buy*, which was published in 1958 and remained the predominant rhetoric for women’s buying in the advertising industry during the 1960s, American advertising executive Janet L. Wolff described cosmetics as essential to a woman, for a number of reasons. First, a woman had a natural interest in making herself attractive, to raise her own opinion of herself; looking her best made her feel more self-assured. Secondly, other people’s attention was also important, as being attractive helped women in most social situations, and possibly opened doors or made social contacts easier. Finally, and most importantly, a woman must be beautiful, or at least the most attractive she could possibly be, to find a husband, and to maintain that beauty to keep said husband. Wolff’s idea that women must look attractive for men exemplifies the tone of the era of advertisers regarding women as consumers of cosmetics. Women bought cosmetics because they felt obligated to maintain their attractiveness to their husbands, and coupled with the expectation of women being housewives, the ideal of the beautiful, well-maintained housewife was created.
This image of the attractive homemaker was prominent throughout the *Ladies' Home Journal*; for example, the February 1962 issue featured an ad that conflates both beauty and housework, to make an all-purpose beauty and cleaning product that was perfect for the housewife who cared about both her own appearance and her house. Lux Liquid “answers both your wishes: for Lux-
Lovely Hands and Sparking dishes.”

According to Lux Liquid, housewives clearly had one desire when it comes to cleaning fluids: to make one’s dishes cleaner without sacrificing their desirable appearance as a woman. Washing dishes was a chore that was wont to toughen up the skin on one’s hands, because of both the constant wetting and drying, as well as the abrasive nature of the cleaning liquid meant to get off tough grease and food stains. However, with Lux Liquid, a woman was supposedly able to be a good housewife by maintaining her beauty to stay attractive for her husband, and also keep a clean home for him to return to after a long day’s work. The ad’s emphasis on keeping one’s hands soft and smooth reflects the common societal expectation that while women needed to engage in hard work to maintain her home, these same women also needed to prevent the signs of hard work from showing in their appearance, lest they look haggard and unattractive. Women during this period were expected to be beautiful and hardworking, two qualities that were not mutually exclusive, but the latter quality needed to be covered by the veneer of beauty, or, in other words, cosmetics. In addition, the model’s facial expression in the ad indicates emotions of happiness or contentment; she was undeniably pleased by the product. The ad clearly targeted women’s emotions, demonstrating to women that they, too, could be beautiful, and therefore happy, like this woman if they used the product.

In *Ladies’ Home Journal*, cosmetics advertisements that depicted women of color or other nationalities were exceedingly rare, reflecting the fact that beauty in this postwar period was entrenched in whiteness. Beauty consisted first and

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foremost of white skin and straight hair during this period, which left very little wiggle room for women of other races, who potentially had less “white,” and therefore to American mainstream society less desirable, features like darker skin, textured hair, or even features like smaller eyes and thinner lips. In all of the issues during the years 1960 through 1962, I encountered only a handful of advertisements that mention any race other than white or any country besides the United States. Every advertisement I did encounter that traveled beyond America mentioned only European countries, and specifically only England, France, and Italy. For example, the March 1960 issue featured an advertisement for Odo-ro-no cream, a deodorant claimed to be popular in London: “... most fashionable women in London, rely on Odo-ro-no.” The ad quoted a Lady Mary Hardwicke, “renowned beauty and leader in London’s social circles.” The identity of Lady Mary Hardwicke is unable to be properly ascertained, and historical records have only revealed the remnants of a semi-famous British tennis player named Mary Hardwick. The woman was clearly not a public figure, but the mere claim that she was a fashionable woman in London was enough to lend authority to the product, demonstrating yet another example of the reverence for Europe that was present in America in the aftermath of World War II. Another example of such admiration appeared in the January 1960 issue, in an ad for “Evening in Paris” dry skin bath oil. The product was named for Paris, a fashion capital of the world, and lended credence to its luxuriousness and

142 Ibid.
marketability; the product was meant to make one feel like one was spending an evening in Paris, an idea clearly attractive enough to give confidence in both the production and advertising companies in its ability to sell.

In contrast to *Ladies’ Home Journal*, women of color featured in the vast majority of the advertisements promoted by *Ebony*, which sought to uplift the African American middle class. Black middle-class women were no strangers to the beauty industry, and sometimes in specific cases, black per capita expenditures of cosmetics even exceeded those of whites per capita.\(^{144}\) However, like the food industry, the white-dominated cosmetics industry also did not view African Americans as worthy of individualized attention—most did not see black people as affluent enough to warrant special advertising attention, nor sophisticated enough to respond to product marketing, and many argued that they were already familiar enough with their products through mainstream, or in other words white-targeted, media advertising. African American marketing experts pushed for the recognition of black consumers, beginning in the 1950s, and during this period several market research studies emerged, all aiming to demonstrate that African Americans were affluent enough, urban enough, and sophisticated enough to deserve attention from white advertisers.\(^{145}\) John H. Johnson, the founder of *Ebony*, was at the forefront of this movement to promote black consumerism, and the advertisements featured in *Ebony* reflect the white ideals of beauty that permeated the growing black middle class.

\(^{144}\) Walker, 90.  
\(^{145}\) Ibid.
Figure 2.7. Nadinola bleaching cream.  
Source: Ebony, 91 (January 1960).

John H. Johnson was a vocal proponent of using black models in white companies’ ads in his magazine, not just to break down racial barriers but also for the profit that a large national company would bring; the vast majority of cosmetics advertisements in *Ebony*, as a result, were from white-owned companies and featured black women modeling cosmetics based on white aesthetic tastes. White producers and marketers did not purposefully seek out the African American market, and, more often than not, ignored the black demographic as a whole; Johnson and some other black executives reached out to these companies for the sake of both economic advancement as well as
desegregation. Skin-lightening creams were a hallmark of *Ebony* advertising, with multiple companies advertising their skin-bleaching and lightening creams in every issue in the 1960s. The American hegemony of white, or lighter, skin had been present since the beginnings of the slave trade in America, where slave traders advertised the lightest-skinned women as fit for domestic work, while the darker-skinned women were less physically attractive, more animalistic, and thus more fit for manual labor and outdoor work. After emancipation, often darker-skinned African Americans were associated with slavery and being former slaves, and skin-lightening products became increasingly popular among African Americans, continuing into the twentieth century.

Nadinola Bleaching Cream, produced as part of the Nadinola line of the white-owned J. Strickland & Co. company, was a popular skin-bleaching cosmetic that featured multiple times in *Ebony*. The Nadinola ad in the January 1960 issue of *Ebony* exemplifies this idea of light skin as beauty, as well as of the usage of beauty as primarily to attract men during this period: “Don’t let dull, dark skin rob you of romance.” Dark skin was unattractive and prevented women from finding a husband, and the black model advertising the product had exceptionally light skin, along with Eurocentric features, like thinner lips and a higher nose bridge. This idea of male attraction as being the primary driver of a woman’s need to be beautiful is clearly present, as well as the idea that lighter skin is an effective way to achieve this beauty. In addition, the ad also stated that “life is more fun when your complexion is clear,” implying that a woman’s life

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147 Ibid.
was more fun, and therefore happier, when she looked attractive for men. Emotions are once again targeted, and in this case the black woman was explicitly told that she would have a better, more “fun” life if she had physical features that would allow her to be beautiful and, therefore, attract men. Another example of the male gaze being present in these ads is in another Nadinola ad, this time in the February 1960 issue; the advertisement tells the viewer to “look how men flock around” when the bleaching cream was applied.\textsuperscript{148} The silhouettes of two men were gazing at the model, insinuating that the cream’s primary purpose was to aid in obtaining male romantic interest, which could be achieved by purchasing this product and thus aiding in American capitalism, reinforcing the idea that beauty culture was essential to the gendered version of the American dream, in which women were consumers to look beautiful for men.

\textit{Ebony} was much more likely to portray its female models in cosmetics ads as working women, while \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal} and the white-owned companies featured in \textit{Ebony} were much less likely. For example, the advertisement for Lustrasilk, a hair-straightening product, depicted a black model with straightened hair in professional dress, sitting at a typewriter and holding a phone up to her ear. This depiction of a professional black woman reveals the belief during this period that an attractive appearance was essential for female success, and that having straight hair, a white beauty ideal, was needed for black women to be seen as professional and attractive—a belief in the black community known as

“respectability politics.”\textsuperscript{149} The concept of respectability was promulgated in the 1890s, when middle-class black women promoted cleanliness, sexual modesty, and other characteristics aimed at impressing white people to ensure access to jobs, housing, and eventually equal rights, as well as to discourage lynchings and segregation.\textsuperscript{150} Straight hair was attractive while curly or textured hair belied “blackness,” and therefore a lack of beauty as well as respectability and professionalism; black women had been associated with the “mammy” figure throughout America’s history of slavery and even post-emancipation, when black women often could only find employment in domestic settings, like cooking or laundering. These women sported their natural hair, and therefore natural hair became associated with this image, while straightened hair came to symbolize “respectability,” and therefore white-collar work and professionalism for black women. \textit{Ebony} prided itself on uplifting the black middle class, and thus during the postwar period depicted women as being beautiful by being similar to the white middle- and upper-class women who comprised the ideal American woman. Lustrasilk proclaimed in their ad that with their product, one was able to “bring out the ‘natural’ beauty of [their] hair . . . [with] the wonderful home permanent that straightens super-curly or hard-to-manage hair safely.”\textsuperscript{151} The use of the word “natural” here seems paradoxical; natural hair for black women was associated with slavery and poverty, while the unnatural, straightened hair

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
Lustrasilk promoted respectability. Perhaps Lustrasilk was attempting to uplift black women by telling them that their original hair, natural in the sense that the hair is the hair they were born with, could be beautiful with just a little bit of outside help.

Figure 2.8. Breck shampoo.

In contrast, white models in both Ebony and Ladies’ Home Journal advertised products such as hair setting sprays and hair dyes, rather than straightening products. Many white women already had straight hair, and thus
focused on more immediate concerns, such as maintaining their lustrous hair colors (concealing gray hairs), and keeping their hair shiny through an entire day of chores or outings. White women were portrayed as housewives in these hair advertisements, which constantly advertised the necessity of keeping one’s hair pristine for long periods of time and activity. For example, the February 1962 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal* featured an advertisement for Breck shampoo, with the tagline “complete hair care for your family.”¹⁵² The ad is directed at housewives, as the primary shoppers for their families, assuring them of the economy and convenience provided by Breck in not only supplying affordable, all-encompassing haircare for all of their family members, but also in “enhancing the natural beauty of hair.”¹⁵³ The essential maintenance of her own beauty is still emphasized above all, of course. In *Ebony* as well, white models emphasized the role of the woman as an attractive housewife; the advertisement for Posner’s Hair Beauty in the January 1960 issue of *Ebony* featured a white model advertising a weatherproof setting spray, for women who were frequently outside, in all sorts of weather, grocery shopping or picking up their children from school. While black women were constantly told via advertising of their need to maintain a certain unnatural beauty standard through straightening their hair to attain social capital, white women, who already had this social capital, were advertised to with more practical ideas aiding toward maintaining their social capital as housewives.

¹⁵³ Ibid.
Conclusion

American history has reinvented, time and time again, the image of the ideal American woman—from the frontier wife toiling away on her homestead, to the Gibson Girl coloring her hair blonde and making elaborate desserts in the kitchen, the role of the woman in society has always been an essential, if understated, part of national identity. As technology developed and new mediums like television invaded households all over the country, cultural expectations of women increasingly became streamlined, and cosmetics advertisements contributed to this societal project by promoting politicized images of women that aided in the American nation-building project, but only through a narrowly-defined lens of whiteness and physicality. Women in these advertisements were depicted as perfect, beautiful, and, most importantly, conventional people to aspire to. Attractive housewives were considered the epitome of American culture, an ideal that soldiers sought to protect and politicians sought to show off. By buying into beauty culture, women were contributing to American society by attracting both American men as well as people all over the world, impressing upon the world that America was a prosperous land, made visible by their beautiful, successful housewives. However, as analysis of the marketing for beauty products in this chapter discusses, the American beauty industry was fraught with both politicization and racialization. The image of the ideal American homemaker who somehow toiled in the home day after day but remained pristine in appearance contrasts sharply with the black-targeted beauty
products who deliberately promoted a middle-class image based on respectability, and therefore self-sufficiency.

Appliances and cosmetics play intricate roles in the labor of cooking. Cooking is arguably the most important task of a housewife, as an essential daily chore that her family’s health and wellbeing depends on, and both appliances and beauty culture are essential to cooking, which requires immense labor at the detriment of one’s appearance, as will be discussed in the next chapter on cooking as related to the housewife. When one cooks, one uses appliances to help her make delicious and creative foods, as well as makeup to keep her appearance pristine during such labor. The women most able to accomplish this task successfully were the ones able to carve out a voice for themselves in public discourse, as leading authorities on the task of cooking—as a result, they were able to capitalize on their identities as housewives, a role usually relegated to the domestic sphere, to command influence in popular media in a manner which both contradicted and conformed to the separate spheres ideology that dominated postwar American society.
Chapter 3: Establishing Feminine Authority and the Language of Housewifery

Figure 3.1. Lipton Dip.  
*Source: Ladies’ Home Journal, 35 (December 1961).*

For the postwar American housewife, cooking was not just a menial daily chore only for the sake of feeding her family; cooking, and the foods she made, represented modernity as a result of the technologies that transformed the chore into one that visibly displayed America’s prosperity. The advertisement featured above was from the December 1961 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and illustrated an onion and tomato dip, perfect for both a cocktail hors d’oeuvre as
well as a simple afternoon snack.  

A model gracefully dipped a chip into the tomato dip with her delicately manicured fingers, signifying the high quality of the food—luxurious women consume luxurious food, after all. From the artfully placed, red-manicured hand to the casual language that addresses the viewer implicitly as hostess, the advertisement is a very typical example of food marketing during this period, which focused on personifying advertisements to better appeal to the consumer. Though many of them did not show women in their entirety, with this ad only showing off a hand, the hand has qualities that housewives desired and worked hard to attain: cosmetic beauty. Their target audiences were always economically well-off women who took care of the cooking in the household, and through their advertising they sought to appeal to both the aesthetic and intellectual senses of housewives, who wanted both the most economical and most advanced techniques, including for cooking, so that their households would uphold the postwar American value of modernity and progress through science and technology. According to the consumer industry, cooking was an avenue for women to display both their femininity and intelligence, by allowing them to engineer and execute, using their own intelligence and creativity, elaborate, fancy meals, all the while maintaining their beautiful appearance during such difficult labor.

This chapter begins with a subsection introducing the concept of cooking in America as a domestic household chore. I divided the history of cooking in American history into three distinct segments, marked by the invention of a

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significant technology in cooking: fireplaces, gas cookstoves, and home freezing and frozen foods. Every section includes a discussion of cookbook writing during the period, and how they changed throughout history as a result of each technology. The second and third sections of the chapter analyze writing in popular media regarding cooking, to study how the household chore of cooking was marketed by different avenues of consumer culture. The second section analyzes the content and language of three cookbooks popular nationwide during the postwar period, concentrating on how cookbook writing during this period focuses on appealing to homemakers on a personal level. Bestselling cookbooks were primarily authored by either fellow homemakers or companies using homemaker input, and as a result had a much more conversational, congenially instructive tone. The final section of the chapter examines the content and language of food advertising in Ladies Home Journal, concentrating on representations of race and nationality outside of whiteness. I chose to discuss different societal perceptions of women for each medium because of the nature of said mediums: cookbooks are most often written by women, or at least characters of women in the case of Betty Crocker, for other women, lending a more personal aspect to the language. In addition, as a result of this more personal view, with these women drawing from their own lives and experiences, race is often not present in works written by wealthy white women. Food advertising, on the other hand, reaches a much wider audience, and thus is much more cosmopolitan. Through analyzing said popular commercial mediums revolving around cooking, the chapter asserts that cooking as a household chore gave both women and
people of color both a voice and an authority that they otherwise may not have
had the opportunity to have in a commercial context. This influence came with
different implications for white women versus women of color; white, wealthy
women were seen as authorities on cooking because they were considered the
ideal homemakers, while women of color, traditionally in positions of servitude
that often involved cooking as part of their labor, held an authority derived from
experience. However, the women of color in these commercial depictions of
cooking did not genuinely hold the social capital that white housewives wielded
in their cookbooks, which were a much more personalized and authoritative
medium than advertisements, where the women of color were merely passive
figureheads. Black media also deliberately selected what food advertising they
showcased, carefully choosing when to display the white ideal as a model and
when to uplift black businesses instead of white ones. Ultimately, both
 technological developments and the rise of consumer industry allowed certain
groups of women to commercialize their competence at housework as well as
influence their own representations in popular media.

A Brief History of Cooking and its Technological Innovations

For the majority of history, the domestic chore of cooking, a laborious
chore focused more on sustenance than anything else, has fallen primarily under
the domain of the woman of the house. Technological developments transformed
the labor of home cooking into novel work that allowed housewives to exert
creativity and elevate their status as housewives by demonstrating their skill and
competence at such housework. Historically, making meals has been women’s
work in America, and the kitchen, where the work of cooking is done, is considered by many to be the heart of a house and a home, both literally and figuratively. In the eighteenth century, the kitchen was usually the busiest and warmest part of a house, in which family members all worked together, not only preparing food but washing, spinning, weaving, toolmaking, and other such chores, all of which occurred in the kitchen, with its warm fireplace. Thus, cooking has been associated not only with chores and daily monotonous labor, but also love, warmth, and family time spent together. Even as families grew wealthier and houses expanded in size, moving the primary living spaces away from the kitchen and into other sitting rooms like parlors, the kitchen remained an essential space of the home, and was frequently considered the housewife’s main place of occupation. The chore of cooking has encountered three major innovations throughout its history, which have dramatically impacted its development. The fireplace, invented around the eleventh century, allowed people to move their cooking indoors, and remained the status quo for centuries. The second major invention that revolutionized cooking was the stove, which spread rapidly in American homes in the nineteenth century and allowed for more precise, and less labor-intensive meal preparation. Finally, frozen and convenience foods, invented and mass manufactured in the twentieth century during the postwar period for everyday consumption, represent a revitalization of cooking innovations in the contemporary period.

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155 Ogden, 157.
In seventeenth and eighteenth century America, the average kitchen consisted of a fireplace built alongside one wall of the (primarily one-room) house, with perhaps a table or two for working, along with shelves to hold food and tools. The typical American housewife of the early 1800s found cooking to take up the majority of her time in a day, despite having numerous other chores to juggle during the daytime while her husband worked outdoors in the fields, such as taking care of children, cleaning the house, making, washing and repairing clothes, et cetera. Cooking in a fireplace was an incredibly time-consuming activity. Not only did food need preparing before going into the fireplace to boil or roast, but the fire itself needed strict maintenance. Fires needed constant tending, like poking, shifting logs and adding wood, to keep going. The fireplace constantly sprinkled soot and ashes all over the kitchen, requiring the added chore of regular sweeping, and the cook faced constant heat due to poor ventilation in these rooms; often in the summer days, the heat was overwhelming. In addition, water and firewood needed to be carried into the kitchen as needed, and the task of chopping wood and hauling said wood, along with water from the well, usually fell on the woman as well. Tools such as skillets, kettles, skewers, and racks were made of iron, heavy and incredibly hot, and needed to be placed meticulously over the fire via long handles to prevent burns. Moreover,

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157 Ibid., 18.
158 Strasser, 36.
159 Ogden, 17.
160 Ogden, 17.
despite these long-handled utensils, women still needed to bend and kneel and reach into the open flames often.

Boiling and stewing were the easiest methods to prepare food over a fireplace, because they required relatively little maintenance and fuel, leaving the housewife to attend to her numerous other chores while supper simmered. However, historically these methods did not yield the most appetizing results; during this period, quantity and ease of preparation were heavily favored over taste. All animals, as well as every part of the animal, were considered fit to be used and eaten. Pigeons, considered in contemporary times more a pest than fowl, were regularly consumed in eighteenth-century New England. In addition, because storing and preserving food was difficult before refrigeration, cooking was a constant, never-ending daily task. In the summer, food began decomposing almost immediately, and meat needed to be salted carefully. Few houses possessed iceboxes, so women were constantly cooking. As a result, American housewives during this period often did not have the time, nor leisure, to create elaborate meals, and therefore American cookbooks did not exist during this period, with the first American cookbook being released only in 1798. Women did not often make complicated meals, much less write about them. If a woman wanted directions on more sophisticated cooking, she turned toward British cookbooks like Mrs. Glasse’s Art of Cookery, which was first published in

\[161\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[162\text{ Ogden, 18.}\]
London in 1755 and enjoyed enough popularity in America that it was subsequently republished in America over multiple editions.¹⁶³

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, houses were primarily rural and the majority of housewives undertook domestic labor with the help of her children, but some wealthier women were able to hire help. Most young women learned to cook by helping their mothers during their childhoods, and often relatives outside of immediate families lived together. Families could hire labor, especially young unmarried girls, to help with household work, while other families had slaves working in the kitchen. However, hiring help did not release a housewife from cooking entirely, because there was always too much work for that. Wealthy women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as renowned socialite and First Lady Abigail Adams, could host lavish dinner parties, but did not remove themselves from the laborious cooking process as future American hostesses would. Even Abigail Adams churned butter, proclaiming that hers was the only butter that “would keep.”¹⁶⁴

When America began to industrialize during the nineteenth century, this period of rapid technological innovation modernized the laborious chore of household cooking, centering around one invention in particular: the cast iron cookstove, which was first invented in the late eighteenth century but veritably exploded in popularity in the 1830s, as the technology to manufacture them streamlined. The cast iron cookstove replaced wood-burning stoves, which were both expensive and laborious to maintain, requiring the housewife to cut and haul

¹⁶³ Ogden, 17.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.
large quantities of wood. By the mid-1800s, stoves were manufactured and sold nationwide, and significantly reduced the housewife’s workload in the kitchen. Cookstoves raised the cooking area off of the floor of the fireplace, significantly reducing the danger resulting from being near an open fire, as well as the labor of constantly kneeling and standing up.165 Women no longer needed to haul firewood and water into the kitchen, as stoves were powered by gas and provided immediate hot water from the stoves’ water reservoirs.166 Cooking became more precise as well, as women could use the stoves to much more accurately control and regulate the heat for their meals in a way that they could not do with a fireplace. Some protested against the stoves, complaining that the taste of food cooked on a gas plate could not compare to that of food cooked over an open fire. Baking was also more difficult in a stove, and even renowned Catharine Beecher, who wrote multiple popular guides on housekeeping in the nineteenth century and was a vocal proponent of gas stoves, admitted to the stove’s disadvantages when comparing its food to that of a hearty, brisk fire.167

The gas-powered cookstove significantly reduced the labor involved in cooking, while simultaneously helping to foster, along with the industrialization of society as a whole, the growth of the middle class during the nineteenth century. As gas cookstoves became more and more popular, companies continued to innovate and make the gas ranges more efficient, as well as easier and safer to use; cooking instruments developed as well, using lighter materials

165 Miller, 22.
166 Ibid.
167 Strasser, 36.
like aluminum, instead of iron, which had been used for centuries. To make these products along with the other technologies rapidly being invented and used during this period, factories, jobs and incomes abounded, leading to the promulgation of the working class and the proliferation of the middle class, as wealth could be accumulated much more easily now in cities. In these cities, the American middle class began to focus on embodying Victorian ideals in the nineteenth century. Under Queen Victoria, British women did not have the right to vote or own property, and the fashion among the British middle class was for women to stay at home and maintain a domestic haven for her husband and children, creating the separate spheres theory, in which the woman’s sphere was the home and the man’s sphere was the world outside of the home, the world of business and politics. The separate spheres theory took hold of American middle class society in particular. Women, especially mothers, resisted work for wages whenever they could, and focused their efforts on maintaining beautiful homes for their husbands and children, as well as hosting in their beautiful homes. Domestic help, which largely comprised of single immigrant women, was a staple of urban middle- and upper-class households, especially in coastal urban cities like New York City and Boston, where immigration was high; in America in 1890, the fifty largest cities had about 18 percent of the total population of the country, and 32 percent of the domestic servants. Housewives did less manual labor during this period, taking on much more managerial roles during meals.

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168 Strasser, 229.
169 Ibid., 167.
Cookbooks written and circulated during this period reflect this shift in expectations toward cooking and household chores, as well as the changing status of women with the growth of the upper classes. During the nineteenth century, women were allowed one significant avenue into public discourse: writing and publishing cookbooks. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to the separate spheres ideology, middle- and upper-class men were expected to maintain their presence in the public sphere, via engaging in work and politics, while women of the same status focused on the domestic sphere, while suppressing their views about politics and social change. Women were assumed to be experts in cooking, so writing cookbooks seemed like a natural extension from women’s domestic responsibilities. While not overtly political, cookbooks during this period, and from thereon out, served not only as manuals for food preparation, but for living life in general. Because women were charged during this period with cultivating standards of American taste and culture comparable to fashionable Europe, as well as the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the nation, they wrote cookbooks that contained not only recipes but lectures on how to dress, how to lose weight, how to decorate one’s parlor for a holiday party. Lydia Marie Child published *The American Frugal Housewife* in 1835, and is considered the first cookbook designed to instruct American women on how to create an ideal domestic environment for their

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families. These books, which operated on the assumption that the woman was a housewife devoted solely to attending to her house, catered primarily to the elite and to the middle class, helping cultivate within the women of these economic classes an association with a larger cultural framework of domesticity prevalent throughout the nation. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The American Woman’s Home*, first published in 1869 and one of the best selling books of the nineteenth century, is considered the most influential book published on instructing women, and included non-cooking related topics like sanitation, interior design, and even health matters.

The final invention that drastically altered cooking in American households, frozen foods, promulgated during the first half of the twentieth century and involved a landmark technological development: home freezing, or the ability to keep food frozen, and thus ready to defrost and cook with or eat at a moment’s notice at home. As domestic servitude dramatically decreased as a profession in America at the end of the nineteenth century, housewives began to take on a much more hands-on approach to cooking, transitioning to making all of their own meals themselves and leading into a reliance on technology, like refrigerators and convenience foods. Factory-made foods began to rise in prominence throughout the country. Canned meats, soups, fruits and vegetables, and then dry items like pancake mix and baking powder, were among the first

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172 Ibid.
173 *Walden*, 15.
manufactured foods to become staples of home cooking.\footnote{Laura Shapiro, \textit{Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America}. (Viking, 2004), 47.} Frozen foods were less quick to catch on with the general public due to both unfamiliarity and mistrust of newfangled freezing technology, but also began to slowly enter the general consumer market.\footnote{Christopher Holmes Smith, "Freeze Frames: Frozen Foods and Memories of the Postwar American Family" in \textit{Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race} ed. Sherrie A. Inness (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 180.} Clarence Birdeye, considered the founder of the modern frozen foods industry, jumpstarted the frozen food industry in the early twentieth century by developing revolutionary packaging methods.\footnote{Ibid., 186.} He went into business specializing in frozen fruits and vegetables through his company General Foods Company; his operations were immediately successful, and the Postum Company quickly bought out Birdseye, seeing the potential in his newfangled business. Other companies rapidly joined the frozen food venture, and by 1935 the frozen foods industry was budding nationwide.\footnote{Ibid.} However, by the start of World War II, not enough families across America, especially in rural regions, had access to home freezing equipment.\footnote{Ibid.} In addition, wartime delayed further development of the industry, with the country focusing its efforts on preserving and manufacturing foods to supply soldiers, rather than on freezing, when resources were scarce to begin with and the numbers of freezers in the country wasn’t increasing.

In the decades immediately following the war, however, the frozen food industry expanded dramatically as America sought technological innovation and
modernity to cement its status as a global superpower; everything needed to be bigger, faster, and more advanced. Initially, frozen products were not very popular, as housewives turned up their noses at the costs, which were higher than fresh foods. In addition, the concept of cooking for the family was so entrenched in the ideology and status of the housewife that women rejected the idea of serving their husbands and children ready-made food, rather than food they had prepared herself, with their own labor and love. However, by 1954, consumption of frozen foods had jumped from 17 to 36 pounds annually per capita over five years, reflecting the increasing popularity of the technology.180 Two factors that directly impacted the widespread expansion of frozen foods after the war were the rise of disposable incomes, and the migration of city dwellers to suburbs. Incomes rose steadily after the war, boosting millions of Americans into the middle class. From 1950 to 1960, the number of homeowners quadrupled, and these Americans spent much of their incomes on status symbols like houses, furniture, paintings, silver tableware, and especially food.181 Suburban houses were much more spacious than urban dwellings, affording more kitchen space, which in turn allowed more space for home freezers, which had been previously considered obtrusively large in apartments and smaller houses in tightly-packed cities.182 People now had the technology to store these foods, which were considered symbols of modernity and progress. TV dinners were the first frozen products to explode in popularity nationwide; invented by Quaker States Foods,

180 Shapiro, 69.
181 Ibid., 81.
182 Ibid., 63.
segmented dinner trays became an incredibly convenient way to feed one’s children when the parents were going out, or for husbands whose wives weren’t home.\textsuperscript{183} TV dinners did not replace women’s home cooking, however, and discourse regarding the use of frozen food in the kitchen at home became a major component of American cooking culture, which had shifted significantly during the postwar period due to a rapid decline of the servant class during this period.

America experienced a post-World War II boom in working women, as more and more positions for women in the labor force became available due to the shortage of men. This availability of opportunities for women beyond the typical jobs of maids and nannies inspired a mass exodus from the servant class, prompting a dramatic shortfall in hired domestic help. In addition, the return to separate spheres after the war resulted in women becoming housewives, who took care of households nearly single-handedly, without any help. Thus, twentieth-century middle- and upper-class housewives took a much more active role in their housework, as opposed to the managerial positions they had assumed the century prior. As a result, popular media, including advertising and cookbooks, addressed women much more familiarly, and guided them through every single aspect of housework. The language that addressed housewives in cookbooks, magazines, and other forms of media often assumed no prior knowledge, heavily implying the widespread societal belief during this period that women did not know how to cook, and that, regardless of age, women only learned to cook once married.\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{183} Shapiro, 65.
Women were expected to cook, but seemed to not learn until married, and the reason behind this lateness in learning a task seemingly essential to womanhood is unclear; perhaps homemakers truly did take on all household responsibilities alone, although it’s uncertain why many mothers did not prepare their daughters for adulthood by teaching them to cook. In addition, cookbooks instructed women on how to grocery shop, budget for her household, and host multiple-course dinner parties that required the hostess to cook, serve, and entertain her guests seamlessly.

Irma Rombauer’s *The Joy of Cooking* was the most influential cookbook of the twentieth century, first published in 1931 and selling around 26 million copies over the course of eighty years. Rombauer’s cookbook was often the first text many women consulted when they started to run a household. Her congenial, motherly manner as well as the simple but hearty quality of her recipes made her exceedingly popular; for example, there was “no reason” for her “chicken or veal creamed” to “not be delicious, whether it is made in a luxurious way or with leftover food.” She explicitly stated that one didn’t need elaborate methods or ingredients to make a tasty main course for one’s family. *The Joy of Cooking* represents the new approach cookbooks took to instructing women, treating cooking like it was a task at the heart of the housewife’s labor, as well as the one that most demonstrated her love for her family. She sought to demonstrate that cooking, while routine work, was not drudgery, reflecting the

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185 Trubek, 57.
187 Ibid., 58.
common view that cooking for housewives during this period was labor-intensive and difficult, and frozen foods marketing addressed this development directly.

To advertise their products, frozen foods companies proclaimed that their products were the housewife’s dream; freezing apparently eliminated nearly every trace of work for the cook, by letting her purchase and serve already seasoned and prepared food that only needed defrosting, which then allowed the housewife time to pursue enjoyable activities during the time she would normally be cooking, like charity work or playing tennis.\(^{188}\) Frozen foods were also depicted by popular media to positively contribute to allowing women to exercise their intellects by practicing creativity. Because preparing ready-made frozen foods was framed as effortless, women could afford to be original and unique by personalizing such foods. Women’s personal gratification was emphasized, which was a unique departure from household manuals and instructions of earlier periods, which taught women to cook foods appealing to their family members, rather than seek personal fulfillment in their meals.\(^{189}\) This emphasis on housewives’ personal fulfillment is also reminiscent of the “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” columns, another form of popular media which counseled homemakers to find personal gratification in their marriages by successfully and competently caring for their husbands and children, and that any boredom or dissatisfaction she finds from her life is from some specific issue, rather than her occupation in general. The language is exceedingly similar to that found in cookbooks, which instructed and praised women for finding happiness in caring for her family via her food, a labor

\(^{188}\) Inness, 24.  
\(^{189}\) Ibid., 17.
of love. Cookbook authors during this period, predominantly female, which was in line with previous eras, praised frozen and convenience foods extensively. They justified their praise with their firsthand experience of how much time and labor cooking demanded every day, along with how dull that routine could become. Authors lauded frozen foods’ ability to not only lighten women’s workloads, but also to make cooking more enjoyable by allowing women to have fun with the chore. In addition, because America sought modernity during this period, purchasing and consuming frozen foods also served as a status marker by showing that women and their families were up-to-date. Women who did not cook with frozen foods were often considered old-fashioned. The household chore of cooking during this period was one that reflected societal ideals that a housewife maintained not only the health and sustenance of her household through her cooking, but also maintained her family’s status by choosing what to cook.

**Postwar Cookbooks and their Sympathetic Appeals to Household Cooking**

The postwar period experienced a proliferation of cookbooks written and published primarily by middle- and upper-class women, and especially housewives, during this period. These women sought, through their cookbooks, to provide instructions not only on preparing meals but on how to shop frugally, clean the house, and entertain guests via lavish dinner parties, among other things. The language present in these cookbooks reveals how women during the postwar period were portrayed by popular media, as women eager to learn to cook

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190 Inness, 17.
191 Ibid., 24.
for their husbands and families at home. However, upon analyzing a few of these books, including the nationwide bestselling cookbooks Betty Crocker’s Picture Cookbook (1950) and The Joy of Cooking (1962), considered the go-to household manuals for American women in the twentieth century, the language present, as well as their chosen topics of discussion regarding cooking and household chores, reveals that though authors shied away from discussing race and class directly, methods of finance and time-saving derived from technological innovation were mentioned in great detail throughout these books, indicating a real acknowledgment of the limitations of women as housewives, especially if they were working or of less financial means. Budgeting for grocery shopping was a recurring theme; women were advised to make a shopping list before entering the grocery store, to prevent excessive or unnecessary spur-of-the-moment purchases, as well as to compare prices between brands, though they also had to be sure not to sacrifice quality for economy too much.\(^{192}\) Relying on frozen foods, a newfangled technology that significantly saved on time and labor, were also strongly encouraged to both lessen the workload and increase the quality of meals. Though the authors were either wealthier individual women or corporations, women of all social classes could engage with the instructions on economizing cooking and other chores by saving time and money.

Once voted the second most influential woman in America, behind Eleanor Roosevelt, Betty Crocker was never a real person, but a cheerful matron character who taught millions of American women to cook for over a century. Conceived in 1921 by American-based food manufacturer of consumer branded products, General Mills Company, then known as the Washburn-Crosby Company, Betty Crocker as a character first developed to act as spokeswoman for their product Gold Medal Flour. Beginning in 1930, Betty Crocker expanded her voice to cookbooks. Crocker was General Mills’ first attempt at

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195 Swenson, 148.
personalizing communication with their consumers; she was created in the image
of a stereotypical white, well-to-do housewife to earn the trust of consumers, and
she served a multitude of roles, from friend to mother to mentor, to the women of
the country who consumed her content.

*Betty Crocker’s Picture Cookbook* was published by the McGraw-Hill
Book Company in 1950, and quickly became a staple on the bookshelves of
houses all over the country. I examined the third edition, published in 1961.
McGraw-Hill included a preface in the book, claiming to present “over 2,000
tested ways to prepare tasty, appetizing, nutritious meals for your family,” and
that with these new recipes “your hours in the kitchen will be fewer, lighter and
more enjoyable with this aid . . . to better, easier cooking.”¹⁹⁶ The preface further
went on to state that “hundreds of thousands of homemakers wrote Betty Crocker
saying how it helped them,” indicating that readers could place their trust in her
recipes because hundreds of thousands of other women, and most specifically
homemakers whose professional occupations revolve solely around keeping
house, had as well. The publishing company’s preface reveals the messages
popular media imbued on women during this period: that they needed to prepare
healthy and delicious meals for their families at home, and that to do this they
needed detailed, yet simple instruction. The company addresses the reader
familiarly as “you,” indicating the trend during this period of cookbooks acting as
congenial mentors; this was the (faceless) corporation’s voice and not Betty
Crocker’s, but the language was already a very casual, as well as instructional,

tone that gently but firmly told women that their cooking would improve significantly by taking the book’s instruction. Furthermore, McGraw-Hill explained that following the instructions in the book would vastly simplify the cook’s time spent in the kitchen, representing how companies during this period viewed women as consumers–women purchased products to develop themselves as wives, mothers and housekeepers to maintain societal standards for their households. A woman could save time, using Betty Crocker, and pursue other activities for the betterment of herself and her household.

The actual contents of Betty Crocker’s Picture Cookbook, from the cooking instructions themselves to the personalized commentary that precedes them, reveal the tendency during this period for cookbooks to act as mentors to these housewives who had never cooked before, and were determined to learn and uphold their household standards to the best of their ability. Some of the recipes featured comments from other housewives, while Betty Crocker herself directly remarked on others. For example, Betty Crocker introduced her recipe for “Stir-N-Roll Biscuits” with her own commentary on the quality of the recipe: “with a wonderfully delicate crust . . . Quick to make. No floury mess to clear up. So sure and easy!” Crocker simultaneously appealed to the quality of taste as well as ease of preparation, with little to no cleaning, appeasing the homemaker’s preoccupation with making high quality, tasty dishes able to impress her family and guests, while also assuring the homemaker of the convenience and easiness of making the dish. By reassuring the cook that the recipe was foolproof to make,

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197 Betty Crocker’s Picture Cookbook, 85.
the cookbook reveals the trend during this period of cookbooks assuming little-to-
no prior knowledge of cooking from its readers, hence the step-by-step
instructions of even the most minute details; the “Stir-N-Roll Biscuits” require
kneading “about ten times.”198 This implication, that women were not learning
how to cook from their mothers, seems paradoxical considering the expectation of
women to be domestic housekeeping experts during this period, but the
assumption that women, regardless of any age, only learned to cook once married
was prominent throughout society.199 There is no single explanation for this
apparent contradiction in regards to societal expectations versus their actual
upbringings, but one explanation may be that perhaps mothers assumed cooking
could be learned through observation. Cooking and expectations for food and
meals may also have changed between generations as technologies developed
over the decades; mothers may have been unfamiliar with newfangled kitchen
appliances and the new international cuisine types permeating the American food
industry, as well as the increasing expectations for home-cooked meals to be
elaborately prepared and decorated. In any event, women turned to cookbooks
like Betty Crocker, which acted as surrogate mothers for teaching domestic tasks,
from cooking to shopping to hostessing. The cookbook may have even served as
something of a status marker for housewives; owning and using Betty Crocker’s
recipes bestowed upon the woman a sense of competence and modernity.

Another distinctive aspect of Betty Crocker’s recipes, also reminiscent of
the postwar period, is the sheer abundance of frozen and canned foods present in

198 Betty Crocker’s Picture Cookbook, 85.
199 Inness, 167.
her recipes, representing the trend in cooking during this period which sought to eliminate labor and foster creativity for women, who shouldered, primarily alone, the enormous burden of cooking three meals a day every day. The *Betty Crocker Picture Cookbook* featured multiple sections discussing proper and convenient uses of the new, modern technology of freezing. At the end of the soup section, for example, Crocker advised the reader to “keep several cans of frozen soup on hand.”\(^{200}\) Another section discussed adding frozen cans of shrimp and crabmeat to as easy methods of making soups heartier.\(^{201}\) Crocker praised these canned items, claiming that they saved time and made the dishes taste better, again reflecting emphasis on decreasing the amount of time spent in the kitchen. Speed was always listed as the first advantage of frozen foods, with every helpful freezing tip section at the end being labeled “Freezer Shortcuts,” to emphasize the convenience of the technology.

Another cookbook that became a national bestseller during the postwar period and previously discussed in the introduction to this chapter, *The Joy of Cooking: A Compilation of Reliable Recipes with an Occasional Culinary Chat*, by St. Louis homemaker Irma S. Rombauer, contains similar language to Betty Crocker and also reflects the congenial nature of cookbooks during this period. However, unlike corporate character Betty Crocker, *The Joy of Cooking* was incredibly personal, narrated by Rombauer and endowed with her own personal anecdotes and commentary, adding an especially warm tone to the cookbook. Irma S. Rombauer was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, married a lawyer,

\(^{200}\) *Betty Crocker’s Picture Cookbook*, 408.

\(^{201}\) Ibid.
and lived as a full-time homemaker and hostess, throwing lavish dinner parties for her society friends and her husband’s business associates, until her husband committed suicide in 1930. He left Rombauer with only $6,000 in savings, and a subsequent need to support herself. To make money, as well as cope with her grief and isolation, Rombauer decided to write a cookbook, including both recipes that she herself had developed over the years as well as recipes from friends and family. She self-published *The Joy of Cooking* in 1930, and continued to update the book and publish new editions with the help of her daughter, Marion Rombauer Becker, who eventually took over the editing and publishing of the newer editions, once her mother became older and her health started to decline. The edition I am choosing to look at is the fifth one, published in 1962, containing over 4,000 recipes and an emphasis on newer technologies that only started appearing since the fourth edition, like blending.  

Rombauer’s tone of voice in her cookbook is, similarly to Betty Crocker, one of familiarity and matronliness. One personality aspect that sets her apart from Betty Crocker, however, is her straightforward acknowledgment that cooking was a chore, a necessary evil of domestic life. In her foreword to the cookbook, she stated that the book was “a result of a long practical experience,” and that she had “made an attempt to meet the needs of the average household, to make palatable dishes with simple means and to lift everyday cooking out of the commonplace.” She readily admitted that cooking is commonplace and

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202 Trubek, 57.
203 Ibid., 58.
204 Trubek, 58.
implied its drudgery, but also simultaneously encouraged women to take it on as an adventure.\textsuperscript{205} This encouragement and passion is present in many of the anecdotes that precede her recipes. For example, in the introduction to the section on soufflés, immediately after she acknowledged that the soufflé was renowned for how difficult it is to make, Rombauer stated: “The soufflé is a luxury or economy dish according to your wishes... It is at all times delicate and tempting, so take your courage into your hands and try it out.”\textsuperscript{206} She emphasized the reader’s agency in the composition of the dish—one could make it as fancy or as simple as they like, presenting the reader with the gift of creativity, a common theme throughout cookbooks during this period, as well as an acknowledgment of divergent menus throughout different regions of the country. She then went on to encourage the reader, taking on a motherly, supportive tone and telling them that there was no harm in being ambitious and trying new things. “The worst that can happen,” she explained, “is the sacrifice of a few inexpensive staples.”\textsuperscript{207} To her, cooking was an adventure that required some spunk and tenacity, which she kindly tried to imbue her readers with, instead of a chore.

Similarly again to Betty Crocker, frozen foods also feature heavily in Rombauer’s book, though they are not staples in many recipes. Instead, Rombauer dedicated an appendix, attached after all of the recipe sections, to frozen foods. She acknowledged their importance in American cooking and society, but warned against extravagance with the newfangled technology. She

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\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{206} Rombauer, 217.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
countered frozen food enthusiasts, who often during this period claimed that tossing food into the freezer yielded fabulous results no matter what the food was, by stating that in order to expect high quality results, one must freeze high quality food to begin with. She emphasized the quality of fresh ingredients, and warned against hoarding foods in freezers. She also acknowledged the usefulness of pre-prepared frozen foods like TV dinners, casseroles, meat pies, et cetera, but also made sure to mention that certain frozen foods are “more successful” than others, emphasizing the need to thaw very carefully and that they were probably less healthy than foods made from scratch. In this way, she took a different track from the corporate Betty Crocker cookbook, which lauded frozen foods without mention of the potential drawbacks to the foods.

The final cookbook examined in this section is The Good Housekeeping Cookbook, edited by Dorothy B. Marsh and published in 1963 by Hearst Corporation and Harcourt, Brace and World. The cookbook is a collection of over 3,500 recipes tested by the Good Housekeeping Institute, a research organization created to test the products, recipes, and other such materials published by American women’s magazine Good Housekeeping, which was, along with Ladies’ Home Journal, one of the most popular women’s magazines and one of the most popular monthlies in the country during the postwar period (experiencing a circulation of 3,500,000 in the 1950s). This “testing” was comparable to the household technological appliances, like refrigerators and

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\(^{208}\) Rombaeur, xvii.

vacuums, mentioned in the first chapter, that were also engineered and “tested” by the companies and housewives. Though it is unclear how much of a role housewives actually played in designing and developing these recipes, women’s feedback was clearly included in these recipes, as evident by Dorothy B. Marsh, a woman, editing the cookbook. Having a woman as the official editor of the book lends the cookbook a legitimacy and reliability that a nameless, faceless corporation isn’t able to provide; during the postwar period, housewives sought other housewives’ opinions, and companies like the Good Housekeeping Institute capitalized on this by attaching female authority to their instructional products, regardless of how much women actually contributed to them. It’s impossible to determine how much input women had in the making of the recipes of *The Good Housekeeping Cookbook*, but that clearly didn’t stop sales. The cookbook experienced much popularity also because of its association with the popular magazine, and was another staple in women’s kitchens, along with *The Betty Crocker Picture Cookbook* and *The Joy of Cooking*, during the postwar period.

*The Good Housekeeping Cookbook* employed many of the same narrative techniques as the other two cookbooks, including the friendly, approachable tone. Unlike the other two books, the cookbook makes it clear that there is no unilateral voice or character instructing the reader; instead the book solely focused on addressing the reader as “you” and never refers to itself as a person or entity. No personal anecdotes or opinions were expressed. Instead, the space normally present before the recipes for personal touches was used to address the reader, giving them helpful hints and tips for both the recipes, and for other aspects of life.
as well. To begin the “Dips, Dunks and Nibblers” section, for example, the cookbook addressed the homemaker in her capacity as a hostess: “probably you’ll set [hors d’oeuvres/snacks/little party foods] on the coffee table so guests can help themselves.”210 The book then, immediately preceding simple recipes that dinner party guests can be employed to help make themselves, stated that “guests love making their own [appetizers], which leaves you, the hostess, free to enjoy your guests or to tend to last-minute details in the kitchen, and generally guarantees the success of your entertaining.”211 Rather than personally speaking to and sympathizing with the reader the way the other two cookbooks did, The Good Housekeeping Cookbook instead offered detached, yet kind advice that sought not to support or comfort, but instruct and enlighten.

Freezing was also heavily emphasized in The Good Housekeeping Cookbook, combining both the praiseworthy tone of the Betty Crocker Picture Cookbook as well as the meticulous, instructional tone of The Joy of Cooking. The cookbook began with commending both frozen foods and freezers for both their convenience and their economy. In this case, women both froze their own food at home after preparing it, and also purchased frozen foods at the grocery store, and kept both in home freezers. Freezing foods in a home freezer, the cookbook explained, allowed one to “need never waste a scrap of food,” “cook at your leisure . . . allowing you to make time-consuming dishes,” and “[buy] in quantity.”212 Once again, a cookbook cited frozen food as being less time

210 Marsh, 144.
211 Ibid.
212 Marsh, 701.
consuming to cook being a significant advantage in purchasing them. In this instance, however, the homemaker was encouraged to use the extra time gained to prepare more elaborate dishes that she may otherwise not have had time for; this is a departure from more typical advice during this period, which told women to pursue other meaningful activities outside cooking. However, this simply could be a result of *The Good Housekeeping Cookbook* focusing on cooking not just being for family, but also for society in the form of dinner parties and other occasions; fancier, more elaborate recipes may impress guests more. The section then went on to carefully instruct the reader on how to use one’s freezer, telling them to freeze food only of good quality, freeze them promptly, as well as label the packages because foods are hard to identify once frozen.\footnote{213} The cookbook continued its trend of advising its reader warmly without adding any personal touches, while clearly endorsing the use of such modern technology.

One unique section of *The Good Housekeeping Cookbook* which sets it apart from the *Betty Crocker Picture Cookbook* and *The Joy of Cooking* is that the book devotes an entire section of its contents to teaching the housewife to be economical when cooking. The other two books did not explicitly advise women on how to save money while grocery shopping or cooking, though they did make passing remarks on the economy of certain aspects or items of cooking; *The Joy of Cooking* introduced its “Menus” section by stating that planning menus was difficult because it required budgets to be discussed. *The Good Housekeeping Cookbook*, on the other hand, devoted many of its pages to candidly discussing

\footnote{213} Ibid.
finances and how a homemaker could make her kitchen more financially efficient. It instructed the reader to develop marketing know-how and save money at supermarkets by making a shopping list, instead of waiting until one gets to the market to decide what they’re going to buy. Meat at grocery stores were often cheaper than butchers, canned vegetables were cheaper than fresh vegetables, et cetera. Moving even beyond simply comparing prices, the cookbook advised one to consider health benefits as well when purchasing items. For example, butter “gives [the reader] important amounts of vitamin A, as well as a high energy value of 100 calories per tablespoonful,” while margarine “has the same energy value as butter . . . and is nutritionally comparable to butter.” As a result, it was reasonable to purchase margarine, which was cheaper than butter and had essentially the same nutritional value, over butter. Such economic concerns acknowledged budget-conscious women, in contrast to other cookbooks, which glossed over the topic. As a result, women of lower economic classes were able to resonate with the instructions in the book. Women were not explicitly referred to as housewives in the cookbook, and coupled with the economic discussions in the book, one can infer that working class and poorer women were able to take accurate instruction from the book and actually increase their quality of shopping, cooking, and household economy as a result. This cookbook represents one of the more blatant representations of American women who were not middle- or upper-class, although the advice could certainly be wholeheartedly adopted by wealthier women as well. Advertisements found in *Ladies’ Home Journal* for food

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214 Marsh, 88.
215 Ibid., 100.
products featured similar language to these popular cookbooks, from homemakers finding fulfillment in the labor of love to economizing the chore, but because of its blatantly commercial nature, saw some significant differences in the content of the advertisements–white women spoke little of other races or cultures in the cookbooks they themselves wrote, but marketing agencies did not subject themselves to the same limitations, up to an extent.

**Cosmopolitanism and Racial Depictions in *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Ebony***

During the postwar period, the ideology that identified women as homemakers held strong in the advertising industry and especially the food industry, despite the reality of World War II having placed the majority of American women in the workforce, with many of these women choosing to stay on and make careers after the war. In 1960, one in three women worked, but this reality was not reflected in food advertising, which presented messages that played central roles in shaping twentieth-century gender roles.\(^{216}\) Unlike other advertised products, food is not a luxury but a centrality to the human experience, and thus commands attention in a way that other products like cars, televisions, or even washing machines, do not. Food is influential, because everyone needs it and everyone buys it. Because of its universality, food as a product appeals to everyone, and the advertisers are thus able to target specific demographics while still attracting general attention. In the postwar period, food advertisers chose middle- and upper-class white female homemakers as their specific target demographic, advertising to this group specifically with the assumption that other

groups would see their advertisements as well and aspire to emulate this group by buying the same products. Analyzing food advertisements in women’s magazine *Ladies’ Home Journal* and African American lifestyle magazines *Ebony* and *Jet* reveals the predominance of white models, and especially white housewives, in food advertisements during this period.

![Figure 2.3. Borden’s Fine Cheeses.](source:Ladies’ Home Journal, 9 (March 1960).)

Upon examination of *Ladies’ Home Journal* issues from 1960 to 1962, only a handful of food advertisements featured mentions of different nationalities or depictions of people of color. In the majority of such cases, the only mention of any different race or nation tended to be related to the taste of the food, and only European countries. For example, the March 1960 issue featured an
advertisement for Borden’s Fine Cheeses, which “[added] true Italian flavor to your favorite Italian recipes.” Italian and Italian-inspired food were evidently widespread in America during this period, perhaps as a result of World War II soldiers being exposed to the cuisine during their times stationed in Europe, along with the high numbers of Italians among early twentieth-century American immigrants. It was popular enough for people to have their own individual favorite recipes and for people to care about and aspire to make their recipes authentic. Cuisines of non-European ethnic origins, such as Chinese cuisine, are not accorded the same familiarity and exposure through advertising in these national magazines, indicating the eurocentrism of cosmopolitanism in American society throughout this period. Its presence in advertising indicates the confidence that the industry has in the popularity and prestige of Italian food among wealthy white homemakers during this period.

Another example of this praise of European qualities in food in Ladies’ Home Journal is present in the July 1971 issue, in an advertisement for Wish-Bone salad dressings. The ad featured five different flavors of premade salad dressing, with four out of the five a self-proclaimed flavor profile from a different country: Italian, Deluxe French, Russian, and French. The descriptions for each flavor are telling as to the quality of the country of origin itself. For Italian, the dressing was “the real Italian dressing made from authentic herbs and spices.” The authenticity of the product is emphasized, reflecting this message, prevalent in the food advertising industry, about the prestige of genuine Italian food. The

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description for the Deluxe French was the most vivid of all, and served to praise both the delicacy of the French and their cuisine, as well as the authenticity of Wish-Bone’s version. The Deluxe French comprised a number of different spices and herbs that were “blended with all the care the French use in making a fine cognac.”219 The veneration present in the language of the advertisement clearly emphasized the enviable skill of France in making products with delicate flavors like cognac. Wish-Bone proceeded to claim that they were able to mimic this skill to produce a product of comparable quality, and its presence in the Ladies’ Home Journal, a national magazine catering toward the middle and upper echelons of society indicated that this admiration of Europe was present in American high society.

However, this admiration of Europe, present in advertisements, only extended to a certain number of countries in Europe. Italy, France, and England, which were not only the homes of the globally renowned fashion capitals of Milan, Paris, and London but also major superpowers during World War II, were by far the most prevalent European countries mentioned in Ladies’ Home Journal, and were certainly the most praised. For example, in the Wish-Bone advertisement, dressings from three national cuisines were named: Italy, France, and Russia. The language of the Russian dressing was praiseworthy of the dressing itself, like the other two, but noticeably different in content in that the description mentioned neither Russia nor Russian cuisine the way the other two descriptions did regarding their respective countries. Wish-Bone described the

219 “Wish-Bone,” 2.
Russian dressing as a “thick, spicy dressing with a tantalizing touch of sweetness” that resulted from a combination of 23 choice ingredients.\textsuperscript{220} Despite it being named the “Russian” dressing, there was no mention of any sort of Russian influence in the description, unlike the Italian and French dressings, which praised the countries of origin either implicitly, like the “real” Italian, or explicitly, like the “careful” French.\textsuperscript{221} Consumers were likely not interested in hearing praise for Russia or the Soviet Union during the Cold War era, so advertisers chose instead to focus on describing the taste, rather than the country of origin.

Visually, food advertisements also reveal a lot regarding the food advertising industry’s target demographics, as well as the images they were pushing in society of the “ideal woman.” Borden’s advertisement featured a pale hand with a red manicure delicately shaking a can of Borden’s Parmesan cheese onto a dish of pasta. This hand, with its white skin tone and bright red polished nails, is a feature predominant across food advertising during this period, and features in advertisements for various food products and companies in both magazines. For example, the Coca-Cola advertisement on page 21 of the April 1960 issue of \textit{Ebony} magazine (figure 0.2) featured what appeared to be the same pale hand with red nails. The presence of this white hand in \textit{Ebony} was unusual because of the nature of the national magazine, as one focusing on African American news, culture, and entertainment. The majority of the advertisements in \textit{Ebony}, from appliances to cosmetics, usually featured black models to cater toward this target demographic, but with a few notable exceptions: food is one

\textsuperscript{220} “Wish-Bone,” 2.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
significant one. The food advertising industry had notoriously ignored people of color, most significantly African Americans, who comprised a significant part of the consumer economy during the postwar period. Historian Katherine J. Parkin argued that this neglect may have stemmed, at least in part, from the expectation that African Americans simply could not afford the products they were advertising.\textsuperscript{222} Other scholars have suggested that because of the anti-black racism prevalent in American society during the Jim Crow era, which overlapped significantly with the postwar period, the food advertising industry simply chose to exclude black people and their potential as a market; their contributions toward consumer society would go toward buying these products aimed toward white women, to emulate these women.

The presence of the white manicured hand in both \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal} and \textit{Ebony}, magazines with different demographics, demonstrates the stereotype of the woman being pushed by the food advertising industry: the white, wealthy, polished homemaker was an image that both white and black women, of both wealthy and poorer classes, were supposed to aspire to. The previously mentioned March 1960 \textit{Ladies Home Journal} advertisement for Borden’s fine cheeses featured a red-manicured, white-skinned hand pouring grated cheese onto a pasta dish.\textsuperscript{223} The April 1960 issue of \textit{Ebony} promoted an ad for Coca-Cola, in which an identical hand poured a Cola into a glass.\textsuperscript{224} As previously discussed, the hand was virtually identical in all of the advertisements, regardless of the

\textsuperscript{223} “Borden’s Fine Cheeses,” 9.
\textsuperscript{224} “Coca-Cola,” \textit{Ebony}, April 1960, 21.
company of origin. The smooth hand was not work-hardened, and indicated a life of privilege and luxury; they were not hands that were constantly washing dishes, scrubbing floors and cooking meals. In addition, the color of the nails belied significance as well. The color red has historically symbolized luxury and splendor in Europe, and by extension America, a nation born of European immigrants, since as far back as 1541, when Italian poet Agnolo Firenzuola wrote that red was the ideal color of beauty in his literary work *Discourse on the Beauty of Women*; the famous red bottoms of the shoes of luxury brand Christian Louboutin is one of the most notorious contemporary examples. The beautification of this hand that advertised household products marketed toward homemakers indicates the status of the ideal woman using these products. The hand belonged to a white and wealthy woman, and the women looking upon these advertisements were meant to idolize and emulate these models.

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Occasionally people of races other than white were portrayed in food advertisements, and these depictions were often based upon racist and negative stereotypes against these races, further solidifying the food advertising industry’s characterization of the white race as superior. Aunt Jemima, a brand of pancake mix, syrup, and other such pre-prepared breakfast products, was popular nationwide from the nineteenth century onward, and advertisements for the brand were found in nearly every *Ladies’ Home Journal* issue between 1960 and 1962. Aunt Jemima was a caricature of the archetypical black “mammy” figure, with typically unattractive and “matronly,” or otherwise elderly, features like dark skin, extra weight, and a red bandanna covering her head. Aunt Jemima was clearly designed carefully to embody the image of a black housekeeper-slash-
nanny-cook figure, to build trust in the consumer and announce that obviously the product tastes good with such an experienced motherly figure spearheading the product. Aunt Jemima was meant to inspire confidence by using racial stereotypes to underline the fact that historically, black women, and especially older black women, had Aunt Jemima’s facial features; her face was prominently displayed in the advertisement, and was the only black face seen in the entire issue. However, the description attached to the product was noticeably impersonal, and only refers to Aunt Jemima as a product, not as a person: “Which is Aunt Jemima day at your house? Aunt Jemimas . . . are gobbled up more often than any other pancakes in the world.”226 Aunt Jemima was only referred to as a day and a product to be eaten. Paired with its placement in a magazine catering toward white women, we can infer from the wording of the advertisement that white women were not meant to be taking orders or even advice from a black woman, only an abstract concept without any real influence or authority. Aunt Jemima was both an authority figure and not; she did not give orders, but her mere presence suggested an authenticity to the product.

Though Aunt Jemima occupied a hallowed spot in *Ladies’ Home Journal* every issue, the character, as well as the company as a whole and its products, was noticeably absent from *Ebony*. In 1960, Aunt Jemima was in every issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Not a single issue of *Ebony*, also a monthly magazine, featured Aunt Jemima. Instead, Ebony advertised a pancake syrup manufactured and produced by the Alabama-Georgia Syrup Company, founded in 1906 by a

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black couple who hailed from Alabama and Georgia.\textsuperscript{227} The advertisement was headlined by a quote from African American singer and celebrity Nat King Cole, who proclaimed that he “was raised on Alaga syrup.”\textsuperscript{228} Aunt Jemima was a national company; \textit{Ebony} deliberately chose to omit advertisements for the racist caricature, and instead chose to feature a black-owned rival product. However, the Alaga syrup ad was directly preceded by an ad for Betty Crocker chocolate cinnamon buns, with Betty Crocker’s blonde, red-lipped portrait beaming right above Nat King Cole’s black-and-white image proclaiming his love of the black-owned syrup.\textsuperscript{229} The presence of Betty Crocker indicates that the advertising department of \textit{Ebony} did not have qualms with presenting white figureheads in their magazines. However, perhaps Betty Crocker, as the spokesperson for General Mills, a national company that manufactured everything from flour to soup, did not have a sufficient counterpart in the black food industry, the way Aunt Jemima did with Alaga. There was no black-led company in the postwar period that commanded the range of products or the audience that General Mills did, and thus \textit{Ebony} may not have sought to replace it. \textit{Ebony} was founded, as the first popular magazine for black Americans, to remove the image of frumpy laundresses, nannies, and maids from the contemporary African American societal image.\textsuperscript{230} As a result, the white Betty Crocker authority figure may have been deemed societally important enough to include in \textit{Ebony}, as a respectable,

\textsuperscript{228} “Alaga Syrup,” \textit{Ebony}, May 1960, 134.
\textsuperscript{229} “Betty Crocker,” \textit{Ebony}, May 1960, 133
competent, and poised figure to aspire to be. Companies, through popular media, distributed nationwide this rhetoric that the ideal woman was a white, attractive, competent homemaker, and *Ebony* seemed to acknowledge this characterization of American society by including the rhetoric in their magazine, both to further civil rights as well as generate revenue by promoting wealthy white companies.

![Riceland Rice Advertisement](image)

Figure 3.6. Riceland Rice.
*Source: Ebony*, 53 (February 1960).

One negative racial stereotype that permeated both white- and black-targeted magazines via advertisement was actually a white company, Riceland Rice, that chose to use a racist depiction of Asians to uplift their product. Rice is decisively an Asian crop, with 90 percent of the world’s yields grown in monsoon Asia.\(^{231}\) While rice is also grown in the American south, historically Asians have been looked towards as both the originators and experts on rice, with rice being a staple in the diets of nearly every population on the continent of Asia. As a result of this perceived authority, American company Riceland Foods, founded and

headquartered in Arkansas, promoted its rice utilizing this Asian stereotype. Both 
*Ladies’ Home Journal* (March 1961 issue) and *Ebony* (April 1960 issue) featured 
the same Riceland Rice advertisement, which proclaimed that its product was 
“velly nice,” next to a cartoon drawing of a Chinese rice farmer holding a bowl of 
rice, stuck with chopsticks.\(^{232}\) The misspelling of their token phrase mimicked the 
characteristic accent of Asian immigrants, who were often unfamiliar with the “r” 
sound so common in the English language. The Chinese man depicted in the 
corner was dressed in “traditional” Chinese clothing, and has the stereotypical 
“Asian” squinty eyes. In addition, the chopsticks were stuck upright in his bowl 
of rice, an action deemed rude in Asian cultures. Evidently, no research was done 
in creating this character, and while black Americans chose to avoid and even 
deliberately replace similar caricatures of themselves like the Aunt Jemima 
character, this Asian stereotype was displayed prominently.

In addition, the description of the rice product itself made no mention of 
any Asian influence; instead, its texture and easiness to prepare were praised, very 
similarly to the cookbook language that had so praised convenience in cooking. 
Like Aunt Jemima, the Asian farmer and his grammatically incorrect praise were 
mere abstract concepts meant to lend authenticity to the product without actually 
giving people of color any real authority. As American women were instructed to 
learn from and aspire to become accomplished white homemakers like Irma 
Rombauer and others, they needed not feel as if they were deviating from this 
well-traveled, dependable path by deferring to other figures of authority. *Ebony*’s

decision to run the ad reveals the tensions between not just white people and people of color, but between different peoples of color.

However, the presence of this ad, as well as its (albeit overtly racist) representation of Asians suggests an acknowledgement by American media that diets, and demographics by extension, were changing in significant ways during this period. Both white people and people of color were consuming different types of food from all over the world, but at the same time absorbing popular media’s negative depictions of the origins of said food (besides those from desirable countries, which were primarily European). The idolization of white homemakers really comes through with these negative depictions; Asian American homemakers, for example, are completely neglected in this advertisement for rice, despite probably being the leading authorities on rice. Unlike black women, who at least were addressed in the media by characters like Aunt Jemima, Asian American housewives and Asian women in general were veritably excluded from popular culture in America. American society indirectly acknowledged the increasing diversification of its population, but chose to uplift only those groups of women conducive to its ideal of the white American housewife, while excluding others, especially Asian Americans, even as Asian immigration increased (because they became eligible for naturalization post-World War II) and cultural centers proliferated.233

Conclusion

Cooking as a domestic chore has fallen under the domain of women since humans became sedentary beings, staying in houses and engaging in agriculture. Technological innovation has ushered in multiple eras of change for the chore, but one aspect has never changed: society expected women to shoulder the burden of physically sustaining her family with food. Cookbooks, even when written by women for women, urged women to consider cooking an adventure for the betterment of her family, as well as to use technologies like freezing to lessen the workload and make meals more creative and fun. Advertising, on the other hand, emphasized the commercial nature of the chore; to sell to women, marketers chose to admit to the drudgery of cooking, and advertised products meant to give women better lives as well as allow them to exhibit their creativity and intelligence. As evidenced by these different approaches, the laborious life of the homemaker was acknowledged quite prominently in society, but popular media instead chose to address these problems by encouraging women to continue to work hard, seeing them first and foremost as consumers, rather than as women or people. Housewives also took advantage of this capitalist mindset and chose to profit on their skills as homemakers by commercializing their skillset, with fellow women as their consumers. Housewifery in postwar America is deeply entrenched in the commercial sphere, which is where women were able to gain influence and capitalize on their perceived competence and skill as the ideal woman to gain economic and societal advantage.

Racial tensions in the labor of cooking, as well as food itself, present themselves clearly in food advertisements in women’s magazines, and
demonstrate tensions the ideal of the white, wealthy homemaker ideal faced in an increasingly diversifying society. Advertisements targeted toward white housewives demonstrate an appreciation for European qualities of a certain social and economic class, reflecting American society’s postwar view of European countries, like England and France, as those of enviable fashion and luxury; wealthy whiteness is evidently coveted. Meanwhile, food advertising in black-targeted *Ebony* indicates that similarly to appliances and cosmetics, food is also a means of social uplift, and advertisements are placed purposefully in *Ebony* to promote the magazine’s agenda of encouraging black prosperity via demonstrating white ideals as an example of prosperity. However, black advertisers also chose, when the opportunity arose, to promote black businesses over white ones, choosing first and foremost to promote blackness and black success over encouraging aspirations to emulate whiteness. Other races, notably Asian Americans, did not have the same media presence, and their absence, along with the negative depictions when they did occasionally appear in commercial America, reflect the idea that American society acknowledged Asian women as consumers rather than women. In the end, housewifery was firmly a concept dependent on whiteness and particular social and economic class, as evident by both the women who could, bolstered by their appliances and technologies, capitalize on their housework, as well as the differing, racialized perceptions of the women who were depicted and the women who were ignored by consumer culture.
Conclusion: Why the Housewife?

I first encountered the historical concept of the housewife while doing research for my final paper in Introduction to German History, one of the first history classes I took in college. I spent about a week mulling over ideas for my final independent research paper. I knew that I wanted to write about women, because I realized very quickly in college that women have historically been vastly underrepresented and marginalized in academic scholarship. I also knew that I wanted to write about the Jewish people, because their hardships, especially in twentieth-century Germany and Europe, deserve as much spotlight as possible. As I read more about the daily lives of Jews in pre-World War II Germany and the fear and turmoil they endured, I realized that in many of these anecdotes and recountings, one figure stood out as the backbone of the family and household: the Jewish housewife, the woman who held everyone together and protected everyone both emotionally and physically. Struck by both the strength of these women, who devoted essentially their entire lives to keeping their families and households safe, as well as the dearth of academic material on them, I chose to study housewives, a group of women not commonly discussed in historical scholarship. This interest has continued throughout my college career, culminating in this thesis regarding women’s work and housewifery during the postwar period. Through my thesis I sought to demonstrate that the housewife’s role, in American history in particular, did not center only around domestic life. She is the backbone of not just her household, but also of the national economy.
and society–my study shows that she was at the center of American culture as a whole.

I conceived the idea of a research project centered specifically around the American housewife, after reading American feminist writer Betty Friedan’s landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which described the disenchantment women felt regarding the concept of the housewife American society pushed during the postwar period. Written in 1963, Friedan addressed the “separate spheres” theory that began to dominate American society after the conclusion of World War II, which had brought soldiers back home craving peace and stability in the form of a house, wife, and children. Friedan interviewed suburban housewives and discovered that all of the women experienced what she famously coined “the problem with no name:” a debilitating sense of boredom and lack of purpose that prevented these women from reaching their full potential in becoming productive members of society. According to not just personal interviews but also scientific research on psychology, advertising, and media, American popular culture convinced women to sacrifice personal goals, such as careers, for the sake of familial stability and men’s satisfaction. To repair this loss of self, Friedan argued, women needed to seek their own self-fulfillment by not just being housewives isolated within the “comfortable concentration camp” of their homes, families, and suburban neighborhoods, but by establishing their own careers, and therefore their own meaningful and important contributions to
According to Friedan, economic and professional ambition was the ideal avenue for which housewives could escape their lives of drudgery as housewives isolated in the overly-insular communities of suburbs, reflecting the lived, less than ideal experiences of many of these women who had achieved the American dream of femininity as discussed in this thesis, yet found themselves still unsatisfied, and even despondent at their status in life.

Immediately after its publication, *The Feminine Mystique* triggered the beginning of second-wave feminism, as Friedan’s ideas resonated with housewives nationwide and these educated, upper-class women rallied to fight for gender equality and the right for the woman to make her way in society outside her home and family. However, despite the fact that Friedan, in her book, addresses women as a collective, in reality the book addresses at most only a small fraction of American women. *The Feminine Mystique*’s target demographic is middle- and upper-class, white housewives, the fraction of American women who possess the privilege of not needing to work for money. There is a conspicuous absence of discussion regarding race or class in Friedan’s book, despite her addressing women collectively, as one homogenous group of people who all experienced “the problem with no name” without variation. However, her ideas are aimed at housewives without variation; the women, often women of color, who needed to both physically and emotionally care for their households and families as well as work to financially support their households are not

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mentioned at all. She states that a woman achieved her full potential in society by pursuing a career, which was something many women, and especially non-white women, could not afford to pursue because they had jobs out of necessity, not passion or ambition. Friedan, as an educated upper-class white woman herself, did not move beyond her own lived experiences, and her perspective ignored the fact that the plight of college-educated white housewives is not a comprehensive, adequate reference point in qualifying the impact such a contrived, narrow view of ideal American femininity had on women.

As a result of this narrow view, both women of lower socioeconomic status and women of color, often overlapping demographics, found themselves ignored in American societal rhetoric regarding womanhood; they comprised a significant portion of the women who made up the backbone of American society, and yet their labor went unseen. Even in a feminist work like *The Feminine Mystique*, only white, wealthy women are addressed to combat the problematic view of the ideal woman during the postwar period. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, postwar popular media promoted traditional concepts of femininity centered around the image of the white suburban housewife, a slim demographic that represents only a small portion of the women of America, a country known for its racial diversity and high numbers of immigrants due to its perceived image as a country of freedom and upward mobility. To American popular media, there was only one ideal woman: the white, wealthy housewife, and women who did not fit this narrow image received extremely limited acknowledgement, often merely in the form of negative racial stereotyping. For
example, mainstream popular culture often portrayed black women as servile mammies and promiscuous sexual deviants. Betty Friedan followed suit in this lack of acknowledgement for people of color, by omitting any mention of race completely in her book.

Through my thesis, I have sought not only to spotlight how American women responded to rigid definitions of womanhood as housewifery, but also to highlight the presence of historically marginalized women in popular culture in postwar America, during an era in which the white, wealthy woman was exalted as the pinnacle of femininity. By examining different aspects of media, like magazines, commercials, and cookbooks, I have demonstrated that white women took advantage of their perceived skill and competence as housewives to gain both social and economic capital. White, wealthy housewives were seen as competent, and used this perceived authority to participate in lucrative commercial ventures, like authoring cookbooks. African American women were not granted the same symbolic value as white women in American media, and as a result were rarely, if ever, represented, and especially not as housewife figures in mainstream media like *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Black-run media like *Ebony*, meanwhile, took the opposite approach to suit their own political agenda, simultaneously acknowledging and rejecting promoting the image of the white housewife. Black women chose to follow white American standards of beauty and femininity derived from this mainstream housewife imagery, but used these standards for their own means in order to look respectable and professional, and therefore uplift the black community and prove that they, too, were modern and
part of a prosperous American economy and society. However, these are only two demographics of women, those most prominent in the narrow scope of American media.

To this end, I propose future studies focusing specifically on underrepresented groups of women, the women of color and lower classes who left behind few primary sources for the historical record, and thus receive less attention from scholars. The black community created avenues to express themselves that often reached a national scale, like periodicals like *Ebony*, but other ethnic groups, especially Asian and Latina diasporic groups, did not have a strong media presence, or even a strong presence in mainstream American culture in general. When such women did appear in the media, such as Brazilian Hollywood singer and actress Carmen Miranda, or Chinese-American film star Anna May Wong, they were not represented as housewives at all. Carmen Miranda, nicknamed “The Brazilian Bombshell,” became famous in Hollywood for both her vivacious personality and her vibrant Technicolor films, which often featured her singing and dancing in outrageous fruit-basket headdresses.\(^{235}\) At the pinnacle of her success in the early 1940s, Miranda was an icon of the excessive female sexuality and stylized femininity characteristic of Hollywood wartime cinema.\(^{236}\) Anna May Wong, the most famous Asian American actress in Hollywood, received similar treatment, and played “oriental” roles that had her dressed to be as Chinese-appearing as possible—traditional Chinese gowns,

\(^{236}\) Ibid.
hairstyles, makeup. She embraced her heritage, and sought to represent modern, articulate Chinese womanhood during her career throughout the first half of the twentieth centuries. Miranda and Wong are both women of color who experienced fame and success as public figures in America, yet they are not portrayed as housewives, or, in other words, women who suit the ideal of perfect American womanhood. Both women were considered beautiful and glamorous, but not women to aspire to; they are fantastical figures of stereotyped images of their races, meant purely for viewing entertainment. They are present in popular media but excluded from the key identifier of womanhood during this period, representing the idea that while demographics were changing in the country, the ideal of the American housewife remained rigid and white. Historical studies examining the lives of such marginalized groups of women as housewives exist but are not many in number. The scholarship that does exist describes the lives of such women as ones of constant, unending labor; these women were often too busy rearing their families and also contributing to the family income to consume popular culture like magazines or television, and some were even illiterate, as women who grew up in poverty without education, or as immigrants who did not speak English. These women lacked privilege, and therefore a voice in the historical record.

Throughout my research on women’s reactions to the postwar American ideal of womanhood via housewifery, I found few primary sources on American

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238 Ibid.
Asian and Latina housewives, because these women rarely left behind writing, and even fewer academic scholarship on said groups. I think that conducting oral history studies on these women, via interviewing family members and acquaintances of said women, would serve to expand the literature on American women’s work and housewifery, especially during the postwar period, when white, wealthy housewives were so exalted and placed on a pedestal for women to aspire to. Did these women aspire to become the model woman American consumer media pushed onto them? Did they empathize with the plight that Betty Friedan claimed all women lived through? These women lost their voices, but historical scholarship, especially the rapidly expanding fields of feminist and gender history, can help these women establish their place in history as the backbone of American life, the mothers and wives who kept their families going and facilitated the prosperity of the nation.
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