

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: ALL-AMERICAN BEAUTY: THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN, EUROPEAN AMERICAN, AND JAPANESE AMERICAN WOMEN WITH BEAUTY CULTURE IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY UNITED STATES

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This study documents how shifting attitudes regarding female display were negotiated between the start of World War II in 1941 and the close of the 1950s. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, multiple players including women, men, employers, and the U. S. government, defined beauty, charm, poise, and grace as essential characteristics of womanhood, creating what I term an all-American beauty ideal. By examining this ideal as it functioned in the lives of African American, European American, and Japanese American women, I argue that each of these groups inscribed its own notions of gender, power, race, and nationalism into representations of the female form. Analyzing this ideal as it operated within and outside of American borders, my study demonstrates the many ways in which beauty culture functioned as a powerful mechanism to expand or diminish the cultural,

economic, and political agency of various social groups in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

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EUROPEAN AMERICAN, AND JAPANESE AMERICAN WOMEN WITH
BEAUTY CULTURE IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY UNITED STATES

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Dedication

For Mom and Dad

Acknowledgements

Numerous friends, colleagues, and scholars gave me careful and consistent advice as I worked on this project. And I am forever indebted to the many hands that guided my dissertation to completion. At this time I wish to acknowledge the tremendous encouragement and support that my advisor, Alfred Moss, has given to me since I began my graduate studies. Without his wise counsel and hard work this project would not have been possible.

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An Introduction to Beauty Culture

Beauty culture, as understood by American women of the mid-twentieth century, was a set of feminine arts that any woman could learn in order to create a radiant personal appearance. A knowledge of beauty culture included expertise in the selection of clothing styles that flattered one's figure, proper application of makeup, understanding color combinations that best complemented one's skin and eyes, artistic arrangement of one's hair, and many other skills that allowed a woman to present herself to her best advantage. Etiquette, diction, carriage, and the cultivation of charming disposition were also important parts of the feminine ideal that young women of the mid-twentieth century were encouraged to master.

Carefully balancing a book on her head, the young Florence Edmonds modeled such expertise as she walked before fellow members of her “charm class” in 1947. Edmonds took her charm class as a student at the Palmer Memorial Institute (PMI), an elite South Carolina boarding school for girls from the wealthiest black families across the nation. Dubbing PMI the Exeter of “Negro” America, *Ebony* magazine reported that that the institution received over 600 applications for its 35 vacant spots the year Edmonds attended her charm class.¹ In addition to giving her students a rigorous high school education, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, PMI's founder and president, ran her female students through a strenuous finishing school as well. The young ladies who attended PMI learned etiquette, deportment, home economics, fashion, manners, and morals. The physical appearance and feminine charm of her

¹ *Ebony*, (October 1947): 22.

students was of great important to the president, who had authored her own textbook on the subject *The Correct Thing to Do, to Say, to Wear*.²

Charm, grace, and beauty courses were, however, not only the privilege of America's upper classes during in mid-twentieth century America. Beauty culture was an important activity for the masses of middle-class American women. Like her more affluent counterpart at PMI, Mae Sawa, a middle class Chicago teen, performed her own balancing act before fellow members of the Jolenés Club in 1948. Meaning "born beautiful" in French, the Jolenés' Club discussed poise, grooming, dating, and other topics of interest to young American females. Noting that eight other such groups existed in the Windy City, *Nisei Vue: The Japanese-American Magazine* nicknamed Mae Sawa and her fellow Jolenés' the "Nisei Bobby Soxers" to invoke the All-American appeal which the young women exemplified.³

In addition to schools and civic associations, workplaces also served as popular venues for the display of charm, fashion and beauty during the middle decades of the twentieth century. In 1943 white female workers laboring at the Joseph E. Seagram and Sons Distillery in Louisville, Kentucky participated in a two-week Charm and Beauty School of their own. Like the courses that Edmonds and Sawa took, this industrial version of the beauty school taught female war workers the proper way to walk, sit, exercise, apply make-up, and wear the popular fashions. While many of the European American women who worked at the Seagram's plant were recruited specifically for its wartime labor needs, beauty culture remained an important part of working-class women's daily culture both during and after World

² Charlotte Hawkins Brown, *The Correct Thing to Do, to Say, to Wear*. Self published: South Carolina, 1944.

³ "Nisei Bobby Soxers" *Nisei Vue: The Japanese-American Magazine* (January, 1948).

War II.⁴ Indeed wherever women could be found in any number, talk of the latest clothing styles, newest hairdos, trendiest fashion accessories, and other things aimed at increasing their feminine appeal was sure to be a topic of intense interest.

*

The large role that beauty culture has historically played in the daily lives of ordinary American women has led many scholars and cultural critics to comment on its effects. Many of these interpretations have focused on how acts of female beautification have negatively effected the lives of women. Feminist critics have taken the lead in such debates, arguing that women who fell victim to beauty advice and commercial standards of attractiveness were stripped of their intelligence and power while at the same time made into objects of male desire. In her popular 1991 work, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, writer Naomi Wolf argues that the fashion and beauty industries have unscrupulously aided in the production of a beauty culture that plays off of women's bodily insecurities.⁵ By selling consumer products targeted to "fix" women's "imperfections" Wolfe argues that such companies cash in by exploiting women's anxieties and lack of self-confidence.

As a corrective to works that see only self-hate in women's beauty practices, a second body of scholarship on beauty culture has emerged. A preeminent figure in this school is historian Kathy Peiss, whose important analysis of the beauty industry

⁴ *Proof*, (1942): 8.

⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: W. Morrow, 1991).

Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture was published in 1998.⁶

Peiss's work analyzes both the corporate and consumer cultures that beauty products have created and points out the many positive effects these tools have also had on women's lives. Peiss documents how female entrepreneurs have constructed female-dominated worlds of commerce based around beauty culture. Because female entrepreneurs sold their products to women and employed countless numbers of women in their enterprises, Peiss contends that these entrepreneurs created opportunities for women not available in the male-dominated larger business culture. While noting that mass market advertisers throughout the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s stressed that makeup could help a woman "catch a man," Peiss argues that consumers did not necessarily conceptualize makeup in this way. Just as often, she asserts, beauty culture has facilitated the formation of female friendships and has been influential in the formation of female business and social circles.

While numerous reflections on beauty culture have been written, the vast majority of works fall easily within either of these two camps. Showing the ways in which beauty culture has hurt women, as in Elizabeth Haiken's powerful exposé of the Plastic Surgery Industry, *Venus Envy*, is an important focus of the literature.⁷ So is demonstrating the ways in which beauty culture has helped women, as in Alelia Bundle's biography of African American hair care millionaire "Madame. C.J. Walker," *On Her Own Ground*.⁸ However, the overriding problem with the larger historiography of beauty culture is that it rarely moves away from the question "Is

⁶ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

⁷ Elizabeth Haiken, *Venus Envy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁸ Alelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madame C. J. Walker* (New York: Scribner, 2002).

beauty culture bad or good for women?” My work answers new sets of questions. How has beauty culture functioned within society and how have its ideals circulated through and been negotiated among the many different groups of American women who have used it? These were the main question that led me to my study of beauty culture in the context of the mid-twentieth century, an era when many Americans were seeing new roles open up for them as a result of World War II, the Black Freedom movement, and the early years of the women’s movement.

* * *

Theorist Susan Bordo has argued bodies are a sort of “cultural plastic” from which an individual can mold identity and set its basic form.⁹ As opposed to seeing the body as a fixed or unchanging corpus, Bordo pushes us to see how the body is consciously shaped and changed by both the individual and the society in which it is situated. Bordo’s claim rests on the premise that the body is, in part, a social construction. The human form is thus the physical embodiment of the values, mores, and beliefs of the person and peoples who mold its exterior. Seen in this light, acts of beautification should not be regarded simply as “adult play,” and the tools of self-beautification should not be dismissed as meaningless cultural artifacts. Rather, the historian can understand beauty culture as an outlet for the expression of cultural values, ideals and motivations. Indeed an analysis of the body and beauty culture reveals much about how Americans viewed both themselves and others during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

⁹ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

Instead of examining just one expression of the American body, the narrative I sketch in the following four chapters examines beauty culture in the lives of African American, European American, and Japanese American women. In doing this, my study documents how shifting attitudes regarding female display were negotiated among women, men, employers, and the U. S. government between the start of World War II in 1941 and the close of the 1950s.

Too often the history of beauty culture has been segmented. For example, while the literature contains a rich and vibrant debate on the politics of black women's hair and hair care, the lessons learned from such texts have remained primarily a part of scholarship that focuses on the peoples of the African Diaspora. Indeed other cohorts of ethnic works exist, such as works that detail twentieth-century beauty entrepreneurs from European immigrant backgrounds or pieces on Latina identity in the West. In most cases such works do not speak to each other, and monographs such as Julie Willett's *Permanent Waves: The Making of The American Beauty Shop*, which integrate the experiences of African American and European American women are rare.¹⁰ Works that substantially discuss beauty culture in terms greater than black and white are virtually nonexistent. As a corrective to such trends in the literature, my study examines female beauty culture as it functioned within and among three groups of American women. While examinations of individual ethnic groups are often instructive, they cannot adequately illuminate the ways in which concepts of beauty circulated through various cultural groups to inform a larger American culture of beauty. My multicultural approach is a means to understanding

¹⁰ Julie A. Willett, *Permanent Waves: The Making of The American Beauty Shop* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

how multiple players conceptualized and used beauty culture to act and interact within the larger American society of which each group was a part. By doing this many new insights about beauty culture and the larger mass politics of consumer culture and social ideals in the mid-twentieth century come to light. This study is a four-part exploration of those insights.

I chose to study African American and European American groups because of the long historical contribution each has made to the formation and shaping of U. S. culture. Japanese Americans are also an important part of the American cultural landscape and I chose to examine Japanese Americans particularly because of the salient historical role their group played as the nation went to war with Japan in 1941. In both domestic and transnational contexts, my dissertation argues that each of these groups inscribed their own notions of gender, power, race, and nationalism into idealized representations of the female form.

In order to keep my terminology consistent I have employed the terms African American, European American, and Japanese American throughout my text to identify persons living in the United States who were both immigrants or long-standing U. S. citizens. Within my text these terms are synonymous with “black,” “white,” and “yellow.” However, I use such terms with less frequency and more caution because of their pejorative connotations, past and present. I also use the term ordinary women, not as a demeaning term that suggests they were less than extraordinary but as a phrases which encapsulate my effort to understand the experience of American womanhood from the experience of daily life. I have sought to incorporate the experience of women of various cultures, regions, and ages, and

occupations into my story of American womanhood. Although readers may point to specific groups not fully covered in my analysis, my effort has been to be inclusive of the many different groups of women that lived in the United States.

*

The first chapter of my dissertation explains the meanings and significance of female beauty culture in the industrial workplace during World War II. Using employee publications and several corporate archives, I document the popularity of the pin-up contests, beauty pageants, and beautification workshops that employers hosted for their newly hired female workforce during the war. I argue that the broadcasting of ordinary women's sexualized bodies in the industrial workplace maintained gender difference and facilitated gender hierarchy at a time when women had the opportunity to gain economic power and positions of leadership in the U. S. workplace. In addition the mass proliferation of ordinary women's sexualized bodies in the cultural marketplace was a major shift in what Americans viewed as normalized aesthetic display during the century's second half. Chapter one situates the emergence of these phenomena within the patriotic push for young women to literally bare their bodies for the benefit of the war effort.

Chapter two details the interplay of aesthetic ideals among three ethnic groups in my study. I argue European Americans employed beautified white female bodies as symbols of national power and global preeminence by contrasting such ideals to depictions of an "ugly," "wretched," and racially "inferior" Japanese enemy. Using internment camp newspapers, I then document how Japanese Americans attempted to deflect similar characterizations of their bodies. I argue that Japanese Americans

participated in Miss America-style beauty contests in efforts to differentiate their bodies from those of the Japanese enemy and to link their bodies to an idealized white female form. I then link the fact that some Japanese Americans also performed blackface minstrel skits at internment camp events to such aesthetic politics. By denigrating the African American body in a manner familiar to many whites, I contend that Japanese Americans attempted to further establish their American cultural sensibilities by contrasting their bodies against the bodies of African America's historic racial "other."

The first two chapters of my dissertation thus look at beauty culture and the body in the context of a global war, a situation that encouraged many Americans to interpret their bodies as superior in beauty to those of other peoples around the world and use aesthetic ideals as a way of measuring and comparing Americans to other peoples of the globe. The second half of my dissertation expands upon these trends in the postwar years. Chapters three and four demonstrate the powerful role that conceptions of beauty played in Americans' attempts to create new allies for themselves in the postwar world.

The third chapter of my work examines American ideals of beauty and womanhood as they circulated in postwar Japan. I argue that in the years immediately following World War II, American occupation officials and their Japanese collaborators used beauty culture to promote democratic ideals of womanhood in postwar Japan. Such measures were enacted in order to mold America's former female enemies into reflections of their U.S. counterparts. Through the records of several occupation units I demonstrate how the occupation used beauty culture to

organize rural and urban women in democratic associations throughout Japan monitored the expressions of womanhood in Japanese fashion magazines.

The final chapter examines the business activities of African American entrepreneurs in the fashion, hair care, charm, and modeling fields during the late 1940s and 1950s. I argue that black beauty culturists were an integral part the Civil Rights Movement because their businesses attempted to gain greater cultural respect and economic opportunity for African American women. After initially encountering resistance in the United States, I show how black beauty entrepreneurs found markets for their services and products in Europe, African and the Caribbean. These entrepreneurs then built upon the connections, reputation, and relationships that they formed abroad to expand the influence of their businesses in the larger U. S. domestic white-dominated beauty culture market. In doing this, I argue that black beauty culturists became entrepreneurs of a new image of black womanhood in the United States and, by extension, marketers of a new image of women of color around the globe.

As the four chapters outlined above make clear, multiple players defined beauty, charm, poise, and grace as an essential characteristic of womanhood in the mid-twentieth century. The beauty industry as a whole, in conjunction with governmental initiatives, and the evolution of the average woman to beauty consciousness all played critical roles in the production of an All-American beauty ideal during World War II and the decade and a half that followed. By looking at how this ideal functioned within and outside of American borders my study demonstrates

the many ways in which beauty culture has been a powerful mechanism used to expand or diminish various social groups cultural, economic, and political agency. The All-American beauty ideal was a contested terrain that embodied ideals of gender, race, power, and nationalism in the mid-twentieth century. While pictures of girls balancing books on their heads or women posing for pin-up pictures may seem to be whimsical and superficial vestiges of the past, my work demonstrates that beauty culture is a far from meaningless cultural artifact.

Beauty Culture Before The Mid-Twentieth Century

The pinup contests, fashion reviews, “pulchritude parades” and other expressions of femininity discussed in this work were a uniquely mid-twentieth century expression of popular womanhood. Not only had popular aesthetic ideals greatly changed since the era when pin-ups’ grandmothers and great-grandmothers came of age, but many of the meanings behind bodily display had changed as well. In addition to simply showing more skin than their nineteenth-century counterparts, the ways in which ordinary people conceptualized their bodies had changed as well.

By understanding of the aesthetic mores and beauty rituals practiced by previous groups of American women, we are better able to situate the mid-twentieth century’s “quest to beautify” within longer-standing American traditions and beliefs. During the nineteenth century many Americans believed that a person’s inner self and core moral character would manifest itself directly upon their physical form. The use of cosmetics, therefore, was taboo because it was seen as a ruse employed to cover-up a lack of honesty, piety, frugality, or sexual purity. Indeed, as Kathy Peiss has noted, before the twentieth century cosmetics were used most frequently by sex workers and

actors –persons who, it was believed, had an interest in masking their true selves in order to create an altered public persona.¹¹ Clothing fashions were an extremely important part of the feminine aesthetic throughout the 19th century. Nonetheless, overly extravagant garments were frowned upon by moral reformers of the Victorian era because they viewed outward frivolity as a sign that a woman’s attention had been turned away from the perfection of inner moral pursuits.¹²

Many Americans of the nineteenth century, especially the white Protestant mainstream, believed that diligence and perseverance were traits that would bring the individual success and prosperity. After a life of hard work, regardless of the situation one was born into, good things, it was believed, would come to persons who possessed a strong moral character. Popular literature, such as the novels created by nineteenth-century writer Horatio Alger, modeled this ideal for the American public. The morals contained in Alger’s works, for example his popular 1867 novel *Ragged Dick*, valorized the lowly and downtrodden individual who was lifted out of poverty by the virtue of hard work. Over the course of one’s life, Alger’s protagonists suggested, it was possible to go from rags to riches as a result of individual honor, courage, and the will to persist in the face of adversity. In this way Horatio Alger’s leading characters best exemplified the “cult of character” around which much of nineteenth century America’s value revolved. Character, it was believed, “made the man” and developing inner virtue was a goal men and women of the era strived to attain.

¹¹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

¹² Mary W. Blanchard, “Boundaries of the Victorian Body: Aesthetic Fashion in Gilded Age America,” *American Historical Review* 100 (Feb 1995), 29.

As the monographs of historians Nan Enstad, Karen Halttunen, Gary Cross and Warren Susmann have demonstrated, the growth of national markets and emergence of mass consumer cultures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century facilitated fundamental shifts in how Americans expressed their ideals and values. The consumerist ethos that emerged during this influential period in American history changed the most basic ways in which Americans related to, understood, and employed their outward physical appearance. Indeed it was during this era that the ordinary American began using consumer goods as avenues for the expression of the inner self. The availability of ready to-wear clothing for example, allowed individuals to easily “try on” various articles of dress and the public personas associated with such garments. Unlike the expensive and tailor-made corsets, petticoats, and other garments of the Victorian wardrobe, inexpensive and generic imitations of bourgeoisie haute culture could now be purchased on a factory worker’s salary.

For example, historian Nan Enstad has vibrantly documented this occurrence as it functioned in the lives of female factory employees laboring in turn-of the century New York City. Instead of wearing practical work boots, female factory workers insisted upon wearing the cheap but fashionable “French heels” to their place of work. Purchasing the flimsy and quickly worn shoes from the carts of street vendors, women workers cherished their fashionable high-heeled shoes because they visually eschewed the status normally given to a factory worker. Not simply on the street but in the factory as well, female workers used their association to consumer goods to project an image for themselves. Enstad’s history thus recounts how female laborers battled with their employers for a suitable cloakroom where, the elaborately

decorated hats women workers wore to the factory would not become soiled from the grime of the shop floor. Indeed from head to toe female factory workers used fashion to refashion both their bodies and their public persona. Instead of internalizing an identity based on their position as bottom-of-the-pile blue-collar workers, Enstad argues, female factory workers used cheap fashions to define a divergent public character for themselves. More than lowly “shop girls,” these workers cultivated a highly stylized feminine look as a means to demanding a modicum of public respectability.¹³

Historian Julie Willet has similarly shown how in the 1920s the daughters of European American immigrants patronized beauty shops to have their hair “bobbed” in an act of defiant identity politics. Unlike the long hairstyles traditionally valued in white ethnic cultures, the bobbed haircut distinguished the young women as distinctly American. In addition the cut necessitated frequent trips to the beauty shop, a commercial site that replaced familial hair care rituals and allowed permitted the young women to socialize with other young women like themselves. In this way beauty culture, its aesthetics, performance, and production all functioned in ways that facilitated identity formation in the twentieth century.

According to apparel historian Jill Fields, ready-to-wear clothing heightened the effect fashion held in ordinary people’s lives. Because the individual could now easily combine various garments at will, women in particular were motivated to consult proclaimed fashion experts and magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* for

¹³ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the turn of the Twentieth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) , 1.

proper wardrobe advice.¹⁴ Thus by the twentieth century “conspicuous consumption” was no longer a luxury experienced only by “the leisure class” that Thorestein Veblen chronicled in the nineteenth century. Rather the nation’s mass production capabilities escorted its people into a century in which consumption would become a defining characteristic of the masses.

More than being simply a site of personal definition, Karen Halttunen has explained that fashions came to be conceptualized by Americans as “a form of moral self-improvement.” As taboos against cosmetics use faded, they were sold by a growing number of retailers who marketed such preparations as an inexpensive means for the ordinary women to make her looks more exceptional. Advertisers dually stressed the transformative effects that beauty products and preparations held. As early as the turn-of-the-twentieth century they argued that the ideal woman’s healthy, radiant, and youthful appearance came as a direct result of her consistent use of these products. While such print advertisements sold both women and men on the idea that good looks were a premium social capital, scholar Richard Ohmann notes that only female bodies were eroticized in such advertisements.

As the century continued print advertisements in magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* were augmented and eventually succeeded in popularity by media forms that literally lifted consumerist messages off the written page. The early-twentieth-century film industry, soon to be joined by the television industry that emerged in the late 1940s, modeled and shaped fashions for the American public. During this era many young American women learned how to stylize their bodies by

¹⁴ Jill Fields, *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

mimicking the movie stars and television actresses that they watched on the silver screen and in their living rooms. Much like print advertisers, Hollywood images promoted the use of consumer beauty goods for the attainment of happiness, health, and even husbands.

Beauty culture was marketed as an important part of life for members of the white American mainstream as well as for members of ethnic and minority groups as well. A 1945 article found on the Ladies' Page of the *Baltimore Afro-American* recommended that every woman honestly assess her beauty deficiencies by dutifully and meticulously "checking herself over about once a month." It was only by "spending a quiet and critical few minutes before a full length mirror" and following up on such self-inspections with "corrective treatments for the complexion and the figure" that the periodical promised a woman could "find her appearance improved 100 percent."¹⁵ A 1950 article in *Scene: The Pictorial Magazine* bluntly assessed Japanese American women's beauty needs by stating, "so you are a Nisei girl. And nature didn't endow you with the tall, slim build so stylish these days. Well, be of good cheer, girls. The new trend in coiffures – shorter and shorter for '50 – is just the thing for you." While Japanese American girls were "too chunky" and had "too much hair," the publication argued that it would take only the newest of haircuts to fix Japanese American women's beauty impediments.¹⁶

By the middle decades of the century the targets of this consumerist push became younger and younger, with many of the newest product lines being devoted to adolescents and girls. In addition to traditional women's magazines such as *Good*

¹⁵ "Charm School" *Baltimore African American* (May 5, 1945): 13.

¹⁶ *Scene: The Pictorial Magazine* vol. 1, no. 12 (April 1950)

Housekeeping, periodicals such as *Seventeen* and *Charm* directed much younger audiences of women and girls towards the consumption of beauty products to improve their physical aesthetics. In May 1958 the Maidenform Brassiere Company found the results of a Teen Age Market Study conducted by *Seventeen Magazine* “somewhat disappointing.” Although the manufacturer was pleased by what it learned about the padded bra and girdle preferences of fourteen to seventeen-year-old girls, it found the results unsatisfactory because, as its report noted, “we hoped to get many more younger girls than we did.”¹⁷ The beauty culture that had emerged in the early twentieth century flourished in the century’s middle decades and left no subgroup of women untouched by its mandates.

¹⁷ Teen Age Market Study, 28 May 1958, MAID, Box 23, Folder: Preference Test Write-up: Teen Age Market Study, 28 May 1958.

Chapter 1: Why Working Women Became Pin-up Girls: The
Construction and Representation of Beauty, Patriotism, and
Femininity on the American Home Front During World War II

Figure 3: Shirley Levine, Maidenform's Pin-up Girl, 1945

The All-American Pin-up Girl

Like many American companies during World War II, the Maiden Form Brassiere factory in Bayonne, New Jersey sent goodwill packages to former company employees who were fighting in the war overseas. The packages these soldiers received often contained food, candy, cigarettes, and monthly editions of the company's employee publication, *The Maiden Forum*.¹⁸ Soldiers' letters published in *The Maiden Forum* expressed great appreciation for the care packages and emphasized that reading the company's newsletter lifted their spirits.¹⁹ Because they were far from home and were often stationed overseas, these men especially liked to read about hometown news, local sporting events, and the lives of former co-workers that were highlighted in the publication. But the feature that attracted the most attention, thanks, and praise from soldiers than any other during the war was the female pin-up contest.

The pin-up contest at Maiden Form got its start when former Maiden Form worker Johnny Powasnik wrote a letter to the company's general manager, Moe Rosenthal, mentioning that the men of his division had a great interest in naming a female Maiden Form worker as an honorary pin-up girl for the 978th Engineering division of the U.S. Navy.²⁰ After spotlighting Johnny's request as its headline feature, *The Maiden Forum* noted it "certainly that calls us to action" and followed up by creating entrant guidelines for female employees of the company who wished to compete in the beauty contest. The paper instructed prospective pin-up candidates to

¹⁸ *The Maiden Forum*, (February 1945): 2.

¹⁹ *The Maiden Forum*, (April 1945): 4.

²⁰ *The Maiden Forum*, (April 1945): 1.

send pictures of themselves to the newsletter for publication and consideration by the 978th Engineering division. *The Maiden Forum* would then assemble and print the entries, after which Johnny and his fellow soldiers could vote for their favorite Maiden Form worker and name her their pin-up girl.²¹ In addition, the Maiden Form Brassiere Company offered a five-dollar cash prize to the winner. As anticipation grew, the company's cafeteria manager upped the purse by promising free lunches for a week or a carton of cigarettes to the winner.

In April 1945, *The Maiden Forum* published 77 pictures of white female workers who had entered their photos in the contest. Pictures of these "Maiden Form Pretties" ranged from headshots of women, both young and old, to full-body photographs of scantily clad machine operators, seamstresses, clerical staff, and other company workers. While some of the submissions were conservative in nature, others were of photos of women posing in sexually suggestive positions wearing bathing suits –or less. For example, one submission showed a nude woman in the outdoors whose crouching body was covered by only a small round pillow.

Several of the officers and enlisted men judging the pin-ups wrote to *The Maiden Forum*, thanking the women for the morale boost that the contest had provided them. Johnny Powasnik, the sailor who had spearheaded the contest, wrote that his entire ship was excited about crowning the winner and that he would like to take the winner of the competition out on a date when he returned from the war.²² Another serviceman who was not affiliated with the Maiden Form Company,

²¹ Maiden Formers spelled the word "pin-up," not "pinup," as we spell it today.

²² *The Maiden Forum*, (June 1945): 1.

excitedly wrote the following comment on his ballot: "Boy they sure can raise them
in Jersey...there are

Figure 4: "Pin-up Pretties," *The Maiden Forum* (May, 1945): 4.

some nice ones there!"²³ The letter announcing the sailors' final choice noted, "after many heated arguments, several black eyes, two men in the hospital, long hours of debating, and much drooling at the mouth, the wolves of the 978th howled number twenty as our Sweetheart."²⁴ The 978th Engineer Maintenance Company of the United States Navy had chosen Maiden Form office worker Shirley Levine as their pin-up girl.

Modestly dressed in comparison to other entrants in the competition, the contest's winner wore a star-spangled T-shirt and shorts outfit in the winning photo entry. Yet the edition of *The Maiden Forum* that proclaimed Shirley as the winner featured a less conservative portrayal of her as it published three large photographs of Shirley in a bikini and high heels. In describing her award-winning good looks, *The Maiden Forum's* headlines touted Shirley as a "typical American girl," going on to pinpoint her all-American style as "curly auburn hair combed carelessly into a feather bob, sparkling blue eyes, an amiable smile, casual clothes, and a figure that could aptly be described as 'well-stacked.'"²⁵

*

As several historians have observed, pin-ups emerged as a prominent phenomenon in American cultural life during World War II. Pin-ups, which could include any amateur or professional photograph or illustration of a sexualized women—typically young, white, slender, well-made-up and captured alone—built upon earlier twentieth-century representations of the female form. While erotic art had long been a

²³ *The Maiden Forum*, (July 1945): 3.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

part of an underground American sexual culture, explicitly sexualized images of the female body remained hidden from mainstream “respectable” public culture during the first decades of the twentieth century. And even though many American soldiers became fans of the “naughty French postcards” they brought home from World War I, it was the 1920s, according to historian Joanne Meyerowitz, that marked the emergence of overtly sexual images of women in the American mainstream.²⁶ As demonstrated by the *Ladies Home Journal* and other popular American magazines, the growing mass advertisement culture of the age often sought to market all kinds of products alongside sexualized imagery of idealized female bodies.

Art historian Maria Elena Buszek also contends that early twentieth-century film representations of women were precursors to the pin-up. Film brought images of self-assured, sexually confident, and glamorous women to the masses of Americans living through the anything but glamorous realities of life during the Great Depression years of the 1930s. During World War II, sexualized print representations of women came to be popularly known as “pin-ups.” The pin-up was given its name by soldiers who literally tacked pictures of women to their bunks and lockers during their seemingly endless days away from home on the warfront overseas. In his history of sexuality, John D’Emilo argues that officials of the United States Department of War condoned and even facilitated the distribution of pin-up pictures to soldiers, judging the sexual fantasies they stimulated less harmful to their health than the risks venereal diseases posed if soldiers acted out their sexual desires with foreign

²⁶ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Women, Cheesecake and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid-Twentieth-Century U.S.” *Journal of Women’s History* 8, no. 3, (1996) , 14. ; Robert B. Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James”: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II” *American Quarterly* 24, no. 4, (Dec., 1990) , 492.

prostitutes. More importantly, according to D'Emilio, pin-ups of American females were for the U.S. War Department officials one way of combating the ultimate social taboo of homosexuality in the military.

The literal explosion of pin-up imagery during World War II gave the American soldier many different images to choose from. In his article "I want a Girl, Just like the Girl that Married Harry James," historian Robert B. Westbrook states that during World War II, Hollywood actress Betty Grable was America's most popular pin-up girl. By the end of the war there had been over five million requests for Grable's picture by service members alone.²⁷ Grable's appeal, Westbrook argues, was due in part to her girl-next-door looks, which made her a woman that thousands of American soldiers imagined themselves returning home to after the war. Grable was accompanied in popularity by fellow movie star Rita Hayworth, whose sultrier and overtly sexual appeal was featured in pictures of the actress wearing only a negligee in a 1941 edition of the widely read *Life* magazine.²⁸

In addition to the many Hollywood women who transformed themselves into pin-up girls during the war, the genre was further bolstered by the popularity of centerfold pin-up illustrations printed in *Esquire* magazine. By World War II, *Esquire*, a periodical directed towards sophisticated, urban male readers, had become a leader in journalism on the subjects of men's fashion and society. These sections of the publication were however quickly upstaged in popularity by the introduction of pin-up illustrations in 1940. As Maria Buszek notes, the airbrush illustrations of *Esquire*'s "Varga Girls" depicted women whose enticing sexual appeal beckoned the

²⁷ Westbrook, 596.

²⁸ *ibid*, 598.

male gaze via their exaggerated anatomical design and “come hither” facial expressions. In fact, the Varga Girl pin-ups were so popular with military men during the war that *Esquire* was willing to produce 9 million advertisement-free copies of its publication, which it distributed to soldiers in U.S. military installations abroad.²⁹ Following the popularity of *Esquire*, a series of imitator magazines such as *Look* and *Men Only* also started up during World War II.

As pin-ups multiplied in the American mainstream, they drew the attention and ire of moralists who cautioned that the consumption of such images was not good for American’s moral health. For example, the Catholic Church’s Legion of Decency preemptively warned its faithful of movies whose sexual indecency made their viewing a moral sin. Even the Postmaster General, in an act that was later deemed unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court, revoked *Esquire*’s mail privileges under charges of obscenity.³⁰ The mass popularity of such images was, in part, responsible for the backlash from cultural moralists who, finding such public representations of women to be immoral and obscene, sought to stop their mass dissemination. Heated public debates surrounding the production of pin-ups serve as further evidence of the large effect the genre had upon the American cultural landscape during World War II.

However, the clearest indicator of the mass appeal that pin-ups generated during the war does not come from Hollywood, popular magazines, or critics. After all, the roles actresses played in movies and the centerfolds found in “girlie” magazines were in fact representations of women created and disseminated by those

²⁹ Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) , 210.

³⁰ Meyerowitz, 15.

in the growing American image industry. The most striking feature of spread of pin-ups and other sexualizations of women's bodies during World War II is that the genre became popular with typical American women who emulated pin-ups. During the war years, women across the nation self-produced pictures of themselves. Women often sent these homemade pin-up photos to their boyfriends, husbands, and lovers serving abroad.

Women also sent their pictures to a myriad of local and national publications in the hope that they might be reprinted there. During the war, a diverse range of pin-ups showcasing ordinary and everyday women hit the American mainstream. The full-spread pin-up parades printed in semi-official military publications such as *Yank* and *Stars and Stripes* were some of its most prominent features. Pictures of African American pin-ups could be found in *Ebony*, *The Afro-American* and other newspapers and magazines that were part of the black press. In addition, white working-class pin-ups became a staple in *The American Federationist*, a publication of the American Federation of Labor. Thus homemade pin-ups served not only as an intimate exchange between lovers, but also as an entry point through which women were able to engage in a new part of American mass culture.

The mass appeal that the pin-up and other "cheesecake" representations of typical American women in the cultural marketplace are particularly notable during this period in United States history. Although erotic imagery of models, prostitutes, actresses, and other women had long been accessible to Americans, World War II brought sexualized imagery of ordinary and everyday women into clear public view. The women, who allowed pictures of themselves in bathing suits and high heels to be

published in a myriad of American media, took part in an act that women just a few years before would have thought unimaginable. These shifting attitudes regarding how women's bodies could be publicly portrayed were negotiated among women, men, employers, and the United States government during the pivotal time period of World War II. The popular mass sexualization and public representation of female bodies continued in the post war era and was one of the largest historical changes in the lives of American women over the course of the twentieth century.

While scholars have analyzed the professionally produced pin-ups of models and actresses, they have largely ignored pin-ups of average American women, such as those found in employee publications. Pin-ups, along with other representations of the female body found in employee publications, ethnic newspapers, and other forms of community-based media, suggest to the historian that the workplace was an integral site where the changing politics of female sexuality and gender roles were being negotiated during the mid-twentieth century. In this regard, these under-utilized sets of primary documents offer significant insight into the meanings and significance that the display of average womens' beautified bodies took on in America during World War II.

* * *

The story of the Maiden Form pin-up contest, as chronicled in the company's employee publication, is an ideal example of the changing mores that surrounded the public display of average women's bodies in the mid-twentieth century workplace. By entering photographs of themselves into this competition, women working at the company took part in an act of public sexualized display. It might not seem all that

unusual that the seamstresses and office workers who worked at the Maiden Form factory and helped to manufacture an item that has become inextricably linked with American femininity –the bra– would participate in a pin-up contest. Indeed, female employees at a cosmetics plant in Suffern, New Jersey, also competed in an annual swimsuit contest to name “Miss Allied-Avon” during the early years of the war. The company pin-up, however, was a feature that many companies who had nothing to do with the beauty industry brought onto their shop floors during World War II. In October 1943, *The Acme News* published a picture of Peggy Johnson, a young white American worker at the Acme Steel plant as the first of its many pin-up girls.³¹ Similar features were also printed in the publications of the Santa Fe Railway System, Sun Oil Refineries, and the Lukens Steel Company, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons Distillery, and several other work places that had been mobilized for the war effort in a wide range of industries across the nation. While some of these companies named official pin-up girls or hosted employee bathing suit contests, others printed more candid “cheesecake” photographs of female employees on vacation or tending to their victory gardens.

Emily Kopin, a white American from Milwaukee, who began office work at the Allen-Bradley Company of Wisconsin directly after graduation from high school in 1943 vividly remembered taking such photographs of herself and her friends during their leisure time away from war work. In an oral interview, Kopin recalled:

We used to spend days down at the parks and down at the lakefront posing for pictures. It sounds so silly now, but we used to spend days

³¹ *Acme News* 9, no. 10 (October 1943).

posing for pictures and sunbathing so that it [we] would look good in the pictures.³²

Kopin's interview also suggests the meaning such photographs held for war women who took pin-up photographs of themselves during World War II. As Kopin related in her oral history, she and her friends considered themselves "tagged," meaning that they were busy corresponding with a specific soldier stationed abroad. The Air Force lieutenant that Emily had her eye on sent her his wings as a symbol of their relationship, and many of the other women she knew who were even more seriously committed to servicemen wore engagement rings.

In its simplest form the female pin-up picture could be held by a soldier as a reminder of a particular woman's love and fidelity. While intimate exchanges of jewelry and pin-up pictures between soldiers and women on the home front might take place only between the two individuals involved, very often these acts were not private. On the contrary, during the war the spread of personal pin-ups was a very public affair. Showing off one's engagement ring, and not simply accepting it, held a prominent place in the American courtship ritual for women. Just as women took rings, men received pin-up pictures from their girlfriends, wives and lovers with the full intention of showing them to their fellow soldiers. In this regard, it was both the soldier's possession and the public display of a woman's privately produced pin-up picture that solidified the relationship.

On a local level, employee publications played an important role in the dissemination of worker pin-ups during the war. For instance, the Acme Steel Company's employee publication noted in July of 1942:

³² Michael E. Stevens, ed. *Women Remember the War, 1941-1945: Voices of the Wisconsin Past* (Madison: Center for Documentary History State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1993), 34.

An item in a recent issue of the Fort Custer News read- "Is there anyone who has not seen the pictures of Bill Scott's girl?" Bill hails from the Archer Engineering department, while his "girl" is lovely Rhoda Jasmund of the Acme Department. Bill is assigned to headquarters office at Fort Custer.³³

While Rhoda Jasmund may have taken an individual picture of herself that she personally sent it to her beau, the image soon became available for public consumption. Rhoda Jasmund's picture could be viewed by either anyone who read the local newspaper at the military camp Scott was stationed or the employee publication at Jasmund's workplace.

Unlike the textile industry to which Maiden Formers belonged, the steel industry that employed Rhoda Jasmund had very few women working in it during the interwar period from 1919-1941. With the onset of World War II, however, this employment trend quickly changed. Even before America's official entry into the war, global hostilities anticipated elevated production needs for U.S. manufacturers and sent many employers scrambling to find new workers. The entrance of America into World War II and the ensuing national draft of able-bodied men created a new sexual division in the U.S. labor market. During the war thousands of women secured jobs in which only men that had been employed before the war. Consequently, the once pervasive social belief that women were incapable of effectively performing labor that required high levels of physical exertion and mental agility gave way to the demands of the growing wartime economy. As troop levels surged and home front labor shortages grew more dire, female workers soon took on even the most traditionally masculine of factory jobs.

³³ *Acme News* 8, no. 7 (July 1942)

An examination of the war years shows that it was during these formative years that ordinary American women increasingly entered the public sphere as both sexualized objects and workers in traditionally masculine fields. Evidence of this development lies in World War II employee publications, which vividly display the dramatic cultural transformations that took place in just a few short years. During the war, women's bodies were popularly conceptualized as appropriate sites of both sexual display and of physical labor. Female cheesecake and blue-collar labor for women did not increase independently of each other during World War II. In fact, as these employee publications show us, often the exact same women fulfilled both new social roles at the same time. During the Second World War, white American women emerged in U.S. factories as riveters, welders, and ship builders, and simultaneously as pin-ups, beauty queens, and cheesecake in their employee publications. It was not a coincidence that the first public and mass-distributed sexualized imagery of typical American women coincided chronologically with their entry into sectors of the economy that had traditionally excluded them.

During World War II, women who worked in American factories and displayed their bodies in pin-up photography were not labeled as sexual deviants, but rather were popularly hailed as patriotic representations of womanhood on the home front. War necessitated American women's entrance into traditionally masculine workplaces. Yet instead of changing its attitude about prevailing gender norms, American society compensated for this act of public gender dissonance by overtly feminizing its new workers. Using film and contemporary sociological studies to bolster her argument, Buzek contends that during the mid-twentieth century, "a

cultural sensibility emerged to demand of women a kind of penance [for their work outside the home] in the form of a return to traditionally feminine dress and emphasis on homemaking.”³⁴

During the war, it became culturally acceptable and desirable for white women working in factories to display their sexualized bodies because such representations neutralized the stigma that partaking in traditionally masculine labor might have placed upon them. As the pin-up pictures of manicured, coifed, and beautified war workers in employee publications seemed to suggest, although a woman might have been doing a man’s job, she was still able to remain feminine. Given the realities of war, U. S. culture could have changed its construction of femininity to incorporate once-masculine social roles into acceptable definitions of womanhood. But instead, American society chose to express femininity through the sexualization of female workers bodies. Pin-ups in employee publications are one piece of mid-twentieth century material culture that evidences this trend. By publicizing the sexual appeal of its workers to all who looked at them, employee publications used public media to demonstrate that white women workers retained their femininity and sexual appeal while laboring in a masculine sector of the economy. They also reinforced men and women’s perceived differences at a time when women and men were often performing the same jobs in the labor force and women had the opportunity to advance in the workplace.

Employers themselves took many measures to promote femininity and beautification among their female workforces. During the war, American companies

³⁴ Buszek, 201.

often went to extremes to encourage beautification among the thousands of women who labored in their factories for the first time. They did this out of a belief that such measures would raise the morale of female employees and thereby increase worker productivity.

Beauty on the Job

“Thus all women, regardless of the hours they work, find it easy to keep themselves well groomed, are ready to enjoy social events, and are proud of their appearance at work.”³⁵

- comment in regards to the effectiveness of an on-site beauty shop offering manicures and facials to workers at the Republic Tool and Drill Company’s defense plant

As historian Karen Anderson notes in her seminal monograph *Wartime Women*, the entrance of women into war production was accompanied by the “glamorization of the female war worker.”³⁶ Anderson suggests that employers enacted such measures in an attempt to make women feel at home in the factory environment. During the mid-twentieth century, beautification of women workers was seen by U.S. government officials and employers in many different industries as a method through which women workers could gain the confidence needed to perform factory labor. As this chapter will illustrate, the women who entered traditionally male workspaces during World War II did not cross into masculine professions by becoming manly in demeanor. Rather, such women were often

³⁵ *Avon Outlook* no. 4 (1943) : 3.

³⁶ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981) , 60.

encouraged by both the government and their bosses to enhance their feminine characteristics even as they readied themselves for blue-collar labor.

During the war the federal government produced posters, pamphlets, and other wartime propaganda that addressed female workers directly. Such campaigns reminded women laboring in wartime production on the home front to stay healthy, sleep regularly, eat a proper diet, and practice safety on the job. In 1943, the Federal Security Agency and U.S. Public Health Service issued a series of posters entitled “Jenny on the Job” that depicted the daily actions of an idealized war worker. Encouraging female war workers to get enough rest at night, one poster of “Jenny” shows the model worker in bed with curlers in her long blonde hair and a photo of her beloved soldier on her nightstand. The poster also announces that in her off-hours, “Jenny gets her beauty sleep.”³⁷ While the poster shows “Jenny” doing her patriotic duty by getting into bed by 9 p.m., it also characterizes this fictitious war worker under a guise of femininity. The idealized image of “Jenny” is that of a competent and conscientious woman worker who maintains her femininity despite her daily labor in a factory. By attempting to shape the popular image of the average war worker as a pretty and feminine “Jenny,” the U.S. government directly sought to attract a new type of laborer to U.S. factories. Posters such as the above-mentioned one depicted females as proper participants in American workplaces. In this regard, women were drawn into the war effort, and a new understanding of women’s appropriate social roles was encouraged.

³⁷ “Jenny on the Job: Gets her beauty Sleep” Office for Emergency Management, Office of War Information, Domestic Operations Branch, Bureau of Special Services. c. 1941–1945. National Archives, College Park, Md. Records of the Office of Government Reports. Record Group 44.

Employee publications also encouraged and often directly facilitated the creation of a beauty-conscious work environment in many companies. Written by a mostly female volunteer staff but paid for by the company, Maiden Form's employee publication directly fostered the adoption of beauty culture by employees during working hours. *The Maiden Forum* often printed articles on a variety of beauty topics, including the latest fashion trends, beauty advice, shopping horror stories, and dieting tips. Gossip surrounding company women's own acts of beautification were also chronicled. Serving all sections of the factory, *The Maiden Forum* gave each department its own news section and assigned each floor a reporter to whom workers could submit departmental gossip. *The Maiden Forum's* gossip page was always filled with information on the snazziest company dressers, most beautiful bridal pictures, trickiest hairdos, and flashiest jewelry worn at work. During the war several other companies added a specific "woman's page" to their publications where fashion and beauty took center stage. Anderson notes that the *Aero Mechanic* went as far as to publish a series of questionnaires that offered women workers the opportunity to gauge their "FQ" or "Femininity Quotient." Women who scored highest on this questionnaire were those who "managed to combine their industrial work with traditional concepts of femininity in attire, tastes, and behavior on the job."³⁸

The glamorization of the bodies of female war workers extended far beyond the "talk" in employee publications. American beauty culture was incorporated by employers into worker training and retention programs, as well as into a multitude of other services that employers offered their newly hired female work force. During the

³⁸ Anderson, 60.

war many American employers institutionalized worker beautification and made it a formal part of their corporate culture. Employers instituted worker beautification programs because they viewed such programs as *necessary* measures. Beautification, they argued, was needed to keep their female employees' morale and productivity high as women worked in employment sectors that conventional ideology conceived of as traditionally masculine.

Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, a distiller of fine alcoholic beverages based in Kentucky, is an example of one of the many American companies that underwent a vast feminization, and accompanying beautification, of its workforce during World War II. Before the war, the Seagram's Company employed mostly men and made limited use of only of unmarried female employees in gender-segregated sections of the factory. However, the realities of World War II brought many changes to the company. Beginning in 1941, Seagram's began to hire more women and place them in roles they had not previously performed. Along with changing the types of products it produced during the war, the company also shifted many of its business practices to meet the perceived needs of its new female workforce.

In general, Seagram's company officials devoted much time, effort and money to thinking of ways in which they could best integrate women into the workforce. In a 1941 memo entitled "Reclassifying Male Jobs as Female," A. E. Hardgrove, an official at the Louisville, Kentucky plant, broke down company operations into three categories. The first category comprised "positions into which women could be quickly placed" such as the Assistant Time Keeper and Invoice Clerk. The second referred to "positions into which women could be placed with training and

experience,” which Hardgrove identified as the Tax Payment Coordinator and Warehouse Records Supervisor. And the third category included jobs such as that of company statistician that Hardgrove felt “could be more advantageously filled by men.”

In measuring women’s suitability for each position Hardgrove outlined the physical, mental and interpersonal skills needed to perform effectively the duties and responsibilities of that position. It was this third criterion that seemed to influence Hardgrove’s opinion most. For instance, he felt that the job of “Bottling House Time Keeper” was a position into which women might easily transition, since most of the employees on the bottling line were already women. Similarly, although he felt any person with a legal background would be able to fulfill the position of “Government Regulations Supervisor,” he cautioned that a man might be better able to interact with district officials and other outside persons to whom this employee was a liaison.

Ideas that women were not as mentally acute as their male counterparts also influenced Hardgrove’s opinion. Indeed, even in the female-ready position of “Bottling House Time Keeper,” Hardgrove expressed a concern that

During the busy season, there might be a greater possibility that a girl Time Keep[er] would require additional help, since her duties would be much heavier. It can sometimes be demonstrated that girls are emotionally unstable when quick action is required and as the pressure of duties increases considerably, and therefore do not hold up as well as men under stress.³⁹

In spite of the perceived drawbacks to employing female labor in many of its positions, Seagrams was faced with the reality of making female employees a

³⁹ “Reclassifying Male Jobs as Female” 23 April 1941, A. E. Hardgrove, Louisville, KY, Seagrams Plant. Records of the Seagram Company Ltd. (SEAG) Accession 2126, Series XI: Industrial Relations, Box: 859. Folder: Industrial Relations, Personnel General (2 of 3), Hagley Museum and Library

workable solution to its labor shortage. Without an alternative labor source, company officials dedicated themselves to figuring out ways of changing their company operations and employee relations in order to effectively employ women despite their perception of and reservations about women's interpersonal, mental and physical drawbacks.

By early 1942, Seagrams made a commitment to train and provisionally hire women as heavy machine operators in the company's Louisville plant. *Proof*, Seagram's employee publication, reported that the new female workers had been able to perform this important job in distillery operations effectively. For example, with regard to one female employee in this job, *Proof* further noted that: "she may wear in her hair a red ribbon to match the stripe in her uniform and she may worry now and then about her lipstick, but she does her work as efficiently and as expertly as a man."⁴⁰

This worker was among the first of hundreds of women to fully take over traditionally male jobs at the company, which drastically changed its worker demographic. By 1943, women had taken positions in all but the maintenance department at the Bristol plant and constituted a full 64 percent of workers at the rectifying and blending department. Indeed, the Sanitation, Shipping, and Yards and Ground Staffs, all of which had employed only men before the war, were now at least half female.⁴¹

World War II rattled the social division of labor within U.S. society. Not only were executives in government and industry worried about effectively mainstreaming

⁴⁰ *Proof* 1, no. 4 (1942) : 2.

⁴¹ *Proof* 2, no. 13 (1943) : 1.

women into a formerly male workforce, but also they were interested in facilitating an approach that allowed women to retain their femininity while at the same time performing traditionally masculine jobs. This, they believed, would keep female morale high and enable them to become more efficient in their jobs.

One way in which Seagram's sought to accommodate out-of-town female workers was to set up a company-sponsored housing unit called "The Manor."⁴² This dormitory style worker housing was offered only to female employees, and providing them with room, board, and the supervision of a house matron. Such actions were in line with practices advocated by the United States Department of Labor in its 1942 Handbook entitled "Recreation and Housing for Women War Workers."⁴³ This government manual advocated that special attention be paid to women workers and cautioned that facilities suitable for male laborers might not be adequate for use by a female work force. It further recommended that companies attempt to find low-cost housing for the disproportionate number of women workers in low-income brackets, provide adequate child-care facilities for working mothers, make available housekeeping services for working homemakers, as well offer all women workers after-hours recreational activities that would allow time for relaxation and rest. In this regard, the handbook argued that such accommodations were essential to "preserving [the] morale, health, and efficiency of women workers." Although Seagram's was able to provide some of its female workers with housing options and food delivery

⁴² *Proof 2*, no. 5 (1942).

⁴³ Mary V. Robinson, "Recreation and Housing for Women War Workers: A Handbook on Standards." *Bulletin of Women's Bureau*, no. 190, United States Department of Labor, (United States Government Printing Office: Washington, 1942).

services, many employer programs never left the planning stage during World War II.⁴⁴

In another aggressive move aimed at effectively transitioning women into plant life, company officials set themselves to creating an employee program that would help to efficiently and comfortably ease women into their new roles at the plant. With this objective in mind, the company sent five female employees who represented the Louisville, Kentucky, Relay, Maryland, and Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, plants on a two-week trip to a noted New York City beauty salon so that they could obtain certificates in personal grooming and beautification in the Dorothy Gray Training Program. While their official capacities at the Seagram's plant were as blue-collar laborers, the five women selected were expected to formally share the skills they learned in the training program with their female co-workers. Chronicling the event, *Proof* reported that:

The theory behind the company's action in sending these women employees to New York is simply stated: Personal grooming is indicative of personal efficiency. The company believes that whether women are in the offices, on the bottling lines or out in the distillery, they must be well groomed to do their best work.⁴⁵

The following year, instead of sending company employees out for beauty advice, Seagram's held its own two-week charm and beauty incentive program at the Relay, Lawrenceburg, and Louisville plants. *Proof* reported that

By following the suggestions on grooming, hair styling, selection of make-up, and methods of application, offered by the Dorothy Gray representative, each girl has vowed to keep up her own morale and that of her fellow workers on the home front. Each day of the two

⁴⁴ Anderson, 50.

⁴⁵ *Proof*, (1942): 8.

weeks' session was marked by the appearance of a girl wearing a new hair-do or a new shade of lipstick.⁴⁶

Seagram's employee publication also documented that during the training program, female workers were given one-on-one consultations with Dorothy Gray about their personal beauty needs and received their own take-home beauty kit. At the end of the two-week beauty extravaganza, female employees participated in fashion shows and teas to show off their newly stylized bodies (with the exception of the Louisville plant where federal safety regulations precluded such a showcase).

Seagrams, a for-profit company, introduced a beautification program and an out-of-state professional beauty consultant to its employees during the middle of a labor shortage brought about by global war. The fact that it would conceive of such measures as cost-effective worker training is a testament to the power that mass conceptions of feminine beauty held in the minds of Americans during the mid-twentieth century. In this regard, while it might be easy to dismiss acts of female beautification as frivolous "adult play," the Seagrams example vividly demonstrates the power that such social constructs had during the mid-twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century, beautification had become entrenched in fundamental ideas of what it meant to be a woman. The use of make-up, hair-styling, and clothing selection were such normalized parts of the experience of womanhood that an employer with no relationship to the beauty industry whatsoever felt that the cultivation of such abilities was a necessary prerequisite to developing psychologically healthy female employees who would work more efficiently than an "un-beautified" female work force.

⁴⁶ *Proof*, (1943): 8.

Seagram's was not alone in its belief that a more beautiful female workforce could translate into higher morale and greater efficiency on the part of employees. In 1943 the *Avon Outlook* reported that women who worked at the Republic Tool and Drill Company could drop by their plant's beauty shop anytime between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. to enjoy a manicure or relax with a soothing facial. The Chicago plant's beauty shop was created as part of a morale-boosting effort and was available only to the Chicago-based company's female employees.⁴⁷ The *Avon Outlook* was a trade publication that the Avon cosmetics company sent to its representatives, who were also district and city managers. Its publishers viewed factories engaged in war production as a market for new customers; therefore, articles in the *Avon Outlook* were quick to identify corporate beautification efforts of interest to their sales force. The publication further informed its door-to-door saleswomen that in addition to the Republic Drill and Tool, many other large war plants across the nation, including the Chrysler Corporation, Wright Aeronautical Corporation, American Locomotive Company, Sperry Gyroscope Company, and the N.A. Woodworth Company had built company-sponsored beauty shops inside their plants. *The Outlook* argued that beauty facilities located inside factories allowed women to keep up their appearance and feel better at work, regardless of the type of labor they performed.

In addition to on-site beauty treatments, the provision of fashionable uniforms designed for women workers was another way that company executives attempted to

⁴⁷ *Avon Outlook*, no.4 (1943) : 3.

feminize formerly male jobs for the benefit of their new female employees. *The Outlook* reported that:

General Electric, one of the largest producers of war materials and employer of many women, recognizes that a woman's appearance affects her work. And, since it is necessary for women welders to have their hair covered to assure maximum safety, General Electric asked Sally Victor to style a hat that would be suitable for any woman who takes up welding as a trade.⁴⁸

The signature hat designed by Sally Victor was meant to be both fashionable and functional, complimenting the woman's face, while at the same time properly covering the welder's hair for both her safety and the protection of her hairdo. An additional important detail was the letter "V," which was included in the design of the hat. Standing for "Victory," the red "V" stood prominently on the crown of the welder's blue cap. In this patriotic gesture, the hat designer linked the functions of safety and aesthetic design to beatification and the war effort.

Another company, Avon, also figured prominently in wartime discussions about beauty culture on the home front. As a cosmetics company, Avon had a large economic interest in promoting beauty culture. By relating worker beautification to worker morale, Avon and other companies in the beauty industry were able to position themselves as patriotic players in the growing wartime economy. Facing the possibility of a drastic downturn in company revenues during an era of personal scaling back and national rationing, the executives of these companies made the argument that the beautification of women's bodies was an essential part of winning the war. In gearing up for its spring 1943 "Campaign for Beauty" Avon Vice-

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 3.

President and General Manager J. A. Ewald wrote an open letter to the company's sales force, pleading that:

Avon stands in the front ranks of American business in its efforts to help win the war. There is nothing indirect about it – our products that build good health and sound morale are *vitaly necessary* to people engaged in war work. When we manufacture and sell Avon products we are making a far-reaching contribution. We are not thinking of a happy America, crooning a tune, as we go out to sell today. Rather, we are thinking of a struggling America that needs to be kept strong in body and mind.⁴⁹ [Emphasis in original]

Considering the sale of make-up and cosmetic creams as closely tied to the war effort, Ewald urged his sales force to “prove your loyalty to our country” by visiting the homes of every war worker in the saleswoman's territory to tell prospective clients about Avon's products.

Even smaller beauty enterprises sought to profit during the war years. In 1942 Alberta Webb, a former student at the African American-owned Franklin School of Beauty in Houston, Texas wrote to the school's owners after quitting her cosmetology program and moving to California. Alberta thanked Mr. and Mrs. Jemison, the school's owners, for the opportunities they had given to her to work and study at their facility and reassured them that she would return to cosmetology soon. At the same time, however, she also reported that in California “there are so many girls who are working and going to defense training schools at night that it makes one feel like getting busy and doing something.”⁵⁰ The Jemisons were already aware of the opportunities for profit that resulted from linking their small business enterprise to the war effort. Three months before receiving Webb's letter, they had asked three of their

⁴⁹ *Avon Outlook*, no. 4 (1943) : 1.

⁵⁰ Alberta Webb to “Mr. and Mrs. Jemison” 22 October 1942, Franklin Beauty School Collection (FRAN), RG D 44, Box 2, Folder 26: Registration Forms W, 1939-1943, Houston Metropolitan Research Center Houston Public Library Houston, Texas

graduating cosmetology students to write a speech entitled “Beauty for Defense,” the best of which would be read at the school’s upcoming commencement ceremonies.⁵¹

Connecting the beauty enterprise to the national war effort enabled those in the beauty industry to do more than merely sell their products and services to female war workers. Making such a connection also offered beauty manufacturers the possibility of obtaining lucrative government contracts during war. Not being awarded such contracts could drastically curtail production, as was experienced in the early stages of the war by the Allied-Avon cosmetic and fragrance factory in Suffern, New Jersey. War-created shortages of materials meant that it was hard to produce beauty products even when consumer demand was high. During the first year of the war, Avon produced approximately 22,526,000 cosmetic pieces. But, by the following year, production had dipped to 14,166,000 pieces and would not again reach the 20,000,000 piece mark for the duration of the war.⁵² In his address to factory workers at the end of 1941, W. Van Alan Clark, Chairman of the Allied-Avon Board of Directors, argued that the acquisition of government war contracts was vital to keeping the company afloat. He spoke frankly to factory workers about the company’s situation and stated:

I wish I could say a word about what is ahead for next year. We are all anxious. How will it be with us? Can we keep on? Will there be jobs for all?...We know we will not have easy going... As to actual Defense work itself –we may find something. We do not have machine tools and equipment usual for such work or we would have been in it long ago⁵³

⁵¹ “(Mrs.) A. F. Jemison,” President Franklin Beauty School, Houston, to Mrs. Rosa L. Williams, Houston, 21 March 1942, FRAN Box 2, Folder 26: Registration Forms W, 1939-1943

⁵² Report, Series IV: Branches and Labs Subseries A; Locations, Box: 9, Allied-Avon Products Collection (AVON), The Hagley Museum and Library, 298 Buck Rd. Wilmington, DE 19807

⁵³ *Family Album* 1, no. 10 (December 1941) : inside cover

Two months after Clark's ominous letter was published in the Avon employee publication, the factory received its first government contract to bottle liquid smoke for the military. Further contracts necessitated that half of the Suffern, New Jersey plant shift its productive focus from make-up and fragrance production to fulfilling government contracts for insect repellent, pharmaceuticals, paratrooper kits, and gas mask canisters.⁵⁴

The Maiden Form Brassiere Company saw a similar need to obtain government contracts and was successful in many of its efforts. During the war, over two million items were manufactured by Maiden Form, including mattress covers, military uniform shirts, and a bra-like vest worn by carrier pigeons.⁵⁵ However, in a strategic move that directly linked its normal products to the war effort, the company was able to bolster its production of brassieres through government contracts as well. Thus, at the same time as it met the needs of the U.S. military through war production contracts, the company was also able to obtain the necessary materials for continued production of its regular sale items for consumption by the general American public.

In addition to the other items it produced for the military, Maiden Form was able to convince the United States War Board that brassieres and garter belts were *essential* war materials, vitally needed by average American women working in the war effort. The company argued that nurses, members of the Women's Auxiliary Corps, and female war workers at home would face serious health risks if brassiere production were halted. Supporting these arguments with the "latest scientific data,"

⁵⁴ *Family Album 2*, no. 2 (February 1942) Vol. : 1 ; collection finding guide

⁵⁵ *The Maiden Forum*, (August 1945) : 1. "Pigeon Vests" were bra-like vests for birds that were used to secure carrier pigeons when the paratroopers holding them jumped out of planes that crossed over enemy lines.

Maiden Form warned that unrestrained female breasts would cause exhaustion and fatigue among war workers, resulting in a slow-down in production time in America's factories. Because Maiden Form successfully argued that the bra was a necessary war material, the company was able to expand, and not scale back, its production during the war. Consequently, at a time when expensive fabrics were being rationed for non-military commercial use, Maiden Form increased its domestic production and continued to ship its all-satin "Intimo" bra line to five continents throughout the duration of the war, exporting the product to its buyers in England, India, Ceylon, Belgium, Congo, and South Africa.⁵⁶

During the 1940s, Maiden Form marketed the brassiere for both its aesthetic characteristics and health value. The bra, Maiden Form argued, was an essential component of the modern female lifestyle. The ability of Maiden form to maintain its domestic markets, produce brassieres for U.S. military consumption, and expand its international market share in this context is impressive. In particular, this achievement indicates the ubiquitous hold that this consumer item had on the U.S. market by the fourth decade of the century. In this regard, the fact that Maiden Form's success came during a time of global war is especially significant.

On the national level, wartime is often thought of as a temporary period, when daily life is drastically different than in more normal times of peace. War is abnormal for most people; it is a time when nonessential daily activities are suspended and the nation devotes itself to its most essential goals and interests. The war years of the 1940s give us a window through which we can view what was truly valued in

⁵⁶ *The Maiden Forum*, (November, 1944) : 1.

American culture, because less important consumer goods, leisure activities, and patterns of life were suspended. In this regard, it is interesting to note that in addition to airplanes, tanks, and ammunition, the United States government also considered that the continued mass production of the bra was essential during World War II. During America's entanglement in a global war of dramatic proportion, the manner in which American women's breasts were shaped remained a matter of vital concern.

Tina Davidson, a historian with the Canadian Women's Army Corps, has argued that the Canadian Army's focus on the beauty of its female soldiers during World War II points to the superficial nature of the CWACS involvement in the war effort.⁵⁷ During the war, the Canadian Army made hairdressing facilities, stockings, and supplies of cosmetics, and fashionable uniforms for female military personnel. According to Davidson, these measures reinforced the idea that the CWACS were women first, and soldiers second.

As Davidson reports, the CWAC uniform even received attention south of the Canadian border, when the official organ of the United States Armed Forces named it the "smartest" uniform of all the allied women's services.⁵⁸ However, many at Maiden Form appeared to disagree with that appraisal. In March 1945, *The Maiden Forum* boldly asserted: "We are proud that we have played so large a part in keeping our women's auxiliary forces the best dressed in the world."⁵⁹ In addition to the brassiere's medical value, *The Maiden Forum* boasted of the bra's ability to create

⁵⁷ Tina Davidson, 'A Woman's Rights to charm and Beauty': Maintaining the feminine Ideal in the Canadian Women's Army Corps, *Atlantis* 26, no. 1(Fall/Winter 2001) , 46.

⁵⁸ Davidson, 47-48.

⁵⁹ *The Maiden Forum*, (March 1945) : 1.

style and panache in America's female forces. It was not only important for American women to help in the war effort, but also for them to look good while doing it.⁶⁰

Davidson argues that by focusing on the beautification of the CWACs, the Canadian Army was making an implicit statement about the unimportance of its female troops. Much like the acts of beautification that they partook in, the CWACs were viewed by their male superiors as trivial to larger military operations. Thus, according to Davidson, the beautification of women in the Canadian Army was used as a marker of the women's superficial status. This assessment of beautification may indeed be an accurate understanding of women's role in the Canadian troops. In the United States, however, beautification played a much different role. As the Seagrams, Avon, and Maiden Form examples clearly show, beautification of the female body during World War II was not conceived of as a meaningless past time of working women. While beautification might have marked U.S. women as fundamentally different from men or even needier than their male counterparts, it did not suggest that they were insignificant players; nor did it suggest that their contributions to the war effort were trivial. On the contrary, the use of cosmetics, hair styling, and fashion were seen as essential elements of femininity and thus necessary extensions of women's needed involvement in the national war effort. Because women workers were needed to "man" American factories during the war, employers and the U.S. government conceived of beautification as a way to make women's jobs easier.

⁶⁰ This is especially interesting considering the fact that during World War II, American soldiers started rumors that females serving in the Women's Army Corps were lesbians. Stereotyped as "mannish" by male soldiers, the WACs were thought to be lacking in femininity. It is quite possible that The Maiden Form Brassiere Company used the stereotype to its advantage. By insisting that a Maiden Form bra helped augment a woman's "natural" figure and allowed her to "look like a woman," Maiden Form gave a homophobic United States Government yet another reason to snatch up its female-forming brassieres. By keeping the WACs "the best dressed [women] in the world," their "mannish" image could thus be combated.

Beauty, Patriotism, and Morale

“Tell the girls back home to stay beautiful.”⁶¹

- Former Avon-Allied employee Eddie Conklin to a fellow Marine

Upon his return to the United States, Johnny Powasnik, the worker who first called for the creation of the Maiden Form pin-up contest, visited his old plant to meet contest winner Shirley Levine and to deliver his thanks to all of Maiden Form’s workers on behalf of the 978th Engineers. Implying a connection between the achievements of Maiden Form (which produced necessary war materials) and the accomplishments of Shirley Levine (who produced sexy pictures of herself), Johnny declared, “I sure do feel proud of Maiden Form and Shirley.”⁶² During the mid-twentieth century, many Americans conceptualized the beautification and display of female bodies as a patriotic gesture. Like Shirley Levine, American women who engaged in such behavior were popularly rewarded for their efforts. Moreover, not keeping up one’s looks was similarly frowned upon and discouraged by soldiers, employers, popular media, the U.S. government, and women themselves –each of whom closely associated female beautification with the national war effort.

The story of the Maiden Form pin-up contest and the performance of beauty culture in the World War II workplace indicate ways in which Americans on the home front connected themselves on a daily intimate level to the war being fought overseas. While creating an attractive personal appearance for her own pleasure might have been incentive enough for a woman such as Shirley Levine to take a pin-up picture of herself, during World War II, the beautification and display of women's

⁶¹ *Family Album* 3, no. 8 (August 1943) : 11.

⁶² *The Maiden Forum*, (December 1945) : 1.

bodies was intimately tied to a national political objective. *The Maiden Forum* pin-up contest made it possible for a group of female war workers in Bayonne, New Jersey and a division of military men stationed abroad to participate collectively in a sexually pleasurable, yet patriotic, pastime during an era of global war and hardship. This contest was one of thousands of such events that took place all across the nation, and served to unite men and women in a long-distance patriotic diversion. The importance of such contests should not be overlooked when one thinks about how Americans on the home front related to the war being fought abroad and how they connected their lives to the struggles of soldiers fighting overseas.

While the United States enlisted its male soldiers to fight for victory abroad, many American women residing within U.S. borders also used their bodies to aid in America's war effort. In her work *Mobilizing Women for War*, scholar Leila Rupp has argued that an important factor in America's World War II victory was its ability to effectively mobilize American women.⁶³ Compared with Germany, which offered women in war production jobs lower salaries than their American counterparts, America was able to fully enlist women in the task of military production.⁶⁴ As historian Karen Anderson has documented, by 1944 over 19 million American women were actively engaged in war work, an increase of over 47% from the prewar years.⁶⁵

⁶³ Leila Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda 1939-1945*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

⁶⁴ Although World War I had its own batch of "Rosie the Riveters," women who entered America's factories during The Great War were neither as numerous as World War II's working women, nor was their effect as long-lasting.

⁶⁵ Anderson, 4.

Women took on these jobs for various reasons. The comparatively high monetary compensation war workers received was certainly a significant factor in bringing many women to U.S. factories. Especially for married women and women of color, who had consistently faced the most opposition and discrimination in such sectors of the labor force, the war offered sizable financial opportunities that had not been previously available to them. Many women were driven by a sense of adventure or an eagerness to learn a new skill; still others joined as a way to deal with the loneliness they felt in homes that had fewer husbands, sons and daughters to take care of. Finally, for many women, a sense of patriotism also played an important role in their signing up for war work.

Rupp argues that United States propaganda during the war focused on nurturing a sense of "personalized patriotism" in its efforts to encourage more women to join in the war effort. Linking war production jobs in terms of feminine virtues, government spokespersons encouraged women to view their employment as shipbuilders, welders, and mechanics as activities that helped keep their boyfriends, brothers, and sons safe. Just as a sense of personal patriotism led many women to blue-collar work during the war, that same sense patriotism was also one of the incentives for women to pose for pin-up pictures and partake in other acts of beauty culture.

Analysis of the mid-twentieth century employee publications indicates that the typical white American working woman was encouraged from multiple fronts to develop a sense of personalized patriotism during World War II. Her commitment to the cause encompassed both the work she performed inside the factory as well as the

work she did on her own body as a pin-up girl or otherwise beauty conscious woman. During World War II, working women, fighting men, employers, and the United States government all stressed that acts of female self-beautification were an integral component of working women's involvement in the war effort.

Many young women, enthusiastic participants in the era's beauty culture, used their bodies and beauty expertise as an entry point into the national discourse on the war. These women used something that both men and women valued about women – their ability to create a pleasing appearance –in order to become participants in the mainstream currents of patriotic expression during the war. In 1942, Jean Birks, who served as Acme Steel's "Victory Bond Girl," used her good looks to encourage other employees to buy the U.S. war bonds she distributed at the Riverdale plant.⁶⁶

Likewise, the three "pretty maids," whose bent-over bodies were shown tending to their gardens in the Chicago Railway Exchange's employee publication, were heralded as "attractive Galveston employees" whose volunteer service and physical appearance were used to encourage workers to plant victory gardens.⁶⁷ In these examples, it was women's gendered status as females, their knowledge regarding self-beautification, and their willingness to publicly display their bodies that allowed them to physically wear patriotism on their bodies while sharing their enthusiasm with others.

Beautified images of female workers were ever-present in mid-twentieth century workplaces and served as important components of the patriotic imagery found in employee publications. Although women's bodies were essential to popular

⁶⁶ *Acme News* 8, no. 3. (March 1942).

⁶⁷ *The Santa Fe Magazine* XXXVIII, no. 6 (June 1944) : 1.

forms of World War II patriotic display, not all women's bodies were included in such presentations. In particular, whiteness was a defining characteristic of the pin-ups on display in war production plants. Only one of the employee publications surveyed for this study, *The Maiden Forum*, ever featured a non-white woman as a "pin-up girl," and that was in 1946, a year after World War II ended. While women of many ethnic groups were employed in U.S. factories during the war, and were often featured at work in their employee publications in other capacities, the absence of pin-ups of women of color is an important indicator of the racial divisions that plagued many American workplaces during the mid-twentieth century.

Although pin-ups of women of color did not appear in employee publications, the production and consumption of patriotic representations of female beauty was not limited to white women working in factories during World War II. The demands of beauty culture placed similar constraints on the lives of African American, European American and Japanese American women involved in the war effort during World War II. Much like their European American counterparts, African American and Japanese American women sought to support and encourage the troops in a multitude of ways during the war. In addition to taking jobs in U.S. factories –often despite fierce objections by white women– African American and Japanese American women also purchased war bonds, collected reading materials for injured soldiers, grew victory gardens, donated blood to the Red Cross, and participated in the era's growing pin-up culture for the benefit of soldiers stationed abroad. The absence of pin-ups of color in the employee publications of predominantly white workplaces and the racial dynamics surrounding popular American conceptions of beauty are discussed further

in chapter two. Subsequent sections of my dissertation will also examine the unique meanings that beauty culture respectively held in the lives of African American and Japanese American women.

Articles in the black press, personal manuscript collections, and materials promoting the war effort demonstrate that notions of beauty, patriotism, and work were all inter-related in the lives of black women during World War II. When a young black woman who showed great skill as an arc welder by blasting over 120 rivets a minute was crowned by New York City Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia as “Miss Negro Victory Worker of 1944,” she expressed a great sense of personal pride in performing her job. During the victory speech she gave at the “Negro Freedom Rally” held at Madison Square Garden, the woman’s words echoed the sense of personalized patriotism that Rupp argues was crucial to white American women workers during the war. Before LaGuardia and others at the rally, the honoree remarked:

When you are working in a war plant –and maybe this is my own personal feeling –you talk very little while you work but you do a lot of thinking. And with the roar of machinery you sort of get a message, which seems to say to you that this job must be well done, because the stake in getting it out is perhaps the life of some boy fighting on the beachheads. That’s what I keep thinking”⁶⁸

By naming this ideal female laborer “Miss Negro War Worker,” the contest did more than honor its winner as an exemplary employee. The contest wrapped the conferral of this honor in both patriotism and the language of popular beauty contests. The account of the contest found in the records of the U.S. Department of Labor, suggests that the judges who selected “Miss Negro War Worker” chose a winner they

⁶⁸ *Negro Women War Workers*, Bulletin no. 205, Women’s Bureau: United States Department of Labor, 1945 p. 11

considered both an ideal female war worker and the best example of “Negro” female beauty.

Throughout World War II, the black press covered both the movements of African American troops stationed overseas and the actions of black persons on the home front. In addition to hundreds of beauty-related postings such as the “beauty-of-the-week” and “charm school” features, which also published full-body photographs and headshots of attractive women, *The Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Baltimore Afro-American* collectively printed over 45 female pin-up pictures in 1945 alone. Many of the women showcased in these publications had been named the pin-up girl for a specific unit or division of “Negro” soldiers fighting abroad.

The Seabees 21st Special Battalion of the United States Navy sponsored one such contest detailed in the *Baltimore Afro-American*. As the paper related, the battalion was made up primarily of black seamen and petty officers, and was also led by a black officer. Women who wished to participate in the contest had to be unmarried, between the ages of 16 and 25, and must have completed the 11th grade, but should not have yet reached their junior year in college. Along with a 5” by 7” photograph of herself, the successful candidates were also asked to send to the battalion: “a statement of her age, weight and height and an affidavit signed by her school principal and her church minister attesting to her educational and moral qualities.”⁶⁹ In addition to the honor of being crowned “Miss 21st Special,” the winner also received a cash award of \$500 to be used towards her education.

⁶⁹ *Baltimore African American* (Baltimore) 3 February 1945 : 12.

Much like the write-ups of the European American women (discussed above) and those of Japanese American women (discussed below), articles about African American women featured in the black press often stressed the morale boost these women's beautified bodies provided for "lonely soldiers" fighting abroad. In this regard, the *Pittsburg Courier* billed pin-up sisters Margie and Vergie Washington as "double inspiration" for the GIs overseas,⁷⁰ while the *Baltimore Afro-American* heralded "Miss TAAF" Naomi Polkinghorne as "winsome" and "demure" based on her ability to inspire the Tuskegee Army Airmen.⁷¹ Wishing to show off a number the pictures at once, *The Pittsburg Courier* printed a montage of pin-ups that women had sent to a group of Navy men stationed somewhere in the Philippines. The paper noted the patriotic duty such women had performed by sending soldiers pictures of their bodies and went on to state that these women were "kind-hearted American girls, who have done much to make serviceman's lot a little easier to bear."⁷²

Soldiers themselves were very frank about the morale boost that pin-ups gave them. When the *Baltimore Afro-American* asked men stationed in the Mariana Islands: "What do you think of the pictures of thinly clad women as pin-ups?," all of the men had positive things to say about the sexualized representations of females. While each soldier preferred his pin-ups in various states of undress, many also commented that the viewing of pin-ups helped their mental state. Private Nathaniel Douthit of Harlan, Kentucky approvingly stated, "I love 'em. If it wasn't for an

⁷⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburg) 4 August 1945 : 9.

⁷¹ *Baltimore African American* (Baltimore) 15 April 1945 : 13.

⁷² *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh) 7 April 1945 : 11.

occasional glimpse of femininity, I'd go nuts. If I had my wish they'd have on even less. I prefer the ones with bathing suits on to the night gown type."⁷³

⁷³ "Do GI's Want their pin-ups Thinly Clad, or Fully Dressed?" by Cpl. James Smith *Baltimore African American* (Baltimore) 10 February 1945 : 14.

Figure 5: Marylin Jefferson, Pin-up for the “Tan Yanks,” 1945

Appeals for African American pin-ups were not always made through the black press. Staff Sergeant James A. Watson, a marine in training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, sent a direct request for a pin-up photo to the owner of an African American modeling agency in New York City. A press release issued by the agency, Branford Models, related that the marine had penned:

I am writing to you in behalf of us Negro marines who are proud of our race and our beautiful women...please help us to secure some pictures of your girls so that we can decorate our nearly erected recreational hall? I have at my disposal lots of pin-up pictures of white models but we feel we want some of our girls too, God Bless'em all.⁷⁴

Although the pictures the marine requested were not typical of the types of photographs for which Branford Models usually posed, the agency's director noted with appreciation:

The girls rallied readily to the cause and a king-sized batch of photos is being sent to Sgt. Watson in answer to...his letter.... we're just as proud of Jimmie Watson and his fellow servicemen as they seem to be of us. The girls were really thrilled.⁷⁵

Regional editions of black newspapers, employee publications, and internment camp newspapers all served as a link between the soldier and, in the words of scholar Benedict Anderson, the "imagined community" he considered himself a part of back home.⁷⁶ Words of thanks from soldiers to beautified women were found in all three publications. These photos and their captions are evidence of the important role that pin-ups of American women played in the soldiers' perception and understanding of

⁷⁴ Press Release, Branford Models, Barbara M. Watson Papers (WATS). SC MG 421. Folder 9, Printed Material, 1950-1955, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 515 Malcolm X Boulevard, New York, NY 10037-1801

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁶ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

the nation they saw themselves fighting for. Having a specifically black pin-up gave the soldier Jimmie Watson a sense of sexual satisfaction and racial pride, both of which he used to connect himself to the larger national project of war. In this sense, Watson was representative of his fellow servicemen.

The pin-up of a woman from a serviceman's local community or even the picture of a "hometown girl" he had never met offered him a sexual fantasy and remembrance of the peacetime world he had left behind. In addition, the visual consumption of pin-up pictures by soldiers allowed fighting men to anticipate the war's end. Care packages with American foods, newspaper articles about loved ones in the States, and photographs of attractive young women were small samples of the pleasures that men were promised that they could fully taste only upon their return from the war. Pin-up pictures of American women aided soldiers in fantasies about the types of sexual encounters they wished to engage in after the war. Just as a sense of personalized patriotism often linked the work a woman did on the home front to the struggles of a specific soldier she knew abroad, the reverse was also true. Pin-ups of hometown and "typical American girls" served as reminders to many soldiers of what they were fighting for on the most personal and intimate level.

The connections between female display and patriotism are also visible in the newspapers of West Coast internment camps. Though segregated from much of American society during the war, Japanese Americans living in detention centers were also avid fans and consumers of pin-ups during the war. Indeed, in August 1942 the copy boy at the *Tanforan Totalizer* openly lamented in the newspaper that his main criticism of the camp library was that: "too many pictures are torn out of the

magazines, especially *Esquire*.”⁷⁷ Although internment camp newspapers did not include photography, and thus did not carry photographs of Japanese American women, hand-drawn illustrations and descriptions of Japanese American pin-ups appeared in the publications. In June 1942, *The Tanforan Tootalizer* listed three kitchen workers from “mess hall #21” who had been named by a group of community men as that edition’s “lovelies of the week.” Filling in the gap that a photograph would have provided, the newspaper described the women simply as: “Tama Tsuchiya, 16, 5’3”, server; Mitasuya Hironeka, 20, 5’, waitress; and Miyeko Yemada, 20, 5’2”, server.”⁷⁸

The beauty contests and “pulchritude parades” that took place in the internment camps along with pin-ups, intimately tied patriotism and female beauty. A direct connection between *Esquire*’s “Varga Girl” pin-up art of European American women and pin-ups of Japanese American women living in the Denson, Arkansas internment camp can be seen March 1945 edition of the *Denson Tribune*. This edition of the paper reported on a two-night patriotic variety show at the camp in which twelve “Vargettes” performed alongside other talented male and female Japanese American performers inside the camp’s dining hall #36. The show was officially dedicated to men serving in the armed forces and was filled with both patriotic sentiment and beautiful young women. As the *Denson Tribune* reported, the show’s finale “climaxed” when Bessie Makashima, dressed as “Miss Liberty,” paraded around the dance floor followed by fellow “Vargettes” Chizu Kitaoa, Mary Ikeguchi,

⁷⁷ *Tanforan Totalizer (Tanforan, California)* 1 August 1942 : 7.

⁷⁸ *Tanforan Totalizer (Tanforan, California)* 20 June 20 1942 : 6. Tanforan

the Watanabe sisters, and nine other Nisei women holding red, white, and blue streamers.⁷⁹

By participating in the beautification and sexualization of the Japanese American female body in characteristically American ways, Japanese Americans linked themselves to the larger nation in which they lived. Although the illustrations in the internment camp newsletters were amateur and nowhere near as sexually provocative as the “Varga Girls” who appeared on the pages of *Esquire* magazine, they expressed both sentiments and social goals. The use of idealized representations of pin-ups in these camp publications helped to link these Japanese American communities to the nation through the celebration of beautification as a patriotic tool. Just as in the African American example above, the use of women of color as pin-ups was essential to mainstreaming ethnic communities into the larger picture of American culture and life. Many Japanese Americans, especially the second-generation Nisei youth who were the actual performers in such events, identified strongly with American customs and traditions and felt a strong allegiance to their country. In this regard, although many Nisei valued or, at least recognized the influence of their Japanese heritage, most did not consider themselves culturally Japanese. The pin-up imagery found in their internment camp newsletters served as a critical link to the representation of this identity. Illustrations of young, smiling Japanese American women with the American flag flying beside them and fireworks going off in the background linked the ideals of beauty, patriotism, and national pride,

⁷⁹ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 2 March 2 1945 : 8.

Figure 6: Illustration of Bessie Makashima, “Miss Liberty” Denson, Arkansas Relocation Center, 1942

even for a group of people who had been racially discriminated against, castigated, physically interned, and earmarked as possibly subversive by their government.

African American, European American, and Japanese American women all participated in the pin-up culture of World War II. When “Miss Doris M. Smith” won the title of the “Sweetheart of Company B,” an African American engineering battalion stationed in the Pacific, the battalion also sent her a \$100 war bond as a token of their appreciation.⁸⁰ Similarly, white employee Jean Connell was given \$25 by the employee events club of her company after being named “Miss Allied of 1944” in the pin-up contest conducted by Allied servicemen in all parts of the world.⁸¹ In 1943 news about contestants in a beauty pageant held at the Rowher, Arkansas internment camp for Japanese Americans headlined *The Rowher Outpost* everyday for weeks. The woman who was eventually chosen as “queen,” received a celebrity-like reception at the camp. Pin-up contests on the home front during World War II were an elaborate social ritual that received popular participation by separate of American women. Beautification and sexualized representation of the female body was not passively encouraged, but was rather directly rewarded and hailed as the ultimate goal that a patriotic young woman should strive to achieve.

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In addition to soldiers’ consumption of pin-up images, in-person interactions with real women also played an important role in keeping the troops’ morale high

⁸⁰ Pittsburgh Courier (Pittsburgh) 28 April 1945 : 15.

⁸¹ *Family Album* 5, no. 1 (January, 1945) : 1.

during the long and gruesome war, As African American Sergeant Sidney Headerson of Flint, Michigan explained to *Baltimore Afro-American*, pin-ups:

...keep me in the right frame of mind. Sometimes when I am low in spirit and see a pretty face and figure, I come back to reality. Instead of putting more clothes on them, I would suggest less clothes and if possible I would like to see just one of them in real life.⁸²

In 1943 a Japanese American soldier told a *Denson Tribune* reporter that although his military training involved hard work, it was all worth it when he socialized at base parties with the “pretty and perfumed” women from the Denson and Rohwer internment camps. He suggested that his fellow soldiers had been pleasantly surprised during a recent dance when the same girls they had remembered as plain and unbecoming, “dolled” themselves up for the gathering held at his military training base. Encouraging the women to make frequent and regular visits to the camp, the soldier assured them:

You’re women worth fighting for. If you don’t believe us, ask the hundreds of dripping [sweating] guys who bumped you around the jammed packed Service club floor.⁸³

Therefore, during World War II, numerous voices encouraged American women to make themselves into attractive pin-ups. These same voices made it especially clear that the expression of female beauty needed to be visible to soldiers to help them perform their duties.

Popular messages sent to female nurses, United Service Organizations (USO) hostesses, Red Cross volunteers, and other women engaged in war work all stressed that maintaining an attractive appearance was essential to keeping the troops’ spirits

⁸² *ibid*, 14.

⁸³ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 17 August 1943 : 3.

elevated. Possibly this was what motivated a group of white women working at the Bendiz Friez plant in Baltimore to form the Friez Rockettes, and perform for the benefit of soldiers at nearby military installations during the war.⁸⁴ The USO and similar organizations encouraged women to fraternize with soldiers, using their feminine charms during dances and other company-sponsored social gatherings to lift their spirits. The message sent was that it was essential for women at these events to be beautiful. In a call for new junior hostesses in the employee publication of the Acme Steel Company, the listing specifically requested that in addition to being “refined in manner,” the young unmarried women applying must also be “pleasing in appearance.”⁸⁵

During the war, American women of many ethnic groups, geographic locations, and professions were told that the beatification of their bodies played an important role in raising troop morale. Regardless of whether she was a white American technician working in Chicago steel mill, a Japanese American high school student attending a dance at a nearby military camp, or an African American Red Cross nurse stationed in England, she was encouraged by society to be very conscious of her looks at all times.

These cultural ideals were reinforced by cartoons, illustrations, photographs, articles, and opinion pieces that lambasted women who did not meet these socially prescribed beauty expectations. The black press, internment camp newspapers, and employee publications often made fun of “fat” women and others deemed aesthetically unappealing. In addition, “unattractive” women were frequently

⁸⁴ Anderson, 61.

⁸⁵ *Acme News* 8, no. 9, (September 1942).

portrayed as loud, rude, dimwitted, sexually aggressive, or simply pathetic. Women who eschewed beautification were considered hopelessly physically and mentally unattractive. During World War II, the publications expressed the viewpoint that women who consciously chose not to beautify themselves betrayed not only themselves, but also their country.

An article in the *Baltimore Afro-American* entitled “GIs Want ARC (American Red Cross) Girls ‘Sharp’ from their Hair-Do’s to Nail Polish” blatantly expressed the concern that some women were not fulfilling their womanly duties to servicemen by “letting down” their appearance. The article explained that injured soldiers were very particular about the physical appearance of the women who nursed them back to health. After visiting an Army hospital abroad Evelyn Brooks, war correspondent for *The Baltimore Afro-American*, noted that:

GIs here are as particular about Red Cross girls being on the ball as to looks as they are about the service they girls render. It's a matter of morale, they carefully explain. “What’s wrong with your hair?” one queried, recently, looking with disfavor upon the au naturelle locks of a worker and me. I meekly explained that our trouble was lack of heat. A short time afterwards we had the necessary heat, with the promise that if we keep ourselves on the ball, he would find all the necessities. And please do not let your fingernail polish become chipped unless you want to be reminded often that you need a manicure.⁸⁶

A similar article by James H. Randall, a staff writer for the American Negro Press lamented that during his tour of Red Cross clubs in England, he saw only about seven attractive women and of those he felt three were “rude” and “condescending”. After touring two servicemen’s clubs staffed by “all-colored personnel with British help” Randall argued that:

⁸⁶ Evelyn Sutton, “GIs Want ARC (American Red Cross) Girls ‘Sharp’ from their Hair-Do’s to Nail Polish” *Baltimore African American* (Baltimore) 24 February 1945 : 10.

The American Red Cross could go a long way in its program of bolstering the morale of the GIs over here if they would pay a trifle more attention to pulchritude and personality when selecting personnel. One of the objections, which the boys have to the general run of the staff, is that there seems to be a dearth of good-looking women. Of course I know all of the women are charming but it seems that every time they send over a new contingent, they are all of the dull, homely and old-fashioned type.⁸⁷

While pin-ups and other beautified women were praised and rewarded for their actions, women who fell below predominant social standards were mocked and publicly humiliated.

As the above examples show, women who did not participate in prevailing acts of the beauty culture could get as much negative publicity as the pin-ups got in positive reinforcement. During the war, beautification was sold to women not simply as something that was important for their own good, but also as a goal to be attained for the common good or benefit of others. Thus, beautification was understood popularly as a duty women owed to their husbands, boyfriends, families, and even their nation.

Reinforcing these concerns was the unhesitating tendency of many Japanese American males to tell the women what they perceived as their faults. At times males in detention centers did not shy away from sharing with women what they perceived as their faults. In July 1942 “CK,” a member of the *Tanforan Totalizer* staff weighed in with his complaints about the misuse of beauty products by women in the camp. He chastised camp women for overusing make-up, hair crèmes, and fragrances. Then he criticized the camp women, saying that too many of them suffered from what he

⁸⁷ James H. Randall, “Red Cross Queried on Policy of Personally and Pulchritude” *Baltimore African American* (Baltimore) 18 April 1945 : 15

called “surplus avoirdupois,” a term he used to indicate that the women were unbecomingly overweight. Further scolding women at the camp, CK chided:

Girls, you shouldn't buy too much candy and ice cream at the canteen. You are getting fat. Maybe it will be all right if you run around the track at 5:30am like the Shimanouchi sisters.⁸⁸

There was continuous commentary about female beauty in camp newspapers. After CK's comments were published, others in the community used the paper to express their views on the subject of female beautification in the camps. The men who sponsored the selection of the “mess hall lovelies” in the paper each week concurred with CK's opinions. However, a female internee quickly snapped back in a letter to the editor, rebutting that CK had:

gone too far in his column, criticizing other people, especially girls and mess hall workers.... What business is it of his to comment and insult other people's figures?”⁸⁹

This letter indicated that this woman, and perhaps others, fought back against the dominant social commentary that surrounded their bodies.

Although not all women accepted the prevailing views or played by the rules of beautification that were thrust upon them, the mass proliferation of beautified representations of women's bodies made it very difficult for mid-twentieth century women to resist what had become a norm in American society. Clearly during World War II, models and Hollywood pin-ups were not alone in the pressures they received to beautify their bodies. The proliferating pin-up culture demanded that even ordinary American women be conscious of their beauty and attempt to correct any perceived physical imperfections. The push for women to beautify and display their bodies

⁸⁸ *Tanforan Totalizer (Tanforan, California)* 25 July 1942) : 8.

⁸⁹ *Tanforan Totalizer (Tanforan, California)* 1 August 1942 : 8.

crossed racial, geographic, and class boundaries, serving as one of the largest shifts in the lives of American women during the course of the twentieth century. It also marks the emergence of one of the most controlling cultural forces in the lives of American women over the course of U.S. history.

* * *

During the Second World War, the United States government warned citizens that the American way of life was in danger and that therefore, America's sons, brothers, and husbands had to be enlisted in the war against the dangerous forces of the Axis powers. While a select number of American women took up arms as military nurses or members of the Women's Auxiliary Corps, a far greater number participated in the war effort on the home front. Patriotic and full of pride, the women who worked at the Maiden Form factory were no exception. Eager to show support for departing soldiers, whenever a train passed the Maiden Form factory, the company's women ran to the windows next to their workspaces to wave good-bye. But it was not their handkerchiefs that the Maiden Form women held in their hands while wishing the soldiers farewell; interestingly enough, as the Maiden Form women stood at the open windows that faced the railroad tracks adjacent to their factory, they waved nothing other than Maiden Form bras.⁹⁰ *The Maiden Forum* reported that the sight of young women hurling bras out the window elicited a riotous response from the traveling soldiers who often cheered and hooted. One young soldier was so overjoyed he threw his hat in the women's direction. Calling the hat their "trophy," the women hung it over the women's workstation with a pink ribbon, thereby

⁹⁰ *The Maiden Forum*, (October 1944) : 3.

expressing the pride they felt in the daily acts they performed to raise the troops' spirits. Maiden Form women who whimsically waved brassieres out the window worked in a factory that produced government-issued military uniforms, submitted pin-up pictures of themselves to their company newsletter, and physically made war goods with their hands while at the same time displaying patriotism on their bodies.

Much like the seamstresses working at Maiden Form, many American women viewed their bodies as important in terms of fulfilling their social responsibilities. Thus, the explanation of why working women became pin-ups girls during the Second World War lies in connections that such women made between their duties as females, workers, and Americans. The adoption of beauty culture and production of pin-up pictures was a way for them to thread each of these three separate identities together into one cohesive representation of their personhood. Considering the messages women received from soldiers, their employers, and society-at-large, it is not surprising that they felt this way. During World War II, numerous authoritative voices in American society promoted and rewarded the belief that women's acts of self-beautification were a patriotic duty that raised their morale and the morale of servicemen. Beauty product companies counseled the U.S. government and female war workers that personal beauty was a prerequisite to becoming a productive worker. In addition, as employers in a wide range of industries trained their newly hired female staff in the skills needed to perform their jobs, they simultaneously encouraged their participation in beauty contests, "pulchritude parades," and other beauty rituals on company time. Other venues, initiated by Japanese Americans living in west coast internment camps and African Americans inhabiting urban communities

across the United States, provided similar spaces where women of color could also be actors in the rituals of beautification in their segregated communities. The experiences of African, European, and Japanese American women during World War II all point to the pervasive power the ideology of beautification had on the lives of different groups of American women during the war.

As discussed above, working women on the home front became “pin-up girls” during World War II for several reasons. On a societal level, women’s bodies were conceptualized as a venue through which they could personally participate in the war effort. The beautification and representation of women’s bodies was deemed a marker of their femininity, a sign of their personal efficacy, and their gift to a nation at war. For these reasons, white American steel worker Penny Sestoso submitted a full-body pin-up of herself lying on a beach blanket in a t-shirt, shorts and heels to her employee publication.⁹¹ Similar motivations caused African American first Lieutenant Naomi Bell to take equal pride in serving her nation as a military officer, hard-working nurse at the Tuskegee Army Air Field Station Hospital, and “Pin-up Girl of the Week” for the *Pittsburgh Courier*.⁹² Female Japanese American cafeteria attendants pledged allegiance to these same principles when they scampered to get their hair done and their work completed so they could be named “Mess Hall Lovlies” in their internment camp newspaper.

This new pattern of bodily display on the part of women who were not professional models or actresses became a pervasive and acceptable practice during World War II. Historians debate the extent to which World War II changed American

⁹¹ *Acme News* 8, no. 12 (December 1943) : 3

⁹² *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh) 16 June 1945 : 7

culture and society. While some argue that the war fundamentally changed Americans' attitudes, beliefs, and mores, others counter that the war essentially accelerated longstanding social trends. When looking specifically at the beautified representations of American women between 1941 and 1945, it is clear that the war was a catalytic event. With widespread public approval, one of the most significant cultural effects of the war was that it brought sexualized images of average women's bodies into the mainstream of public display in American society. These patterns continued and expanded in the decades to follow. Thus the war served as a watershed moment in the history of American women because before this time, overt sexuality was an important part only of the appeal cultivated by models, actresses, and other women whose work was directly tied to the physical aesthetic. However, as evidenced by the pin-up phenomena, the war introduced sexualized representations of average American women's bodies into American visual culture. Indeed, since that time, public sexual display of one's body has remained a ritualized and pervasive part of the experience of womanhood in the United States.

Chapter 2: Bodies of the “Other,” Reflections of the Self:
Beauty Race and Identity during World War II

Figure 7: V-J Day Cover of the Allied-Avon *Family Album*.

At the national level, President Roosevelt, Congress, and U.S. government officials had been involved in escalating international tensions for several years prior to America's official entrance into World War II. Yet many Americans did not feel a deep emotional connection to the global politics of war until after the December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft and submarine raid on the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The Pearl Harbor attack forced Americans, many of whom still held strong isolationist views from the nation's prior engagement in World War I, to view their lives in a global context. In fact, the experience of being under siege during the Pearl Harbor attack caused many Americans to reflect on why their nation, culture, and way of life were worth defending.

Such thought was not unusual since wars often reinforce a sense of national unity as citizens contemplate their national identity and character. To wit, President Roosevelt began his 1942 State of the Union address with the proud observation that since the Pearl Harbor attack, "the Union was never more closely knit together." In his speech, Roosevelt argued that the war should be understood as a struggle between "good" and "evil." He went on to characterize Americans as "champions of tolerance, and decency, and freedom, and faith," stressing that a total victory over the enemy was needed. Roosevelt thus attempted to bolster national unity by presenting to Americans the image of a malevolent external enemy whom the American people could define themselves against.

Removed from the geopolitics that ignited the war, many Americans understood the conflict to be centered on preserving their way of life and extending to others around the globe the freedoms that they enjoyed. During World War II,

Americans came to define who they were and what they stood for by comparing their lives to the lives of those living in the countries governed by the Axis powers. Once fully engaged in a war against the fascist governments of Germany, Italy, Japan and their allies, Americans conceptualized the protection of their core national values as an important part of what they were fighting for. A belief that democracy, freedom, and the American way of life should be upheld at all cost was an important, if not the most important, ideological justification for U.S. involvement in the war. This concept explained to U.S. citizens “why we fight” and why the Allies “must win.”

An innate sense of national superiority thus guided many Americans’ thoughts about the war, about their enemies, and about the core of their own identity. Bodily aesthetics were one mechanism through which this sense of national superiority was expressed in mass American culture between 1941 and 1945. In the war between “good” and “evil,” Americans often employed their cultural constructs of beauty and race as a type of visual shorthand. In fact, the physical demarcations of beauty and race were used by Americans to represent both their bodies and those of their enemies. These constructs served as more than merely superficial characterizations: they contained implicit judgments. During the war, written communications, mass publications, and pictorial representations utilized popular conceptions of race and beauty to clearly distinguish “virtuous” Americans bodies from those of their “evil” enemies. In the context of the struggle to win a military victory abroad and unity on the home front, representations of the body took center stage in many Americans’ discussions about the war. This discourse was often as important to people of color in the United States as it was to those in the white majority.

Foreign “Others”

*“I haven’t seen so many white girls in months!”*⁹³

- a U.S. Marine upon returning to his prewar place of employment

In his analysis of Japanese-U.S. propaganda during World War II, historian John Dower has pointed out that racialized images of the enemy's body played a significant role in augmenting the anti-Japanese feelings held by many Americans during the war.⁹⁴ Beyond the derogatory names – "yellow bastards" and "monkey men" – that Americans used to refer to the Japanese and the ugly and wretched portrayals of them in cartoons, it was in fact the enemy's caricatured physical appearance that helped to make the Japanese so repugnant to many Americans. Using primarily military journals as evidence, Dower's work illustrates how the Japanese body was portrayed in anti-Japanese cartoons as an ugly, sub-human, and deserving of death. In such depictions, the enemy's image represented his dubious intentions as painting the enemy as amoral and inferior made a clear visual statement about why the Japanese had to be defeated.

Similarly, historian Robert B. Westbrook has uncovered government propaganda from as early as the late 1930s that depicted racial caricatures of Japanese military men. To interest Americans in the burgeoning international conflict, government-funded artists drew such representations aimed at the general American public. By forebodingly asking, “Will a yellow hand of lust fall roughly on the white shoulder of *your* sister?” such rape propaganda suggested American men had a

⁹³ *The Family Album* 3, no. 2 (February 1943) : 6.

⁹⁴ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

personal responsibility to act.⁹⁵ The meanings of symbols and images in such propaganda were recognizable to many in the U.S. because they played on long-standing American racial schemas. Many whites had long feared black males as sexual predators who sought to violate the chastity of white women. Such negative characterizations of black males were prevalent in both private discussions and popular culture for much of U.S. history, and these perceptions were thus easily applied to other persons of color during World War II. Beginning in the late-19th century, popular representations of a mythic black male rapist symbolized a deep domestic threat within American culture. This foreboding racial “other,” who sought to compromise the virtue of white women, represented a menace to the uncomplicated and happy white American ideal of life. D.W. Griffith’s 1912 film *Birth of Nation* best illustrates this popular racial narrative. Griffith is recognized by film historians as the father of American cinema and his production played into the popular trope of the black male racist.⁹⁶ Rife with racial allegory, the film’s storyline followed the exploits of an ogreish black villain who absconded with an unwilling young white girl and was stopped only by the valiant efforts of local Ku Klux Klansmen.

President Woodrow Wilson, who invited his entire cabinet to a White House viewing of the film, was one of many white Americans who watched such depictions of African Americans for personal enjoyment and entertainment during the early

⁹⁵ Robert B. Westbrook, *Why We Fought: Forging American Obligations in World War II*. (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004) , 70-71.

⁹⁶ For an excellent discussion of the negative stereotypes of the black male body in popular American culture during the 20th century, see: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of the New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black *Representations*, No. 24, Special Issue: America Reconstructed, 1840-1940. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 129-155.

twentieth century. Portrayals of the black male rapist were a popular and readily understood cultural icon of the Jim Crow Era. In part, these depictions derived from white fears of black political enfranchisement and represented the black body as an eminent threat to the way of life that many white Americans had come to enjoy. And even though discussion of an eminent “yellow peril” was a new phenomenon in American mass culture during the twentieth century, such characterizations played on long-standing racial schemas, which made them easily understandable to many Americans during the 1940s. Thus, government-disseminated rape propaganda, such as the poster described above exploited traditional fears about the non-white “other” in order to express to Americans the severity of the new threat posed by the Japanese enemy.

The bodies of enemy soldiers were thus on the front lines of symbolic attack in American characterizations of the other” during the war. Government rape propaganda racially defamed the Japanese male body while at the same time characterizing the white female body as an object of ultimate esteem that needed to be protected by American military recruits. Posters conveying this message simplified the complexities of war by presenting a straightforward domestic threat and compelling national interest. The subtext of these representations asserted that American men needed to be mobilized against the forces of immoral and unscrupulous foreign combatants so that the white female body and the American way of life that she represented would remain safe.

During World War II, derogatory characterizations of Japanese soldiers’ bodies were not limited to government propaganda and cartoons in military journals.

In addition to the excellent government-produced sources that Dower and Westbrook have uncovered, such conceptions of the enemy can be found in the private sector as well. Indeed, racist language and imagery flourished in American workplaces, where it was visible on a daily basis to those on the home front. In addition to externally produced posters that hung on office walls, internally produced employee newspapers also frequently included racist characterizations of American foes.

Employee publications sought to reinforce a sense of American pride and patriotism among their workforces during the war. Such efforts had positive economic benefits for companies involved in war work and important psychological benefits for workers who were often intimately tied to men serving abroad. Pictures of American flags, articles about a company's war production accomplishments, and lists of former workers currently enlisted in military service were staples of many employee publications. In addition, at times, employee publications cultivated national pride by degrading the people and nations who opposed the United States. In this regard, company newspapers' verbal and pictorial caricatures of the enemies' bodies marked them as racial "others" and demoted them to sub-human status. For example, the grotesquely animalistic bodies of caricatured Japanese soldiers appeared in stark contrast to the pictures of female pin-ups also on the pages of such publications. As Chapter One demonstrates, during the war female pin-ups stood for an important American ideal. In this regard, the racist characterizations of Japanese soldiers represented the imagined threat to this ideal. White American female pin-ups served as prized models of the ideal female human form, while the bodies of foreign male soldiers were its antithesis.

In April 1943, Pfc. Paul Holic boasted to the readers of *Lukens Plate*, Acme Steel's employee newspaper: "I'm glad I got my chance to face those slant eyes." Holic viewed his first encounter with Japanese forces to be a pleasurable experience that gave him the opportunity to exact "some revenge" upon the Japanese "for getting us all into this conflict."⁹⁷ Settling the score with the Japanese aggressor often took the form of both physical and verbal assault upon Japanese soldiers' bodies in publications such as the one that published Holic's letter. In fact, the letters printed in employee newspapers that American soldiers penned to their former coworkers back home evidence this trend. Two months after publishing Holic's letter, *Lukens Plate* printed a lengthy account of the war from another former employee of Acme Steel. In the letter, Pfc. Harry Dynesko, like Holic, cast Japanese soldiers as sub-human racial adversaries, when informing those at the steel mill:

Since I have been in the Army, I have spent most of my time overseas. I have been in the service for 15 months. I have been in action lately with those pork-heads. I got tangled up with some of those Japs, I was certainly in some hot sports I had to get out of. But I managed to maneuver around them Japs and get a potshot at them. Them Japs [sic] are tricky little porkies but I know their tricks too well now.... We had to hunt the japs like rabbits to get them out of their holes... Those porkies could be smelled miles away [so] you know that there is a Jap around somewhere in the area.... That morning we gave them the works [with] lead flying [in] all direction[s] and that morning the japs were laying around sky high. What a mess! They really make you so sick from their smell that we had to volver [shoot] them up...I hope I will meet up with the Porkies again. I hope it will be soon.⁹⁸

Dynesko's words clearly illustrate the frequency and intensity with which the bodies of enemy soldiers were assumed to be and treated as animalistic, sub-human and deserving of death. He spoke of Japanese soldiers not as terrifying military

⁹⁷ *Lukens Plate* 10, no. 7 (April 1943).

⁹⁸ *Lukens Plate* 10, no. 14 (June 1943). : 5.

opponents, but as varmint-like “porkies” who sat ready to be hunted down. By symbolically and literally defiling the enemy’s body, American combatants convinced themselves that their adversaries were less human and less formidable than Americans, and consequently easier to kill.

Directly relating his military service to the war work being performed at the Lukens Steel Mill in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, Dynesko encouraged plant workers to keep their productivity high. His letter asked the entire mill staff to see their daily jobs on the home front as essential to his efforts to defeat the enemy that he so vividly portrayed for them. Dynesko closed his letter with the statement: “we can use the steel [produced at the Lukens Mill] to pour on the little porkies.”⁹⁹

The sentiments of Privates Holic and Dynesko were not isolated incidents. Racist language and imagery was often blatant and expressly encouraged in employee publications. Beginning in February 1942, The *Lukens Plate* printed what it judged to be the best employee-submitted “Luken’s War Bond Jingle” as a monthly feature. For their patriotic effort, each winning jingle-writer was awarded a \$25 U.S. war savings bond by the company. As an example jingle, the publication offered the following model:

So sorry for Yellow Jappy
Who will be somewhat slap-happy
When his belly gets the feel
Of bombs well-made from Lukens Steel.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Ibid, p. 5

¹⁰⁰*Lukens Plate* 9, no. 3 (February 1942) : 1.

Speaking of the Japanese as “yellow,” was used to both denote the enemies' different skin color and perceived cowardice. In this way, race became a key description by which the enemy's outward physical appearance was related to his inner character.

Choosing a yellow backdrop for its first cover after V-J Day, Allied-Avon's employee publication similarly printed four belittling depictions of shaking Japanese military men under the word “VICTORY.”¹⁰¹ Other Allied-Avon employee publication covers in comparison with the V-J Day illustration are especially telling. For example, *The Family Album*, an employee publication that typically fostered a placid familial atmosphere, regularly featured photographs. Springtime photos of the local landscape, candid shots of employees' children, and full-body spreads of the company's swimsuit contest participants graced the publication's covers during the war years. These images were model scenes of American life being lived out in the Suffern, New Jersey area. In contrast with such a portrayal, the September 1945 V-J Day cover prominently featured the caricatured bodies of Japanese military men. The publication presented such persons as literally foreign to Americans and their way of life. Derogatory representations of the “other” were especially compelling visual tools in that they derived their power from their contrast to an all-American ideal. Covers of *The Family Album* were visual presentations to factory employees of both what they were and were not.

Yet the racist manner in which many in the U.S. represented the bodies of Japanese men should not be seen as an inevitable outcome of an American psyche predisposed to bigotry. While there is no doubt that thousands of Americans felt

¹⁰¹ *Family Album* 5, no. 7 (August 1945) : front cover

themselves racially superior to Asians before, during, and after World War II, not all Americans chose to castigate the Japanese enemy via racist rhetoric. As such, racism should not be understood to be an unchanging constant in American life, but rather a phenomenon shaped by a specific context. While racism has historically functioned to position one group as supreme over another, certainly it has been employed at different times and places, and used in various ways to achieve different ends.

In the context of World War II, the use of sub-human caricatures of Japanese soldiers expressed fears about domestic safety and national survival, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack. An enemy few Americans had thought about before the war now loomed large in American consciousness. In this context, the use of anti-Japanese imagery in American culture during World War II defamed the bodies of America's enemies in an attempt to symbolically attack the military might of the Empire of Japan. American military men who spoke of the Japanese opponents as "slant-eyed rabbits" or foul-smelling "little porkies" dehumanized them through their racist language and thus made the enemy appear to be a less foreboding opponent. For Pfc. Dynesko and others in the U.S. military, the supposed racial inferiority of the enemies they met in the Asian theater made Japanese fighters seem more like animals hunted for sport than powerful and threatening military adversaries who had launched a brilliantly calibrated and successful attack on the United States.

But Japanese soldiers depicted as animalistic vermin in employee publications were not the only targets of visual attack. For instance, a July 1943 cartoon in the

Acme News showed a disparaging illustration of a Japanese and a German enemy.¹⁰² The same year Seagram's created what company advertisers called a "goodwill poster" that pictured animalistic caricatures of Italian, German, and Japanese military men.¹⁰³ Thus, while physical differences based on race were important markers by which the Japanese were castigated as "others," inferiority was attributed to even European enemies who were ethnically similar to the white American majority. It was their wretched and homely physical look, compounded by the physical markers of their race, which made the Japanese appear so despicable in American illustrations. Both ugly and racially abhorrent, such depictions of the physical demarcations of race and the absence of beauty portrayed the Japanese soldier as an evildoer in the eyes of Americans.

Representations of the enemy's body thus served as a template upon which American commentaries about the Axis power's evil nature was superimposed. As such, the body held a key symbolic position in America during the war. Repulsive caricatures of Japanese, German, and Italian soldiers' bodies signified their governments' repugnant national intentions. In declaring war upon Japan the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, President Roosevelt asked Americans to "remember the character of the onslaught against us."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, as this discussion has shown, throughout the war the Japanese were popularly characterized by Americans as hideous and repulsive enemies. Disparaging representations of enemy soldiers' bodies were targets that Americans symbolically assaulted as proxies for the Axis powers.

¹⁰² *Acme News*, (July 1943).

¹⁰³ "Goodwill poster," SEAG Accession 2173, Series IV: Miscellany, Subseries: B, C, D, Box 292, Folder: Design for Goodwill, c. 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Declaration of War upon the Empire of Japan by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 8, 1941

Verbal and pictorial assaults such as these foreshadowed the annihilating physical attacks that U.S. troops hoped to launch in retaliation for the Pearl Harbor offensive. In this way, the body and the body politic were powerfully linked during World War II.

*

In American culture, during the war representations of the American female body served as a stark contrast to representations of male enemy body. In July 1943 an employee publication of the Acme Steel Company in Chicago, Illinois printed a lengthy letter it had received from Cpl. Louis Macaluso, a former truck driver for the company. Reporting on the war from an island in the Pacific, Macaluso recalled the delight he felt witnessing his first aerial “dogfight” between American and Japanese forces. Macaluso happily informed those back home that the “yellow bellies” gave up quickly and attempted to return to their home bases in order to avoid total defeat. He thanked those at his former place of employment for care packages and cartons of cigarettes that they had recently sent him. In addition to negatively characterizing the enemies’ bodies, he also reminisced about the types of bodies he missed seeing back home. In particular, Macaluso wanted the folks back home to know that on the Pacific front: “There is one thing rarer than chocolate and whiskey: FEMALES. They are non-existent.... No wife, no sweetheart back home need worry about her spouse, or fiancé, being unfaithful. He couldn’t be if he chose to be.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, his racist characterizations of the enemies’ bodies sharply contrasted with his positive appraisal of American women's bodies.

¹⁰⁵ *Acme News* 9, no. 7 (July 1943) : 9.

A yearning to be reunited with American women after the war caused many soldiers to fantasize while they were away from the homefront. However, it was not simply that many men serving abroad missed physical contact with women; indeed sexual encounters between soldiers and foreign women were common during the war. Furthermore, the words of enlisted men and military officers make clear the particular type of women they missed. The sentiments expressed in the letters of Macaluso, Hammer, and DeStefano pointed to the fact that they missed interactions with women of their own race and culture. Perhaps no GI made this clearer than a marine on military leave in 1943 who, after entering his pre-war place of employment in New Jersey, jubilantly exclaimed: "I haven't seen so many white girls in months!"

During the war, race and beauty became tied together in ways that bolstered white Americans' conceptions of their supremacy. In this context, the symbolic value that the beautified female pin-up held in the United States is made especially clear when it is contrasted with depictions of the enemy's body within American culture. For instance, both idealized representations of the American female body and derogatory caricatures of the male body of the enemy frequently appeared in employee publications during the war. Bodies were thus key symbols of the nation and national interest in America during World War II. These images both denoted and reinforced for many Americans the reasons why they were fighting. The bodies of the nation's enemies were drawn as weak and deprived, thus signifying that the Axis powers were incapable of fair combat with U.S. forces. By contrast, pictures of youthful pin-ups conveyed America's strength and vitality, and as Chapter One details, the pin-up image strengthened the soldier's will to fight. In addition to

functioning as an incentive to U.S. military achievement, for those living in mainstream American society, such depictions represented the richness of life in the United States.

Yet such use of white female bodies was not a new trend in American life. Indeed, the female form had been long employed as a national symbol that represented core American ideals and values throughout United States history. Lady Liberty, the Scales of Justice, and other popular American iconography have historically linked representations of the female body to American virtues such as equality, liberty, and freedom. Like these earlier forms of female imagery, the pin-ups that proliferated in America during World War II were, for many Americans, symbols of the joys and freedoms that life in the United States offered and made possible. In particular, beauty was an important part of the American pin-up's appeal. The prototypically young, white, slender woman represented more than an ideal American physical form; she represented a way of life. Pin-ups were often draped, as Maiden Form worker Shirley Levine, in the American flag. Thus depictions of the white female pin-up represented the happy, liberated, and uninhibited spirit that many Americans sought to live and believed that they were defending during World War II.

Especially in the military arena, pin-ups were used as symbols of the nation's strength during the Second World War. In the war's aerial combat zones, the noses of American fighter planes were decorated with pictures of sexually alluring pin-up illustrations. At the same time, the common American vernacular incorporated the use of the term "bombshell" to describe stunning displays of female beauty.¹⁰⁶ Even

¹⁰⁶ Elaine Tyler May *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

the sexually alluring swimsuit style of the decade, “the bikini,” was named after the South Pacific island where America’s first nuclear bomb was tested. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, female beauty became a common symbol not just of liberty and freedom, but also of power.

Pin-ups symbolized the supremacy of American military power because for many Americans, they represented the global epitome of the female form. In fact, many European Americans in the United States during World War II perceived the young, slender, beautified white American pin-up to be the most attractive female form in the world. The subject of the American female’s beauty in comparison to the bodies of other women in the world was a frequent topic in employee publications during World War II and the ensuing period of international troop deployment after V-J Day.

In the months following the Allied victory in Japan, Shirley Levine, Maiden Form’s first company pin-up girl, wrote a question-and-answer segment, called “The Inquirer,” for the company’s employee publication. Levine interviewed her co-workers about love, dating, and current company events; she then posted some of the responses she received for the enjoyment of the entire Maiden Form community. In July 1946, Levine asked newly returned soldiers: “How does the American girl stack up with girls you met overseas?” “I found the native women of the jungles very friendly BUT – American girls sure know the score better,” said mechanic Dominick DeStefano.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, most of the men questioned by Levine claimed they preferred stylized (white) American women to the less beautified (non-white) females they met

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 2.

while on duty abroad. Factory supervisor Arthur Hammer thus lamented: "I'll go on record stating that there is no comparison between American girls and girls in the Pacific Islands. The New Guinea natives who are reputedly the South Sea Beauties are far from beautiful. Many a GI was disillusioned as I was."¹⁰⁸

Unsolicited comparisons between women appeared in *The Maiden Forum* even before Levine's inquiry. And likewise, race and beauty were key markers upon which soldiers based their appraisals. After returning to the brassiere factory, a soldier formerly stationed in Alaska bemoaned how unattractive he found the Native American women that he met during the war. He noted: "We were away from civilization entirely – strictly GIs. There was no shortage of women if you consider Eskimos... [But] after nineteen months of that, almost anything would look good."¹⁰⁹ In a similar vein, another Maiden Form worker who had been stationed in the South Pacific testified that beautified American women enjoyed a clear physical superiority over women in that region of the world. After noting he had a Maiden Form pin-up on the wall of his tent, the soldier commented, "I don't know if your slogan 'A Maiden Form For Every Shape' would do so well down here, as these girls don't look like those at home."¹¹⁰ This, soldier was certain the bodies of women in the South Pacific were so different from those of the women he knew in Bayonne, New Jersey, that he doubted that even the Maiden Form bra would aid in making them physically desirable. Thus, in addition to the fact that the women at home were white, their use of beauty culture was also important in soldiers' evaluations of their desirability.

¹⁰⁸ "The Inquirer," *The Maiden Forum*, (July 1946) : 2.

¹⁰⁹ *The Maiden Forum*, (October 1946) : 4.

¹¹⁰ *The Maiden Forum*, (January 1945) : 1.

While American women often dominated white soldiers' discussions of beauty culture, these were not the only women about whom the men wrote in their letters. Soldiers' words also indicate why they found the bodies of many nationalities of white women to be attractive, whether the women were from America, Europe, Australia, or elsewhere. When comparing American women to women in other parts of the world, white men often used a women's emphasis on beauty culture as a standard of measure by which they were able to assess and evaluate her attractiveness. The words of three soldiers who answered Levine's question in *The Maiden Forum* evidence this criterion. Mechanic Jack Shanker stated his opinion that the beauty of women in Europe was a result of their "hav[ing] perfected the art of make-up."¹¹¹ Meanwhile, his coworker Charles Rudolph pointed to Asian Pacific women's lack of brassiere use as a way to comment negatively upon their bodies, lamenting that: "I ONLY saw Hula girls and the native women of the islands – you know, I don't think any of them ever heard of Maiden Form. The girls I saw in the islands have lots of personality all of which they show – American girls wear clothes."¹¹² Proclaiming his vast knowledge and reflection on the subject, Maiden Form factory supervisor and Ex-GI Bill Shapiro detailed his experiences with women in several nations and likewise ranked them low in attractiveness because they did not employ the same grooming and beauty regimens as American women. As Shapiro explained, "I've seen many girls in Europe including German, French, and Swiss. I found the country girls a little more backward than the city girls. For example, they use less make-up and dress more plainly." Certain that beauty products enhanced a

¹¹¹ "The Inquirer," *The Maiden Forum*, (July 1946) : 2.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 2.

female's desirability, Shapiro praised American women for their exemplary skill in this art. "There is no doubt about it," Shapiro commented, "[I] give it to the American girls."¹¹³

Regardless of whether soldiers were involved in intimate personal relationships with the women they met abroad or actually waited to return to the U.S. to engage in sexual relations, their words are illustrative. Analyzing these responses is one way of assessing how beauty was defined in America during the mid-twentieth century from a bottom-up perspective. The words of former military personnel in employee publications thus demonstrate not only that white American men found the bodies of white American females highly desirable, but their responses also point to the specific reasons why they found these women so attractive. Taken together, the comments of soldiers in employee publications demonstrate that it was not simply white women that soldiers missed, but specifically white women who had beautified their bodies with make-up, heels, and fashionable clothing. Public speech by American men about the women they found desirable shows the extent to which the use of beauty culture was a criterion by which females were categorized and judged attractive during the mid-twentieth century.

* * *

In addition to the views of returning soldiers, working women's own opinions on beauty can also be seen in employee publications. In this regard, during its first two years of publication, all of *The Maiden Forum*'s staff writers and floor reporters were women. In addition, the overwhelming majority of one-time contributors to the

¹¹³ Ibid, 2.

publication were women. Each edition of *The Maiden Forum* listed the names of all staff members and a picture of the twenty-three newsletter staffers in the October 1945 issue visually confirms its all-female staff of volunteer company employees. Other employee publications with fewer women on staff frequently added female editors and contributors to “ladies pages” during the war. *The Lukens Plate* reported that “for 132 years, from 1810 until 1942” the only women to work at the Lukens Steel Mill were employed as office staff.¹¹⁴ With the start of the war and the entrance of female workers into the workplace, employee publications such as this one began to print a variety of articles on general beauty topics written by and intended for women workers.¹¹⁵ These articles included the latest fashion trends, shopping stories, beauty advice, and dieting tips. Published pieces in employee publications also commented extensively on the physical beauty of their female workers. Gossip columns, consisting of “news” from employees frequently carried information on the snazziest company dressers, most beautiful brides, trickiest hairdos, and flashiest jewelry being worn at the factory. These articles suggest many of the ways in which working women conceptualized beauty.

Like the opinions of returning soldiers, working women’s’ opinions about what constituted beauty also stressed the need for women to actively participate in the era’s growing beauty culture. This was true of women who worked in the beauty industry as well as those who worked in sectors of the economy completely unrelated to female beautification. American females’ talent for beauty culture was seen as a

¹¹⁴ *Lukens Plate* 9, no. 22 (October 1942) : 1.

¹¹⁵ Company papers also suggest that employers realized factory men would take employee publications home and share them with members of their family. Fashion and beauty articles, they hoped, would entice the wives of male employees to read worker publications and take a greater interest in the corporate community.

crucial aide to ensuring their sexual desirability. Beauty culture, as commonly understood by women who read and contributed to mid-twentieth century employee publications, was a set of feminine arts that would allow any woman to craft an ideal physical aesthetic. A knowledge of beauty culture included expertise in the selection of clothing styles that flattered one's figure, proper application of makeup, knowledge of color combinations that best complemented one's hair, skin and eyes, the arrangement of one's hair, and any other skills that allowed a woman to "present herself to her best advantage."¹¹⁶ As one Maiden Form worker put it, beauty culture was "a knack which every person can develop," given "intelligent effort" and the proper tools.

Beauty advice columns found in *The Maiden Forum* frequently stressed the items women could buy in order to be beautiful and attempted to solve women's perceived bodily imperfections by encouraging them to purchase jewelry, makeup, brassieres, and other mass-produced products. The publication similarly emphasized that the ideal female body could be achieved by any woman through proper execution of the tools of beauty culture, which included items such as high-heeled shoes, cosmetics, and the "uplift brassiere." Readers were advised about the importance of understanding beauty culture and were regularly counseled on matters such as which summer bathing suit to buy and how to pick out the best dinner dress. Furthermore, the publication also warned against fashion "no-no's," stating that "cheap accessories ruin an outfit," and even printed columns that asked company men for guidance on

¹¹⁶ *The Maiden Forum*, (February 1945) : 3.

which styles looked most flattering on women.¹¹⁷ After giving beauty advice in its October 1945 edition, *The Maiden Forum* hinted at the pride beauty culture was intended to give women, promising “more tips to come on what makes us what we are, the world’s best dressers – American women.”¹¹⁸

The making of America’s growing beauty culture during World War II, reflected changes in larger national production and consumption patterns. These trends were becoming evident even earlier in the twentieth century when Americans began to produce fewer of the goods that they daily used for living themselves. In place of in-home production and reliance upon regional markets that dominated nineteenth century economic life, Americans in the early twentieth century bought the majority of their food, soap, clothing, and other daily commodities from the large national corporations that arose during the era.¹¹⁹ These trends continued to grow through the century and had found a solid base by the 1940s. Americans’ belief – proclaimed vigorously during World War II – that they were better looking than the other peoples of the world was deeply entangled with their growing mass-market economy and burgeoning national consumer culture and in particular, by the activities of purveyors of beauty products and their advertisers. The history of the Maiden Form Brassiere Company, its workers, and its business practices is evidence of this trend.

The creation of a national American beauty market helped to facilitate the creation of a national beauty ideal. Pinups, such as Shirley Levine, personified the “All-American Girl.” By the mid-twentieth century American society was immersed

¹¹⁷ *The Maiden Forum*, (March 1945) : 4.

¹¹⁸ *The Maiden Forum*, (October 1945) : 1.

¹¹⁹ For a deeper analysis of this transition, see Susan Strasser's *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

in what Kathy Peiss has termed “a culture of beauty.”¹²⁰ This fixation with physical beauty by many Americans, especially young women, prompted a concerted attempt by American women to beautify themselves through the use of make-up, hair styling, and clothing selection. By the beginning of World War II, companies had already begun the mass production of beauty products, and national advertising campaigns were sending their message of consumption into millions of homes. In addition, the film industry, soon to be joined by the emergence of the television industry beginning in the late 1940s, modeled and shaped fashion for the American public. As a result, American women of all classes, regions and races became accustomed to the personal use of beauty products on a daily basis. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, American women used brassieres, garter belts, fashionable clothing, cosmetics, fragrances, stylish shoes, and other beauty products to augment their looks in markedly similar ways. With the creation of America's beauty market and the steadily increasing consumption of a standardized array of available goods, females across the United States participated in rituals of personal adornment that linked them to the common domestic definition of an attractive woman.

American women's consumption thus reinforced and helped to shape the definition of female beauty during the mid-twentieth century. Although rationing on the home front limited the amount of commercial beauty supplies that could be purchased by the average citizen during the war, American women were still able to buy these goods on a scale greater than women in countries that were battlegrounds during World War II. The vibrant postwar economy in the United States also

¹²⁰ Peiss, pp.

witnessed the exponential growth of the cosmetics, fashion, and other industries related to beauty culture. In this context, it is interesting to note that the business executives who led these companies and their advertisers often asserted that their companies were national and global leaders in their fields. American women's ability to beautify their bodies through the use of consumer goods was an important reason why American females and males argued that the bodies of beautified U.S. women were more aesthetically appealing than those of women elsewhere.

From the early 17th century to the World War II years, most Americans regarded Europe as the center of fashion and arbiter of beauty. But during and immediately after World War II, the American beauty industries directly challenged their European competition. World War II ushered in major consequences for European life and economic viability. For example, with the destruction of Europe and its economic collapse, executives from Maiden Form saw the fall-out from World War II as an opportunity to surpass their European competitors and create a new global standard of beauty based on the white American female body.

The words of Maiden Form founders Ida and William Rosenthal in their company's employee publication show their desire to assert their company's growing share in world markets. While William Rosenthal, the President of Maiden Form, regularly sent holiday greetings or expressed thanks to the Maidenform community in *The Maiden Forum*, his wife and company co-founder Ida Rosenthal only contributed to the publication once. Like many immigrant women who came to work for the Maiden Form Brassiere Company over the years, Ida Rosenthal was herself an émigré. The Rosenthals, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, arrived in the

United States in the 1920s and built their company from humble beginnings in a New York City dress shop, where Ida was first employed as a seamstress. In her sole contribution to *The Maiden Forum* in 1949, Ida Rosenthal outlined a recent trip she had taken to France. “While the face of Paris stays the same” Ida Rosenthal wrote, “her heart is greatly changed.” Rosenthal went on to detail her trip observing that:

When Mr. Rosenthal and I arrived in France last month, we saw the identical city we had left ten years before. The ordeal of the last ten years, that cataclysmic decade of war, defeat, occupation, liberation and desperate struggle for national recovery, seemed to have left no scars. But a closer, longer look at the city itself and its citizens, the world of fashion in general and the brassiere industry in particular, revealed that the face of Paris is only a mask.¹²¹

Ida Rosenthal thus expressed to those at her company that while Europe had superficially recovered from the war, the beauty industry in that region could no longer claim global supremacy. The Rosenthal’s trip was part of their effort to expand their company’s international business after the war. On a larger level, it was also part of Maiden Form’s effort to assert American preeminence over the French fashion brassiere industry in the postwar era. Internationally renowned as the birthplace of fashion and invocation for centuries, during her post-World War II trip Ida Rosenthal spoke of a France that now “followed” the trends of American manufacturers.

In the late 1940s, *The Maiden Forum* regularly printed interviews with a variety of company employees. Two interviewees were European “war brides,” women working in Bayonne, New Jersey, who had married American soldiers and were in the process of starting a new life in the U.S. The subtext of both interviews suggested that American beauty expertise now stood above that of the Europeans. In a

¹²¹ “The Figure and Face of Paris” *The Maiden Forum*, (June 1949): 3.

1946 interview, French war bride Jeannie Dowd expressed her pleasure with life in the United States.¹²² The article quoted Dowd as saying: "American clothes are so much nicer – in France, it costs a fortune to dress well. The nice clothes are only for the rich people. Now I do not like any of my clothes. I watch American girls and learn how to dress."¹²³ Dowd's opinions on the differences between French and American "girls" are instructive of the way ideas about beauty and happiness were often closely associated during the era. Speaking specifically about her co-workers at Maiden Form, Dowd exclaimed: "Everyone is so nice and pleasant and the girls are so pretty."¹²⁴ In a similar 1947 article on the life of Marie Miller, a war bride who had been exiled from France during World War II, the publication reported that the first thing Miller did upon arriving in the U.S. and seeing American women was to purchase new clothing. Talking about the changes she and her young daughter had gone through, Miller proudly proclaimed "we are Americans now," and evidenced this claim with the assertions that once in the U.S. she had taken an immediate interest in abandoning her old French style and speaking only in English with her daughter at home.¹²⁵

Ida Rosenthal, Marie Miller, and Jeanie Dowd were all European-born women who now attested to the supremacy of American beauty standards from their vantage point at Maiden Form. *The Maiden Forum* made it clear that once in America, French war brides Jeanie Dowd and Marie Miller had learned from American working women how to be beautiful and fashionable. At the same time, their company's

¹²² *The Maiden Forum*, (September-August 1946) : 2.

¹²³ *The Maiden Forum*, (September-August 1946) : 2.

¹²⁴ *The Maiden Forum*, (September-August 1946) : 2.

¹²⁵ *The Maiden Forum*, (February 1947) : 2.

founder Ida Rosenthal asserted that U.S. manufacturers of brassieres now surpassed the French in fashion ingenuity. Thus, in their bid for fashion supremacy, a group of women working for a company based in Bayonne, New Jersey pitted themselves against women in Paris, France.

The message of all three articles was that the U.S. posed serious competition in the global world of looks and the production of aesthetic desirability. Just as the Maiden Form company envisioned itself as even surpassing its international competition, women living in the U.S. boldly asserted the reasons why their own bodies were more desirable those of foreign women. The desire of European women living in the U.S. to look like their American counterparts supports this argument and also points to the ways in which beauty culture defined American women's understanding of who they were and the types of things that made them more physically desirable than foreign women who were even of the same race.

* * *

Americans feelings of global preeminence were a direct result of World War II and the changes it brought about for numerous people around the world. It is well known that this conflict was a brutal and bloody war that generated chaos, atomic weaponry, the killing of millions of innocent people, and in many parts of the world, total destruction, and numerous historians have pointed to the plethora of political, economic, and social tensions that promulgated and shaped the war. In this chapter, it has not been my intention to suggest that the World War II was fought *because* Americans thought they were more beautiful than were other people of the world. Rather, what I explain is one of the important and consequential ways in which

Americans on the home front made a war being fought primarily overseas both immediate and comprehensible to their daily lives. In the context of this discussion, aesthetic difference was an important mental schema that many Americans used to symbolize, interpret, and understand their experiences with the war.

Mentally constructing an enemy whose body was physically abhorrent allowed Americans to create in their minds a Japanese foe that was inherently inferior and defeatable. At the same time, the beautified bodies of American women came to symbolize the power, prestige, and potential wealth the American way of life had to offer, which men in the military were fighting so hard to protect. In this regard, the body of a nineteen-year-old pin-up symbolized the fruits of an allied victory. And when the beautified American pinup was contrasted with representations of an animalistic Japanese aggressor, it thus stimulated a mental framework that envisioned World War II as a struggle to the death between “good and evil,” or of “beauty and the beast.”

The power of this symbolism did not evaporate when wartime hostilities ended. Rather, as the United States engaged with other nations in the postwar era, it sought to retain its position as an international leader and global power, and physical beauty was an important symbol of this power. The comparison of American female beauty to the physical characteristics of women around the world was a small part of a larger national drive to assert the superiority of American identity via international comparisons. During the interwar period from 1919-1941, some Americans had been content to focus primarily on domestic matters, leaving international tensions to work themselves out without U.S. intervention. However, following World War II,

Americans abandoned isolationism and instead embraced a new ideal of American exceptionalism. Celebration of superior expertise in personal beautification was one of the many ways that Americans positioned themselves as world-class leaders.

Even in this era, which touted the desirability of American culture, life, and physical beauty, not all Americans were included in popular definitions of who represented an ideal American. While many Americans exalted themselves by comparisons with foreigners, ethnic communities within the U.S. reinforced a sense of physical superiority by comparing their bodies with the bodies of other Americans racially different than themselves. The creation of such internal “others” was an especially pronounced trend within the white American community. Likewise, when Americans of color fought back against such characterizations, they often did so by “othering” a third American racial group.

Internal “Others”

“Do all of the Nisei fellows dress like that in camps?”¹²⁶

- Question asked of traveling Japanese American during WWII

Long before the outbreak of World War II, within American society, race had been used as an internal category to unite and empower one group over another. As far back as the colonial era, a race-based system of slavery had become, in the words of historian Philip D. Morgan, “an acceptable, fundamental and toughly American institution.” This system of forced labor relegated blacks to the lowest rungs of America’s social and economic ladder. By the nineteenth century, supporters of the slave regime justified their actions by arguing that persons of African descent possessed an innate childlike naiveté, were incapable of managing their lives, and were inferior because they needed the institution of slavery to take care of them. Even many white abolitionists, though convinced slavery was a moral wrong, also viewed African Americans as their biological inferiors. Following emancipation, as historian Eric Foner has noted, former slaves received “nothing but freedom.” The newly freed people did not see any real changes in the quality of their lives; race trumped political status in American life and continued to be a force that restricted the lives of many black Americans for decades to come. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era often referred to as the “nadir of racism” in the United States, American life remained legally and socially segregated along racial lines. Although African Americans had gained freedom, citizenship, and the right to vote over eighty years before the beginning of World War II, the status of blacks within the nation was

¹²⁶ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 18 June 1943 : 5.

inferior to that of white Americans. Indeed in the 1940s, in the opinion of many whites, black Americans remained second-class citizens.

The popular belief among whites that black Americans were their inferiors manifested itself in numerous white cultural forms during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Popular American culture made a spectacle of the black body in order to denigrate it and thereby sustain the superior status that whiteness conferred on them. In this regard, understanding the ways in which African Americans were historically defamed by whites in the United States brings into clearer focus the meanings behind the racist ways in which Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans were caricatured by whites during World War II. White Americans recycled longstanding stereotypes of black Americans in a new context to attack the Japanese enemy during the war. Depictions of the male Japanese soldier's body built on deep-seated American traditions that had depicted the bodies of selected people of color as inferior, immoral, and threatening. In particular, such characterizations were extremely troubling to Americans of Japanese descent, who had much to lose if their bodies were associated with the many negative qualities other Americans ascribed to the Japanese enemy.

During the time that Japanese Americans were victims of these racial dynamics, they attempted to use the longstanding black/white racial binary in the United States to their advantage. On the defensive because of doubts about their loyalty to the United States, Japanese Americans participated in cultural rituals that minimized their racial identity and asserted that their cultural sensibilities were fundamentally Western and American. One of the ways they sought to accomplish

this goal was by promoting images of the Japanese American body closer to the body of whites by joining other Americans in denigrating the black body. During World War II, some Japanese Americans attempted, in a variety of ways to bolster their tenuous position in the United States by aligning themselves with white culture and promoting the image of their bodies in contrast to those of blacks, America's historic racial other. An analysis of the beauty pageants and minstrel shows that white and Japanese Americans performed during the war makes this connection clear and is instrumental to understanding how Japanese Americans came to appropriate racist white cultural expressions and used them to their advantage during the war.

*

Insight into the ways in which Japanese Americans sought to demonstrate their Americanization during World War II can be gained by exploring the history and meanings of white cultural traditions. Numerous employee publications from the mid-twentieth century document such activities. On a sunny summer afternoon in August 1945, the Sun Oil refinery in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania, suspended its regular business activities to host 10,500 of its employees and their guests for an afternoon of fun and relaxation. Covering the events of the day, the *Sun News* headlined its September edition with a picture of the "Miss Sun Oil" beauty contest winners who were honored that afternoon. Thelma Knox, of the refinery lab, Marjorie Jones, of the heavy oil testing lab, and Lucille Allen, of the yield office, each were given a bouquet of red roses when they were named first-, second-, and third- place finishers in the company-sponsored pageant. A full-body picture of the three young employees in swimsuits and high heels was printed above the fold on the front page

of the *Sun News*. The publication ceremoniously announced that the women had been “Judged Sun’s Most Beautiful” at the company event.¹²⁷

The inside pages of the September edition of the *Sun News* show that the Marcus Hook refinery actually hosted not one, but two employee picnics that day – one for its white workers and a separate event for its black employees. White employees were able to enjoy their day either on rides at a local theme park or swimming at the Sunoco Recreation Center. More modest accommodations seem to have prevailed at the black picnic, which offered dancing and games on the field of a company-owned farm. The paper makes no mention of a separate beauty contest at the African American picnic and since blacks were excluded from participating in white events, evidently African American women were not part of what the majority at the refinery judged to be “Sun’s most beautiful.”

A few months prior to the summer swimsuit contest, *The Sun Refinery News* covered a spring fashion show that white female employees hosted and modeled in at a local hotel. As Chapter One demonstrates, accounts of fashion shows and swimsuit contests, along with bridal pictures and pin-up photographs, were frequent features in many mid-twentieth century employee publications that regularly showcased white womens’ beautified bodies before the entire work community.¹²⁸ While European American women who worked at the Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania refinery had several opportunities to display their beauty and femininity before their peers, black female employees appeared infrequently as a backdrop, and most often not at all in editions of the *Sun Oil News*. When black females did appear in employee

¹²⁷ *Sun Oil News* (August 1946) : 1.

¹²⁸ *Sun Refinery News* 9, no. 9 (April 15, 1946) : 14.

publications, they were typically shown in their uniforms –never swimsuits– and were praised for hard work or an exceptional skill. Such was the case of Hattie Morgan, an African American employee at the Allied Kid Company, a manufacturer of animal hide for handbags and shoes. Morgan was pictured in the employee publication at her workplace on one occasion with a group of other black kitchen workers and later in an individual write-up that described her as an avid and talented bowler.¹²⁹ While a “cheesecake” picture of Morgan’s white coworkers vacationing at the beach appeared in the Allied Kid Company’s *Tannery Talk*, she and other black women were never featured the same way as white female employees. In this regard, it is very telling that this trend was the norm in employee publications in the vast majority of American workplaces.¹³⁰

While the *Sun Oil News* did not publish biographies of black female workers or highlight their bodies in ways that beautified them, representations of black bodies were not completely missing from the publication. In addition to promoting summer outings, sports clubs and contests, the Marcus Hook refinery community was similar to many American workplaces in that they included minstrel shows on their calendar of leisure-time employee events. In the mid-twentieth century, company-sponsored minstrel shows often starred factory employees, had high turnouts, and received extensive coverage in employee publications. Thus, racist representations of black bodies received more attention in the *Sun Oil News* than did the lives of the African American employees who worked at the Marcus Hook refinery.

¹²⁹ *Tannery Talk* 1, no. 7 (November, 1947) : 5. ; *Tannery Talk* 2, no. 11 (March, 1948) : 5.

¹³⁰ *Tannery Talk* 4, no. 8 (August, 1949) : 5.

Theater historians have argued that minstrel shows represent the emergence of the first truly American genre of theater. This is because blackface minstrel shows were the first type of popular American theatrical performances not based on longer-standing European theatrical traditions. Comedic blackface skits emerged as a unique expression of the American psyche, and were a byproduct of the legacy of racism in the United States. In particular, this type of theatrical performance evidences the ways that white America viewed itself in relation to the nation's black citizenry.

Minstrel shows first appeared in the United States during the early 1800s and remained a popular form of professional entertainment for the duration of the century. These performances featured white actors donned in blackface make-up who impersonated African Americans for a comedic effect. The shows featured singing, dancing, and skits about the forays of the stereotypical characters they depicted. The storylines of most popular minstrel shows portrayed blacks as dimwitted buffoons with little on their minds other than loafing around or stealing food. Contemporary white American gender roles were reversed in minstrel shows. Black women were portrayed as overbearing and dominant in blackface performances, while African American men were emasculated, weak, and foolish. Such depictions point to the popular white perception that black culture was backward and in breach of white social norms.

The color line that historically divided American society was thus not only defined via economic, political, and social endorsements, but also through cultural messages as well. In this regard, minstrel shows exemplified how popular cultural expressions reinforced whites' notions of black "otherness" and inferiority. Through

minstrel shows, white Americans used their depiction of black culture as a foil against which they defined themselves and their culture. The stock characters in minstrel performances drew easy laughs from audiences because they were based on longstanding racial stereotypes ingrained in white American culture. Racial stereotypes of black Americans played a key role in constructing notions of whiteness. Through minstrel shows, white Americans were able to define themselves by ascribing to African Americans what they thought they were not.

By the early twentieth century, minstrel shows were replaced by new types of entertainment, most notably by film and later television, which took precedence in American cultural life. Yet the racist imagery that had pervaded blackface minstrel shows did not die with the diminishing popularity of the stage genre. Instead, the characters and images of blackness popularized by minstrel shows, such as the happy-go-lucky black male “Sambo” figure and the overbearing female “Mammy” extended themselves into new forms of American entertainment. For example, the popular *Amos and Andy* radio show which chronicled the tales of two buffoonish Sambo-like black men, was representative of this trend. The original *Amos and Andy* radio show featured two white narrators who impersonated black men’s voices. When this popular show moved to television, African American actors replaced the white narrators, but nothing else changed. The one-dimensional characters presented in both forms of the series relied heavily on slapstick humor, buffoonery of the black male leads, and the shrewish behavior of the female characters. Although neither the radio nor the television actors wore actual blackface make-up, their actions, demeanor, and general comportment grew out of and copied the minstrel genre.

With the vast appeal that film, television, and other forms of professional performance had acquired in the U.S. by the mid-twentieth century, minstrel shows became the domain of amateur actors on the local scene. During the 1940s, recreational performances of minstrel shows were popular among European American fraternal organizations, social clubs, and other local groups. The continued popularity of full-regalia blackface minstrel shows among whites, over a century after the genre's emergence, points to the deep roots that the denigration of the black body continued to hold in American culture deep into the mid-twentieth century.

In particular, minstrel performances in mixed-race corporate workplaces make apparent the racial lines that divided even “integrated” workplaces in the 1940s. Black citizens might have been physically hired to work beside white workers in a factory setting, but at the same time, they were still set apart from the mainstream workplace community via cultural events that portrayed them as “others.” Minstrel shows at the Allied-Avon factory and Sun Oil refinery are representative of the type of performances that took place in American workplaces during World War II. For instance, in the weeks before their minstrel show, members of the Glee Club at the Allied-Avon factory held rehearsals each Tuesday and Wednesday after work. After two performances of the minstrel show were given for employees and their guests in April 1942, *The Family Album* reported that “the joint attendance of approximately 1,200 persons... [was] probably the largest delegation either [the] Tuxedo High School Auditorium or Sacred Heart Hall have ever enjoyed.”¹³¹ *The Family Album* reported that the “blackface comedians kept the audience convulsed with laughter

¹³¹ *The Family Album* 2, no. 4 (April, 1942) : 1.

throughout the entire show.”¹³² Adjacent pictures of the event showed white actors portraying black characters named “Hawkeye Snoopersnoop,” “Judge Rasputin Rattlebrain,” and “Honeysuckle Sweetface.” Eight months after covering the segregated company picnics and white beauty contest at the Markus Hook refinery, the *Sun Oil News* elaborately detailed a minstrel show that members of Glee Club at its workplace wrote, directed, and in which they presented in for the enjoyment of their fellow employees. Serving as an “evening of hilarious entertainment,” the event was performed in honor of war veterans returning to Sun Oil.¹³³

Before the Sun Oil minstrel show’s opening number a group of white female employee serving as usherettes helped the director to prepare a way for a chorus of blackface actors about to take the stage. Pictures of these white women workers show them dressed in flowing full-length evening gowns and wearing elaborately styled hairdos. The beautified bodies of these female workers starkly contrasted the degraded blackface representations of African Americans that followed them onto the stage. Similar employee usherettes were also used at the Allied-Avon plant. As pictures from both companies’ minstrel shows make clear, while cosmetics were used to make-up the faces of white female usherettes, they were also used to “make-down” the faces of the white male impersonators of African Americans. And while white male employees acted out ridiculous caricatures of black folk for the enjoyment of those in attendance, white women workers “played” with popular notions of beauty. Cosmetics were used by white employees at these performances to exalt the white female body and to simultaneously degrade the black male and female body.

¹³² *The Family Album* 2, no. 4 (April, 1942) : 1.

¹³³ *Sun Refinery News* 7, Toledo Section (May, 15 1946) : 8.

The above-mentioned performances served as more than just entertainment for the European Americans who participated in them. It is particularly notable that African American employees are completely missing from the visual and written historical record of these events. As such, these events were an integral site for the performance of whiteness during the mid-twentieth century, and cosmetics were the tools that helped to exaggerate and make explicit the identities that whites constructed at these events. These two representations of the human form lay in complete juxtaposition and dramatically highlighted how European Americans viewed and defined themselves against a racial “other.” Such shows were the personification of the buffoon and the beauty, and thereby of black and white.

In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that the display of bodies held a prominent place in mid-twentieth century white American culture. Although African Americans fought for the United States during World War II, their participation in the war effort did little to halt the popular denigration of the African American body, a longstanding tradition in white American culture. In addition, while World War II may have afforded many African Americans new opportunities to work in relatively high paying factory jobs, such workers did not enter their workplaces as equals to white employees. Social and cultural barriers continued to separate black Americans from the larger workplace community. The 150-year tradition of blackface minstrel shows continued as a leisure-time activity for whites during the 1940s, even in companies that employed black war-production workers. While a segregated company picnic might have socially divided the work community, minstrel shows and beauty pageants served as cultural means by which white

Americans asserted the differences they saw between themselves and black Americans. In this regard, culture both reinforced and sanctioned divisions that integration and political change had threatened to obscure.

Playing on their historical denigration of African American bodies, European Americans placed their bodies in comparison with the bodies of other groups of people during World War II. In doing so, European Americans disparaged the bodies of “others” both inside and outside America’s borders to assert their sense of superiority. During this process, whites exalted their own bodies as the expression of a beautiful and powerful ideal. As earlier sections of this chapter show, enemies of the state were on the front lines of such negative aesthetic characterizations. During the 1940s Japanese, German, and Italian nationals were targets of symbolic attacks because the U.S. was engaged in a war against the Axis powers. Thus, attacks on the bodies of America’s adversaries as weak and animalistic frequently mirrored the ways in which the black body had been long caricatured in the United States. In addition, and as discussed earlier, American soldiers returning from war frequently declared American women’s bodies superior to those of women they encountered while stationed overseas. During the mid-twentieth century, some white men women used beauty culture as their reference to assert that their bodies were even more desirable than those of European women. White American women’s popular definitions of attractiveness thus represented not only an American ideal, also were promoted by some U.S. citizens as world-class representations of womanhood. At the same time, however, black women’s bodies and Asian American women’s bodies were summarily absent from popular American definitions of attractiveness.

Pin-ups of women of color were a source of racial pride within their respective communities, despite their conspicuous absence in the larger American print culture. Although European Americans defined their identity and sense of superiority through white definitions of race and beauty, women of color were not passive victims of their exclusion from the American mainstream as they also used beauty culture to assert their attractiveness despite negative characterizations of their race by whites. For example, African American entrepreneurs in the fashion, modeling, and charm schools worked hard to bring the black body into mainstream representations of femininity and charm in mainstream U.S. culture during the mid-twentieth century. Chapter Three will analyze the ways in which African American women in the middle decades of the twentieth century used beauty culture to assert their own sense of personhood and respectability in the face of white representations that maligned their image.

Japanese Americans also used popular conceptions of beauty culture to combat the perception of exclusion they felt from mass representations of American femininity and attractiveness. For them, this task was an important goal because the bodies of Japanese Americans had undergone special scrutiny by whites during the war. Popular white characterizations of Japanese nationals were often applied to all Americans of Japanese descent without discretion, a judgment many in the Japanese American community resisted. During the war, Japanese Americans made a concerted effort to publicly present their bodies as fundamentally American and thus attempted to defy popular stereotypes that associated them with the Japanese nationals who were battling the U.S. and its allies. In fact, through the use of body politics,

Japanese Americans tried to change their status as internal “others” in the United States during World War II.

The experiences of Japanese Americans living in the U.S. during World War II offers a unique vantage point from which to observe the meanings of race, beauty, and the body in wartime America. It demonstrates the ways in which an Asian American group both challenged and manipulated to their advantage the longstanding black/white racial binary in the United States. The lives of Japanese Americans living in internment camps vividly demonstrate the power that representations of the body held during World War II and the seminal role that constructions of race and beauty played in American culture.

* * *

The Japanese American experience in the U.S. and their interactions with other American ethnic groups began well before the onset of World War II. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a steady migratory stream of immigrant workers in search of better economic opportunities flowed from rural areas in Japan to the West Coast cities of the United States. This first generation of Japanese Americans, known as the Issei, were barred from becoming U.S. citizens and were legally categorized as “enemy aliens” throughout World War II. Although the Issei were unable to gain full rights in the United States, their children, known as the Nisei, and grandchildren, called the Sansei, were recognized as American citizens due to the fact that they were born on U.S. soil. However, regardless of a Japanese American’s national origin, many white Americans automatically suspected both the Issei and Nisei to be enemy sympathizers during the war.

Following the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, many Americans feared and mistrusted Japanese Americans who lived in California, Oregon, and Washington. Because of their Japanese heritage and relatively close proximity to the Pacific front, the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei were thought to be prime candidates for foreign espionage and domestic sabotage if they remained on the west coast. Responding to this fear that had been fed by xenophobia and racism, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, and without specifying Japanese Americans by name, authorized the Secretary of War and his military commanders to use federal troops to forcibly remove “all or any persons” from places deemed essential “military areas.”¹³⁴ Thus, Japanese Americans were evacuated from their West Coast homes, not on a case-by-case basis, but en masse. As a result, over 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent living on the west coast were forced to sell their belongings, leave their houses, and take up residence elsewhere. While a small number were able to move in with family or friends in other parts of the nation, the vast majority of the evacuees – approximately 110,000 – had no place else to go. Therefore, these individuals had no other choice but to move to one of the ten government-run relocation facilities. Detained in these centers for the duration of the conflict, Japanese Americans faced the daunting task of returning their lives to some sort of normalcy within the troubling conditions of temporary camp life in a nation at war.

In the camps individuals were given the basic necessities for living. Families lived in a number of government-produced barracks and ate meals together in large

¹³⁴ Executive Order No. 9066, February 19, 1942, Authorizing the Secretary of War to Prescribe Military Areas, Franklin D. Roosevelt

mess halls. School age children also attended classes just as they had before the war. However, while the camps provided a basic level of stability for temporary living, they did little to combat the general feelings of instability and anxiety that many Americans of Japanese descent experienced. Certainly, they confronted a very uncertain future during World War II. While the war was being fought primarily abroad against a foreign enemy “other,” they were seen by many non-Japanese Americans as internal “others.” Under suspicion of disloyalty to the U.S. by their fellow citizens, the burden of proving their loyalty fell upon Japanese Americans themselves.

While the lives of all Japanese Americans were stunted by the events of World War II, the effect of internment was especially acute for the younger generation. Like many children of immigrant parents, the Nisei were raised in a bi-cultural environment. They shared in the “old world” culture, language, values and mores that their first-generation parents imparted to them. At the same time, however, they grew up in and were part of a larger American culture that they shared with their non-Japanese American peers. The Sansei were often even more removed from the origins of their Japanese heritage. Unlike like older Issei, who had already lived much of their lives before the war, the Nisei and Sansei would need to function for decades in a postwar world. Thus, the Nisei and Sansei found themselves in a very precarious situation as Americans of Japanese descent living in the United States during World War II because being labeled as traitors to America could profoundly affect their lives for years to come.

The burden of proving Japanese American loyalty to the United States therefore fell most heavily on Japanese American youth. While all Japanese Americans were encouraged to be ambassadors of goodwill for the community, often the Nisei and Sansei had the greatest ability to represent their community in a positive light to other Americans. Partly due to such considerations, during World War II many young Japanese Americans served in the U.S. military. The Nisei and Sansei who served in segregated units of the U.S. military had to deal with the negative reactions of fellow Americans who resented having persons of Japanese descent in the U.S. military on any terms. Sergeant Ben Kurokii, who was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross and participated in over 30 aerial raids in the European, African and Pacific theaters, experienced such discrimination firsthand. Speaking before a gathering in February 1944 he poignantly stated that he would “rather go through all those bombing missions again than relive his training days” when he felt isolated and discriminated against by fellow U.S. airmen. Despite his uniform, medals, and being named a war hero abroad, Sergeant Kurokii, proclaimed in San Francisco “I don’t know for sure if it’s safe to walk the streets of my own country.”¹³⁵ Kurokii, a native of Hershey, Nebraska, pleaded for those in the U.S. to show greater tolerance for the many loyal Japanese Americans who felt the same way about the Japanese as he did. Indeed, Kurokii had asked the military for one last assignment in the Pacific. In the Pacific theater, Japanese Americans were often enlisted in the dangerous role of decoys or as translators for captured enemies. Kurokii however proclaimed, “When I visit Tokyo, it will be in a Liberator bomber.”

¹³⁵ *Seattle Times* (Seattle) 2 May 1944 : 3., as listed in John R. Litz, ed. *Japanese American Soldiers in the Seattle Times*, December 1, 1941 to October 31, 1945.

Despite protests and challenges to their service, Japanese Americans such as Kurokii fought for the U.S. in World War II and helped their country attain victory. In fact, many Japanese Americans felt a great deal of contempt for the Japanese enemy. Japanese American infantry members of the American Fifth Army, many of whom hailed from Hawaii, were essential to winning the Allied campaign against German troops at the Anzio Beachhead in Italy. Like white American military men, their slogan in battle was “Remember Pearl Harbor.” For their merits in Italy, three Japanese Americans were awarded Distinguished Service Crosses. In addition, the military awarded twenty-one bronze stars, thirty-six Silver Stars, and nine hundred Purple hearts to Japanese Americans who fought at Anzio.¹³⁶ In this regard, Japanese American casualties fighting against enemy forces in Italy were heavy and show the desire of many Nisei and Sansei to defend and serve their country to the death. Beside the valiant service of military men, Japanese American women also served in women’s auxiliary forces during World War II. Such acts came both from a personal desire to serve their country and as an expression of a political agenda formulated by those in the larger Japanese American community. In fact, proving Japanese American loyalty to the U.S. for their parents and grandparents living in the internment camps motivated many Nisei and Sansei, and therefore they put themselves on the frontlines in the effort as the ultimate test of Japanese American loyalty to their country.

In addition to military service, Japanese American youth who left internment camps to attend college or enter the workforce also represented their community. A

¹³⁶ *Seattle Times* (Seattle) 5 August 1944 : 3.

1942 letter to the editor of the *Santa Anita Pacemaker* from an Issei reader reminded young Nisei students leaving an internment center to attend predominantly white institutions of higher learning that they bore the greatest burden in demonstrating the Americanism of the entire Japanese American community in the United States. “Upon these students,” the letter writer declared “will be the onus of proving to people to whom they are strangers that the first word in “Japanese Americans” is merely an adjective describing the color of our skin – not the color of our beliefs.”¹³⁷

In addition to leaving the camps to positively represent the Japanese American community, displays of patriotism within the camps were also stressed. The *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, a newspaper written and published by residents of the “Santa Anita, California Assembly and Detention Center,” emphasized in its articles and editorials the important roles that Nisei living inside the camps could play in the project of Americanization.¹³⁸ On Mother’s Day 1942, the twelve young women who delivered babies at the Santa Anita detention center were reminded by an editorial in the newspaper that it was their duty to secure for their children a bright future as Americans. Echoing the concept of “republican motherhood,” which had a historical tradition in the United States, the editorialist instructed the new mothers of their duties to their family, their community, and their nation. The interned Japanese American editorialist poignantly conveyed to the women that “Yours is the responsibility of making your children American, of making them an integral part of

¹³⁷ *Santa Anita Pace Maker* I, no. 25 (Santa Anita, California), 11 July 1942 : 6.

¹³⁸ Before their detention in internment camps, many Japanese Americans were gathered at California assembly centers such as Santa Anita before more permanent facilities were built by the government.

this great democratic nation, and of the great democratic world, which will be ours in the future.” The writer further implored the women “You must not fail.”¹³⁹

As shown above, the strategies employed by Japanese Americans to prove their loyalty to the United States during World War II were many and varied. Some of the most pervasive and visible were patriotic activities that took place inside the internment camps in large-scale demonstrations of American customs and traditions. Visible expressions that denoted the extent to which Japanese Americans had adopted American culture were a key tactic by which Japanese Americans attempted to solidify their public identity as Americans during World War II. On August 1, 1942 Japanese American girls, ages seven to eighteen, presented a “folk festival” for the benefit of those living at the Tanforan, California Assembly Center. Yet no expression of traditional Japanese folk culture was presented at this event; instead, more than four hundred Japanese American girls performed Irish, Scotch, Dutch, Spanish, and American Indian dances in an exhibition of “American folk culture.”¹⁴⁰ Religion was another communal activity that Japanese Americans used in a similar way. On the first Sunday of May 1942, Japanese American religious services at the Santa Anita Detention and Assembly Center celebrated “I am an American Day.” At one point during Protestant services led by Y. Yamaka, an Episcopal priest, the congregation sang “Faith of Our Fathers.” On the same day, in a blend of Asian and American traditions, a group at a separate religious gathering listened to a sermon from their worship leader on the topic of “American Buddhism.”¹⁴¹ For Japanese

¹³⁹ *Santa Anita Pace Maker* I, no. 6. (Santa Anita, California), 8 May 1942 : 5.

¹⁴⁰ *Tanforan Totalizer (Tanforan, California)*, 1 August 1942 : 5

¹⁴¹ *Santa Anita Pace Maker* (Santa Anita, California), 19 May 1942 : 3.

Americans who had been summarily detained in internment camps, the group performance of European American folk dance, celebration of Protestant religious service, and the practice of Americanized Buddhism were communal expressions of the Japanese American community's commitment to American values, American religious traditions, and a greater American lifestyle.

Participation in American cultural traditions was a strong political statement by Japanese Americans during World War II. Through such performances, persons of Japanese descent publicly showcased their American identity even as their American civil liberties were violated. Rituals that centered on the display of the Nisei and Sansei body were a powerful method through which Japanese Americans attempted to publicly reposition their bodies as typically American, an identity that some in the U.S. charged Japanese American's looks belied. While their Japanese heritage and ethnicity had led to internment, many Japanese Americans hoped that their exhibition of American traditions, culture, and sensibilities would be instrumental in liberating them in the near future. Foremost among the American cultural rituals that Japanese Americans participated in to accomplish these ends were beauty pageants and minstrel shows.

At times performed in tandem, beauty pageants and minstrel shows were key venues where Japanese Americans showcased their bodies in prototypically American ways. Through the performance of beauty culture in queen pageants, Japanese American womens' bodies were stylized in ways that were similar to the methods that other American women used to beautify themselves. Through the performance of minstrel shows, Japanese American s deflected criticism of their bodies by ridiculing

the bodies of another ethnic group – African Americans – in a traditionally American manner. These events were attempts by Japanese Americans to raise the relative position in the United States by using their bodies to portray European American ideals of beauty while at the same time contrasting their bodies favorably with negative representations of black bodies.

In the context of this discussion, beauty queen pageants received some of the heaviest coverage of all of events reported in camp newspapers. News of the Rohwer, Arkansas camp's beauty queen contest began weeks before the actual winner's crowning. The camp newspaper, the *Rohwer Outpost*, gave detailed information about the contestants, pageant rules, and preparations for events in several of its editions. Reports about which contestants were in the lead and other general pageant gossip were used to increase interest in the large camp-wide event. In its special Coronation Ball Edition, the *Rohwer Outpost* reported that 650 persons bought tickets to see Shigeko Nakano crowned "Queen of Rhower." Nakano, who received over 5,000 popularity votes, was given a gold wristwatch and silver crown by the pageant's sponsors, the Royal Dukes Club, a camp association made up of Japanese American men. The contest's two runners-up won the title of "royal attendant," and each received sterling silver vanity sets from the Dukes.¹⁴²

Japanese Americans beauty pageants in internment camps mirrored the all-white national "Miss America Pageant" in terms of participation requirements and the prestige these events conferred upon their winners. In a "search for Denson's Perfect Girl," a queen contest held at the Arkansas center's spring carnival required that the

¹⁴² *The Rohwer Outpost, Coronation Bulletin, (Rohwer, Arkansas) 28 February 1943 : 1.*

eighteen to twenty-two-year-old participants be “sylphlike in figure” and at least five feet in height. In addition, the queen was expected to be “poised and the picture of feminine charm, have personality with a capital P, be able to converse well, [and] have qualities of leadership.” The newspaper then noted, “although it seems impossible that such a prize could keep from having a plain golden ring on her third left finger, she must remain single until after the contest.”¹⁴³

Internment camp pageants also resembled smaller beauty queen contests that took place across the nation, such as those for white women working in American factories. Much like the contests chronicled in employee publications, those described in internment camp newspapers often advertised each contestant’s age, height, hometown, and at times, weight. The queen pageants thus literally put women’s bodies on display and offered evidence of the young women’s “All-American qualities.” In describing each of the thirteen Nisei contestants competing for the beauty queen crown at the Denson, Arkansas camp, the *Denson Tribune* sketched out their biographical information. Mary Aoto was described by the newspaper as having a “Coca Cola smile.” Kiyō Hiwano was named a “triple V girl (vim, vigor, and vitality),” which the newspaper noted made her a walking “breakfast cereal ad.” Like beauty queens displayed in the employee publications of American factories, Nisei women were heavily praised for their apt use of beauty culture. These publications presented beauty culture as a skill that greatly augmented women’s looks as well as the quality of their lives. Having crafted a pleasing physical appearance, the *Denson Tribune* seemed to suggest, aided the Japanese American beauty queen contestants in

¹⁴³ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 7 May 1943 : 9.

the actual jobs they performed inside their internment camp. For her poise and beauty, contestant May Hamade was referred to by the *Denson Tribune* as “the dream secretary in Administration Building 1.” Similarly, nurses’ aide Tamako Hiramami was described in the camp newspaper as “an ideal angel of mercy,” with the publication further noting, “males hate to get well when she is ministering.”¹⁴⁴

In pageants that valued Nisei women for their qualities as “all-American girls,” the use of a characteristically Japanese aesthetic might hurt a contestant’s chances of winning. And while traditional Japanese clothing would later be a part of Japanese American beauty pageants in the post-World War II era, during the conflict surviving accounts indicate that contestants in beauty queen contests wore only traditional American beauty pageant garb. Similarly, a contestant who possessed what the Issei called “daikon aski,” or thick calves, was looked down on even though this physical form was a traditional marker of Japanese beauty. In its discussion of a 1943 camp beauty pageant, the *Denson Tribune* referred to daikon aski as a “physical distortion, which too many Nisei women are victims of.”¹⁴⁵ Comments in the *Taforan Toatlizer* likewise suggested that a daikon aski aesthetic was evidence that some Nisei women were becoming overweight and unattractive while living in the camps.

Crafting an “All-American” look was important for many Japanese American women, not just beauty queens. The adoption of a specifically American aesthetic was a way for Japanese American women of all ages to participate in activities that were a part of their daily life before the war, and thus enabled them to psychologically reconnect themselves to the larger American culture from which they

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 18 May 1943 : 1.

had been segregated. Covering a USO fashion show, the *Denson Tribune* reported that Japanese American women who showed off popular American dress fashions and hairstyles modeled an “unbeatable combination” of “feminine grace and poise.”¹⁴⁶ In the same way that white American women utilized beauty culture to claim that their bodies were among the most beautiful in the world, Japanese American women used the tools of beauty culture to craft bodies that were identifiably American in their looks, physical desirability, and appeal.

With regard to the ability of Japanese American women to take advantage of the tools of beauty culture during the war, it should be mentioned that persons residing in American internment camps during World War II were provided food, shelter, clothing, and other basic living essentials. In June 1942 the “With the Womenfolk” section of the *Tanforan Tootalizer* lamented, “It’s nice of the government to issue us wearing apparel, but we’re hoping that they won’t be too shapeless and unbecoming.”¹⁴⁷ Such comments evidence the desire on the part of Japanese Americans to obtain more than just the basic living essentials; in fact, Japanese American women wanted clothing most Americans at the time would have found attractive. In this regard, inadequate access to hairstyling facilities, fashionable dress, and cosmetics was an issue of constant concern for Japanese American women in the camps. In this context, beauty-related issues were discussed in internment camp newspapers with the same frequency that they appeared in the employee publications already analyzed in this work. The *Tanforan Totalizer* similarly lamented that the “permanent waves” that Japanese American women had “rushed to get before the

¹⁴⁶ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 10 March 1944 : 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Tanforan Totalizer* I, no. 6. (Tanforan, California) 20 June 1942 : 5.

evacuation” had faded due to the camp’s lack of adequate beauty goods and facilities. Once interned Japanese American women inaugurated cooperative beauty salons to provide popular beauty services in the absence of government-supported beauty facilities in the camps. In 1943 Toshio Tomiisige, publicity manager for the Rohwer Cooperative Beauty Enterprise, announced that machine permanents would be available at the facility for \$1.50 and finger waves for \$.25.¹⁴⁸ The Rohwer Cooperative Beauty Enterprise, located in the laundry room of “barrack 42,” employed eight operators and offered facial and scalp treatments for Japanese American women. Similarly, popular American styles such as the “Polka Curl” and “Feather Bob” were available at the Denson Co-op Beauty Salon. In conclusion, access to American beauty culture was important to Japanese American women, even while they were physically isolated from the rest of American society.

Minstrel shows provided a stark visual contrast to the beauty on display in Japanese American beauty salons and beauty queen contests. A cartoon depiction of two blackface characters in the *Santa Anita Pacemaker* set the tone for a “Southern Jamboree” hosted by the detention and assembly center’s “Hi-jinx” girl’s club. The August 2, 1942 minstrel event was performed by the young internees for the enjoyment of those living at the California assembly and detention facility. Among the selections the girls performed was a rendition of “Summertime,” from George Gershwin’s famous African American opera *Porgy and Bess*. In May 1944, the dramatic club at the Denson High School also put on an “All-American Minstrel

¹⁴⁸ *The Rohwer Outpost* (Rohwer, Arkansas) 7 April 1943.

Show” as part of their “Kampus Karnival.”¹⁴⁹ In addition, students Amy Sasaki, Edith Shintaku, Tom Sugimoto and Shiro Takemoto made up a band called the “Inkspot Quartet” –a name that mimicked the popular African American jazz quartet “The Inkspots.” The Inkspot Quartet played John Philip Sousa’s *Stars and Stripes Forever*, a score that held deep patriotic sentiment, and John Zamecnik’s *Ole South (A Plantation Patrol)*, a novelty piece composed for nineteenth-century white Mississippian audiences. In classic minstrel and variety show style, singing, tap dancing, baton drills, and accordion solos were also performed at the event.

Variety shows in which Japanese American internees performed scores written by famous European American composers and acted in blackface minstrel skits vibrantly illustrate the complexity that the politics of representation took on during World War II. Like beauty pageants, minstrel performances linked Japanese Americans to traditional forms of American entertainment and offered a space for veiled social commentary. Certainly most, if not all, the Japanese Americans forced from their homes and made to live in the horse stalls at the former Santa Anita racetrack found their current situation degrading and offensive. Yet, parents in this same Japanese American community allowed their children to participate in black face skits that African Americans would similarly have experienced as degrading and offensive. Through their minstrel shows, Japanese Americans fought their physical segregation in American society by participating in a long-standing cultural tradition that degraded African Americans and gave credence to the historic segregation of blacks.

¹⁴⁹ *Denson Tribune* II, No. 35, (Denson, Arkansas) 2 May 1944.

Negative representations of the African American body in Japanese American internment camps extended beyond the minstrel shows of Nisei youth groups. During World War II, the *Denson Tribune* also published a blackface cartoon series. These “Pete and Zeke” cartoons mirrored the buffoonery, antics, and gender role reversal characteristic of the minstrel genre in the United States. An October 19, 1943 cartoon entitled ‘Dome Defense’ depicted a three-scene dialogue between the two-blackfaced title characters, each dressed in over-sized bowties and hats. In the exchange, Pete asks Zeke a series of questions in dialect. These include: “How come you is so black Zeke?” and “How come you drinks milk?” Zeke responds by noting that he is “so black” because his parents are that way. In addition Zeke claimed that the “doc sez” that if he drinks milk it will strengthen his bones. Zeke then supplements his response by noting he has a special need for a healthy skull, explaining to Pete: “I gotta have a hard bone head the way my wife hits me!!”¹⁵⁰

Such racist representations of black Americans served as cultural tools that Japanese Americans used in order to counter and challenge their own racial marginalization in the United States during World War II. Both employee publications in American factories and newspapers in Japanese internment camps disparaged the black body and assaulted it as an inferior racial “other.” Just as whites used blackface minstrel shows to define what they were not, Japanese Americans defined themselves against black stereotypes to enhance their similarities and thus cultural ties to whites. The *Denson Tribune* reported that the Denson High School’s blackface minstrel show was “participated in by Caucasians and nonCaucasians,

¹⁵⁰ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 19 October 1943 : 2.

islanders and mainlanders.” Most likely “Caucasians” at this event were the very camp personnel in charge of overseeing the detained Japanese Americans. Through a shared negative mimicry of the black body, Japanese Americans at this event thus aligned themselves with their white oppressors at the expense of blacks. In a more serious commentary on the condition of black Americans, the *Denson Tribune* announced a 1943 community meeting that was scheduled to discuss “the Negro problem after the War.” The Japanese Americans who held this meeting inside their internment camp tacitly asserted that that it was “Negros,” and not Japanese Americans, who were the real sources of racial fear and anxiety in the United States.

Because of their Japanese heritage and ethnicity, Japanese Americans lived with the suspicion of their loyalty to the U.S. and experienced harsh treatment at the hands of many of their fellow Americans during World War II. This was a new expression of whites’ fear of the “yellow peril” that had sustained history in the United States stemming from the earlier years of Asian immigration to the United States. In response to their treatment, the reaction of Japanese Americans was to draw on even longer-standing racist cultural traditions in American history –the denigration of the culture and bodies of African Americans. Thus, through minstrel shows, cartoons and community lectures, Japanese Americans attempted to deflect questions about their loyalty and race by highlighting the perceived deficiencies of another group of Americans. In order to enhance their own domestic image and prove their status as true Americans, some Japanese Americans craftily employed the racist characterizations of African Americans to their own advantage.

For many Japanese Americans, the politics of representation was seen as a crucial part of their bid for greater acceptance in American society. The internal policing that went on within the Japanese American community points to the seriousness with which some Japanese Americans pursued this goal. In 1943 an internee living in the Denson, Arkansas camp related the sense of great personal dismay that he felt after coming into contact with the “unconventional dress” of Nisei youth on his recent trip to Utah and Colorado.¹⁵¹ The evacuee recalled the shock and disgust he felt seeing a group of Nisei men walking down a Denver street in “complete zoot attire.” The traveler recalled feeling especially “sick to his stomach” when questioned by a “native Coloradoan” about whether such dress was common among Nisei living in internment camps. Similarly ashamed by fellow Japanese American youth living in Salt Lake City, he criticized a Nisei boy who came to a “respectable” social gathering dressed in “tight ankle trousers, a black drape coat which covered much of his small chassis, a huge bow-tie, [and] a zoot boot topped with an enormous chapeau.” Very concerned about the fact that these Japanese Americans did not conform to popular white social norms of dress, the internee emphasized his disapproval by noting that even the “colored and Mexican” youths were dressed in more conventional attire than the “rowdy, cheap, and shiftless” group of Nisei “hoodlums” he encountered.

In the eyes of the above-mentioned traveler, all Japanese Americans had a special responsibility to positively represent their race during World War II. In this regard, dressing in “unconventional” clothing styles placed Japanese Americans

¹⁵¹ *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 18 June 1943 : 5.

outside of the mainstream of American culture to which many Nisei living in internment camps hoped to someday return. The zoot suit was a particularly risky clothing style because of its popular association with the anti-war movement. In a time of rationing on the homefront the zoot suit required large amounts of fabric, which was seen as excessive to many Americans during wartime. Rebellious African American youth, such as the young Malcolm X, specifically wore the zoot suit to demonstrate that they did not support the domestic war effort. Thus, some Issei so vehemently rejected Japanese American adoption of this clothing style because they feared being associated with elements of African American youth culture and thus being labeled as unpatriotic by white Americans. Stressing that the positive representation of the Japanese body needed to be a collective effort, the traveler closed his letter to the editor of the *Denson Tribune* by noting that: “Whether they are aware of it or not, Nisei now leaving the centers for outside resettlement are ambassadors of good will for the remainder of the evacuees who eventually intend to leave camp.”¹⁵²

Japanese Americans living both in and outside of internment camps were concerned about their image in American society during World War II. In February 1942 the *Seattle Times* printed an exchange between William Hosokawa, secretary of the Seattle Japanese-American Citizens League, and Hap Fischer, the white cartoonist who drew the popular Joe Palooka cartoon series, which was printed in Seattle’s major newspaper. In his letter Hosokawa noted that many Japanese Americans were fond of the series, which followed the adventures of the heroic U.S. soldier Joe

¹⁵² “Behavior and Unconventional dress of Denver Nisei Zoot Suit Boys Decried” *Denson Tribune* (Denson, Arkansas) 18 June 1943 : 5.

Palooka. Hosokawa informed Fischer: “We have seen the fine example Joe has set in the way of clean American living and unselfish patriotism and now we feel that Joe can help us with our particular problem.”¹⁵³ Hosokawa suggested that in a future cartoon it might “be a great step toward national unity if Joe could meet one or two...American-born Japanese in the Army so that the general public will realize that we of this group are doing our part in national defense.” Further outlining the type of Japanese Americans he would like Joe to encounter, Hosokawa suggested that:

Joe would find these Japanese Americans slighter of stature than other Americans. They would have straight black hair, and perhaps slightly slanting eyes. But the most outstanding thing about him would be his language, which would be as American as swing...He would be interested in all the mischief and fun that his buddies would be. He would be in complete accord with Joe when Joe declared on January 9 that is was like choosin’ between a skunk, a rattlesnake or a garbage can to try to determine “who’s the scummiest – the Japs, the Nazis, or the Fascists”¹⁵⁴

Not only did the fictional Joe feel that “Japs” were “skunks,” the letters of American military men also confirm that many Americans conceptualized Japanese nationals as “porkies” and “rabbits.” In fact, most European Americans lumped Japanese Americans together with America’s Japanese enemies. During the conflict, Issei, Nisei, and Sansei used their American culture and sensibilities to prove they were loyal citizens and not internal “others.” The fictional Japanese American character Hosokawa suggested for inclusion in the cartoon series would not question derogatory American characterizations of the Japanese; instead he would participate in them using language that was “as American as swing.” Hosokawa, a local officer for the major Japanese American civic group in the United States, had a vested

¹⁵³ “Nisei Loyal, Joe Palooka Salutes Members in Army” *Seattle Times* (Seattle) 2 February 1942 : 17.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

interest in protecting the civil liberties of his ethnic community. The fact that he felt a cartoon featuring a patriotic Japanese American would help to accomplish this goal is a testament to the power that representations of the body in the eyes of many Americans during World War II.

* * *

As discussed earlier in this chapter, during World War II body aesthetics were important on the U.S. home front. Like the battlefield, the body was a site where the politics of World War II were ferociously contested. In this regard, many groups of Americans used representations of the body to form their personal and national identity in the context of a war that even today is depicted as a struggle that pitted “good” against “evil.” Japanese Americans were no exception to this rule. Indeed, their actions allow us to understand the rich and complex racial dynamics that took place on the American home front during the war.

The minstrel shows, beauty contests, and other events hosted by interned Japanese demonstrate that the history of racism and racial tension in the United States must be discussed in broader terms than the familiar black-white duality common of the American lexicon has allowed. Japanese Americans during World War II are an example of an American group who both used and attempted to transcend the contemporary American racial rhetoric of their era. Writing Japanese American history is more than an inclusive project for which multicultural study is in itself an end. The history of groups at the margins of American society are important for both what they say about that individual group as well as what they tell us about the American mainstream and the larger organization of society as a whole. As such, too

often the history of American racial tension has focused on whites and binary exchanges they had with the groups that they were disenfranchising. Rather than concentrating solely on this two-way exchange, the history of Japanese American beauty pageants and minstrel shows demonstrate that persons of the mid-twentieth century interacted in more a much more complex dialogue. In particular, these events evidence a discourse in which the experiences of three American groups were intimately and fundamentally entwined.

Chapter 3: Gendering Japan: The Promotion of U.S. Ideals of Womanhood and Beauty in Occupied Japan

Figure 8: Postwar images from the Japanese Fashion Magazine *Sutairu* (Style).

By examining how American ideals of beauty were expressed in post-World War II Japan, this chapter offers readers more than a history of evolving fashion trends and changing hairstyles. Rather, it positions beauty culture within the political and ideological debates of the early postwar period by showing how democratic ideals were advanced in Japan. In the years immediately following World War II, American beauty culture was used by occupation officials and their Japanese collaborators to promote American ideals of womanhood in Japan. Far from insignificant, American hairstyles, clothing fashions, and other forms of beauty culture were important tools that the occupying forces consciously used to advance their political agenda. As the following discussion will illustrate, American beauty culture served as a vehicle for transmitting American lifestyles, values, and democratic ideals to the Japanese people.

As the first section of this dissertation highlights, during World War II many Americans viewed the people of Japan as menacing evildoers and repugnant racial others. The postwar scenario, however, led the United States to reconsider this perception. The global political realignment that ensued as a result of the war's end meant that the U. S. could more advantageously use Japan if it reconceptualized its people as loyal allies in the emerging postwar world.

Following the Allied victory over Japan on August 15, 1945, President Harry S. Truman appointed General Douglas MacArthur to head the Allied occupation of the country. General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), and his largely American military force remained in Japan through April 28,

1952, when the country again became a sovereign nation.¹⁵⁵ MacArthur regarded nurturing democracy in Japan as a crucial and necessary step in protecting the United States' political interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Because the American leadership feared the growth of leftist political regimes and the power of the Soviet influence in Asia, the occupation forces were charged with transforming Japan's citizens from militarist adversaries to democratic allies. This goal became particularly significant following the Communist take-over of China in 1949 and the start of the Korean War in 1950. SCAP leaders envisioned a Japan that would serve as a strong U. S. ally in the rapidly expanding Cold War.

The Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E) was one of many units SCAP established to advance democracy in Japan. The main goal of the CI&E was to ensure the development of an educational program designed to promote a culture of pro-U. S. civic engagement in Japan following the war. Thus, the close of military operations in Japan signaled the start of a new cultural campaign through which the United States sought to "educate" Japanese citizens about freedom, democracy, and other core American cultural values. In this regard, attempting to rebuild Japan in America's likeness meant going beyond simply changing the nation's political leadership. Rather, the occupying forces viewed the actions and behaviors of ordinary men and women as matters of considerable significance.

The CI&E viewed the re-education of Japanese women as crucial to the effective democratization of Japan. In contrast to male soldiers who had physically fought against the Allies during World War II, occupation officials hoped to more

¹⁵⁵ The acronym SCAP is used in this paper to refer to the occupation body. In addition to the United States, Australia, England, India, and New Zealand also sent troops who took part in the occupation serving under MacArthur's command.

easily influence the opinions of Japanese women. From 1937, the start of the Sino-Japanese War, to 1945, the end of World War II Japanese women coped with deplorable living conditions. By the time Emperor Hirohito conceded Japan's defeat in 1945, many of the country's women had become frustrated with and angered at the militarists who had led their nation into war. Occupation officials sought to capitalize on this resentment and hoped to transform Japanese women's bitterness toward the old guard into a greater receptiveness to the American postwar agenda. The cooperation of Japanese women was important because as a result of massive wartime casualties suffered by fighting men, women made up the majority of the Japanese population. With this as well as the more general objective of promoting democratic change in mind, General MacArthur granted Japanese women suffrage in December 1945.

On March 26, 1946, three weeks before the Japan's first postwar election, the CI&E issued a press release entitled "Women and Voting." Encouraging this newly enfranchised group of voters to take part in the historic election, the press release quoted the words of Agatha Jones, a U.S. civilian, who had given a speech to a gathering of Japanese women a week earlier. According to the CI&E, Jones stated:

What can any young girl, without experience in the ways of statesmanship and politics, [do] to protect the future? One very potent weapon is now in your hands. You can vote. You are now enfranchised citizens of Japan. You have the right and the duty to participate in the government of your country. Japan will become what its citizens make it. No longer can the blame for poor government be laid at the door of one or more groups of selfish people. The government is now yours.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ "Women and Voting" Records of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Women's Affairs and Activities, 1945-1950, (SCAP) Civil Information and Education Section Magazine Release SCAP Records, Box 5250, Folder: Press & Magazine Release, Records Group 331, National Archives II, College Park, MD

The many Japanese women who cast their votes for the first time on April 10, 1946 did more than make history; they played an important role in shifting the makeup of postwar Japanese political culture. Indeed, the 1946 election resulted in thirty-nine women being chosen to serve in the Japanese Diet. Yet in many respects, Japanese women's attainment of suffrage tells us as much about the will of the occupier as it does the occupied. As scholar Mire Koikari has pointed out, the achievement of female suffrage and the ascendance of women to the Japanese Diet have been touted by historians as important benchmarks in global feminist history. However, at the same time, as Koikari argues, these developments may be better understood within the framework of American imperial ambitions rather than as a story of Japanese female agency or empowerment.¹⁵⁷ From this perspective, an understanding of women's changing roles in postwar Japan allows us an opportunity to learn about U. S. history, American ambitions, and transnational movements. Following the 1946 election in Japan, occupation officials frequently used female suffrage as evidence that the Japanese could be effectively schooled in the American democratic agenda. By giving Japanese women the political rights and social responsibilities that U.S. women possessed, the occupation attempted to Americanize Japan and write its history as one of progress and the liberation of women. The historian can better understand how a group of Americans stationed abroad believed gender to be defined in their own nation by deconstructing the ideals of womanhood that the occupation promoted in the land of their former enemy.

¹⁵⁷ Mire Koikari "Exporting Democracy?: American Women, "Feminist Reforms," and Politics of Imperialism in the U.S. Occupation of Japan, 1945-1952." *Frontiers* (2002).

As occupation leaders observed early on, the enfranchisement of Japanese women would not ensure they would democratize their country. Indeed, SCAP leaders were highly concerned that Japanese women might vote uncritically by passively choosing whichever candidate their husbands or fathers told them to support. Instilling American political and cultural sensibilities in Japanese women therefore became a primary objective of occupation forces. Within this context, beauty culture was used by the occupation and its Japanese collaborators to promote the Americanization of Japan. Despite the fact that it was rarely formally discussed in foreign policy circles, beauty culture served as an important tool that American forces felt they could promote to help sell the All-American girl ideal to the Japanese as a force for democratization.

Through an analysis of three SCAP units, the Civil Information and Education Section, the Women's Affairs and Activities Division, and the Civil Censorship Detachment, this section will demonstrate how occupation officials consciously used beauty culture to transmit democratic ideals to the Japanese public. By encouraging Japanese women to look, stand, talk, and walk like American women, the occupation hoped to make them think, act, and even vote with American interests in mind as well. American beauty culture was an important part of the womanly ideal that occupation officials hoped to engender in the women of Japan. Beauty was seen as a key signifier of womanhood in the United States, it was used as a tool for promoting feminine ideals, and thereby American cultural and political ideals, in Japan.

First, I will examine the agenda of the Women's Affairs and Activities Division to show how SCAP used beauty culture to organize rural and urban women

in democratic associations throughout Japan. I will argue that occupation encouraged Japanese women to act out American ideals of womanhood in the skits and role playing activities hosting by such events these events. By mimicking American ideals of womanhood in such skits beauty culture was an important part of the feminine performance. The second part of this chapter will look at the roles of the Civil Censorship Detachment and the Civil Information and Education Section played in dictating American womanly ideals to Japanese women. I will demonstrate how these units used Japanese fashion magazines to promote their political agenda in postwar Japan. Using both the written content and images of beauty portrayed visually in these sources, I will support my contention that American beauty culture was an avenue through which American feminine ideals were marketed as modern and desirable for Japanese women.

Enacting Womanhood

SCAP, with its goal of advancing the American agenda in postwar Japan, appealed directly to Japanese women through the Women's Affairs and Activities Division. Set up under the Civil Information and Education Section and headed by headed by Women's Army Corps officer Lieutenant Ethel B. Weed, the Women's Affairs and Activities Division actively promoted democratic ideals of womanhood throughout the country. Toward that end, the Women's Division frequently organized meetings for Japanese women, distributed democratic literature, created public exhibitions, and held large conferences across the nation. In many of the above-

mentioned strategies, talk of American hairdos and clothing fashions served as a means for U.S. occupation officials to begin their discussion of American women's lives. Charged with the formidable task of instilling a democratic culture in the women of Japan, Lieutenant Weed and her staff used a verbal and visual American female prototype as the model that Japanese women were encouraged to emulate. Portrayed as beautiful, confident, and modern, this ideal American woman was the means of expression through which democracy was marketed to Japanese women as exciting, sexy, and progressive.

One of the main goals of the Women's Affairs and Activities Division was organizing and supporting the formation of clubs and associations specifically for Japanese women because such organizations were seen as an important first step in promoting democratic civic engagement among Japanese women. In 1949 the Japanese schoolteacher Tomekichi Nakayama wrote and performed a skit entitled "An Awakening Home" with two fellow members of the Hishikari Women's Association. Nakayama's drama illustrates the effect that occupation forces hoped they could foster in Japan. Her work dealt with changing gender dynamics in the postwar home and the struggles that young women in particular faced in mapping a more democratic path for their new lives in Japan.

In the opening line of Nakayama's skit, the young bride asks her mother-in-law, "Will you do me a favor, Mother?" She continues, "May I go to the beauty shop, please? For a meeting of our women's association is held tomorrow." As Nakayama explains in the forward to her drama, this first act was intended to present a family setting in which old Japanese customs and traditions had "retard[ed] the

process for making our home democratic.” Because SCAP felt female suffrage had been derailed by what it termed as “feudalistic” gender relations in Japan, the relationship of women with other family members was a critical topic that the Women’s Division encouraged Japanese women to discuss in their postwar clubs and organizations. According to Nakayama, her skit was intended to present both utopian and dystopian futures for the Japanese home by addressing women’s new social roles.¹⁵⁸

Since the mother-in-law character in the skit was completely out of touch with modern hairstyling practices, she did not understand why her daughter-in-law wanted to go to the beauty shop. After listening to her daughter-in-law’s request to get a “permanent wave,” she wrongly assumed her daughter-in-law was asking for a new garment and told her it would be too warm for such attire the following day.

Symbolizing the old guard of Japanese society, the mother-in-law character was Nakayama’s highly dramatized version of the pre-war womanly ideal in Japan. As such, the mother-in-law character took pride in the blind subservience she had shown her deceased husband and was praised by society for such actions. Indeed, the older woman announced with pride that she had always obeyed her husband’s command, and according to his instruction, remained silent on issues related to public affairs.

By contrast, the daughter-in-law character, who was a more modern woman, influenced by western aesthetics and political ideals, persisted in her ambitions to attend the women’s meeting and have her hair done. She explained to her mother-in-law that a “permanent wave is when the hair is frizzled with a sizzling sound at a

¹⁵⁸ Tomekichi Nakayama, “Awakening Home” SCAP Records, box 5249, file: Miscellaneous

beauty shop where only women go.” When she understood the full effect of the social atmosphere that the beauty shop introduced, the mother-in-law became upset. She quickly rebuffed the young woman’s request by arguing that beauty shops were places where young “girls who thrust their noses into everything” go to get their “hair bobbed” and have the strange words “democracy, freedom, or sex equality on their lips.” Fearing the daughter would “be infected by the sickness,” the mother-in-law lamented, “if you behave like a ridiculous person [in] that way, I don’t know how I can apologize adequately to my forefathers.”

Yelling out, “alas, I feel wretched,” the old woman called her son into the room so that he could reprimand his wife. The son, also a vanguard of the old era, forbade his wife to go to the beauty shop and then made her change immediately into more unattractive clothing. Instead of getting an American-inspired “permanent wave,” the wife was forced to stay at home and wear her monpe, a sack-like work garment that many Japanese women were encouraged to wear during the war. As historian Jacqueline M. Atkins argues, while many young Japanese women disliked wearing the monpe, it was seen as a part of their patriotic duty during the war.¹⁵⁹

Moreover, although western clothing styles and tastes had been introduced to Japan in the nineteenth century, during the war such styles were looked down upon. Japanese wartime propaganda proclaimed “extravagance is the enemy,” and in 1939 cosmetics and permanent waves were outlawed as unnecessary and corrupting

¹⁵⁹ Jacqueline M. Atkins “Extravagance is the Enemy” *Wearing Propaganda: Textiles on the Home Front in Japan, Britain and the United States, 1931-1945*. ed. Jacqueline M. Atkins (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005) , 166.

western luxuries. In this regard, it is quite telling that in an act of patriotism during the war, Japanese beauty shops limited their customers to three curls per head.¹⁶⁰

American beauty culture, and Japanese women's acceptance or rejection of it, was thus a highly politicized topic in postwar Japan. It was no coincidence that Tomekichi Nakayama, the author of the "The Awakening," depicted the negative legacy Japanese women had inherited. By centering her skit around American beauty culture she sought to highlight the cultural and political initiatives the occupation was promoting in Japan. To the author and the leaders of the U.S. occupation, all trying to promote a new womanly ideal, traditional Japanese culture had long "shackled" the women of that nation. Arguing that traditional gender roles in Japan had made women the "slave[s] of men," Nakayama visually represented this scenario in the closing moments of her first scene. The husband commands his wife to go out to work in the fields, yelling out, "Come on, no dallying. You fool." Dressed in her monpe, the submissive wife obeyed, carrying a hoe, basket, and other cumbersome tools on her shoulders. The message of clear: instead of going to the beauty shop to get a permanent wave with the other members of her women's association, this wife was driven to the work fields by her husband, who smoking a tobacco pipe, followed at a leisurely pace.

In assessing the prewar situation for Japanese women as "feudalistic," SCAP records indicate that women had few public or private spaces in which they could express their personal will or intellectual independence. The Women's Division thus saw encouraging women to enter spheres of female-dominated influence outside the

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, 163.

home as a crucial element in democratizing Japan. As a site of female-dominated political and cultural engagement in the United States, the beauty shop in Nakayama's play symbolized the new possibilities that the occupation offered to Japanese women. Just like bobbed hair cuts and permanents waves, freedom and democracy were marketed to Japanese women as desirable in postwar Japan.

Tomekichi Nakayama's skit "The Awakening" should be viewed in this context. Indeed it is worth noting that after writing and performing the skit before members of her local women's association, she gave her manuscript to Mary King, an occupation official working in the Women's Affairs and Activities Division. Although King felt that Nakayama's amateur skit was "unrefined," she also found it useful to the occupation forces. King noted in the records that she had secured "permission from the author for it to be reproduced and used in any way for educational purposes." Tomekichi Nakayama's skit was similar to works written by occupation officials for use in the Japanese training and leadership institutes that they sponsored.

In July 1948 the Women's Division sponsored a series of two-day leadership training institutes in Beppu, Morioka, and Tokyo.¹⁶¹ Held in Japan's capital city as well as in two additional urban centers in the southern and northern parts of the country, these institutes were intended to train the new generation of female leaders in Japan. In addition, as SCAP records noted, the gathering was meant to "serve as a model for institutes which the representatives will set up in their communities."

¹⁶¹ "Leadership Training Institute: Program Planning of Organizations for Better Communities," SCAP records, Box 5246.

Among other issues, the conference addressed gender norms and the role of women in postwar Japanese society.

Having Japanese women convey the need for a new female role and identity was an important strategy of the occupation. In addition to Lieutenant Ethel B. Weed and other American members of the occupation, prominent Japanese women frequently spoke at the institutes. These women included “Mrs. Hasegawa,” chief of the Miyagi Women and Minors’ Bureau; “Mrs. Ono,” president of the Home Economics Teachers Association; and Taiko Kusaka, a representative of the Japan Red Cross’ Fukushima Branch. Furthermore, Japanese women who had been trained by the occupation forces led small-group discussions at leadership training institutes. They were charged with facilitating discussions of gender roles in the new Japan. In these small-group settings, Japanese leaders helped participants act out skits similar to Tomekichi Nakayama’s drama “The Awakening,” which used gender ideals and expectations as a way to discuss family politics, women’s roles in the home, and postwar Japanese society at large.

One skit, entitled “Husband and Wife,” used in a small-group discussion at the Kumamoto Institute for Leadership Training, began with a young wife “preparing her toilet” in anticipation of a women’s meeting that she was to attend later that night. Upon returning home from a long business trip, the woman’s husband begged her to spend time with him instead of attending the all-female gathering. He lamented to his wife, that “we have been too busy to go out together for the one year, six months, twenty-two days and five hours since we married,” and suggested the couple enjoy dinner and a movie together. Restating her alternative plans for the evening, the wife

responded, “I have finished eating,” and further noted, “I put yours on the shelf. So, please eat it alone. And...if you don’t mind, please wash the dishes.” Seeing that his wife, the president of her women’s organization, was determined to leave him alone for the evening, the husband’s tone turned cold. In the scene’s end, he emphatically told his wife, “now I order you not to go.” Ending the formal script at this point, discussion leaders at the Kumamoto Institute for Leadership Training asked the actors in the skit to improvise their own ending to the story.¹⁶² By situating a discussion of household politics as central to leadership training, the Kumamoto Institute thus linked women’s ability to control their private lives to their ability to operate effectively in the public sphere. By extemporaneously acting out an ending to the “Husband and Wife” skit, the participants were encouraged to role-play solutions to problems that the occupation felt they might face in their own lives. Thus, through promoting American cultural ideals of womanhood in the home, in the beauty shop, and in society at large, the Women’s Division attempted to shape Japanese gender politics in postwar Japan.

In addition to using meetings and conferences for these purposes, the Women’s Division advanced their goals through public exhibitions, American movies, novels, and other tutorials meant to provide Japanese women with western womanly ideals. From June 10 to July 20, 1948, for example, the Matsuya Department Store in Asakusa displayed an occupation-sponsored exhibit about American lifestyles on the third floor of its store. Patrons who paid 25 yen were able to learn about marriage and love in the U.S. by looking at scenes from the lives of

¹⁶² “Husband and Wife” SCAP, Skit: Kumamoto Institute for Leadership Training, SCAP Records, Box 5246, File: Leadership Training Courses.

“typical American families.”¹⁶³ Shown “learning how to cut material for a dress,” a young American schoolgirl featured in one exhibit was praised because the “simple beauty of her dress makes the young girl’s beauty more brilliant.” Explaining the daily routine of the girl’s mother, the exhibit highlighted the ways in which female chores, such as sewing, differed in the U.S. and Japan. As the exhibit noted, American women “do mending” but “under pleasant conditions, in a relaxed sort of way, while they discuss the day’s news with their husband.”¹⁶⁴

By providing Japanese women with information on how the modern American woman was said to have lived her life, the Women’s Division attempted to create an ideal template after which Japanese women could model their lives. By promoting this ideal through a number of tutorial techniques, including skits and exhibits, the occupation attempted to encourage Japanese women to act out in their own lives routines and rituals central to the lives of American women. How closely these ideals matched up with the actual practices of American women is of course another story. What is significant, however, is the fact that occupation officials earnestly believed that by encouraging Japanese women to engage in such daily practices, these rituals would become stepping stones upon which women would eventually stride into autonomous political participation.

While many members of the occupation leadership promoted this American agenda and its imperialistic ideals to their fullest extent, it is worth noting that most believed their actions and efforts to be in the best interest of Japanese women. “You

¹⁶³ “Cut lines for Proposed Exhibit on Leaders’ Training Institutes,” SCAP, Intra-section Memorandum on OIC Exhibits, Women’s Information Officer to OIC Exhibits Branch SCAP Records, Box 5247.

¹⁶⁴ “Exhibition for Japanese on American Lifestyles,” SCAP, Box 5247

went to Japan as an idealist and have kept loyal to your ideals,” wrote the American historian, suffragist, and reformer Mary Beard to Lieutenant Ethel B. Weed in 1950.¹⁶⁵ In her efforts to reform Japanese gender practices, Lieutenant Weed at times turned to Beard for advice while she served as the head of the Women’s Division. Most likely put into contact with Beard through her subordinate, Shindzue Kato, a voting and birth control rights advocate in prewar Japan, Lieutenant Weed actively looked for guidance in her new role. Like many of the female military personnel stationed in Japan, Ethel Weed came to the country with no prior knowledge of Japanese language and culture.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the collaborative role played by bilingual Japanese women such as Kato was crucial in implementing the occupation’s initiatives work. As this section has shown, Japanese women literally helped their female compatriots enact American ideals of womanhood through skits and other public performances of rituals of womanhood. As the next section will show, Japanese language print media played a similar and equally important role in marketing American beauty culture and political ideas to the women of Japan.

Portraying Womanhood

General McArthur did not fully take over or shut down the Japanese media during the postwar period. Rather, SCAP viewed the Japanese press as a powerful tool in its effort to democratize Japan. But instead of seizing control of the Japanese

¹⁶⁵ Nancy F. Cott, ed., *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 318.

¹⁶⁶ Koikari, 8.

press, SCAP authorized the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) to enforce a strict press code in Japan from 1945 to 1949. Under this code, Japanese print media were banned from publishing information that would indicate U. S. troop movements, disturb public tranquility, or disseminate negative propaganda about the United States. At the same time, SCAP enlisted the Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E) to help promote the American agenda in the Japanese print media. By partnering with members of the Japanese press and providing them with materials that could be translated into Japanese and printed alongside articles written by Japanese, the occupation hoped to further its mission in the nation. Thus, while the materials found in postwar Japanese print culture came largely from Japanese writers, editors, and publishers, they operated within a foreign-directed political framework.

As one aspect of its democratizing mission in Japan, SCAP units hoped to use the press to shape new gender roles for Japanese women. During the occupation, Japanese women's magazine as well as general interest publications aimed specifically at Japanese women were given articles for publication by SCAP personnel. Initially, the CI&E's press strategy was to provide female readers with advice on setting up women's clubs, organizations, and associations. Giving readers mostly administrative guidelines, this literature instructed women on how to take proper minutes at their meetings, informed them about the obligations of individual members to an organization, and outlined the qualifications for elected leaders. However, and not surprisingly, CI&E records indicate this procedural information failed to spark reader interest. By contrast, the Japanese public responded much more

enthusiastically to stories that highlighted the lives of American women, showing how they lived “democratic lives” in the United States.

It was for this reason that on March 31, 1948, an unnamed occupation official working as a CI&E press liaison contacted Lieutenant Ethel B. Weed, the head of the Women’s Division to ask for assistance. As the press liaison noted, “over and over again, the women’s magazines emphasize the fact that they want practical articles which are tied to the home.”¹⁶⁷ Not satisfied with providing information to Japanese women that solely related to their roles as homemakers, the CI&E pressured the Japanese media to print articles that would encourage Japanese women to engage in community life outside the home. Noting the occupation’s ulterior motive, the press liaison informed Lieutenant Weed, “We try to sell them on the idea that the housewife must look outside of the home, as political and economic problems affect the home. The editors agree but say the relationship has to be brought out very clearly to their readers.” As the CI&E official’s words demonstrate, using the press to model civic engagement for Japanese women was thus an obvious CI&E tactic.

On her next trip to the United States, the same press liaison requested that Lieutenant Weed identify articles that SCAP could give to the editors of Japanese women’s magazines. Looking specifically for information that would both be of interest to Japanese women and also further SCAP aims, the CI&E official suggested that Lieutenant Weed look into materials published by the YWCA, 4-H, and American Girl Scouts. In fact, the press liaison gave Lieutenant Weed a list of Japanese magazines and the particular types of articles of interest to their editors. The

¹⁶⁷ Unsigned letter to Lt. Ethel B. Weed, Japan, 31 March 1948, SCAP, Box 5250, File, Press & Magazine Relations, Magazine Folder

publication, *Shufu to Seikatsu (Ladies Life)* for instance, “has expressed a desire for material on democracy as it is lived in America.” Stressing the personal connection that had to be established in such articles, the official noted that editors desired “actual cases of rural groups organizing to improve the lot of their families and communities rather than discussion on general principles.” The press liaison further noted that the CI&E hoped to provide the Japanese press with “actual case histories and human interest examples...as well as practical material on the general principles of home management.” In addition to periodicals aimed specifically at women, the CI&E hoped to instill its ideals in other types of publications as well. The liaison noted that the farming magazine *Iye no Hikari (Light for the Home)* “wants information to help women organize their household affairs so they will have more time to develop their minds.” With a circulation of over 1,200,000 subscribers, *Iye no Hikari (Light for the Home)* had the largest readership of any Japanese magazine in the postwar period. Therefore, an article on homemaking carried by this publication was guaranteed to have a sizable male and female readership.

The role of women’s magazines as it related to SCAP’s mission for the Japanese press should not be overlooked. Of the many tactics CI&E used to promote its message of Americanization and democratization, the use of print media to target women proved to be one of the most effective modes of communicating information to the Japanese public. Indeed, a special report entitled “Magazines for Women,” prepared by the CI&E Press and Publications Research Unit in April 1946, noted that “the present purchase of women’s magazines includes not only women eager to read about the “democratic way,” but also young men who consider women’s magazines a

source of good literature and true Japanese culture.”¹⁶⁸ The CI&E’s 1951 Operations Manual similarly outlined the Press and Publications Branch’s important role in the postwar transition by noting that “Japan is a reading nation.”¹⁶⁹ Pointing Japan’s extensive publishing industry and high literacy rates, the manual recognized that women’s magazines were a powerful and effective tool and took them into account in their fiscal plans for the following year. Due to the “the clamor of the Japanese for reading material as well as the practically universal interest in the present and future position of Japanese women,” women’s magazines were seen by SCAP as an ideal vehicle through which the American agenda could be promoted to both Japanese men and women.

According to a CI&E report issued in 1945, the year occupation forces took control of Japan, *Shufu no Tomo (Ladies Friend)* and *Fujin Kurabu (Ladies Club)* were the most popular publications dedicated solely to topics of interest to women. With 750,000 and 500,000 monthly subscribers respectively, by December 1945 their combined subscription base was larger than that of the farming publication *Iye no Hikari (Light for the Home)*, which had previously enjoyed the largest readership in the nation.¹⁷⁰ *Shufu no Tomo (Ladies Friend)* and *Fujin Kurabu (Ladies Club)* were in the top five of all magazines printed in Japan and made up approximately two-thirds of the total circulation for women’s publications as a whole. While the major women’s publications established their readership in the years before the war, several smaller periodicals gained popularity in the postwar period. Indeed the popularity that

¹⁶⁸ “Magazines for Women” 8 April 1946, SCAP, Press and publications Research Unit, Box, 5250, Folder: Press & Magazines Relations Folder.

¹⁶⁹ CI&E Operation Manuel, Plans for Fiscal year 1952, p. 130, SCAP, Box 5248

¹⁷⁰ “Report of the Current Status of Magazine Publication in Japan,” December 1, 1945, SCAP, Box 5250, Folder: Press & Magazine Relations Folder

such publications witnessed in the immediate postwar years has led scholar Emiko Ochai to call the period “the golden age of women’s magazines.”¹⁷¹

As a subcategory of women’s magazines, fashion magazines were among those that flourished during the postwar era. Because they were favored by the occupation, fashion magazines are important to understanding how U.S. ideals of womanhood were promoted in postwar Japan. While fashion magazines such as *Sutairu (Style)* and *Sutairu To Dezain (Style, Fashion, and Design)* made up a smaller share of Japanese print culture than general interest women’s magazines, SCAP records show that this type of publication was preferred by the occupation, and that fashion magazines played a significant role in presenting American ideals of womanhood to the Japanese public in the years following V-J Day. Indeed, Americanized forms of beauty and fashion dominated postwar Japanese fashion magazines. Serving as the leading women’s fashion magazine in Japan, *Sutairu (Style)* showed its readers popular western clothing and swimwear styles and printed articles with titles such as “Basic Knowledge of Foreign Clothes,” “American Women in 24 Hours,” and “The Latest American Fashions.” Several editions of *Sutairu (Style)* even included intricate western clothing patterns, so that readers could more easily incorporate American styles into their daily wardrobes.

Forced to suspend publication during the war, the fashion magazine *Sutairu (Style)* resumed publication in 1945. With a circulation of 300,000 monthly copies, *Sutairu (Style)* was the most popular fashion magazine and the third most popular publication aimed at women in the postwar era. In its April 1946 special report on

¹⁷¹ Emiko Ochai, “Decent Housewives and Sensual White Women: Representations of Women in Postwar Japanese Magazines.” *Japan Review* 9 (1997) , 152.

women's magazines, CI&E personnel hailed fashion magazines as some of the best publications in Japan. In particular, the report praised Japanese fashion magazines for their pictorial displays and appealing layouts. In addition, they also argued that that the fashion magazines *Sutairu (Style)*, *Fujin Gahou (Women's Pictorial)*, and *Fujin Asahi (Women's Morning Sun)* were "probably the most attractive" magazines of any category printed in Japan at the time.¹⁷²

Because Japan was hit hard by wartime shortages in the postwar era, many publishers continued to struggle to keep up production. Obtaining the raw materials needed to print magazines, newspapers, books, and other publications was especially difficult, and printers had to make do with a paper grade inferior in quality to even the lowest quality American "pulp."¹⁷³ Given this reality, the number of illustrations (photographs or drawings) was extremely limited in the postwar Japanese press. Because fashion magazines were one of the few types of print media that regularly carried illustrations during this period, the images they displayed have great cultural weight. Not only did fashion magazines print articles about beauty, they also portrayed western fashions in their photographs and drawings.

In this context the covers of fashion magazines served as an especially important visual image. Each month the cover of *Sutairu (Style)*, featured a drawing of a beautified woman whose race was ambiguous, but whose style was identifiably foreign. The cover girl's skin was always light, and was visually juxtaposed with dark puckered lips and almond-shaped eyes heavily lined in cosmetic color. These

¹⁷² "Magazines for Women" 8 April 1946, SCAP, Press and publications Research Unit, Box, 5250, Folder: Press & Magazines Relations Folder.

¹⁷³ "Report of the Current Status of Magazine Publication in Japan" 1 December 1945, p. 4, General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Civil Information and Education Section, Analysis and Research SCAP, box 5250, Press & Magazines Relations Folder.

depictions of beautiful women rarely had pin-straight hair, but rather large flowing, yet neatly fastened feminine curls. A foreign-centered beauty aesthetic appeared inside the publication as well. Photographs of light-haired, fair-skinned, white women in stylish western garb were a regular feature of the publication. In addition, pin-up style photographs of Japanese women in western style swimwear were a regular feature of fashion magazine's summer editions. As Emiko Ochai has similarly observed in her analysis of general-interest women's magazines, during the occupation (1945-1952), it was the norm for Japanese cover girls to have permed hair, short skirts, and long legs. Interestingly, this trend, she notes disappeared after 1952 only to reappear in the 1970s.¹⁷⁴ Like fashion magazines, Ochai similarly notes that references to fashion and beauty in general interest women's magazines were filtered through western aesthetic ideals.

In addition to its foreign-centered visual aesthetic, the number three magazine *Sutairu (Style)* received tactical support from the occupation because it was not seen as a political threat to the Allied forces. The number one women's publication, *Shufu no Tomo (Ladies Friend)*, on the other hand, received special attention from occupation officials. Characterized by occupation officials as the Japanese equivalent of the American publication *Ladies Home Journal*, *Shufu no Tomo (Ladies Friend)* was perceived as potentially influential vis a vis the attitudes of ordinary Japanese men and women. A confidential 1945 CI&E report noted that while *Shufu no Tomo (Ladies Friend)* was at present "politically neutral" and "chiefly concerned with domestic affairs," this had not always been the case. Indeed members of the Japanese

¹⁷⁴ Ochai, 152.

Publishers Association, the Nippon Shuppan Kyokai, had openly accused *Shufu no Tomo* (*Ladies Friend*) of fully cooperating with the militarist government in power during World War II. However, Takeyoshi Ishikawa, the magazine's director publicly refuted such allegations, arguing that his magazine had suffered greatly during the war and that the militarists had been displeased with it for "not contributing its full share to the [wartime] emergency." Ishikawa supported this assertion by noting that wartime magazines subscriptions to his publication dropped by almost 1,000,000 between 1944 and the end of the war.

Suspended during the final year of World War II, *Sutairu* (*Style*) resumed publishing in January 1946. In addition to posing no direct threat to SCAP during the postwar years, this magazine presented images of womanhood that were favorable to the occupation. A CI&E report, most likely written in 1946, labeled the publication as "quite liberal and up to date, but not controversial."¹⁷⁵ As CI&E officials noted, the publication was geared towards an urban, modern, and sophisticated woman who looked to the West for cultural inspiration. By contrast the report labeled that, *Shufu no Tomo* (*Ladies Friend*) as "conservative" and "extremely militaristic during the war." While noting the publication had images "pretty enough to attract the women's eyes," the report also commented that these images were not "artistic." Furthermore, it was seen as more problematic than fashion magazines because it concentrated more of its content on the inner workings of traditional Japanese homes and as unsophisticated housewives. Under suspicion for its possible collusion with wartime militarists, *Shufu no Tomo* (*Ladies Friend*) emerged from the war with declining

¹⁷⁵ untitled report on women's magazines, n.d., SCAP, Box 5250, Folder: Press & Magazine Relations

subscriptions, while the fashion magazine *Sutairu (Style)* grew in popularity. By July 1949, *Sutairu (Style)* was 78 pages long, had a subscription base of 310,000 readers, and was authorized to publish without examination by U.S. censors.¹⁷⁶ The images and topics found in *Sutairu (Style)*, along with its support from occupation forces, made it a powerful agent of cultural change in the immediate postwar period.

Through their focus on fashion, *Sutairu (Style)*, *Sutairu To Dezain (Style, Fashion, and Design)*, *Sutairu Bukku (Style Book)*, and similar publications reinforced American aesthetic ideals. Postwar editions of *Sutairu Bukku (Style Book)* offered instruction on how to wear clothing so that their waists would appear smaller and their busts bigger. *Sutairu (Style)* even offered Japanese women new variations on the traditional kimono garment, such as styles with big floral prints meant to accentuate and make the bust appear larger. Sexualized photographs of both Japanese and American women's bodies also appeared in fashion magazines. It is particularly noteworthy that these magazines even introduced American style icons to Japanese publications. For example, *Sutairu To Dezain (Style, Fashion, and Design)* published a full-length picture of the popular American film star and pin-up Bette Davis sprawled across a lawn playing with her dog.¹⁷⁷ Postwar fashion magazines gave the women of Japan American role models whose physical styles and behavior they could imitate. These powerful visual tools came not from SCAP pamphlets or Women's Division exhibits, but from the Japanese print media itself.

Through displays of American females living an idealized life, the pages of popular fashion magazines such as *Sutairu (Style)* functioned as a guide that led

¹⁷⁶ *Sutairu*, (July, 1949).

¹⁷⁷ *Sutairu*, (June 1946); *Sutairu To Dezain (Style, Fashion, and Design)*

readers step by step through the dictates of American grooming, cosmetic use, manners, diction, carriage and other the subfields of beauty culture. *Sutairu (Style)* claimed to teach its readers about the most intimate details of American women's lives how they dressed, what they ate, how they walked, and who they chose to date. The publication established the young, slender, white American female body as the ideal that Japanese women should emulate. The publication further claimed that average American women, not just actresses, studied nutrition because they did not want to lose their desirable figures. Advising Japanese women on food choices, *Sutairu (Style)* promised its readers they too could have a more beautiful shape and more elegant style if they stopped eating rice which the publication argued made Japanese women fat.¹⁷⁸ In order to be beautiful, the publication suggested, the Japanese woman had to do more than wear western fashions; she had to mold her body into the idealized western shape so that American fashions would look their best on her. *Sutairu (Style)* thus went way beyond assisting the Japanese woman in cultivating fashion sense. It was not just style, but an American body and lifestyle that the magazine encouraged its readers to adopt. By lecturing women on proper nutrition and etiquette, instructing them on how to walk elegantly, explaining the proper use of rouge, or teaching them how to craft "new look" hairstyles, Japanese fashion magazines did more than make reference to western trends; they set them up as the most preferred female aesthetic.

Sutairu (Style) did not report on national news or politics. Nor was it the publication's intent to focus on the dramatic social and economic changes Japan had

¹⁷⁸ *Sutairu*, (July 1946).

experienced after the war. Like other women's fashion magazines, *Sutairu (Style)* primarily devoted its pages to discussing hairdos and seasonal fashions. Yet the fact that beauty culture was the sole emphasis of fashion magazines does not mean that their content was apolitical. On the contrary, their discussions of American ideals of beauty in the context of the U.S. occupation of Japan meant that the content of *Sutairu (Style)* and other fashion magazines was pointedly political.

The political nature of American beauty culture as it propagated in Japan is clearly illustrated in an article in the August 1949 edition of *Sutairu (Style)*. Instructing Japanese women on what constituted modern beauty, the article featured next to its title the headshot of an exquisitely made-up young white woman. The model's fair skin was contrasted by heavy cosmetic color on her lips, eyes, and cheeks. In addition, her light hair was pulled up into a neat bouffant style that crowned her head. Despite her youth, the model's demeanor was mature, poised, and subtly seductive. The model's most striking feature was her delicately plucked eyebrows, which gracefully arched upward and directed readers' attention to the article's title, "How to Make a Beautiful Face."¹⁷⁹ Written by Japanese physician Takanori Uchida and Japanese dentist Haruo Kumagaya, the article praised modern science and informed readers on the latest developments in beautification for Japanese women. Focusing on the beautification of the eyes and lips, Drs. Uchida and Kumagaya informed Japanese women about medically administered cosmetic procedures from the West that could give them a more attractive personal appearance.

¹⁷⁹ *Sutairu* (August 1949) : 40.

According to Dr. Uchida, creating beautiful eyes meant giving Japanese women a double eye-lid effect similar to those of women of European ancestry. The white woman pictured next to the article thus served as a visual aid to Uchida's discussion of the ideal female eye. While many Japanese women were born with a smooth single eye-lid that extended from the eye brow to the eye lashes, Uchida explained that physicians could give the Japanese woman a double eye-lid effect by strategically removing fat deposits from underneath her skin. Such an operation, Uchida assured readers, could be performed quickly and with minimal scarring, which is why, according to Uchida, such procedures had already become popular in a number of foreign countries.

Following Uchida's commentary on beautiful eyes, the dentist Kumagaya Haruo explained that the shape of a woman's lips also affected her physical desirability and proudly announced that Japanese women could correct and modify the shape of their lips through cosmetic procedures as well. Thus, just as in the United States, American aesthetic ideals operating in postwar Japan carried with them notions of racial and cultural superiority. Western-looking eyes and lips were the ideal not only for American women, but the article suggested for Japanese women as well.

The widespread appearance of these and similar articles in Japan, once a nation that had defined itself through pride in its peoples of racial purity, aesthetic perfection, and imperial dominance over its "inferior" Asian colonial subjects clearly demonstrates that postwar Japan was a changed place. Due to the occupation's activist presence in Japan, many of the cultural forms allowed public expression in

the postwar nation had to serve as conduits and endorsements of America's political goals and ambitions, including American ideals of beauty. Regardless of whether average Japanese women actually preferred a double-eyelid to a single one, or vice versa, the fact that a mainstream cultural outlet even engaged in this conversation demonstrates Japanese print culture had taken a foreign turn. During the postwar era, portrayals of the Japanese body and body politic took their cues from Japan's subordinate relationship to the United States and expressed their lesser status.

The strategy of the U.S. in postwar Japan involved changing not only political systems, but also cultural norms. The features in *Sutairu (Style)* and other Japanese fashion magazines demonstrate the extent to which new western-influenced notions of beauty pervaded mass Japanese print culture in the postwar years. The occupation forces kept a close eye on women's magazines, helped them to obtain American articles, and watched the effect that these publications had on Japanese women. Despite the fact that the U.S. occupation did not completely take over the Japanese press and that black market publications existed throughout the U.S. occupation of Japan, the sheer volume of materials produced by SCAP inundated the public with western images and ideals. As presented in the Japanese print media, the beautified American woman was a fashion icon and democratic role model. In addition to promoting such "positive" images of American womanhood through fashion and beauty culture, SCAP also made certain that negative commentary about the United States stayed out of the Japanese media.

In this regard, although the occupation was generally receptive to cooperative Japanese fashion magazines, the content of these publications was closely scrutinized

by U.S. censors. Indeed, the title of each and every article published in *Sutairu (Style)* was translated and noted in the records of the Civil Censorship Detachment until 1949, the final year of CCD operations in Japan. Like all forms of print media in Japan, the magazine was subject to deletions when occupation forces felt an article violated SCAP's press code. Such was the case for a 1947 *Sutairu (Style)* article in which a Japanese woman expressed surprise at discovering that her friend had taken a waitressing job at a bar that catered to occupation forces. The waitress was excited by the opportunity to make twice as much money serving occupation personnel than she had at her previous job. However, her friend, the article's author, remained unimpressed; she wrote, "to work in such a place as a bar is the first step to corruption." Using popular slang highly critical of her friend's decision, the author added that any "person [who] thinks of becoming a bar waitress may have a predisposition to become a pan-pan girl." The term "pan-pan girl" was a disparaging nickname given to Japanese women who worked for occupation forces, often used to identify those who, on an amateur basis, offered sex to American forces in return for money or material goods. Picking up on the pan-pan reference, a CCD examiner issued an infraction report concerning the proposed article. In the end, an edited version of the article was approved by the CCD, allowing the author to express her opinion that bars were places of corruption, but omitting the pan-pan reference and the fact that the waitress worked on a U.S. base.

Like *Sutairu (Style)*, the women's magazine *Hataraku Fujin (Working Women)* published articles aimed at young women. However, unlike *Sutairu (Style)*, it fell victim to U.S. censors much more frequently. Published by the Japan Democratic

Culture Association in Tokyo, this magazine frequently focused on fashion, beauty, and youth. Postwar editions also included western-style clothing patterns, foreign recipes, and a biography of the French physicist Marie Curie. However, as the title of this publication suggests, the magazine was also greatly influenced by leftist ideals, which meant occupation officials felt it necessary to carefully monitor it.

Included on the CCD's "special treatment list" for promoting communist propaganda, *Hataraku Fujin (Working Women)* was subject to closer scrutiny than most women's magazines, and its portrayals of womanhood were strictly policed. One December 1945 article in *Hataraku Fujin (Working Women)* entitled "The Development of U.S. Women" was censored. While a revised version of the piece was finally cleared for publication, it made the cut only after a censor struck some lines from the article that bluntly assessed American women's historic place in the family as "in most cases, only a means to satisfy a man's desires." Under the auspices of an occupation that was attempting to label traditional Japanese families as feudalistic and American families as egalitarian, such a statement was in direct opposition to SCAP objectives. According to the pre-censored passage, in the past, American wives "did not enjoy more respect than a prostitute" – a claim that occupation officials also saw fit to censor.¹⁸⁰

An analysis of *Hataraku Fujin (Working Women)* is significant because it demonstrates the lengths to which occupation forces went to police ideals of womanhood in postwar Japan. The combined January-February 1947 edition of *Hataraku Fujin (Working Women)* involved 14 deletions and the complete

¹⁸⁰ *Hataraku Fujin*, (December 1945).

suppression of a 12-page article entitled “Mother.”¹⁸¹ The “Mother” piece that censors found so egregious was an abridged version of a short novel written by the Soviet author Maxim Gorky, which had been translated by a Japanese citizen, Yoshie Miyakawa. The preface to an unrelated 1947 English translation of the Gorky novel *Mother* suggests why occupation censors may have found this piece objectionable. In it the left-wing American author Howard Fast wrote that Gorky’s story follows the protagonist’s “motherly concern for her son,” which becomes transformed into a “a motherly concern for all the people.” Fast argued that the mother’s life shows readers “the living process by which an ordinary person becomes, step by step, a fighter for justice.”¹⁸² Occupation forces picked up on the symbolic role of the Mother in Gorky’s story but criticized it as an open endorsement of Communist thought. Introducing the piece to other members of the occupation, one CCD official described *Mother* as “typical propaganda” that “heralds the revolution” and “praises the proletariat.”¹⁸³ By relating the story of an impoverished widow of a drunken husband who becomes involved in Russian politics out of a desire to protect her son Pavel, the CCD official claimed that the Japanese-language version of *Mother* espoused ideals which were in direct opposition to the U.S. agenda in Japan.

Generally plain in their language and tone, CCD reports rarely expressed emotion. Reports of this infraction, however, were written up with an unusual amount of passion. After several communications between the CCD and CI&E, both SCAP units agreed that the “Mother” article should not be circulated in postwar Japan. After

¹⁸¹ *Hataraku Fujin* (January-February 1947).

¹⁸² Howard Fast, “Introduction” *Mother*. Maxim Gorky (Citadel Press: Secaucus, NJ 1947) , v.

¹⁸³ “Memorandum for Records” signed by “RRZ”, 10 March 1947, CCD Records, Gordon W. Prange Collection, Press (PRAN), Pictorial, and Broadcast, District I: Press and Publications Sub-Section, 4200 Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

learning that the publisher, Dai Nippon Insatsu K. K., had gone ahead with printing the January-February 1947 issue of *Hataraku Fujin* (*Working Women*) under the false assumption that permission would soon be granted by the occupation, CCD officials sprang into action. The CCD report recommended that “the publisher be asked if he has sufficient stock of printing paper to enable him to reprint the 12-page section for all 20,000 copies...in a way that it not noticeable to the readers.” If this was not possible, the report emphatically commanded that “the publisher will just have this issue of his magazine in his warehouse for a good long time!”¹⁸⁴

Thus, in addition to promoting its ideal concept of Japanese woman as an urbane, sophisticated, and beautified American female in women’s magazines, the occupation also censored Japanese publications that deviated from this line and did all it could to eliminate any in postwar Japan. By publicizing this ideal and guarding against words that spoke ill of or challenged it, SCAP hoped to turn Japanese interest and attention toward the West while guarding against the cold war communist threat emerging in the East.

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In addition to promoting U.S. economic, political, and military goals in postwar Japan through SCAP, overhauling gender norms was a substantive goal of the occupation forces. While the United States and Japan were bitter adversaries during the war, the postwar scenario resulted in a redefinition of the relationship by the U.S. for its own benefit. In this regard, SCAP viewed obtaining the support of Japanese women for its objectives as an important step in winning over the Japanese

¹⁸⁴ “Memorandum for Records” signed by “RRZ”, 10 March 1947, CCD Records, PRAN, Pictorial, and Broadcast, District I: Press and Publications Sub-Section

people to occupation goals and fostering democracy throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

SCAP leaders believed that Americanized Japanese women would become democratized Japanese women. In addition to granting Japanese women suffrage, the occupation attempted to convince Japanese women they should break with Japan's "feudalistic" gender traditions and take part in more egalitarian social networks. It was for this purpose that SCAP leaders encouraged Japanese women to become civic leaders and community organizers in the new nation. Multiple SCAP bodies, including the CCD, CI&E, and Women's Division, actively encouraged Japanese women to model their behaviors after those of American women who SCAP leaders held up as role models for Japanese women. Alongside the "big brother" role that the U.S. government frequently assumed in its relationship with the countries that it sought to control, Japan was given a "big sister" to emulate in the postwar period. This aura of big sisterhood was transmitted to Japanese women through multiple forms and media. The fact the occupation leaders chose to promote their "democratic goals" in part through skits about beauty shops and magazine articles on western fashions is telling.¹⁸⁵

Though fashion, beauty, and style were never explicitly verbalized as core qualities of American womanhood, they were ever-present facets of the idealized understanding of womanhood that the U.S. attempted to promote in postwar Japan. Reading between the lines of SCAP records and critically engaging visual evidence in

¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the American occupation leaders use of beauty culture in postwar Japan tells us about more than the American strategy for reconstruction in Japan; it also demonstrates the power and context of that beauty culture held in the United States.

Japanese women's magazines shows that ideals of beauty were crucial to how American womanhood was portrayed in postwar Japan. Fashion, grace, poise, deportment, hairstyling and other facets of American beauty culture thus served as markers of the American woman's independence, modernity, and democratic spirit. The occupation's ideal, of course, did not necessarily represent the reality on the American homefront. This was true of both the American woman's supposedly ever-present beauty and independent democratic spirit. At no time in America's history have the majority of its women been young, white, sophisticated urbanites who have placed great importance on keeping up with fashion, politics, and engagement in community activism. By reading back the records of the U.S. occupation in postwar Japan, we are able to see the importance of beauty culture in SCAP's conception of what it meant to be a woman in the United States. Beauty culture was such an important part of the American ideal of womanhood that officials involved in the occupation of another country chose to use it in their strenuous efforts to transform the women of a foreign nation. During the U.S. occupation of Japan, American fashion and beauty were transported alongside guns and ammunition to forcibly convert a foreign enemy into a familiar friend. Beauty culture was therefore not inconsequential; rather it was part of the feminized diplomacy America used to help realize its postwar political agenda.

Chapter 4: “But You Don’t Look Like A Negro: Black Beauty Culturists at Home and Abroad in the Postwar Era

Figure 10: Ophelia Devore, owner of a New York City Charm and Modeling School that primarily served the Black community, n.d.

The great migration of African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century brought more than one million black people from the rural South to Northern industrial centers and was a turning point in African American social, cultural, and economic history. Here, a small but substantial black middle class was able to grow, and in some cases prosper. However, even in this “promised land” of economic opportunity and greater social freedom, the experience of racism often precluded black entrepreneurs from becoming integrated into the mainstream of American business and enterprise. While many African American businesspeople gained affluence by working for and serving the needs of the growing black communities to which they belonged, they remained on the sidelines of the larger national economy. In an attempt to transcend the American context and take their local ventures overseas, a group of African American businesswomen in beauty culture created a multi-sited transnational network during the mid-twentieth century. By integrating their businesses into the larger world of fashion and beauty, this entrepreneurial community sought to grant the women of their race both economic enfranchisement and public respectability.

A commitment to personal enterprise and industry is a theme that can be traced throughout the black experience in the United States. Indeed, as historian Juliet E. K. Walker has pointed out, African Americans have a historic tradition of self-help. During centuries of enslavement, African Americans used a variety of entrepreneurial strategies to create their own freedom using whatever sources of capital they could obtain to better their living conditions. Legal emancipation in the

mid-nineteenth century gave African Americans freedom, but little else. Thus, the self-help tradition became necessary to enable the newly freed people to endure decades of Jim Crow segregation in the South and usher them into twentieth-century industrial centers. In this regard, rather than being completely unique in the black experience, black beauty culturists in the mid-twentieth century were part of a long line of persons of color who had attempted to uplift themselves and their larger community through personal industriousness and entrepreneurial effort.

The business activities of African American beauty culturists in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s followed in the footsteps of early twentieth-century black hair care entrepreneurs Madame C. J. Walker, Annie Turnbo Malone, and Sarah Spencer Washington. Madame C. J. Walker, the best known of the three, amassed a fortune selling black hair care goods and was popularly regarded as the nation's first self-made African American female millionaire. She accomplished this feat by creating her own line of products and styling techniques and then soliciting black women from across the United States and Caribbean to sell her goods as independent business agents in their individual communities. Walker's achievements as an entrepreneur are especially impressive considering she received little outside support from either black or white institutions. Even at the height of her fame, the prominent African American leader Booker T. Washington only begrudgingly allowed Walker to speak at his annual National Negro Business League Conference (NNBL). In part, Washington looked down on Walker's business, asserting that her work encouraged black women to adopt Anglo-centric styles of beauty. Unapologetic, Walker countered that she gave black women respectability and comparatively high paying jobs at a time when

employment options for persons of color were slim. According to biographer A'Lelia Bundles, when Washington declined Walker's multiple requests to speak at the 1912 NNBL conference, she seized the opportunity to speak and took the podium. Looking towards Washington, she proclaimed, "Surely you are not going to shut the door in my face....I feel that I am in a business that is a credit to the womanhood of our race....I went into a business that is despised, that is criticized and talked about by everybody." Walker then gave an impromptu and uninvited speech to those in attendance at the last day of the conference. Her entrepreneurial spirit was captured that day when she proclaimed: "I am a woman that came from the cotton fields of the South. I was promoted from there to the wash-tub....Then I was promoted to the kitchen, and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations."¹⁸⁶

Interest in the politics of black women's hair among the academic community has given the lives of African American hair care leaders such as Madame C. J. Walker a measured amount of historical and theoretical attention. In this regard, scholarly and popular works dealing with the black hair care industry during the early and late twentieth century are particularly prominent. In these rich discussions, however, historians have often treated beauty culturists in the hair care industry as singular players. Yet in reality, hair care was only one part of a highly developed network of black beauty entrepreneurship in the twentieth century. In addition to cosmetology, African American entrepreneurs in fashion, charm instruction, and modeling were also major players in the black beauty industry of the time, and very

¹⁸⁶ Alelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madame C. J. Walker* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 135.

often membership in these communities overlapped. For example, while historians have often noted Annie Turnbo Malone's success in hair care, her activities as a charm school operator were much less frequently discussed. In addition, while black pioneers in fashion, modeling, charm instruction and cosmetology have received little attention individually, scholars have not looked at the connections that groups of entrepreneurs made between each other and with the larger white-dominated world of fashion and beauty during the twentieth century.

Understanding the work of black beauty culturists is important to African American history because entrepreneurs in cosmetology, fashion, charm instruction, and modeling were also economic, social, and cultural leaders in the black community. Such trends were especially pronounced during the middle decades of the twentieth century when African American entrepreneurs in female beauty culture played a significant, and at times, collective role in integrating themselves into the mainstream of the American economy during this pivotal era of national change. Unlike many of their predecessors, however, black beauty entrepreneurs in the years following World War II sought to sell their products, knowledge, and expertise to both white and black Americans. During this period in U.S. history often referred to as the "second reconstruction," black beauty entrepreneurs envisioned their businesses as a part of the economic foundation needed to bolster the status of black people in America. Indeed, by forming transnational partnerships with businesspeople in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, African American beauty entrepreneurs in the middle decades of the twentieth century conceptualized their

business efforts as a way to improve the lives of black peoples both in the United States and around the world.

Business Integration

*“We have come a long way. Our mothers scrubbed, washed, ironed, and cooked in order to send us to school. We now have wonderful positions. Now it is up to us to give all children a new image of the Negro Person”*¹⁸⁷

- Jeanetta Welch Brown, Founder of the National Association of Fashion and Accessory Designers

In the mid-twentieth century, popular American culture had long defined beauty as necessarily white. For years, the white-dominated American media had represented the bodies of black women using an array of negative stereotypes and images that served as the antithesis to the white American ideal. Magazines, motion pictures, board games, postcards, dolls, and virtually every other form of visual media and material culture presented the image of the black woman as either that of the hypersexual prostitute “Jezebel” or the unattractive house servant “Mammy.” Faced with such negative and maligned representations of their race in the popular media, African American beauty entrepreneurs consciously attempted to change the stereotypical mass representation of black women through their ventures in beauty and business.

In part, because black women had been defined outside of what many white Americans viewed as beautiful, the mainstream beauty industry was particularly

¹⁸⁷ “Detroit Negro Women Appraise Themselves” *Detroit Free Press*, n.d. Jeanetta Welch Brown Papers (BROW), Box 2, Folder: Newspaper Clippings, National Archives for Black Women’s History, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, Washington, D.C.

inhospitable to African American professionals. Confronted by this dilemma Dorothy Earley, a Chicago clothing designer, voiced her frustrations to the prominent race leader Mary McCloud Bethune in a 1949 letter:

I received my degree in Dress Design from the Art Institute in June. I didn't realize that this field was such a difficult one for Negroes to break into. I'm tired of answering ads and being told the position has been filled.¹⁸⁸

Earley was interested in becoming a charter member of the National Association of Fashion and Accessory Designers (NAFAD), organized under Bethune's prominent civil rights umbrella organization, the National Council of Negro Women. NAFAD's goal was to bring together African American fashion designers, milliners, professionals in accessories, and boutique owners from across the nation.

Although NAFAD did not describe itself as a black women's organization, its membership and association with its parent organization made clear that it was an organization created by and for African American females. However, by not including "black," "Negro," or "colored" in its title, NAFAD emphasized its desire to bring African American fashion designers more fully into the mainstream of the American fashion industry. In addition, much like fraternal organizations, benevolent societies, schools, banks and other black institutions of the early national period, the members of NAFAD used their status as an all-black group not as a means of segregation, but as a tool of integration. In its 1949 founding documents, the organization clearly stated that its main goal was to: "integrate Negroes into all phases of the fashion world and to present for them whenever needed – a UNITED

¹⁸⁸ Dorothy Earley, Chicago to Mary McCloud Bethune, Washington D.C., 16 December 1949, Records of the National Association of Fashion Designers (NAFA), Box 1, Folder: Correspondence, 1949 May-Dec., National Archives for Black Women's History, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, 1318 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005.

FRONT.”¹⁸⁹ While NAFAD’s national headquarters was located in Washington DC, the organization had local chapters in many American cities, including Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. A 1953 NAFAD brochure clearly stated that the organization “seeks to focus the attention of the fashion world and the public on the “untapped” reservoir of black talent through local and national fashion shows, special projects, conferences, traveling exhibits and its official publication *Fashion Cue*.”¹⁹⁰ A 1963 brochure similarly asserted that the organization was:

to effect complete integration occupation-wise in the fashion industry; to inform members of jobs that are available in the fashion field and to encourage placement of qualified persons in these jobs¹⁹¹

In order to gain visibility and revenue for its members, NAFAD hosted a series of annual events that included conventions, educational trips, fashion shows, debutante balls, and Miss NAFAD scholarship pageants. At its annual conference and fashion show, the members of NAFAD brought their work before, and at times received quite critical feedback from, white fashion industry insiders such as Eleanor Lambert, a top fashion publicist; Ruth Jacobs, editor of *Vogue* magazine; Alice Richardson of *Look Magazine*; and the fashion editors of *Women’s Wear Daily*.

Along with their membership in NAFAD, the women chartering this group were also part of a larger, often informal network of independent African American businesspeople who were pioneers for black women in the fields of fashion, modeling, charm instruction, and cosmetology. The gains of an individual black firm in any one of these fields often had a ripple effect that made success easier for black

¹⁸⁹ Flyer to NAFAD members, NAFA, Box 2, Folder: Convention 1949, April 22-23 New York New York

¹⁹⁰ NAFAD Brochure, NAFA, Folder, Series 5, Fashion Shows 1953.

¹⁹¹ NAFAD Brochure, NAFA, Series 6, Publications and Brochures folder

entrepreneurs in related businesses. Therefore, black business people in the fashion, modeling, charm and cosmetology fields were intimately tied together. Through both their official professional associations and their informal communities, black beauty culturists collectively worked to integrate the fashion and beauty industries during the mid-twentieth century.

African American fashion designers, for example, quickly learned that selling their clothing was, in part, dependent upon having access to professionally trained African American runway models who knew how to properly display and show off their designs at fashion shows. In turn, the emergence of African American modeling agencies during this era was closely tied to the success of the first black-owned mass circulation periodicals, *Ebony* and *Jet*, which targeted an African American female readership. Owned by black publishing entrepreneur John H. Johnson, these magazines provided a national venue where the work of African American models could be viewed. During the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, models trained at the black-owned Brandford Models firm appeared on the cover of several Johnson publications and in print ads geared towards the African American community. However, Barbara Watson, founder of Brandford Models, thought it vitally important to the success of her business to secure for her employees photo shoots with a variety of general goods retailers who sold products not specific to the black market. Not content with merely selling to the African American community, Watson, like many other African American entrepreneurs in female beauty culture, pushed to make her services visible to a wider audience. By using print ads that appeared first in *Ebony* and *Jet*, she was able to gain her models contacts with companies such as Beech-Nut Gum, Ipana

Tooth Paste, Colgate Dental Crème, and Remington Rand Keyboards. The patronage of Watson's business by major white-owned firms thus enabled her to expand operations and train more black women in print and runway techniques. Coming full circle, Watson's business with major white-owned U.S. companies allowed her business to fulfill the smaller-scale needs of black fashion design upstarts. In this regard, black businesspeople became acutely aware that victories for any one member of the black community meant greater opportunities for the African American society as a whole.

African American charm and beauty schools, fashion design groups, black modeling agencies, professional beauty organizations, publishers of African American trade periodicals, and African American schools of cosmetology proliferated during the mid-twentieth century. In some ways, this is not surprising. The black community had historically valued the work of such persons in their community. In addition, black women in the United States had long been able to find employment in making white women look good. What was different about mid-twentieth century African American beauty entrepreneurs is that they attempted to mesh the two spheres of beauty work. In many ways, business integration was a smart strategy. An eye toward integration held the possibility of more lucrative contracts with white-owned firms and the promise of bigger profits than business in the black community alone could afford. However, just as important for many African American entrepreneurs was the fact that integration also meant gaining broad-based respect and the ability to ascend their chosen profession ladder to its top levels. Indeed, many mid-twentieth century African American beauty culturists sought to be

regarded as national, and in some cases global, leaders in the fashion, modeling, charm, and cosmetology industries.

While African American entrepreneurs in female beauty culture hoped to assert themselves as leaders in their respective fields, many also saw a larger social mission embedded in their business ventures. It was not just their own lot that they hoped to better through business integration. Rather, black beauty entrepreneurs expressed a sincere desire to better the lives of the African Americans who worked for them in addition to those who patronized their services. On the largest level these business leaders, like many of the political leaders of their generation, aimed their efforts at changing the very organization of American society and the place that black people occupied in the United States.

For example, the owners of charm schools frequently spoke about the larger social mission that undergirded their work. Often the sister organizations of black-owned modeling agencies, charm schools marketed themselves as places of professional refinement and integration for girls and young women. The previously untutored females who learned how to sit, stand, and speak in these institutions were being primed for lives as professional secretaries and other types of pink-collar labor, from which black women had traditionally been excluded.

Not only did charm school owners want to integrate black women into American society through their efforts, they also wanted their own business places to be centers of integration in the United States. In this regard, African American charm school owners courted all women, not just African Americans, to become their clients. Unable to attend the 1949 NAFAD convention, New York milliner Kara

Velasco explained that at the current moment she was consumed with her newest business venture, a *Personal Improvement and Charm Center*, “with the purpose of serving ALL WOMEN... regardless of race, creed and color...and bringing them together culturally as members of the Centre.” Annette Hudson, owner of the Oakland, California-based business Annette’s School of Transformation, similarly recalled that although many of her clients were black, she also had white, Japanese American, and Jewish American students enrolled in her school. In fact, she took pride in the fact that: “in my studio there was no color.”

By setting up their businesses as places that served women of all races, black beauty entrepreneurs hoped that their private enterprises would benefit both themselves and the general public. In this manner, the work of black beauty entrepreneurs fell in the traditions of black clubwomen who had strived for positive social change throughout the “nadir of American race relations” in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Primarily organized by middle and upper-middle class African American females, black women’s clubs set up schools, community centers, and other programs to help black women less economically able than themselves. Indeed, the prominent African American women’s club, the National Council of Negro Women, chose for its motto “lifting as we climb.” The work of club women such as Nannie Helen Burroughs, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell, has been well documented in several important monographs. The similar work of beauty entrepreneurs, even famous ones, is less noted. The intention of their efforts, however, was quite similar. Both club women who taught an African American girl how to read in their after-school programs and beauty culturists who taught her

“diction” and “voice modulation” in their charm schools promised her the same thing –the ability to change her life and move up the economic ladder in the United States. The approach of mid-twentieth century black beauty culturists was different from that of club women in that they primarily used integrated for-profit business instead of single-race volunteer associations to achieve their goals of racial uplifting. In the same way that club women utilized their not-for-profit organizations to effect social change, black beauty entrepreneurs used their for-profit business enterprises for the same purpose. In addition to helping themselves economically, black beauty entrepreneurs, like club women, wished to enhance the lives of the black women.

Among the most proven methods of economic and social advancement in the United States was the attainment of education and employment. The associations that black beauty entrepreneurs formed often focused on providing African American women with professional training and paid employment both in and outside of the black community. Black beauty culturists also attempted to repackage the way in which their profession was popularly conceptualized. Although many African American beauty culturists held a place of esteem within the black community, their work had historically been minimalized in their dealings with the larger world of white folks. In order to receive more widespread appeal black, beauty culturists thus saw the need to market their expertise in a different way and repackage their expertise. By meshing the business they did with both black and white clients, they began to present their trades in a new light. Especially in their newly integrated dealings with those in the white community, African American beauty entrepreneurs actively marketed black talent, skill, and knowledge –not personal service– to the

American public. Therefore, through their formal associations and informal networks, black beauty entrepreneurs sought to establish themselves not as solicitors to only to other people of color or as the personal servants of white patrons, but rather as experienced professionals, innovators, and even industry leaders.

Such was the achievement of NAFAD member Ann Lowe, who designed the wedding gown and bridesmaids dresses worn by Jacqueline Bouvier and her bridal party at her 1953 wedding to John F. Kennedy. Lowe, who specialized in couture gowns and evening wear, was trained at the S. L. Taylor School of Design in New York City, where she was segregated from the school's white students. After opening her own dress shop on Lexington Avenue in New York City, Lowe's business grew, and she went on to create original designs for debutantes in the Dupont, Rockefeller, Roosevelt, Vanderbilt and other elite white and black American families.¹⁹² Despite her professional training and top-flight credentials, however, Lowe received little public notice during much of her five-decade career. Even after the Kennedy wedding gown she designed appeared on the front page of newspapers across the globe, Lowe was barely known outside of the elite social circles that patronized her services. And while Lowe had become a recognized leader in her field, she did not receive the mainstream public recognition that her white counterparts enjoyed. Indeed, a 1966 *Saturday Evening Post* article that chronicled her career called Lowe "society's best kept secret."

Publicizing the accomplishments of its members, such as Ann Lowe, was therefore a goal of utmost concern for NAFAD. In their efforts to garner black

¹⁹² Rosemary E. Miller *Threads of Time, The Fabric of History: Profiles of African American Dressmakers and Designers from 1850 to the Present* (Washington, D. C.: Toast and Strawberries Press, 2007), 33.

designers their due mead of glory, NAFAD attempted to carve out a role for African Americans as creators of fashion for all women and thereby make the field easier for other black women to break into to. This mission proved to be a formidable task in an America that had traditionally devalued the work of black women. However, it was the hope of NAFAD members as well as other entrepreneurial communities of African American female beauty culturists, that their work could transcend the racial boundaries that had historically constrained the careers of black people in the United States. In order to accomplish this goal, African American female beauty entrepreneurs thought outside of the box and decided to take their business ventures abroad.

Transnational Business Ventures

“I remember you – I remember that hair!”¹⁹³

- President John F. Kennedy to beauty culturist Marjorie Stewart Joyner before an international voyage of the United Beauty School Owners and Teachers Association

In her profile of African American dressmakers, *Threads of Time*, Rosemary E. Reed Miller notes that designer Ann Lowe was especially fond of taking trips to Paris during her career. On one such trip, Miller reports that the American socialite and heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post introduced Lowe to the renowned French fashion designer Christian Dior as “the head of the American House of Ann Lowe.” Lowe was not alone in her practice of visiting centers of fashion outside the United

¹⁹³ “History of United Beauty School Owners and teachers Association, 3rd edition”, no date. Marjorie S. Joyner Papers (JOYN), The Chicago Public Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection, Chicago, IL

States or introductions to foreign industry leaders. In their bids to gain a better economic position in a nation that had frequently stifled business opportunities for women and people of color, African American female beauty entrepreneurs often found some of the answers to their domestic difficulties in a global marketplace.

During the mid-twentieth century, African American beauty entrepreneurs frequently sought out international venues that were hospitable and receptive to black Americans. Strategically using European sites that even white Americans regarded as the birthplace of Western fashion and beauty, African American beauty entrepreneurs were able to reposition the black female body in a more favorable domestic light. After gaining support abroad, particularly in Europe, black beauty entrepreneurs used their international notoriety to establish, legitimize and promote their business ventures in the United States.

It was for this purpose that in 1948 charm and modeling school owner Barbara Watson took a group of African American models to Sweden, where they received heavy coverage in the local press.¹⁹⁴ Watson noted that she planned to use Swedish fashions as an inspiration for clothing that she would adapt to the needs of black women in the United States. Using European sites for American attention was also the strategy of Watson's main New York City competitor, model and modeling school owner Ophelia DeVore. At the time, the beauty industry in the United States frequently required black women to "pass" as white in order to gain employment. Indeed, DeVore, a woman whose physical appearance made it hard to categorize her racially had herself received professional training from the Ford Modeling agency

¹⁹⁴ Press Clipping, WATS, Folder 12: European Trip 1948

under the assumption that she was a white American. DeVore reported that when white Americans found out that she was in fact an African American, they frequently responded: “But you don’t look like a Negro!” It was this misguided perception that inspired DeVore to create what she termed “an internationally acceptable person of Color.”¹⁹⁵ Using France as her launching pad, DeVore set out to craft a public identity for African Americans as models. In 1959, she landed Helen Williams a photo shoot with Christian Dior in Paris and helped Cecilia Cooper win the “Miss Festival” title at the International Cannes Film Festival, the first American of any color to do so. Having “pre-sold” her models in Europe, DeVore was then able to find modeling jobs for them with major American companies such as Johnson & Johnson, Pepsi-Cola, and Revlon.

Leaders of the professional associations of African American fashion designers and cosmetology school owners also engaged in extensive international travel. Officers and some general members of the United Beauty School Owners and Teachers Association (UBSOTA), an African American professional association of cosmetology school owners, made several educational trips to Paris, London and Rome during the 1950s and 1960s. In publicizing their foreign travels, UBSOTA’s leadership touted that members would have the unique opportunity to watch “masters” in the field of cosmetology perform their work. In Paris the UBSOTA delegation met for training sessions with Myriam Carange, a leading French beautician, and “Antoine,” a Parisian dubbed “the Dean of French Hair Stylists,” who, to commemorate the African American delegation’s visit, designed a coiffure

¹⁹⁵ DeVore Promotional Literature, Ophelia DeVore Collection, Personal holding of James Carter (DEVO), Ophelia DeVore Associates, Inc., Empire State Building, 350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3108, New York, NY 10118.

for Josephine Baker, the internationally acclaimed African American singer and dancer who lived in France.¹⁹⁶ In seeking and successfully obtaining their second audience with Amory Houghton, the United States Ambassador to France, Marjorie Stewart Joyner, the delegation's leader explained:

We are classed as small business people and this is our means of raising our standards, educating our group, and learning foreign techniques that perhaps can be adopted to improve our businesses.¹⁹⁷

Through associations with internationally renowned European innovators in fashion and cosmetology, African American beauty culturists sought to establish their credentials abroad in order to attract new clients at home. After returning to the states, UBSOTA's domestic press releases lauded their members' international credentials and ability to teach advanced European and American methods of hair styling, cutting, tinting, bleaching, conditioning, make-up application, and manicuring.¹⁹⁸ In 1960 the organization selected seventy-five of its members to serve as instructors at its "International Institute of the United Beauty School Owners and Teachers Association." Noting that each of the instructors was a member of the United International Advanced Hairstylist and Makeup Guild, the group proclaimed that its cosmetology instructors were "without peer or equal" and dubbed them the "Incomparable 75."¹⁹⁹ In addition to sponsoring its own fashion tours of Europe, NAFAD invited prominent European women to speak at their special events in the United States. Of them, one of the most significant was the visit of Madame Henri

¹⁹⁶ Booklet, History of United Beauty School Owners and Teachers Association, 3rd Edition, no date. JOYN

¹⁹⁷ Marjorie S. Joyner, Chicago to The Honorable Amory Houghton, United States Embassy, Ambassador to France, 22 January 22 1960, JOYN

¹⁹⁸ UBSOTA Press Release, JOYN

¹⁹⁹ UBSOTA Convention Booklet, April 18-22, 1960, JOYN

Bonnet, a milliner by trade and wife of the French Ambassador to the U.S. who spoke to a 1950 gathering of the group in a speech entitled “Fashion in the Forward March of World Democracy.” Thus, by establishing direct connections between themselves and Europeans whom white Americans respected and desired to emulate, black beauty entrepreneurs sought to redress the exclusion they felt in the United States market. In this regard, transnational connections with persons abroad served to strengthen, not diminish, black beauty culturists’ national ambitions.

The foreign focus that African American entrepreneurs in beauty culture utilized was not limited to their pursuit of European attention and knowledge. While gaining publicity for their European accolades and opening new joint markets for black and white women in the United States, African American beauty entrepreneurs also participated in transnational business ventures that linked them to the larger African Diaspora. After importing a positive reputation for themselves from Europe to the United States, black beauty entrepreneurs exported an image of themselves as the world’s premier authorities on black beauty to people of color around the globe.

In an attempt to generate greater profits than could be accrued in the U.S. alone, they sold their products and expertise in the Caribbean, Latin America, and on the African continent itself. The career of Bettie Ester Parham, who chartered a charm school and incorporated her National Beauty Supply Company and its subsidiaries, was representative of this trend. Parham’s cosmetics, hair preparations, and beauty supplies were sold domestically as well as in Mexico and on the Gold Coast of Africa. In the late 1940s, Parham became the first black retail owner on 125th Street

in Harlem, and by 1960 had amassed a net worth of almost \$180,000.²⁰⁰ It was also in 1960 that a group of African American beauty entrepreneurs set up a school called the Hollywood Beauty Culture Centre in Accra, Ghana to develop the beauty industry in that region. This school sought to train Ghanaians as cosmetic salespersons, cosmeticians, hair stylists, and teachers of cosmetology. Following graduation, students were eligible to for employment in one of the institution's two Accra salons.²⁰¹ With the success of its Ghanaian business enterprises, the Hollywood Beauty Culture Centre built a third salon in Nigeria the following year. In a similar effort to expand abroad in 1962, the Miami-based Sunlight School of Beauty expanded its business enterprise in Kingston, Jamaica.²⁰²

By training West African and Caribbean women in U.S. techniques, African American entrepreneurs drew profits, asserted themselves as broad-based beauty industry leaders, and connected themselves to politically enfranchised black persons in other nations. In 1961 Hollywood Beauty Culture Centre in Accra, Ghana hosted its first “Coiffure and Fashion Extravaganza” in the city’s Ambassador Hotel to show off its students’ work. The event took place under the patronage of Ghana’s first lady, Madame Fathia Nkrumah, with all proceeds from the extravaganza benefiting the local Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). During the hair show, Ghanaian and European models from the African American-run Femina School of Department modeled styles created by students at the Hollywood Beauty Culture

²⁰⁰ “National Beauty Supply Co.: A Proprietorship, 31 December 1960” Stanley Berkowitz, Certified Public Accountant, New York Bettie Esther Parham Collection, (PARH) 1945-1981, Folder 1, The New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, NY

²⁰¹ “Ghana School Turns Out 13 Graduates in First Graduation” and “A Hair Fashion Show in Ghana” *Beauty Trade: The Magazine for Negro Beauticians*, October 1964

²⁰² “New School in Kingston, Jamaica” *Beauty Trade: The Magazine for Negro Beauticians*, (November 1961), 42.

Centre.²⁰³ A report on the event in *Beauty Trade* magazine noted that several of the Ghanaian students' hair designs were bouffant styles inspired by the "Jacqueline Coif," a hairdo modeled after the style worn by Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, the newly installed first lady of the United States. At its first commencement ceremony, Mrs. Ruth Batsio, wife of Ghana's minister of Agriculture, awarded the thirteen Ghanaian women who made up the school's 1961 graduating class their diplomas.

In addition to starting schools, African American beauty entrepreneurs' foreign travels allowed them the opportunity to meet with politically enfranchised persons of African descent throughout the world. In addition to their fashion tours of Europe, members of UBSOTA also took trips to Haiti, Ghana, and other predominantly black nations during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1965 a delegation of UBSOTA members met the Liberian President, William V. S. Tubman, at a reception honoring the President of Israel held at Tubman's executive mansion.

African American beauty culturists' trade magazines also facilitated business partnerships with peoples of African descent. These publications helped to solidify African Americans' role as leaders in the global beauty trade even among groups of black women abroad who had never before met African Americans. Starting in 1954, the monthly publication *Beauty Trade: the Magazine for Negro Beauticians* began to draw attention to African American cosmetologists as the publication circulated in Ghana, Nigeria, Trinidad, and elsewhere. In 1961 Teresa Branker, a beauty shop owner in British Guiana, informed the editor of the publication: "I eagerly look forward to your exciting issues each month. To me, every new edition published,

²⁰³ "A Hair Fashion Show in Ghana" *Beauty Trade: The Magazine for Negro Beauticians* (October 1961), 22.

brings me closer in mastering the many styles and on the whole, news in general.”

The following year, Maye H. Grant, who had accompanied her husband Joseph Grant, a Foreign Service officer, on a UNESCO tour of duty to Nigeria, wrote a personal letter directly to the editor of *Beauty Trade*, as well to as three leading African American beauty culturists featured in the publication. Marjorie Stewart Joyner, one of the women to whom the letter was sent, was among the most prominent of mid-twentieth century beauty culturists in the U.S. In addition to working as a traveling consultant for the Madame C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company, she also served as the principle organizer of UBSOTA, and was a leader in helping beauty culturists form transnational associations. In Maye Grant’s lengthy letter to Joyner and the other African American beauty culturists, Grant boasted that her local Nigerian beautician, “Ms. Ogun,” was the best in Lagos. She went on to ask if the African American professionals might correspond with Ogun to help improve the cosmetologist’s knowledge of hair relaxation, tinting, and styling. Ogun, Grant informed her readers, had received professional training in England but now preferred to follow “American Negro techniques” and did this by reading *Beauty Trade* and associating with African Americans. Reflecting the larger impact African American beauty culture was having on a global scale, Grant explained:

For the first time since leaving home....I was made aware of how important the Negro’s achievements have been to the African. It is here that I have been so impressed with the particular contributions of the American Negro Beautician. I have since concluded that the American Negro Beauticians have contributed greatest to the world’s recognition of beauty in women of African blood. It may be that this is the only area that the American Negro can claim undisputed and exclusive leadership for women of African blood on every continent

and hemisphere. I am very proud of this as an American, as a Negro and as a woman.²⁰⁴

In forming their reputation abroad, beauty culturists capitalized on what had been seen as a disability domestically, namely the fact that they were African American, and then marketed this identity in two ways in Africa and its diaspora. Stressing first that they were themselves persons of African descent, African American beauty entrepreneurs made a personal connection to their international clients by using racial solidarity to their advantage and imploring their clients to “buy black.” In addition to selling themselves as “black” and thus as authentic retailers to African peoples, they also sold themselves as “American.” Associated with the glamour of film and affluent living, the cachet of being American in Africa gave African American beauty entrepreneurs added respect abroad. With names such as the Hollywood School of Beauty, African American beauty entrepreneurs positioned themselves as cosmopolitan and world-class business people who were at the forefront of bringing top-flight beauty training, products, and expertise to persons of color around the world.

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Notwithstanding African American beauty entrepreneurs’ success, the identity that they crafted for themselves as international leaders of black beauty was not without its dilemmas. As scholar W. E. B. Du Bois poignantly observed at the start of the twentieth century, simultaneously living as black and as American proved to be a difficult identity to integrate. In this regard, even though African American beauty entrepreneurs sold their products and services to black women around the globe under

²⁰⁴ Willa Lee Calvin, Lagos, Nigeria to Marjorie Stewart Joyner, Chicago, 1 October 1962, JOYN

the auspices of racial solidarity, they in fact gained legitimacy through their associations with white persons, institutions, and ideals of beauty. As Maye Grant, the African American living in Nigeria, wrote in her letter to the four prominent African American beauty culturists: “If Europe, as you have said, is the source of beauty culture, then America is the source of [the] adaptation of this culture to the needs of Africans and African descendants.” Thus while African Americans had become successful in selling to women of color the globe, and positing their bodies as beautiful, the actual aesthetic they retailed often heavily relied upon a foundation of white-dominated western sensibilities and traditions.

The career of Bettie Ester Parham personifies the realities that living under the “veil of double consciousness” often entailed for African American women involved in the global and domestic beauty trades. Parham strongly urged her black clients to buy her products specifically because of her race. An advertisement for beauty products packaged under her Esther Beauty Aids brand directly instructed purchasers that:

A wise old owl would advise the woman of color to BUY HAIR PRODUCTS THAT ARE CREATED FOR HER BY A WOMAN OF COLOR.²⁰⁵ (emphasis in original)

However, while Parham sold products to black women in several countries under the auspices of racial solidarity, the actual products that she retailed heavily emphasized an Anglo-centric look and stressed the perceived inadequacy of African women’s unprocessed hair. For example, the authentic hair wigs that Parham’s company sold were not comprised of African hair. Rather, the “French refined Oriental hair Wigs,”

²⁰⁵ Esther Beauty Aids Advertisement, PARH, folder 1

that Parham priced from \$39 for a feather bob to \$165 dollars for an all hand-ventilated wig, were actually made of a mixture of Chinese and Italian hair.

Parham's use of these two "qualities of hair" prompted a 1945 Federal Trade Commission investigation of her advertising claims. A letter Parham received from Web Woodfill, the Chief Trial Examiner for the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in Washington D.C., specifically questioned Parham's assertion that she sold only the "best quality" hair products. Woodfill argued that this claim was false and that Parham's own correspondence with him contradicted her advertising claims. The FTC investigator pointed out that in his previous correspondence with Parham she had herself admitted that "only European hair is classified by the trade as first or best quality, Chinese hair being known as second quality because of its coarser texture." By incorporating Chinese hair into her wigs, Woodfill asserted, Parham diluted the desirability of her wigs and could not claim them to be of first quality. Writing back to the FTC investigator, Parham stated that her catalog had been changed, and that in the future more information would be given to customers regarding the specific origins of the hair in the wigs she retailed.

The fact that Parham sold black women in Africa and the Americas "first" and "second" quality hair from Europe and Asia, tacitly placed African hair, even by her own assessment, as at least third-tier in terms of ranking of desirability. But such estimations of European, Asian and African hair were not solely the opinion of Bettie Esther Parham or the women who purchased her products. Rather, such rankings of ethnic hair types were beauty industry standards. Thus, while Parham attempted to operate her "for us, by us" global businesses in ways that promoted the beauty

interests of black women, she used products, aesthetics, and marketing techniques that in part gained authority, legitimacy, and direction from a white-dominated beauty industry.

It is well known that the movement of European ideas, concepts, and goods across the Atlantic Ocean has long shaped the lives of persons of African descent. Indeed, research centered on the Atlantic world has come to dominate scholarship on the black experience during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. During these years, Africans were the goods transported across the Atlantic. This fundamental exchange in world history witnessed the birth of the Atlantic world and intimately linked the economies of land masses that had been formerly separated by the Atlantic Ocean. The history of the African slave trade immensely affected the development of American history, and the legacy of this form of black involvement in the Atlantic world remains an important site of memory, identity, politics, and history for many Americans even today. Despite the centrality of the Atlantic world to accounts of the first half of African American history, this locus of historical investigation has been much less prominent in accounts of the more recent black past. With the exception of a small number of monographs, the scholarly literature has primarily ended its analysis of the African American role in the Atlantic world with the close of the slave trade. This is an unfortunate omission in the historiography, because long after Africans stopped serving as commodities in the slave trade, they continued to be active participants in the Atlantic world. As my research on black beauty culturists shows, the twentieth century witnessed the birth of a kind of triangle trade between the Americas, Europe, and Africa. In this trade, a select group of black

persons served not as goods, but as the primary agents of exchange. African American entrepreneurs in the fields of fashion, modeling, charm, and cosmetology were important directors in the formation of transnational partnerships between persons in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas during the twentieth century. They went first to Europe to garner a portion of its prestige and publicity in an attempt to position themselves as global leaders in the beauty and fashion industries. From there, beauty entrepreneurs often traveled to Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of Latin America where they hoped to recruit customers and increase their global market share. Returning home to the United States, these African American beauty entrepreneurs hoped the connections they had formed abroad would enrich them financially and elevate the status of black people in the United States.

Civil Rights and Beauty Culture

“Dear Lord, help us in thy spirit to grow...may we fulfill the world's great demand of beautifying womanhood with a beautician's deft hands.”

- Beautician's Creed, written by members of the Delta Omega Eta Chapter, Alpha Chi Pi Omega, Sorority of Beauty Culturists, 1958²⁰⁶

Although American prerequisites to beauty had long deemed the black body unattractive, such definitions did not deter African American entrepreneurs from attempting to enter the mainstream beauty industry in the United States. Rather than fighting ethnocentric white conceptions of beauty or concentrating solely on creating niche markets in the black community, African American entrepreneurs embraced popular standards and marketed themselves as experts in beautification for all women, regardless of race. Thus, during the middle decades of the twentieth century,

²⁰⁶ UBSOTA Local Chapter Calendar, 1958. JOYN

African American women working in the beauty world did not attempt to radically alter how beauty was popularly defined in the United States or overthrow beauty as a center of power over women's lives. Like beauty product manufacturer Bettie Esther Parham, who sold her "French refined Oriental hair wigs" to black women on two continents, many beauty entrepreneurs operated business ventures and drew profits from an industry that fostered euro-centric aesthetic ideals. Indeed, their economic viability in an integrated marketplace relied, in part, on maintaining the status quo. After gaining clout in the beauty industry, beauty entrepreneurs worked to alter the predominant conception that blackness was the antithesis of beauty by defining black beauty within a white-dominated Western frame of reference. It was from their position as mainstream industry insiders that black beauty culturists knocked down barriers that had traditionally blocked African American women's entrance into mainstream American conceptions of beauty, femininity, and charm.

Through their foreign travels, domestic organizations, and individual business efforts, mid-twentieth century African American beauty culturists took part in a western aesthetic that preferred straight hair, light skin, and thin frames. Instead of attempting to overthrow Eurocentric definitions of aesthetic desirability, they instead argued that black women's bodies could be constructed to fall within these standards. Promoting a definition of beauty such as the one that a later generation came to be heralded as Afrocentric, would not have allowed mid-twentieth century African American beauty entrepreneurs to use Europe as a venue through which they gained notoriety or fame. Such an approach would have prevented them from marketing their products, services, and expertise to mixed races gathering in the United States and

would have taken away some of the authority through which they cultivated themselves as beauty experts on the African continent. Before the more radical calls that “black *is* beautiful” were made in the 1970s, African American beauty entrepreneurs in the 1940s and 1950s asserted that black *could be* beautiful and worked through mainstream American cultural channels to demonstrate this assertion for mid-century Americans.

Through their individual business enterprises African American beauty entrepreneurs worked hard to insert the black body into traditional western definitions of beauty. Instead of promoting a radically new standard of beauty for the world’s black women, African American beauty entrepreneurs tweaked white categorizations of what “looked good” so they could include the beautified black female body. For example, *Beauty Trade: the Magazine for Negro Beauticians* printed pictures and instructions for cosmetologists to follow so that they could style their black clients’ hair according to popular white trends. On the cover of the October 1954 edition of the publication was a black model wearing the straight-haired “Tom Boy” cut.²⁰⁷ The magazine noted that the style had been created for the model at “Salon Des Reines,” a black-owned New York City establishment whose name meant “Salon of Queens” in French. Covering the 1961 “Coif and Fashion Extravaganza” at the Hollywood Beauty School in Ghana, the publication informed readers that several of the African and European models at the event wore the “Jacqueline coif” a hairdo modeled after that of Jacqueline Kennedy, the newly installed first lady of the United States.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ *Beauty Trade: The Magazine for Negro Beauticians*, October 1954, p. 1

²⁰⁸ “A Hair Fashion Show in Ghana” *Beauty Trade: The Magazine for Negro Beauticians*, (October 1961), 22.

African American entrepreneurs argued that beauty culture, its tools, and their counsel were all that black women needed to access mainstream definitions of what “looked good.” Thus, the introduction to Barbara Watson’s 1948 *Home Study Charm Course* gave her black readers the following instructions: “Ladies, look into your mirror again. Erase from your mind any preconceived idea that you –because of your coloring– cannot achieve beauty; you can, you will.”²⁰⁹ In this regard, beauty was not the privilege of those few select black female movie stars whose shared their complexion with white actresses. Rather, as the beauty entrepreneurs argued, all black women could achieve beauty, the attainment of which, they promised, would dramatically change black womens’ lives. Accordingly, Barbara Watson dedicated

²⁰⁹ Barbara Watson’s *Home Study Charm Course*, 1948, WATS, Folder 2

Figure 11: Excerpt from Barbara Watson's *Home Study Charm Course*, 1948

her *Home Study Charm Course* to “the thousands of women of color who appreciate the advantages of charm and poise for their betterment.”²¹⁰

The economic pursuits of African American women such as beauty product retailer Bettie Esther Parham, modeling school owner Ophelia Devore, and the members of beauty organizations such as UBSOTA and NAFAD aimed as their primary goal to bring the black into mainstream definitions of what constituted American beauty. They fought black exclusion from the popular modeling, charm, cosmetology and fashion fields by showing the ways in which blacks could construct their bodies to fulfill the same aesthetic ideal whites prized. Not all observers, from the mid-twentieth century and today would see black beauty entrepreneurs’ goals as positive social change. In addition to exclusion by whites who sought to keep African Americans out of the mainstream of American cultural life, beauty entrepreneurs in the mid-twentieth century also faced black critics who saw their business enterprises and the ideals of beauty they espoused primarily as projects of assimilation and not integration.

Although African American entrepreneurs in beauty culture promoted black women as beautiful within an Anglo-centric world of beauty, their businesses were not completely submissive to the favors of whites. For even as they positioned themselves to be participants in a beauty culture established and directed by whites, African American entrepreneurs sought to expand and even change the culture and its rules. For instance, throughout her career Barbara Watson fervently argued that black women should never view their bodies as barriers to the achievement of beauty, and

²¹⁰ Barbara Watson’s *Home Study Charm Course*, 1948, WATS, Folder 2

that she had the ability to transform any woman into the picture of ideal beauty. While Watson contended that the black female body was physically different from that of the white woman, she did not perceive this difference in physique as something that precluded entrance into the mainstream professional modeling field. To the contrary, in a 1954 interview for the periodical *Visualized Physical Culture*, Watson boldly asserted that by comparison with their white counterparts, “colored models are healthier.” Watson contended that the black models schooled by her firm were not “the hallowed [sic] cheek models” promoted by her white competitors, but rather “perfect [size] 12s.” Furthermore, at her school, she also proclaimed that any woman, regardless of race, could achieve beauty given the proper training, time, and effort needed to accomplish a flawless physical appearance. Echoing the general American assertion that beauty was made and not born, she informed her interviewer that:

Instructors [at Watson’s modeling school] don’t believe that there’s a prevalence of naturally beautiful body among models. They’ve done enough on redistribution of wayward curves and chiseling down of fleshy figures to know that top models work hard all the way for their coveted conformations.²¹¹

Watson’s sentiments were representative of the tactics of a cadre of African American women working in the field of beauty culture who set up cosmetology programs, fashion boutiques, charm schools, modeling agencies, and other independent business ventures in the mid-twentieth century. In marketing their business ventures, black beauty culturists, like Watson, relied heavily on the often-repeated American assertion that beauty was made and not born, seeking to diminish

²¹¹ “Colored Models” Bernass MacFadden’s *Visualized Physical Culture*, Jan/Feb 1954.

the negativity that many Americans, including those within the African American community, associated with the black body. Although the mainstream fashion industry was dominated and run by whites, Barbara Watson and other black businesswomen argued that African American women, through the adoption of beauty culture and dedicated use of its arts, could become American beauties. Beauty was thus conceptualized not as a biological given, but as something that could be cultivated through hard work and perseverance.

While African American models operated in a world that valued light skin and other Eurocentric aesthetics, it is important to note that their African American agents did not market them as white women. Although Barbara Watson's firm competed in a beauty world that was grounded in mainstream white standards of beauty, she emphasized that her "colored models" had top-flight credentials and abilities. Both Barbara Watson and her New York City competitor Ophelia DeVore themselves had to hide the fact that they were African Americans in order to receive their training as young models. After establishing their careers and launching their own schools, however, neither hid the fact that their models were African Americans. Instead they chose to promote their protégées as both black and beautiful.

In promoting black women in a white-dominated industry, black businesswomen stressed that their African American models were neither an aberration of a white ideal nor an exception to a black rule. Mid-twentieth-century African American entrepreneurs in female beauty culture hoped that the women they tutored would serve as ambassadors of black womanhood to white America and to whites around the world. Playing a crucial role in the politics of respectability

similar to black club women, African American businesswomen in the fashion and beauty industries hoped that their black clients would exhibit a positive example of black womanhood in the United States, which would force popular American culture to change its perception and depiction of the black body. During her youth, actress Diahann Carroll was a student at Ophelia DeVore's charm school. In 1954 she was part of the "Carmen Jones" ensemble, a film starring an all-black cast based on the famous George Bizet opera Carmen. In 1968 Carroll won mainstream attention after she was cast by NBC producers as the lead in the television show *Julia*, where she played an attractive African American nurse and caring mother.²¹² Carroll's career illustrates the success that mid-twentieth century black beauty entrepreneurs wanted their black clients achieve. In contrast to traditional portrayals of black women as low-skilled homely domestic workers in the mold of the stereotypical "Aunt Jemima," black beauty culturists promoted an image of black women as sophisticated, world-class professionals who were connoisseurs of fashion, modeling, charm instruction, and cosmetology. When their efforts succeeded, they generated positive effects – the inclusion of images of black bodies in mainstream American culture – albeit through conservative methods that did not challenge the hegemony of the "white is right" aesthetic.

Clearly, black beauty culturists envisioned themselves as progressive agents of social change. Consequently, they conceptualized their efforts to beautify black womens' bodies as part of a larger mission to improve the lives of women to whom they sold their products, as well as enrich and empower themselves, and therefore

²¹² Even in the twenty-first century Diahann Carroll continues to promote a mainstream image of black women as poised, sophisticated, and beautiful in her guest role as the cultured mother of African American surgeon Preston Burke during the third season of the ABC television show *Grey's Anatomy*.

uplift their race. The methods that black beauty entrepreneurs used to attain these avowedly liberal goals were often very conservative. As business people their actions reflected an understanding of what services and products were wanted by their market. They achieved their success by navigating through the dominant racial politics of their time in order to determine how blacks could best improve themselves. Bringing the bodies of African American women into mainstream notions of femininity and respectability was indeed a progressive goal. So too was seeking greater professional acknowledgement for black fashion designers, models, and cosmetologists. At the same time, however, black entrepreneurs' definitions of what constituted beauty remained primarily Eurocentric. In addition they promoted essentialist ideas about women's nature and innate capacity for charm and beauty. Therefore, while these entrepreneurs promoted an understanding of beauty that was culturally conformist, their craft still enabled them participate in the progressive ethos of their era. In this way beauty entrepreneurs utilized conservative measures to achieve politically liberal goals.

The life of Cleveland, Ohio resident Artha Woods embodies many of these seemingly contradictory social goals and tactics. In 1941 Woods became one of the first African Americans to be employed by the Ohio Bell Telephone Company after thousands of city residents, including Woods, jammed phone lines to protest the absence of black employees at that company. From this early start in political activism, Woods went on to found the Artha-Jon Academy of Modeling and Charm so that she could show people in the city "what the black female was capable of."²¹³

²¹³ "Artha Woods" *The Plain Dealer* Tuesday, February 23, 1999.

Woods saw her 30-year career as a modeling and charm school owner as parallel to her efforts to promote racial integration in the United States. In addition to becoming a member of the predominantly white Modeling Association of America, she was inaugurated into the International Models Hall of Fame in New York City. On the local level, Woods became the first African American woman elected to the Cleveland City Council, an office she held from 1979 to 1990, serving as clerk of the Council from 1990 to 1999. During her decade as a council member, Woods represented Ward 6, a section of the city that included the white Mayfield Avenue neighborhood commonly referred to as the city's "Little Italy." Her service as a mediator in an urban center troubled by racial tensions between Italian Americans and African Americans, led to the black modeling and charm school owner being named an "honorary Italian American" by her white constituents.²¹⁴

Throughout her career, Woods promoted African American women as civic and business leaders through her modeling and charm schools. Through beauty culture, she promised to aid her clients "cultural development," "refinement," and "poise," thus allowing them the ability to "enjoy a fuller [and] more meaningful life" while at the same time creating leaders in the African American female community. A telling indicator of the complexity of the mid-century racial struggle is the fact that Woods, a life-long and staunch advocate of racial integration and black empowerment, also sold a line of skin bleaching creams through her Artha-Jon cosmetic brand during the 1950s and 1960s.²¹⁵ Artha Woods and other African American entrepreneurs in female beauty culture did not view their promotion of a

²¹⁴ Interview with Martin Hauserman, Chief City Archivist, Cleveland City Council. 23 March 2006.

²¹⁵ Artha-Jon advertisement Literature, NAFA, Series 6: Newspaper Clippings and Publications

black female body beautified as much as possible in accordance with Eurocentric standards of beauty as contradictory to their claim to be “race women.” As commonly understood by those in the black community, a “race woman” was a female who actively promoted the black political agenda for economic, social and political empowerment. Black beauty culturists did this through their business ventures. Thus their lives, their products, and their conception of the black female aesthetic exemplify the complexity of black America’s racial struggle during the mid-twentieth century.

African American entrepreneurs in female beauty culture saw their beauty work as a political act and conceptualized their business efforts as central to changing the landscape of American race relations in the mid-twentieth century. At first glance, this may seem at odds with the profession they chose and the images of beauty that they helped to disseminate. However, their lives and achievements demonstrate the ways in which their business efforts directly addressed and answered one of the central questions of their era’s political culture: how could black Americans, especially black women, gain greater respect in the United States?

Over the past four decades, popular historical accounts have vibrantly documented the history of the Civil Rights, or Black Freedom Movement, through a multitude of articles, monographs, biographies, oral interviews, and documentaries. This burgeoning scholarship has made analysis of the black experience during the mid-twentieth century a prolific and formidable body of literature. It has unequivocally shown that the Civil Rights era was a time of critical change for black Americans in the U.S., as well as a major turning point in the larger narrative of

American history. A synthesis of this research also suggests that one single movement never existed. Rather, historians have made clear that the mid-twentieth century witnessed a cacophony of diverse movements that came together under the mantra of “civil rights.” During this era, a wide range of players in the African American community acted upon the mid-twentieth century’s political, economic, and cultural battleground. Proving the degree to which the movement served as a true watershed in American history, the black esprit de corps eventually spread to the interests of several other American demographic groups, including women, homosexuals, and persons with disabilities.

During the mid-twentieth century, a variety of black organizations prioritized the pursuit of civil rights, political empowerment, economic empowerment, and self-respect. In this regard, groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and Nation of Islam (NOI) guided the efforts of African Americans to rebuild the foundations of American society. While each of these groups fervently advocated for greater “civil rights,” definitions of what that meant often differed greatly from group to group. In addition, the tactics and goals each of these organizations employed were often also very different, and at times even contradictory. As a result of their fundamental ideological and tactical differences, these organizations were as much engaged in criticism of each other as of white-dominated legal and cultural institutions that had historically disenfranchised black Americans.

While the history of the Civil Rights movement has been examined from multiple perspectives, historians' accounts have depended heavily on the records of black political and religious organizations. That scant attention has been paid to black businesses in this historical literature is a striking omission. Indeed, as scholar John Dittmer has pointed out, talk of business history in the civil rights literature has frequently been confined to the white-owned establishments that denied African Americans access and their racist owners who led the virulent counter-attack against the movement.

This analysis of black beauty entrepreneurs in the mid-twentieth century demonstrates that the history of black entrepreneurship and for-profit business enterprise deserves a place in the historiography of the Civil Rights movement. Like many other black business people who came before them, mid-twentieth century beauty entrepreneurs, saw themselves in part as successful when their enterprises benefited the black community as a whole. My examination of black business ventures during the mid-twentieth century introduces a new set of goals, tactics, and leadership styles that were also part of a diverse Black Freedom Movement. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the important role of black beauty culturists, both as businesswomen and as race leaders, in their generation's struggle to gain respect and equal opportunity for African Americans.

Black beauty culturists saw their beauty work as a catalyst for immense social change. The methods by which they attempted to foment their revolution were, however, very different from the better documented struggles of brothers and sisters in the movement. As heterogeneous as the NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and NOI

were politically and ideologically, when it came to organization they often operated in markedly similar ways. In each group, leadership roles were most often held by men, while women typically worked behind the scenes. By contrast, African American entrepreneurs in female beauty culture did not operate inside male-dominated organizations, nor did they act in ways similar to African American women who did. Few of the black beauty culturists documented in this history defiantly tested laws through direct-action public protest as, for example, did Rosa Parks who through her job as a seamstress was also involved in the world of beauty culture. Most did not entangle themselves in the rough-and-tumble fight for equality of which Fannie Lou Hamer was a leading participant. None stood out as leaders through the grassroots approach for which organizer Ella Baker is best known. Yet despite this, African American female beauty culturists were intensely political in their tactics and goals. And their work also stimulated cultural and economic improvements for members of their race as they operated for profit and principle during a rights conscious era.

Black beauty culturists focused much of their effort on the integration of image. African American charm and beauty school owners, fashion designers, directors of black modeling agencies, members of professional beauty organizations, publishers of African American periodicals, and black cosmetology school owners all promoted in the goals of racial and economic uplift. Many conceptualized their business efforts as an important cultural arm of the era's emerging political agenda. The businesswomen discussed in this study all believed that creation of a positive

public image of the black body was a necessary step towards the realization racial equality for black people in the United States.

Black beauty culturists hoped that the positive international image of African American woman they crafted would be instrumental in improving the economic situation of black women across United States. In this sense, for these entrepreneurs the attainment of beauty for black women was much more than an exercise in personal fulfillment or a frivolous pastime. While black women in the U.S. had long been perceived by white Americans as largely, or even exclusively, washerwomen, maids, or sex workers, beauty culturists wanted to give black females a “look” that would open the way to alternative employment that promoted economic mobility. In this regard, they viewed a black women’s sense of internal courage and her ability to break the color line as in part dependent on her ability to “look the part.” By bringing the black female body into mainstream definitions of femininity, beauty, charm, and grace, they hoped black women might better be able to secure jobs in retail stores, offices, and other pink-collar sectors of the economy.

African Americans in the fields of fashion, charm, beauty, and modeling were, therefore, entrepreneurs in a double sense. First, they worked hard to create a demand for their goods and services among women of all races. After initially encountering resistance in the United States, black beauty culturists transcended the parameters of the national situation that had constrained them and found new markets for their services and products in a larger transnational context. Second, in order to become mainstream participants in American business and enterprise, they built upon the connections, reputation, and relationships that they formed abroad to establish a

secure place for their business ventures in the U.S. domestic market. In doing this, they popularized much more than products; more importantly, they also became entrepreneurs of a new image of black womanhood in the United States and, by extension, marketers of a new image of women of color around the globe.

Conclusion: Race, Beauty, and Social Construction

Over the past three decades, social historians have rightly insisted that race, along with class and gender, be seen as critical categories of analysis, which must be included in historical research and writing in all sub-fields. By specifically integrating the category of race into an understanding of who makes history and how historical change occurs, bottom-up historical accounts revolutionized the way scholarship was written. As a result of this massive shift in the literature, we now know more about the ways in which racial minorities were not just acted upon by others, but also how these same groups acted as provocateurs of historical change themselves. Similarly the rise of cultural history has also changed the scholarly landscape over the past few decades. By focusing on the music, literature, art, television, and film of a society, scholars of the recent American past have been able to contextualize and explain how ordinary Americans experienced life and understood the larger issues affecting their society. Decoding culture and dealing with race have thus proved to be fruitful avenues of historical inquiry.

Drawing from both the literature on social and cultural history, this work has focused on beauty and race in order to illuminate critical issues in mid-Twentieth century America. In doing this I have sought to place my story within the larger transnational context that American history has most recently focused itself upon.

At first glance, race and beauty may seem to be very different things. Historically, race has served as a category that has fundamentally divided American society. Beauty on the other hand, has often been thought of as a more meaningless

distinction. To the contrary, this dissertation has shown that notions of race and beauty have much in common. Indeed both race and beauty are constructed using the same tools –physical expressions of the human form. And these constructs have had similar effects upon the lives of people who have found themselves on the lower ends of desirability for these categorizations; each category has been used to assert power, authority, and legitimacy over Americans deemed as cultural inferiors. In addition, in many instances dominant groups have used race and beauty as shorthand for the expression of their social values and ideals.

In this work I have used the category race to illuminate the cultural politics that lay behind ideals of beauty. In doing this I show how the expression of racial power traveled through what American society prized as beautiful. By analyzing the racial politics of beauty, this work has shown the many ways in which political, social, and, economic trends frequently manifest themselves in aesthetic ideals. I have shown how a pin-up culture was cultivated to aide the efforts of a nation at war, how American fashion was used to promote democracy in postwar Japan, and how black beauty was cultivated to buttress black calls for civil rights. In the above examples, in the many others detailed in this work, beauty culture was used by Americans to augment, aide and define their politics, policy, diplomacy, and war practices. By demonstrating that racial politics were an important component in American conceptions of what it meant to be beautiful, have shown beauty to be much more than a meaningless category of analysis. Race's power to divide, delineate, and categorize people made the social construction of all the more powerful and real in the lives of African American, European American, and Japanese American women.

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List of Manuscript Collections Consulted

Abbreviation	Collection	Location
AVON	Allied-Avon Products Collection	The Hagley Museum and Library, 298 Buck Rd. Wilmington, DE 19807
BROW	Jeanetta Welch Brown Papers	National Archives for Black Women's History, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, 1318 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005
DEVO	Ophelia DeVore Collection	Ophelia DeVore Associates, Inc. (Private Holding), Empire State Building, 350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3108, New York, NY 10118
FRAN	Franklin Beauty School Collection	RG D 44, Houston Metropolitan Research Center Houston Public Library Houston, Texas
JOYN	Marjorie S. Joyner Papers	The Chicago Public Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection, Woodson Regional Library, 9525 S. Halsted Street, Chicago, IL 60628
LOGA	Joshua Logan Papers	Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, 101 Independence Ave. SE, Room LM 101, James Madison Memorial Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20540-4680
MAID	Maidenform Collection	# 585, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, 12 th , 14 th & Constitution Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20560-0601
NAFA	Records of the National Association of Fashion Designers	National Archives for Black Women's History, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, 1318 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005
PRAN	Gordon W. Prange Collection	4200 Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

PRIC	Vincent Price Papers	Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, 101 Independence Ave. SE, Room LM 101, James Madison Memorial Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20540-4680
SCAP	Records of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Women's Affairs and Activities, 1945-1950	Records Group 331, National Archives at College Park, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001
SEAG	Seagram & Sons, Inc. Collection	The Hagley Museum and Library, 298 Buck Rd. Wilmington, DE 19807
SIMS	Cleo Sims Papers	Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 515 Malcolm X Boulevard New York, NY 10037-1801
STAR	Annette Starr Bruce Hudson Collection	African American Museum & Library at Oakland, 659 14th Street Oakland CA, 94612
WATS	Barbara M. Watson Papers	Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 515 Malcolm X Boulevard, New York, NY 10037-1801

List of Serials Consulted

Employee Publications

Acme News, Acme Steel Company, (Chicago, IL)

Family Album, Allied-Avon Plant, (Suffern, NJ)

Lukens Plate, Lukens Steel Company, (Coatesville, PA)

Maiden Forum, Maiden Form Brassiere Company, (Bayonne, NJ)

Proof, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, (Louisville, KY)

Santa Fe Magazine, Railway Exchange, (Chicago, IL)

Sun Refinery News, Sun Oil Co., (Marcus Hook, PA)

Tannery Talk, Allied Kid Co. (Wilmington, DE)

Internment Camp Newsletters

Denson Tribune, Denson Relocation Centers (Jerome, AR)

Tanforan Totalizer, Tanforan Assembly Center (Tanforan CA)

Santa Anita Pace Maker, Santa Anita Assembly Center (Santa Anita, CA)

The Rohwer Outpost, McGehee Relocation Centers (Rohwer, AR)

Japanese Fashion Magazines

Sutairu (Tokyo, Japan)

Sutairu Bukku (Tokyo, Japan)

Sutairu To Dezain (Tokyo, Japan)

Hataraku Fujin, (Tokyo, Japan)

Japanese American Magazines

Nisei Vue: The Japanese-American Magazine

Scene: The Pictorial Magazine: International East-West Magazine (Chicago, IL)

African American Newspapers

Afro-American (Baltimore, MD)

Amsterdam News (New York, NY)

Chicago Defender (Chicago, IL)

Pittsburgh Courier (Pittsburgh, PA)

African American Magazines

Beauty Trade: The Magazine for Negro Beauticians

Ebony (Chicago, IL)