

Selling the Mechanized Household to Black America:
Race and Gender in Domestic Technology Advertising, 1945-1980

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ABSTRACT

In the twentieth century, the target market for household technologies was identified and labeled “Mrs. Consumer,” and the lifestyle, values, and ideals attributed to her guided household technology marketing throughout the century. Bonnie Fox conducted an investigation into household technology marketing techniques, using advertisements in *Ladies Home Journal* (*LHJ*) as her source material. I argue here that, because of the homogenous, mostly-white readership of *LHJ*, Fox’s use of only *LHJ* advertisements limited some of the conclusions she could draw about Mrs. Consumer’s lifestyle, values, and ideals. This thesis studies household technology advertisements in *Ebony* magazine and current literature about the black American experience to identify the impact of including race in the evaluation of household technology advertising in twentieth century America. In particular, this thesis addresses Mrs. Consumer’s extensibility across race; *Ebony*’s household technology advertisements’ treatment of segregation, integration, assimilation, and racial pride; and those advertisements’ handling of the public opinion that the twentieth century American black family structure was “pathological.” This research identifies similarities and differences between the advertisement practices in *Ebony* and *LHJ* in those areas of interest, concluding that the black American housewife’s home experience was more likely to be divergent from Mrs. Consumer’s attributed reality and that *Ebony*’s advertisers tended toward the aspirational when modeling and scripting household technology advertisements.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“You sometimes see a woman who would have made a Joan of Arc in another century and climate, threshing herself to pieces over all the mean worry of housekeeping.”

– Rudyard Kipling

One needs only to take a look around most modern American homes to see how ingrained household technologies have become to the American home life. Dishwashers tuck neatly under a counter covered with electric mixers, toaster ovens, and carving knives; a vacuum cleaner is stored in the laundry room next to the automatic washer and dryer. Due in large part to cultural assumptions and understandings about their primary users, household technologies carry a social significance that other technologies do not have—household technologies’ association with housework relates them to Americans’ beliefs about home life, the nature of housework, the American family structure and distribution of home labor, and the idea that one’s possessions are a reflection of one’s values and identity. These themes enframe household technology advertisers’ understanding and exploitation of their target market.

In 1990, Bonnie Fox authored an article titled “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*.” In it, she reviewed *Ladies Home Journal*’s household technology advertisements from 1910 to 1980 and evaluated them in order to ascertain their message(s) regarding housework. Fox used a coding system to categorize each advertisement, then collected the coded advertisements into seven thematic groupings. According to these groupings, the advertisements encouraged the adoption of the featured technology: to reduce household work; to improve housekeeping quality; to better serve the family (the “labor of love” ideal); to maintain public appearances; for the technology’s aesthetic appeal; to save money; or on the merits of the product itself.¹

Fox’s article discusses the changing nature of labor in American homes in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Largely as a product of urbanization and suburbanization, many American women had become removed from the kind of domestic labor that resulted in the output of a product (e.g., spinning wool or farming), and instead expended their domestic labor on housekeeping. As a result, the new “product” of domestic labor became the results of the housekeeping itself, such as cleanliness and tidiness. Once housework itself had become a

¹ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*,” *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990), 39.

“product,” then the means of its production (i.e., household technologies) could be sold to housewives. The majority of the advertisements in Fox’s study, particularly those from issues printed earlier in the 20th century, were generally aimed at the same target market: white, middle-class housewives who had their husbands’ ears when it came to purchases of household technologies. This specific market was dubbed “Mrs. Consumer” early in the 20th century², and many advertising- and housework-related writings since have included both references to “Mrs. Consumer” and to Fox’s work and the themes she identified in the *Ladies Home Journal* advertisements.

Ladies Home Journal’s publisher describes the magazine as “a unique lifestyle magazine dedicated to the millions of American women who want to look good, do good, and feel great.”³ While this mission statement does not specify a race or income level, the advertisements reviewed in Fox’s study would certainly support the general stereotype of the average *Ladies Home Journal* reader: white, middle-aged, and middle-class (and the age and class demographic still holds true, according to current *Ladies Home Journal*-sponsored market research⁴). Fox’s article used the *Ladies Home Journal* advertisements to identify how advertisements for domestic technologies contributed to the definition and development of the new conceptualization of housework. Her article concludes that advertisements for household technologies deliberately attempted to manage the social definition of household labor—both the process and its “products”—by identifying what American housewives valued and marketing to those values.

While Fox’s study is an interesting work with a sound method, limiting her study to only one women’s magazine may have limited the messages she encountered in the advertisements. The review conducted for the study captured in this thesis shows that a more complex picture emerges if the study is broadened to include *Ebony* magazine, a monthly general interest magazine targeted toward the African-American community, founded in November 1945.⁵ While *Ebony*’s mission is to “enrich, encourage and enlighten the *entire family*...of Black

² Graham, Laurel D. “Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930,” *Signs*, 24 (1999), 633-675.

³ *Ladies Home Journal* Mission Statement. <http://www.meredith.com/mediakit/lhj/print/index.html>

⁴ *Ladies Home Journal* Audience. <http://www.meredith.com/mediakit/lhj/print/women.html>

⁵ Johnson Publishing Co. Factsheet. http://www.johnsonpublishing.com/assembled/about_factsheet.html

America”⁶ (emphasis added) as opposed to targeting women or housewives specifically, household technologies are featured in a significant percentage of *Ebony*’s advertisements. Evaluating the advertisements for domestic technologies in *Ebony* as a comparison to Fox’s study of advertisements in “Selling the Mechanized Household” provides insight into some racial dimensions of advertisers’ understandings of the impacts that their technologies would have on their target market’s lives.

A review of scholarly literature, for example works by Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Susan Strasser, Roland Thompson, and Laurel Graham (see bibliography), reveals that the marketing ideal of “Mrs. Consumer” as the target market for domestic technologies beginning in the early 20th century (when middle-class American women began to move to the suburbs and perform their own housework) is generally accepted as true by women’s studies, advertising, and technology studies historians. The creation of Mrs. Consumer necessarily makes some assumptions about the lives, desires, and values of the women to whom domestic technologies are marketed as well as the social environments into which the technologies would enter. This thesis attempts to extend the idea of Mrs. Consumer beyond her most common incarnation, the middle-class white housewife in suburbia, and investigate whether Mrs. Consumer is truly a more universal concept that crosses racial lines into black America’s urban experience.

As Fox’s article illustrates, household technologies’ social significance creates and supports associations and assumptions about American life in a way that many other technologies do not. This thesis concentrates on three dimensions of the relationship between household technologies and their primary users (in this case, American housewives) as represented by the themes and messages in advertisements for the technologies: the impact of the technologies on the household labor process; ideas about “liberation” as a result of embracing the technology; and the implication that the adoption of a particular technology could serve as a reflection of the user’s value system. In each case, this thesis investigates how including race enriches or complicates our understanding of these relationships.

Fox’s empirical data demonstrates how often advertisements for domestic technologies concentrate on the labor-saving impact that the technology will have in the home. Much of the scholarship evaluating this concept refers to the idea as the “labor-saving fallacy,” as research indicates that household technologies advertised in that way generally only make heavy-lifting

⁶ *Ebony* Mission Statement. http://www.johnsonpublishing.com/assembled/businesses_ebony.html

chores easier to do and/or raise housekeeping standards, resulting in more frequent performance of the now-easier-to-do chores. Ruth Schwartz Cowan's *More Work for Mother* and "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century" and Susan Strasser's *Never Done: A History of American Housework* all investigate the labor-saving fallacy and discuss the overall transfer of household work from men to women as domestic technologies entered the market and the home.⁷ For the most part, Cowan's and Strasser's works assume that the distribution of labor into which the technologies entered was one wherein a husband performed the more strenuous household chores and a wife looked after the children and cooked, cleaned, and performed less-strenuous chores. These assumptions, primarily the assumption that a household consisted of the immediate family only (husband, wife, and first-degree offspring), influence the authors' conclusions. According to census data from 1920 – 1970, the family model assumed by Cowan and Strasser was not the model found in many black American homes—while most homes during that period did consist of a male head with a wife and sometimes children, 20-27% of black families were woman-headed, as opposed to only 10-15% of white homes. Additionally, census data from the same period consistently reports that, when compared to white women of similar familial circumstances (i.e., married, single, widowed, etc.), a higher percentage of black women were employed outside of the home.⁸ As part of this thesis, my study considers the structure of twentieth-century black American households and the distribution of labor among the households' members in order to understand what advertisements may have to say about the potential impact of a technology on that labor process.

As mentioned above, the creation of Mrs. Consumer requires advertisers and marketers to make assumptions about the state of her household and how her family lives. Establishing this set of assumptions opens the door to a discussion about the black American family and how it is represented in advertisements for household technologies. In 1965, Daniel P. Moynihan produced a thesis for the Department of Labor in which he argued, among other things, that the modern black American family experience was "pathological" due to a host of factors. These

⁷ Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century," *Technology and Culture*, 17 (1976), 1-23. Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1983). Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982).

⁸ Census documents available online at [http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/\(year here\)](http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/(year here)); details in bibliography.

factors included single-parent households, a “matriarchal” society, and a state of comfort with a “dependent” role that resulted in a reliance on welfare and a disinclination to work.⁹ While Moynihan compiled research and spearheaded this particular paper, his work was not alone in the perpetuation of those ideas.¹⁰ The aforementioned review of black American households and the promised impact of an advertised domestic technology on those households’ labor process will also consider whether or not the advertisements tended to further such stereotypical notions of the black American family structure.

The notion that housework is something from which one can be liberated is another common theme in Fox’s set of advertisements. One sample in her work shows a woman running out of her front door to meet her friend, exclaiming that she is “a free woman since [she] got [her] Hotpoint range!”¹¹ Roland Marchand’s *Advertising the American Dream* also discusses the concept of products “liberating” their owners, providing free time that would not be available otherwise. Fox’s article indicates that the advertisements she reviewed imply that the time saved on household chores would be spent on leisure activities instead. This makes an assumption about the lifestyle of the target market; that the housewife has no responsibilities other than maintaining her household. Part of my research captures what the advertisements in *Ebony* say about liberation and what they might imply about what will be done with the time recaptured from household work—do these advertisements also assume that the black American housewife would rush out of her front door to meet a friend as soon as she was liberated from her chores, or would she do something else with her time? Closely related to ideas of oppression and liberation are those of segregation and integration, so the review of advertisements also considers potential parallel messages regarding themes of liberation among a population whose members may have experienced actual restraint or oppression, particularly noting whether relief from household labor is ever compared to freedom from actual oppression. One article from a 1961 issue of the advertising trade journal *Sponsor* captures some of the most widely-followed pieces of advice regarding targeting a black American market, in particular recommending that the black consumer would respond most positively to being “recognized” as a legitimate market and

⁹ Moynihan, Daniel P. *The Negro family: The case for national action*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Planning and Research, 1965).

¹⁰ Strickland, Arvarh E. and Weems, Jr., Robert E., eds. *The African-American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001): 56-57.

¹¹ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*,” *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990), 37.

“invited” to participate in the ownership of products.¹² The article suggests that the years of subjugation of black Americans resulted in a hesitation to participate in new experiences (or purchase a new good) without assurance that they would certainly be included without issue.¹³ During the analysis of liberation messages, this thesis will also discuss the manner in which the advertisements address ideas of segregation and/or integration, including whether or not they seem to take a stand on the issue at all.

Several of Fox’s codes can be combined into a larger theme; that of the adoption of a technology as a reflection of one’s values. Advertisements appealing to the housewife’s desire to serve her family, to keep up appearances, to have a pretty appliance, or to keep her family healthy and safe all cater to values that Mrs. Consumer is assumed to have embraced. Bonnie Fox, Mark Rose, Laurel D. Graham, and Ruth Schwartz Cowan each discuss appliance advertising’s representations of women’s work as a “labor of love” or an “expression of love” and their casting of women’s roles in protecting their families from the embarrassment or discomfort of dingy linens or an unsanitary kitchen.¹⁴ This thesis evaluates the advertisements in *Ebony* and identifies what values are being targeted—what will owning this particular technology say about its owner and its owner’s priorities? As part of this evaluation, I consider the role that black Americans played in the advertising arena during much of the twentieth century. Prior to 1940, advertisers did not consider the black community as a separate, distinct, and profitable market.¹⁵ After census data collected between 1930 and 1950 revealed black Americans’ purchasing power, advertising agencies recognized the importance of marketing directly to that segment of the population. While a few black advertising agencies sprung up here and there, most black participation in advertising through the 1970’s was as a “Negro market specialist”—a consultant to larger corporations angling for black consumer support,

¹² “Know-How is Key to Selling Negro Market Today,” *Sponsor Negro Issue*, 15 (1961): 26-27.

¹³ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 71-73.

¹⁴ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*,” *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990): 32. Rose, Mark H. *Cities of Light and Heat: Domesticating Gas and Electricity in Urban America*. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): 135. Graham, Laurel D. “Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930,” *Signs*, 24 (1999): 646. Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. “The ‘Industrial Revolution in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century.’” *Technology and Culture*, 17. (1976): 16.

¹⁵ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 7.

working on “here’s how you can sell to blacks” versus “we are selling to our own.”¹⁶ Any analysis of domestic technology advertisers’ marketing strategies toward black homemakers must certainly consider how black advertising consultants could have shaped those advertisers’ perceptions of their target market’s ideals.

The complexity introduced when the race-related variables discussed here are considered further supports the idea that Fox’s use of only *Ladies Home Journal* advertisements to understand domestic technology advertisements’ impact on the twentieth-century redefinition of household labor may have resulted in a limited understanding of the relationship between domestic technologies and their users. This thesis adds another dimension to Fox’s work, reviewing domestic technology advertisements in *Ebony* to understand the labor processes into which the technologies would enter, what themes of liberation meant to black housewives and to a culture who understood oppression, and how adopting a particular technology could demonstrate or reflect the values of black American culture.

This thesis reevaluates the idea of Mrs. Consumer as *the* idealized consumer of domestic technologies and evaluates whether or not that idealized notion was flexible enough to include the black American housewife’s experience. Additionally, the course of research described in this thesis takes a step back to review whether or not mid-twentieth-century advertisements for domestic technologies appeared to take a stand on issues of segregation and integration, and to consider how advertisements for domestic technologies could serve to either further or strike down negative stereotypes about the “pathological” black American family structure.

To conduct the research for this study, I reviewed advertisements for household technologies in *Ebony* magazine from 1945 through 1980. For each advertisement, I completed the following analysis:

1. Who is in the advertisement?
2. What product/technology does the advertisement represent?
3. What is said in the advertisement (by the characters or in the ad copy)?
4. What (if any) message does the advertisement convey regarding:
 - a. The technology’s impact on the household labor process?

¹⁶ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 32, 35, 41, 52.

- b. Liberation? (and from what? And what will be done now that one is free?)
 - c. The value systems of owners/users of this technology?
5. Whom does the advertisement target?

I reviewed the advertisements in every issue of *Ebony* magazine from 1945 through 1965. From 1965 through 1980, increased magazine length and an increase in duplicate advertisements (i.e., advertisers used the same advertisement for the same product several months in a row) allowed me to reduce the sampling pattern to five to six issues per year without decreasing the number of unique household technology advertisements encountered.

The results of this analysis show that race does, indeed, impact the discourse surrounding domestic technologies and household consumption. Chapter Two elaborates on the concept of “Mrs. Consumer” and relates her “reality” to the family structures and household labor processes found in black American households. Chapter Three discusses ideas of liberation as portrayed in domestic technology advertisements and investigates how the appearances of the household technology advertisements in *Ebony* reflect social attitudes regarding segregation, integration, assimilation, and black racial pride. Chapter Four revisits the value set attributed to Mrs. Consumer, discusses how those values are exploited to drive household technology sales, and describes the role of black advertising consultants as “insiders” to marketing specifically to black consumers. Chapter Five discusses the unexpected findings uncovered during this investigation and recommends areas for further research.

Chapter Two: Mrs. Consumer, the Black Family, and Household Labor Structures

Mrs. Consumer

The twentieth century saw a shift in the distribution of household labor in many middle-class American homes and a resultant identification of the housewife as the target consumer for the developing household technology market. As early-twentieth-century families moved away from agricultural societies and into smaller, more urbanized environments, fewer families employed household servants. As a result, the middle-class housewife began performing the bulk of the “domestic duties” (e.g., cooking, dishwashing, housecleaning, and eventually, laundry) in her home. Scholarly examinations of home appliance advertisements show that the advertisements both captured this shift and attempted to capitalize on it.

Home technology advertising tends to include a depiction of the technology’s user in the advertising’s accompanying illustrations. As Bonnie Fox notes in “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies’ Home Journal*,” late nineteenth-century and very early twentieth-century home appliance advertising depicted the housewife as “upper class, with domestic servants doing their housework and using the appliances...[but] by the 1930s, women who looked middle class were typically pictured doing housework.”¹⁷ Ellen Lupton’s *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office* captures this shift from manager to worker, particularly with respect to the new housewife-cum-laundress and the change in advertising depictions from minority women to white, middle class women.¹⁸ In “The ‘Industrial Revolution in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century,’” Ruth Schwartz Cowan sums up both the social and advertising shifts in the changes in depiction of housewives in magazine advertisements:

“Before World War I...when the lady of the house was drawn, she was often the person being served, or she was supervising the serving, or she was adding an elegant finishing touch to the work. Nursemaids diapered babies, seamstresses pinned up hems, waitresses served meals, laundresses did the wash, and cooks did the cooking. By the end of the 1920s the servants had disappeared from those illustrations; all those jobs were being

¹⁷ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies’ Home Journal*,” *Gender and Society*, 4 (1990): 33.

¹⁸ Lupton, Ellen. *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993): 16.

done by housewives—elegantly manicured and coiffed, to be sure, but housewives nonetheless.”¹⁹

Household technology manufacturers and advertisers were not blind to the changing role of the American housewife. The manufacturers’ evaluation of their products’ consumers revealed that, with respect to household technologies, the woman of the house wielded considerable power regarding which technologies were adopted. As a result, the manufacturers identified the housewife as the target market for these technologies, and crafted the advertising designed to sell those technologies to appeal to the interests and experiences of the American housewife. Much of the scholarship about home appliance advertising recognizes this trend, for example Bonnie Fox in “Selling the Mechanized Household,” Laurel D. Graham in “Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930,” Ellen Lupton in *Mechanical Brides*, and Jennifer Scanlon in *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture*.²⁰ As both Susan Strasser and Ellen Lupton note, home appliance advertisers shared a belief that, although the man of the house may have controlled the finances, it was the woman who made the decisions regarding household purchases.²¹ As a result, advertisers’ goal was to create from the housewife the “ultimate consumer” to whom they could sell their wares.²² The result of these efforts was christened “Mrs. Consumer,” and she became *the* target market for home technologies.

Bonnie Fox’s article includes a reference to Mrs. Consumer as the ideal consumer of domestic technologies, and Fox’s study appears to assume that Mrs. Consumer was the target viewer of the advertisements in *Ladies Home Journal*. This assumption is probably fair, given the assumed readership of *Ladies Home Journal*. That is, if the magazine’s readership is

¹⁹ Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. “The ‘Industrial Revolution in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century.” *Technology and Culture*, 17. (1976): 10.

²⁰ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies’ Home Journal*,” *Gender and Society*, 4 (1990): 27. Graham, Laurel D. “Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth’s Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930,” *Signs*, 24 (1999), 650. Lupton, Ellen. *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993): 11. Scanlon, Jennifer. *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1995): 71.

²¹ Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982): 243-251. Lupton, Ellen. *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993): 7. Scanlon, Jennifer. *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1995): 71.

²² Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies’ Home Journal*,” *Gender and Society*, 4 (1990): 27.

composed of white, middle-aged, middle-class women, why bother targeting anyone else in the advertisements? On the other hand, the target readership for *Ebony* magazine is not limited to women. *Ebony* is a black lifestyle magazine—we can assume that men, women, and even older children would peruse its pages. Even so, with few exceptions, the household technology advertisements in *Ebony* do not appear to market explicitly to men. Like the *Ladies Home Journal* household technology advertisements, the models in those advertisements in *Ebony* are overwhelmingly women, regardless of race. The women are often depicted as wives and mothers, and are nearly always identified as the household member primarily responsible for cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Several advertisements imply that this has been the norm for generations: a May 1964 advertisement for Maytag washers and dryers discusses multiple generations “[depending] on *Grandma* Stevens’ Maytag,” while a May 1972 Farberware cookware advertisement offers to help women learn to cook—addressing in particular those women who never learned that from their *mothers* or *grandmothers* (emphasis added).²³ It appears that the companies who chose to advertise household technologies in *Ebony* assumed that Mrs. Consumer was an appropriate target market for those products, regardless of her race.

The exploitation of Mrs. Consumer by household technology and advertising companies necessarily required some assumptions about the lives, desires, and values of the women to whom domestic technologies are marketed as well as the social environments into which the technologies would enter. The assumptions made during Mrs. Consumer’s conception fell in line with the normative white American experience, which leaves room for investigation into the understanding of the black American household and the impact that household technologies would have on its members’ lives.

The Black Family Structure

Much of the literature about Mrs. Consumer and household technologies assumes that the family structure into which those technologies would enter consisted of a husband, wife, and their first-degree offspring. Black family structures during Mrs. Consumer’s inception did not all fit that description—more black families were woman-headed, and many more black families were multi-generational (i.e., grandparents and other second degree relatives [most often female relatives and their children] were living in the home). According to census data from 1920-1970,

²³ Maytag. Advertisement. *Ebony*, May 1964, 9; Farberware. Advertisement. *Ebony*, May 1972, 55.

while most American homes during that period did consist of a male head with a wife and sometimes children, 20-27% of black families were woman-headed, as opposed to only 10-15% of white homes.²⁴ In a thesis published in 1965 calling for the “establishment of a stable Negro family structure,” Daniel P. Moynihan referenced similar statistics and referred to the American black family experience as “pathological,” citing single-parent households, a “matriarchal” society, and a state of comfort with a “dependent” role that resulted in a reliance on welfare and a disinclination to work.²⁵ Moynihan’s aim in his thesis was positive; that is, he was attempting to structure and recommend national policy initiatives that would pull Americans out of poverty. However, since his research identified that welfare dependence and husband-less homes were more common in black families (particularly urban black families), he titled his work *The Negro family: The case for national action*, and essentially pathologized all non-normative black families’ experiences. E.F. Frazier had previously arrived at conclusions similar to Moynihan’s in his book *The Negro Family in the United States* (in fact, Moynihan’s thesis borrowed frequently from Frazier’s work), and Darryl Michael Scott’s *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* evaluates several studies’ and papers’ conclusions regarding a matriarchal black society and the negative impact it may have had on both the black male ego and the black female’s overall view of men.²⁶ It is true that the census data referenced above shows more women-headed homes in black families than in white families, and the notion that black American families were matriarchal is well-represented in mid-twentieth century scholarship. However, Robert Staples’s essay “The Sexual Revolution and the Black Middle Class” questions the validity of the matriarchal label, and J. R. Eshelman draws a careful distinction between “matriarchal” and “matrifocal,” arguing that the fact that more women than men were present in black families did not de facto neuter the men in black society.²⁷ In a matriarchal society, women (particularly mothers) lead all of the members of a society, including the adult men. In a matrifocal society, women head social structures largely

²⁴ Census documents available online at [http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/\(year here\)](http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/(year here)); details for each decade in bibliography.

²⁵ Moynihan, Daniel P. *The Negro family: The case for national action*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Planning and Research, 1965).

²⁶ Frazier, E. F. *The Negro Family in the United States*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); Scott, Darryl Michael. *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880 – 1996*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 77-81, 151.

²⁷ Staples, Robert. “The Sexual Revolution and the Black Middle Class,” *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1991): 11-19; Eshelman, J. R. *The Family: An Introduction*. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1988): 40-52.

because adult men are absent. Moynihan's report and census data from the same period do not provide evidence of households headed by women when an adult man was also present, only that men were absent from family homes; and the 1940 census explicitly states that "females were not classified as heads of families if their husbands were living in the household at the time."²⁸ While this may seem like a fine line to draw, when one considers the difference between a social structure wherein women wrested control of their households from their men and proceeded to exert authority over them (matriarchal) and one where women head homes out of necessity upon the departure of their men (matrifocal), the direct relation between women-headed black households and emasculated, dependent black men does not stand. D. Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Zinn agree with Eshelman, making the point that although many black men had to leave their immediate families behind to find work (especially during the 50-60 years following Emancipation), the black male was still a very present and very important figure in black households, often through community-based "fictive kinship".²⁹ In "A Strength Perspective on Black Families," Sadye Logan also addresses male roles in the black family, describing how multiple families merged in their struggle against destitution in the 1930s. Logan explains that combining families helped to continue the slave-era practice of multiple generations of family members living together, and it also provided the opportunity for unrelated males to serve as role models for younger black children in lieu of their fathers.³⁰

Home technology advertisements in *Ebony* magazine do not depict the non-normative family structures of black American families. An occasional advertisement mentions a grandmother, usually in the context of illustrating a product's dependability (e.g., the Maytag washer being used by the original owner's granddaughter) or passing along some domestic arts expertise (e.g. the Farberware advertisement mentioned above), but there is no indication that the families in the advertisements actually live in a multi-generational household.³¹ Similarly, there are no advertisements that indicate that the woman who is performing the household chores is

²⁸ Moynihan, Daniel P. *The Negro family: The case for national action*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Planning and Research, 1965); 1960 Census of Population. *Supplementary Report 38: Families in the United States: 1960*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1962): 1-17; 1970 Census of Population – Volume I, Part I. *Table 89: Education, Fertility, and Family Composition by Race for Urban and Rural Residence: 1970*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1973): 388-389; Sixteenth Census of the United States – 1940. *Population: Families*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1943): 7.

²⁹ Zinn, M. B. and Eitzen, D. S. *Diversity in Families*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990): 50-73.

³⁰ Logan, Sadye L. "A Strength Perspective on Black Families: Then and Now." *The Black Family: Strengths, Self-Help, and Positive Change*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996).

³¹ Maytag. Advertisement. *Ebony*, May 1964, 9; Farberware. Advertisement. *Ebony*, May 1972, 55.

the head of the household. In fact, when the home technology advertisements in *Ebony* include or address a man, the advertisement depicts him as a working husband who provides for his family and who is tended to by his wife. In short, the family structure described as “pathological” by Moynihan, Frazier, and Scott is not represented at all in the advertisements in *Ebony*.

One possible explanation for that absence can be arrived at by recalling *Ebony*’s mission statement and an idea explored in a portion of Roland Marchand’s *Advertising the American Dream*. *Ebony*’s mission is to “enrich, encourage, and enlighten the entire family...of Black America.”³² Marchand’s chapter on “Advertisements as Social Tableaux” examines the advertising community tenet that advertisements reflect society. Contrary to that tenet, however, many of the advertisements in Marchand’s study portray an idealized version of reality. To combat this seeming contradiction, Marchand posits that the purpose of advertisements is not to reflect society; advertisements’ purpose is to sell products—to make people *desire* to purchase something. To accomplish that goal, advertisers placed their products in a representation of life as people *desired* it to be. By associating a product with an idealized notion of reality, advertisers linked the purchases of their products with advancing up the social echelons.³³ If we apply Marchand’s argument to the current investigation, it follows that if a well-known social opinion (i.e., Moynihan’s thesis) argues that family structures more commonly found in black families than in white families are “pathological,” then it would better serve *Ebony*’s mission of encouragement and enrichment to depict more normative family structures to show *Ebony* readers what they should aspire to be.

The Household Labor Process

We can conduct an evaluation of Mrs. Consumer’s extensibility best within the context of the household labor process and the assumptions that have been made regarding the execution of housework in American homes. Just as household technology advertisers had to make assumptions about Mrs. Consumer’s values and desires as they crafted advertisements that appealed to her, they also had to make assumptions regarding the distribution of labor in Mrs. Consumer’s household. As mentioned in Chapter 1, twentieth century household technology

³² Johnson Publishing Co. Factsheet. http://www.johnsonpublishing.com/assembled/about_factsheet.html

³³ Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 165-166.

advertisers and the scholars who write about household technology generally assumed that the technologies entered a household labor structure in which the husband performed more strenuous household tasks while the wife carried out the less-intense chores. The advertisements regularly promised Mrs. Consumer that the featured products would reduce the effort required to maintain her household's cleanliness and safety.

While household advertisements often promised relief from the drudgery of day-to-day household chores, many historical works evaluating household technologies and the impact they had on the housewife's workload identify a "labor-saving fallacy." The fallacy is that, although new technologies may have shortened the time or the number of steps required to complete a *particular* household task, the introduction of the technologies did not, in fact, reduce the *overall* amount of time American housewives spent performing household chores. Reasons for this apparent contradiction include a resultant higher standard of cleanliness, the transfer of "heavy lifting" chores from men to women (e.g., men were no longer needed to lug the rugs outdoors to be beaten with a broom after the housewife had a vacuum cleaner), and even the labor required to clean the supposed labor-saving tools themselves. Ruth Schwartz Cowan in *More Work for Mother*; Susan Strasser in *Never Done*; Christine Bose, Philip Bereano, and Mary Malloy in "Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework;" and Ronald Kline in "Ideology and Social Surveys: Reinterpreting the Effects of 'Labsaving' Technology on American Farm Women" all examine the labor-saving fallacy.³⁴ Both Kline's article and another by Michael Bittman, James Rice, and Judy Wajcman provide further data analysis supporting the idea that labor-saving home technologies do not actually reduce the time spent on household chores.³⁵

The labor-saving fallacy, particularly the portion of the argument regarding the transfer of work from men to women, makes a critical assumption about the labor process into which household technologies were entering: that household labor prior to the technology's

³⁴ Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1983); Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982); Bose, Christine E., Bereano, Philip L., and Malloy, Mary. "Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework." *Technology and Culture*, 25 (1984): 63, 67; Kline, Ronald R. "Ideology and Social Surveys: Reinterpreting the Effects of 'Labsaving' Technology on American Farm Women," *Technology and Culture*, 38 (1997), 355-385.

³⁵ Kline, Ronald R. "Ideology and Social Surveys: Reinterpreting the Effects of 'Labsaving' Technology on American Farm Women," *Technology and Culture*, 38 (1997), 355-385; Bittman, Michael; Rice, James M.; and Wajcman, Judy. "Appliances and their impact: the ownership of domestic technology and time spent on household work," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 55 (2004): 401-423.

introduction was shared between men executing strenuous tasks and women performing less-demanding household chores. In the case of black American families, more families were women-headed or headed by a man who had returned home after reaching an age where the physical labor of migrant work was no longer feasible (and therefore, one may assume, the heavy-lifting household chores would also be out of reach).³⁶ In these households, large-scale transfer of housework from men to women did not occur, because little of the housework had been performed by men in the first place. Assuming that these families were able to purchase household technologies (Ronald Tobey, for one, provides examples of New Deal policies that resulted in increases in low-income household domestic technology ownership)³⁷, the labor-saving fallacy is not so false for these women, after all. If women previously were performing both the heavy-lifting *and* the lighter-duty chores, the fact that those more labor-intensive chores now required less intense physical labor to accomplish them would have a positive impact on the housewife's expended labor. While the assumptions made about Mrs. Consumer's lifestyle did not make her particularly inclusive of the black American housewife's reality, the messages contained in household technology advertisements about the labor-saving impact of the technology on household work may actually have been *truer* in the cases of women-headed homes than they were for homes in which men and women shared household chores.

Women who were heading households provide a counter-example to the labor-saving fallacy. Another population whose daily life may have been impacted in an unexpected way by the introduction of household technology is women who served as domestic servants, performing household chores for others' families. Census data for the first half of the twentieth century shows that over half of the black women who were working outside of their homes were performing work as domestic servants.³⁸ Susan Strasser investigates domestic servants' contribution to housework and the relation between their work and household technologies in *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. Prior to the twentieth century, the relatively

³⁶ Strickland, Arvarh E. and Weems, Jr., Robert E., eds. *The African-American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001): 59-64.

³⁷ Tobey, Ronald. *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996): 164-166.

³⁸ Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Volume IV, Chapter III. (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1922): 340; Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Volume V, Chapter III, (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1933): 74; 1950 United States Census of Population – Volume IV, Part I. *Special Report: Employment and Personal Characteristics*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1955): 1B-34.

high cost of emerging household technologies prevented most American families from purchasing them—at that time, hiring domestic servants cost less than purchasing the technologies to perform similar tasks.³⁹ As advertising for household technologies increased in the early twentieth century, the advertisements’ implication was that household technologies would not replace servants, but instead would supplement them, enabling them to perform their housekeeping duties better (and allowing the housewife to remain separated from such labor).⁴⁰ Eventually, American families purchased household technologies while transitioning their servants from “live-in” to “live-out” help. This consequence of the introduction of household technologies resulted in an elevation of domestic service’s status as an occupation. Providing live-in support was backbreaking work, with little to no flexibility or room for negotiation, so when servants could accept as much or as little work as they needed to provide income for themselves or their families in a live-out arrangement, domestic service began to be perceived to “meet the fundamental requirements of a good job.”⁴¹ Ultimately, as Strasser, Ruth Schwartz-Cowan, Ellen Lupton, and other science and technology and women’s studies scholars have reported, new household technologies *did* largely replace the need for domestic servants, and middle-class American housewives started performing their own housework. The case of domestic servants provides another example of how black women’s experiences with household technologies were counter to the argument put forth by the labor-saving fallacy. In this case, the technologies saved labor in two ways—first by reducing the labor required to the point that domestic service could become a “day job” instead of requiring living in, and later by alleviating the labor completely by transferring the tasks from the servants to the housewife!

Like their treatment of family structures, *Ebony*’s household technology advertisements do not appear to make any accommodation for potential differences in the distribution of household labor in a black family. Those differences could either have increased (as in the case of a single mother) or decreased (as in the case of live-in extended family with more helping hands) the workload on the black housewife as compared to a white housewife’s usual experience. While it is possible that this is merely an oversight on the part of household

³⁹ Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982): 162-165.

⁴⁰ Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982): 174.

⁴¹ Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982): 179.

technology advertisers, it is also plausible that excluding non-normative household labor structures from *Ebony*'s advertisements was a deliberate action in the vein of Roland Marchand's theory regarding associating products with social advancement,⁴² intended to "encourage" black families to strive for a household organization that was similar to the non-pathologized white experience.

⁴² Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 165-166

Chapter Three: Liberation, Integration, Assimilation, and Racial Pride

Liberation

While touting the supposed labor-saving characteristics of their featured products, household technology advertisements also contain a heavy dose of liberation-focused language—this easy-clean oven will liberate the housewife from the drudgery of scouring the insides with steel wool; that crockpot will allow her to put dinner together without having to stand over the stove stirring a sauce.⁴³ Note that neither of these advertisements relieves the housewife of her workload completely; she is still responsible for a clean oven and a homemade dinner. In order to both reflect and shape cultural norms regarding middle-class housewives and housework, advertisers had to somehow manage to characterize housework as just arduous enough to require the liberating services of their particular products, without implying that the housewife would be permitted to abandon her duties completely. The idea that twentieth century American housewives were in need of liberation (but not too much) was far-reaching—Henry Ford discussed the need to reduce the drudgery of the housewife in a 1928 essay; and in a 1959 discussion with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Richard Nixon exalted the way that American household products eased the workloads of American housewives.⁴⁴ Cynthia Lee Henthorn’s article “The Emblematic Kitchen: Labor-Saving Technology as National Propaganda, The United States, 1939 – 1959” discusses wartime advertising and propaganda targeting women. Wartime advertising, despite its focus on new technologies that would be fine-tuned and ready for household use once the war was over (e.g. Hotpoint’s bond campaign promising a laborsaving kitchen after victory was achieved or Westinghouse’s ad pamphlet boasting that its automatic washer would eliminate washday—only to make time for “other duties or doings”!), continued to advance the sexual division of labor. These advertisements highlighted the idea that post-war household products and technologies would not *eliminate* “women’s work,” only make that ever-necessary work easier for women to perform.⁴⁵ One will find the notion that household work is a constant reality in women’s lives peppered throughout

⁴³ Roper. Advertisement. *Ebony*, July 1972, 16. Rival. Advertisement. *Ebony*, December 1979, p 133.

⁴⁴ Ford, Henry. “Machinery, the New Messiah,” *The Forum* (1928): 359-364; Nixon, Richard, and Khrushchev, Nikita, “The Kitchen Debate,” from “Nixon and Khrushchev Argue in Public as U.S. Exhibit Opens; Accuse Each Other of Threats,” *the New York Times* (July 25, 1959): 1-3.

⁴⁵ Henthorn, Cynthia Lee. “The Emblematic Kitchen: Labor-Saving Technology as National Propaganda, The United States, 1939 – 1959,” *Knowledge and Society*, 12 (2000): 169-170; Strasser, 268.

household technology advertisements, writings about those advertisements, and works examining the technologies themselves. Bonnie Fox further investigates the ways that twentieth-century home technology advertisements attempted to both reflect and actively shape the recharacterization of housework and American women's attitudes toward it, primarily by identifying the American housewife's motivations and values and then appealing to them.⁴⁶

As mentioned previously, Bonnie Fox reports that the *Ladies Home Journal* advertisements for household technologies imply that the time recaptured from household work would be spent on leisure activities—an advertisement featured in Fox's article tells the reader that the owner of a Hotpoint Range “can even leave the house and enjoy a refreshing afternoon with [her] friends...while dinner cooks.”⁴⁷ The same implication is not as evident in *Ebony*'s advertisements. Advertisements for self-cleaning ovens describe how the ovens clean themselves while they are being used to cook food, so the housewife achieves liberation from cleaning, but she still serves her family.⁴⁸ Crock pot advertisements imply that the cook need not be in the kitchen while the slow-cooker warms dinner (“...has dinner ready for you when you come home;” “...while the cook's away...”), but there is no obvious implication that the cook is out of the house enjoying play time—she could just as easily be working or picking the children up from school.⁴⁹ Whirlpool acknowledges that there may not be enough time in the day to even accomplish all of the chores on the list; the Whirlpool dishwasher relieves the user of dishwashing responsibility so she can shift her attention to her children's bath time or finishing the laundry.⁵⁰

In 1920, the US Census began noting the working status of women. The 1920 census noted that 21% of women age 16 and over were working outside of their homes—19% of white women and 39% of black women.⁵¹ Later decades' censuses continue to track trends among working women. In every decade researched for this study, nonwhite women, married or single,

⁴⁶ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*,” *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990): 25-40.

⁴⁷ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*,” *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990): 37.

⁴⁸ Tappan. Advertisement. *Ebony*, May 1972, 60; Roper. Advertisement. *Ebony*, July 1972, 16.

⁴⁹ Rival. Advertisement. *Ebony*, November 1979, 124; Rival. Advertisement. December 1979, p 133.

⁵⁰ Whirlpool. Advertisement. *Ebony*, July 1980, 37.

⁵¹ Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Volume IV, Chapter III, Population. (Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1922): 340.

are in the labor force in a higher percentage than white women are.⁵² Yet their responsibilities went even beyond paid work and their own housework. Historian Stephanie Shaw's *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* provides some insight into what black women, particularly professional black women, were doing with any time that they may have regained as a result of using a labor-saving technology to perform their household chores. For her book, Shaw reviewed archival data and interviewed black women who were either preparing to enter or already participating in the professional arena during the period from 1880 through 1950.⁵³ Chapter Two described how black households through the latter half of the twentieth century often included multiple generations as well as members unrelated by blood.⁵⁴ Living with, supporting, and nurturing relationships among larger numbers of people instilled a strong sense of community responsibility in those families' caretakers—women—which they passed along to their daughters. As these daughters matured, had families, and began managing households of their own, the responsibility to provide support to their communities did not diminish. In addition to keeping their own households clean, organized, and well-run, black women were expected to pursue public success as well. Then, black women who had achieved a measure of success (by obtaining and succeeding at a professional career, for example) were expected to leverage that success and any social standing they had achieved for the benefit of the race, whether by becoming a community organizer or finding a platform in the civil rights engagement.⁵⁵ Shaw provides one example in Booker T. Washington's daughter, Portia. Portia had secured herself a position in a music program in Germany, but Washington was sure to remind her of the responsibilities that accompanied her privilege: "We shall expect great things from you when you return."⁵⁶ While black women may have benefited from the labor-saving characteristics of household technologies, messages of complete liberation would be less appropriate in advertisements for those technologies. Regaining time from the execution of chores inside her home would not

⁵² Census documents available online at [http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/\(year here\)](http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/(year here)); details per decade in bibliography.

⁵³ Shaw, Stephanie. *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 3.

⁵⁴ Zinn, M. B. and Eitzen, D. S. *Diversity in Families*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990): 50-73.

⁵⁵ Shaw, Stephanie. *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 7, 29, 110-120, 132

⁵⁶ Shaw, Stephanie. *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 111.

allow the black American housewife to put up her feet and relax; it would instead provide her some time that she could then dedicate to *other* obligations outside of her home.

Integration, Assimilation, and Racial Pride

Ideas about liberation and freedom can be particularly interesting when evaluated through the lens of a population who actually had been oppressed through American slavery. Although Emancipation had been completed prior to the years examined by this study, the national debate over segregation and integration occurs during the years in the heart of our data set. Simply due to the nature of their featured products, household technology advertisements are unlikely to make overt references to segregation and integration in the advertising copy or in the dialogue among an advertisement's models. Household technologies are designed for use in the home, whereas the primary impacts of segregation and integration were experienced in public locations. However, if we assume that advertisements represent the society in which they are located (even if that representation is idealized at times), we may be able to identify any opinions household technology advertisers may have held regarding race, segregation and integration, or separatism and assimilation.

Not all of the household technology advertisements in *Ebony* feature models. Those that do, however, display some interesting characteristics. Despite being a black lifestyle magazine, the models in household technology advertisements are all white until November of 1960, when an advertisement for Toastmaster appliances features a black woman using Toastmaster products in her dual roles as a hostess and a homemaker.⁵⁷ Even after black models are included in home technology advertisements, from 1960 until the early 1970s, the black models in the advertisements are nearly all light-skinned, with smooth hair. The advertisements during this period do also occasionally include white and black women together sharing with each other positive experiences about their technology, for example a September 1963 advertisement for Speed Queen washers and dryers in which a black woman tells a white woman about the products' dependability.⁵⁸ After 1972, the black models in household technology advertisements are more varied in their appearances—some are light-skinned with smooth hair, while others are darker-skinned with natural hair. There are very few household technology advertisements in

⁵⁷ Toastmaster. Advertisement. *Ebony*. November 1960, 20.

⁵⁸ Speed Queen. Advertisement. *Ebony*, September 1963, 48

Ebony that show black and white models together after the early 1970s. These trends appear to align with American beauty ideals as defined by the photographic fashion industry and with the rise of black American racial pride. An article in the May 1970 issue of *Ebony* discusses trends in the fashion industry regarding the employment of black models—black models first were drastically underrepresented, then when they were gaining some employment, only *light*-skinned models were in demand. After the late 1960s (the article specifically mentions the 1968 assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a catalyst), requests for black models increased measurably, but these casting calls were specifying *dark*-skinned models.⁵⁹ The increased desire for darker-skinned models coincides with the burgeoning post-civil-rights-era black consciousness movement, which centered on “black racial pride, self-definition, and self-determination.”⁶⁰

These trends are echoed in the advertisements’ use of language, which is the characteristic of the *Ebony* household technology advertisements that contrasts most significantly to the advertisements in *Ladies Home Journal*. Through 1970, language in the advertisements is free of slang and could probably be used in any household technology advertisement, regardless of the magazine it was in or the appearance of the models in the advertisement itself. In the early 1970s, however, urban language and black slang begins to surface in the advertisements for household technologies. The copy in a Mirro-matic pressure cooker celebrates the technology’s benefits with a “Right on!” cheer, and Roper ovens tout their “Right On!” oven finish.⁶¹ In the August 1972 issue of *Ebony*, an advertisement for Ecko pots and pans says, “Burn, mama, burn. It’s Sunday and you’ve got the time to lay a soulful meal on your loving man and beautiful children...” while a black man and black woman with natural hair lean over a pot.⁶² In contrast, *Ladies Home Journal* advertisements for Presto pressure cookers (a Mirro-matic competitor) include no slang or otherwise distinct language, and a September 1972 *Ladies Home Journal* advertisement for West Bend pots and pans features a smiling white woman alone in her kitchen surrounded by fruits, vegetables, and her pots and pans: “It’s basic: there’s a touch of the

⁵⁹ “Have Black Models Really Made It?” *Ebony*, May 1970, 153-160.

⁶⁰ Strickland, Arvarh E. and Weems, Jr., Robert E., eds. *The African-American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001): 177.

⁶¹ Mirro-matic. Advertisement. *Ebony*, July 1972, 16; Roper. Advertisement. May 1971, 22.

⁶² Ecko. Advertisement. *Ebony*. August 1972, p 6.

craftsman in us all.”⁶³ By the late 1970s, race- and culture-differentiating language and slang has again faded out of the advertisement copy for household technology advertisements in *Ebony*.

In the 50 to 60 years after Emancipation, black consumers were largely ignored as a separate purchasing power, so creating separate advertisements to appeal to black consumers was not a part of the advertising strategy for large, white-owned corporations.⁶⁴ The surprising use of white models in advertisements that were placed in a black lifestyle magazine demonstrates this mindset through the end of the 1950s. The 1960s transition to light-skinned black models who occasionally interact with a white model in an advertisement aligns with attitudes during the early days of the civil rights movement, when “going along to get along” was the safest modus operandi for black Americans hoping for integration. As the *Ebony* article about black models describes, the pendulum swung the other way in the early 1970s after the civil rights era wound down—light-skinned models were turned down for not being “black enough”⁶⁵ and advertisers used urban slang in their advertisements’ language as black Americans, newly granted the equal rights for which they had fought, hashed out the creation of a uniquely black identity. Finally, as the 1970s came to a close and the 1980s began, advertisements retired their black slang and regained more diversity among their models, incorporating black models with skin tones “from café au lait to very black,”⁶⁶ perhaps reflecting what Katherine Tate describes as “greater confidence” in black Americans’ station and influence in social and political processes and increased comfort with a less harshly-defined black identity.⁶⁷ While the composition and appearances of the models and the copy language used in *Ebony*’s advertisements do not explicitly promote any social or political agenda (e.g., dark skinned women are not overtly shunned in 1950s advertisements, nor do advertisements in 1971 advocate racial separatism), they do correspond with the attitudes and levels of acceptance that black Americans consumers were encountering in their daily lives.

⁶³ West Bend. Advertisement. *Ladies Home Journal*. September 1972, p 145.

⁶⁴ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 7.

⁶⁵ “Have Black Models Really Made It?” *Ebony*, May 1970, 158.

⁶⁶ “Have Black Models Really Made It?” *Ebony*, May 1970, 156.

⁶⁷ Tate, Katherine. *From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Elections*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993): 183-185.

Chapter Four: Mrs. Consumer's Values and Marketing to "Black Mrs. Consumer"

Creating then Exploiting Mrs. Consumer's Values

After Mrs. Consumer had been identified as the primary target for household technology marketing, household technology advertisers needed to identify a set of values appropriate for Mrs. Consumer, tell her what they were, and then market to them. Although twentieth century advertisements for household technologies often touted the products' labor-saving characteristics or highlighted the "freedom" that would be gained upon the introduction of a particular commodity into the home, advertisers realized that they needed to align their messages with the current social understanding of household work responsibilities while maintaining a market for their products. While the technology manufacturers do go to considerable lengths to promise the housewife that she will be freed from her drudgery, the housewife is not let off the hook completely—the advertisements also take great care to glorify the housewife's overall role and promise that she will gain tremendous satisfaction in the performance of the housework that will still remain even after the introduction of their household technologies. These advertisements suppress the unpleasant nature of performing manual labor and emphasize the benefits of taking care of one's family. The manufacturers employ different approaches when carefully treading this line. Laurel Graham's "Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth's Scientific Management of Homemakers," Bose, Bereano, and Malloy's "Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework," and Jennifer Scanlon's *Inarticulate Longings* each discuss appliance marketing campaigns aimed at stressing the ease with which previously-difficult housework could be accomplished.⁶⁸ Acknowledging that housework will not be eliminated completely, Graham's "Domesticating Efficiency," Ellen Lupton's "Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office," and Bonnie Fox's "Selling the Mechanized Household" highlight advertisements' references to the joy of homemaking and the satisfaction that every woman *should* feel after accomplishing her housework when using their advertised products.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Graham, Laurel D. "Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth's Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930," *Signs*, 24 (1999), 645; Bose, Christine E., Bereano, Philip L., and Malloy, Mary. "Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework." *Technology and Culture*, 25 (1984): 63, 67; Scanlon, Jennifer. *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1995) 72-76.

⁶⁹Graham, 657; Lupton, Ellen. *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993): 4-9; Fox, Bonnie J. "Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*," *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990), 32.

Further treatment of home technology advertisements' elevation and exploitation of the "service to family" ideal and the reframing of housework as an expression of love can be found in Bonnie Fox's "Selling the Mechanized Household," Mark Rose's *Cities of Light and Heat*, Laurel D. Graham's "Domesticating Efficiency," and Ruth Schwartz Cowan's "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home." All of these works discuss appliance advertising's representations of women's work as a "labor of love" or an "expression of love," encouraging women to embrace their chores as a loving and heroic way to protect their families from the embarrassment or discomfort of dingy linens or an unsanitary kitchen.⁷⁰

Associations of embarrassment or discomfort lead us to another, more sinister marketing agenda that preys on the housewife who may dare to dislike her household chores despite her shiny new technology: rather than using the aforementioned *positive* reinforcement of appropriate housewifely behavior, these advertisements use guilt and fear as their motivators, promising *negative* experiences if Mrs. Consumer does *not* use their appliances in the execution of her duties. Ruth Schwartz Cowan's "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home" and Bonnie Fox's "Selling the Mechanized Household" specifically mention guilt as an advertising technique, and Roland Marchand provides several examples of threatening promises in advertisements: Listerine asks the housewife, "Are you unpopular with your own children?" Hoover threatens, "Dirty Rugs are Dangerous—How do You Clean Yours?" The anxious mother in an ad for the Association of American Soap and Glycerine Producers wonders, "What do the neighbors think of *her* children?"⁷¹

In addition to the housewifely values ascribed to Mrs. Consumer, several works help to identify more broadly applied "American" values associated with consumer behavior related to household technologies. Sandy Isenstadt's "Visions of Plenty: Refrigerators in America around 1950" identifies notions of abundance and of freedom from both tedium and excessive labor as

⁷⁰ Fox, Bonnie J. "Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*," *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990), 32. Rose, Mark H. *Cities of Light and Heat: Domesticating Gas and Electricity in Urban America*. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): 135. Graham, Laurel D. "Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth's Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930," *Signs*, 24 (1999): 646. Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century." *Technology and Culture*, 17. (1976): 16.

⁷¹ Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century," *Technology and Culture*, 17 (1976): 16; Fox, Bonnie J. "Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*," *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990): 34, 38.; Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 152.

“American” values.⁷² Cynthia Lee Henthorn explores advertisers’ inclination to label particular values, beliefs, and social structures as “American,” especially during wartime, in “The Emblematic Kitchen: Labor-Saving Technology as National Propaganda, The United States, 1939 – 1959.”⁷³ In “The Garbage Disposer, the Public Health, and the Good Life,” Suellen Hoy identifies healthiness, modernity, comfort, and efficiency as primary values driving Americans, particularly American women, as they contemplated household purchases, and Carolyn Goldstein reviews how home economists “helped” American housewives to recognize the importance of the values that Hoy identifies by encouraging a particular standard of living and directing them toward the home technologies that would help achieve that standard.⁷⁴

Home appliance advertisers who capitalized on women’s pride in their families, sense of responsibility for their well-being, and fear of inadequacy or judgment were counting on the fact that American housewives would compare themselves and their homes to others’ and would expect others to do the same. Bonnie Fox examines the recurring theme in household technology advertisements appealing to the desire “to maintain public appearances,” which assumes that consumers would share their purchases with others and expect to be evaluated on their purchasing decisions.⁷⁵ One Hoosier advertisement for its “Pantryette” built-in cabinets implies that the housewife’s intelligence would be reflected positively in her decision to purchase them.⁷⁶ Addressing the need to “keep up with the Joneses,” Kitchen Maid makes sure to assure its housewife-purchasers that their interchangeable modular kitchens would never be out of date.⁷⁷ Twentieth century advertisements for household technologies socialized the values that would become associated with the American housewife, glorified the work she did, and implied that everyone she knew felt the same way—all to ensure that the housewife continued to drive the

⁷² Isenstadt, Sandy. “Visions of Plenty: Refrigerators in America around 1950,” *Journal of Design History*, 11 (1998): 311-321.

⁷³ Henthorn, Cynthia Lee. “The Emblematic Kitchen: Labor-Saving Technology as National Propaganda, The United States, 1939 – 1959,” *Knowledge and Society*, 12 (2000): 153-185.

⁷⁴ Hoy, Suellen. “The Garbage Disposer, the Public Health, and the Good Life,” *Technology and Culture*, 26 (1985): 779; Goldstein, Carolyn M. “From Service to Sales: Home Economists in Light and Power, 1920-1940,” *Technology and Culture*, 38 (1997):132-133, 142.

⁷⁵ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*,” *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990).

⁷⁶ Beecher, Mary Anne. “Promoting the ‘Unit Idea’: Manufactured Kitchen Cabinets (1900 – 1950),” *APT Bulletin* 32, No. 2/3 (2001): 30.

⁷⁷ Beecher, Mary Anne. “Promoting the ‘Unit Idea’: Manufactured Kitchen Cabinets (1900 – 1950),” *APT Bulletin* 32, No. 2/3 (2001): 33.

purchase of the latest appliances so she could demonstrate to herself and to her peers that her family was as loved, as clean, and as safe as every other family on the block.

For the most part, the themes and messages in the household technology advertisements in *Ebony* are the same as those that Fox encountered during her course of research. As discussed in Chapter Two, family structures as depicted by the advertisements in *Ebony* are similar to the normative white family structure, and these representations extend to the family members' roles—women are responsible for their husbands' and children's care and feeding, including maintaining a safe and healthy home for them. In addition to reinforcing housewifely norms, *Ebony's* household technology advertisements also promote the American ideals discussed previously. For example, multiple advertisements highlight economical aspects of their products, and a June 1960 advertisement for a Hotpoint Space Age 18 refrigerator/freezer touts an increase in food space gained by incorporating an all-new form of insulation—implying not only that the reader enjoys the American abundance of plenty of food to put in that refrigerator, but also that she values “Space Age” modernity and technological progress.⁷⁸

As mentioned above, utilizing fear of judgment or embarrassment is a well-scrutinized advertising strategy as it pertains to Mrs. Consumer and household technologies. Like Generic Mrs. Consumer, Black Mrs. Consumer is not exempt from advertisements of that nature—she expects that her household technology purchases, whether her vacuum cleaner, her refrigerator, or her stove, will be seen, evaluated, and judged by her housewife peers. Luckily for her, *Ebony* does contain advertisements for household technologies that promise to spare her from embarrassment. What is interesting to note, though, is *who* some of the advertisements imply will be passing judgment on the black housewife. A July 1972 advertisement for a Roper oven featuring its “Right-On” oven finish reassures the housewife that, since the oven cleans itself continuously, it will always be “company-clean.”⁷⁹ In this advertisement, a black hostess spreads her skirt to try to hide her grimy non-Roper oven while her white guests are taken aback by its dirtiness. Although using fear of criticism is not unique to advertisers in *Ebony*, none of the literature about household technologies or advertisements for them reviewed during the course of this study mentions a racial component to the threatened judgment. In the early 1970s, just past the peak of the civil rights movement, the implication that a black housewife's

⁷⁸ Hotpoint. Advertisement. *Ebony*, June 1960, 127.

⁷⁹ Roper. Advertisement. *Ebony*, July 1972, 16.

housekeeping skills could be judged as sub-par by white houseguests would be a powerful motivator to purchase a product that promised to help the black housewife maintain her social standing.

Research into consumerism among black Americans, like that conducted by Robert E. Weems, Jr., reveals that most of the values in black homes varied little from those in white American homes, including consumerist impulses.⁸⁰ This similarity in values and ideals introduced some complications into black Americans' understanding of their own identity. Daryl Michael Scott discusses sociological studies and papers describing how the realization that many black Americans shared values and ideals with white Americans caused some internal conflict among black Americans. This conflict was particularly noticeable when one's black peers framed the sharing of those values and desires as despising one's ancestors for being black, or even as wanting to "be white."⁸¹ As mentioned in Chapter Three, in the 1960s and 1970s, the need and desire for black Americans to establish a uniquely black identity had moved to the forefront of social discourse in the black intellectual community. Black Americans, having achieved civil rights legislation, valued ideas of a black nationality, a self-defined racial pride.⁸² Evidence that some of these ideas about racial pride and a uniquely black experience were reflected in *Ebony's* advertisements can be found in the instances of urban slang in advertisements. For example, see the previously-described advertisement for Ecko pots and pans that encourages the housewife in her culinary endeavors, calling her "mama" and describing how she will "lay a soulful meal on [her] loving man and beautiful children."⁸³ However, while the language in the copy does appeal to a uniquely black American identity, the advertisement still reinforces the same norms as are found in advertisements in *Ladies Home Journal*—the housewife is responsible for feeding her husband and children, and the good housewife does those things out of love.

While black and white American housewives may have shared many of the same values, differences in the characteristics of their home and work lives resulted in differences in their perceived roles as housewives and consumers. Weems and Strickland, Helena Lopata, and

⁸⁰ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 7-30.

⁸¹ Scott, Daryl Michael. *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880 – 1996*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 82-83.

⁸² Strickland, Arvarh E. and Weems, Jr., Robert E., eds. *The African-American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001): 176.

⁸³ Ecko. Advertisement. *Ebony*, August 1972, 6.

Marilyn Kern-Foxworth all discuss the power of black women as consumers.⁸⁴ As an example, for the most part, black women managed the spending for their households, wielding considerable influence over which products entered their homes, and Weems cites data indicating that black women most often were responsible for directly managing their families' financial expenditures (as compared to a household where the woman makes the budget but the man still actually handles the money).⁸⁵

Similar to the discussion regarding the labor-saving fallacy in Chapter Two, black housewives' experiences regarding consumerism provide another counter to a perception shared by historians of advertising and women's studies. Much of the literature about household technology marketing and consumerism in the mid-twentieth century discusses the complication that, although the prevailing belief was that the women at whom these advertisements were aimed were responsible for at least 80 percent of household spending, observations indicated that actual purchases, particularly of household technologies, were still performed by the man of the house.⁸⁶ The literature makes the case that, because men handled the household money, advertisers often missed the opportunity to market directly to men for products that they would ultimately be responsible for purchasing.⁸⁷ However, when I apply this observation to black American families, that incongruity is not necessarily present. In black households where men were away performing migrant work and sending money back to their families, in households where the only males present were young or infirm, or in households where men were absent altogether, the woman of the house actually *would* have been the family member handling the household money and making the purchases of household technologies. As with the "labor-saving fallacy," the "fallacy" regarding housewives purchasing household technologies may exist when the argument is compared to the average white American experience, but more

⁸⁴ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 57-60; Strickland, Arvarh E. and Weems, Jr., Robert E., eds. *The African-American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001): 338-339; Lopata, Helena Z. *Occupation: Housewife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971): 142-143; Kern-Foxworth, Marilyn. *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994):154-157.

⁸⁵ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 58.

⁸⁶ Goldstein, Carolyn M. "From Service to Sales: Home Economics in Light and Power, 1920-1940," *Technology and Culture*, 38 (1997): 130. Graham, Laurel D. "Domesticating Efficiency: Lillian Gilbreth's Scientific Management of Homemakers, 1924-1930," *Signs*, 24 (1999): 644. Strasser, Susan. *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982): 243-251.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

instances of the black American experience actually *did* align with the expectations or generalizations made by household technology advertisers.

Blacks in Advertising – Marketing to Black Mrs. Consumer

Even though many black Americans shared the same ideals and values as white Americans, enough differences exist between the groups' social and cultural experiences to justify marketing directly to black Americans as a discrete consumer entity. Prior to 1940, however, advertisers did not consider the black community as a separate, distinct, and profitable market.⁸⁸ Robert Weems investigates black consumerism extensively in *Desegregating the Dollar*, describing how advertising agencies elected to create marketing strategies specifically to target black Americans after they had been identified as a legitimate source of revenue. Weems provides examples of a few black advertising agencies, but most black participation in advertising through the 1970s was as a “Negro market specialist.” Negro market specialists served as consultants to corporations interested in marketing directly to black consumers. In this arrangement, the Negro market specialist essentially provided “insider information” for the largely white corporations—describing how to sell to blacks as “others,” as opposed to the black advertising agency’s experience of selling to people who were like themselves.⁸⁹ One would expect that a Negro market specialist would help to identify differences between black and white communities and cultures and shape marketing strategies to most effectively target black consumers, but that does not appear to be the case. Rather, both the secondary literature and the evidence from my study suggest that Negro market specialists more often simply served to make the white corporations they supported feel good about marketing directly to blacks. In all likelihood, this was a pragmatic decision. As Weems describes their positions, Negro market specialists were most commonly outside consultants, not permanent employees of an advertising agency.⁹⁰ As a result, Negro market specialists’ power to influence advertising content was probably somewhat limited, so they may simply have settled for non-offensive advertisements

⁸⁸ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 7.

⁸⁹ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 32, 35, 41, 52.

⁹⁰ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 49-51.

utilizing black models in the interest of having black consumers represented in advertisements at all.

This pragmatic outlook is illustrated by *Ebony's* own publisher, John H. Johnson, who served as a marketing consultant to corporations hoping to tap into black purchasing power during the 1950s and 1960s. Johnson's approach to marketing involved appealing to what he called white corporations' "enlightened self-interest."⁹¹ That is, rather than encouraging white businesses to consider black consumers as equals (which during this time period could be a hard sell) or to embrace the civil rights movement, Johnson appealed purely to his clients' business sense:

For it was true then and it's true now that if you increase the income of Blacks and Hispanics and poor Whites, you increase the profits of corporate America...What it all boiled down to was that equal opportunity was good business.⁹²

By enabling his clients to attribute the decision to market explicitly to black consumers to sound business practices rather than any sort of espousal of the tenets of the civil rights movement, Johnson was able to both broaden his personal involvement in American marketing and bring advertising dollars into his own enterprises.

Some of the other guidance for companies hoping to attract black consumers remained at a superficial level, for example the recommendations in a 1943 article in the professional journal *Sales Management*, in which David J. Sullivan provides such tips as "Don't exaggerate Negro characters" and "Avoid incorrect English grammar, usage, and dialect."⁹³ The 1961 *Sponsor* article mentioned in Chapter One appears to consider the black psyche a little more, defining the practices of "recognition, identification, and invitation" that were widely circulated and followed as agencies began to target the black consumer market. The article says that "because of the Negro's history of suppression his need to be 'invited' to try the product appears to be a strong one indeed,"⁹⁴ so advertisers dutifully crafted advertisements that "invited" black consumers to spend money on their products. Historical literature about companies hoping to gain entry into the black consumer market in the mid-twentieth century gives little indication that market

⁹¹ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 73.

⁹² John H. Johnson and Lerone Bennett Jr. *Succeeding Against the Odds*. (New York: Warner Books, 1989): 277-280.

⁹³ Sullivan, David J. "Don't Do This—If You Want to Sell Your Products to Negroes!," *Sales Management*, 52 (March 1, 1943): 48,50.

⁹⁴ "Know-How is Key to Selling Negro Market Today," *Sponsor Negro Issue*, 15 (1961): 26-27.

researchers, Negro market specialists or otherwise, gave much consideration to potential *benefits* of an alternatively-structured black home life or to any *positive* characteristics of black culture. Instead, their attitudes and assumptions generally align with those “problems” captured in the Moynihan thesis—advertisers assumed that black consumers needed and wanted to better themselves, so they marketed to them accordingly.⁹⁵

Unlike the abundance of wife- and mother-directed language and themes contained in them, the household technology advertisements in *Ebony* do not provide many examples of advertisements containing messages of “recognition, identification, and invitation.” As mentioned above, the assumption that the housewife would be responsible for the purchase of household technologies is present in the advertisements, but the messages are not targeting black women specifically; they are same as those found in *Ladies’ Home Journal*. It appears that, to *Ebony’s* household technology advertisers, identifying their target market as “Mrs. Consumer” outweighed identifying her as “a black woman.” Although Black Mrs. Consumer and Generic Mrs. Consumer shared similar values overall, slight differences do exist between their consumer experiences, and they could have been incorporated into *Ebony’s* advertisements. However, as described above, black marketing consultants probably did not have the power to strongly advocate for accurately representing or celebrating the black American experience in advertising; they instead took the pragmatic approach of supporting white corporations’ desires to market to black consumers. As a result, there is no clear indication that the involvement of black market consultants influenced household technology advertisements in *Ebony* magazine.

One clear example of how black women’s consumer experience was not represented in household technology advertisements is the absence of any reference to consumer activism. Robert E. Weems recounts one way black consumers in the earlier part of the twentieth century had attempted to reconcile the perceived conflict of interest introduced by wanting basically the same things white consumers did: by demonstrating their valuation of the black community through “consumer activism”—patronizing black-owned businesses and purchasing black-produced goods. Black women played a critical role in these initiatives, mobilizing their communities and organizing activist pursuits. The women were the workhorses supporting much

⁹⁵ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 48-55, 70-79. Strickland, Arvarh E. and Weems, Jr., Robert E., eds. *The African-American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westpoint, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001):336-345; Kern-Foxworth, Marilyn. *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994): 115-119.

of the consumer activism Weems recounts in *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*; women's roles as both homemakers and community advocates positioned them well for furthering movements such as the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign in the 1930s, the store and bus boycotts during the civil rights era, and the "Buy Black" crusade in the early 1970s.⁹⁶ The fact that consumer activism of this nature was completely absent from the advertisements in *Ebony* is most likely a symptom of the pragmatism that John H. Johnson espoused: if Johnson wanted his publishing company to continue to take in advertising revenue, *Ebony* could hardly be expected to encourage its readers to "Buy Black" when shopping for household technologies when the manufacturers paying to advertise their own household technology products were white-owned and -run.

Consumer activism and direct female management of household spending are two characteristics of black housewives that are not explicitly attributed to white housewives in published works in this subject area. These differences would appear to provide an opportunity for more direct marketing to Black Mrs. Consumer, provided that advertising agencies were aware of the differences and could exploit them in their marketing strategies. The fact that marketing of this nature is not apparent in the household technology advertisements in *Ebony* illustrates that the perceived importance of reinforcing normative housewifely behavior and pragmatism regarding advertising revenue in the publishing industry outweighed the ability of Negro market specialists to recommend household technology marketing strategies targeting Black Mrs. Consumer as a separate consumer entity.

⁹⁶ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 56-59, 75-77.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Unexpected Findings, and Recommendations for Further Study

This project used Bonnie Fox's "Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies' Home Journal*" as a starting point for an investigation into black American housewives' relationships with household technologies, as represented by advertisements for those technologies in *Ebony* magazine. We have considered the idea of "Mrs. Consumer" and attempted to relate her values and lifestyle characteristics to the black American housewife's reality; examined ideas of segregation, integration, assimilation, and racial pride as depicted (or not) in *Ebony*'s household technology advertisements; and have investigated the sometimes non-normative family structures that were more common in black families than in white families during the mid-twentieth century.

Mrs. Consumer's Extensibility

The creation of "Mrs. Consumer" provided a well-defined target market for twentieth century household technology advertisers, describing the daily reality for this idealized consumer of domestic technologies and ascribing values to her that advertisers could exploit. During the middle years of the twentieth century, Mrs. Consumer's characteristics are not inclusive enough to include the black American housewife's experience without at least some modifications. If we were to create a Black Mrs. Consumer for 1945 – 1980, a husband would have been optional, she would have been more likely to work out of the home, and she may have had multiple extended family members living in her home. As a result, advertisements targeting Black Mrs. Consumer may have looked different than those encountered during this study. One simple example could be an advertisement depicting dinnertime—rather than a lone smiling woman in a housedress serving dinner to her husband and children, Black Mrs. Consumer may have recognized her reality more if there were two or three adult women in the kitchen, putting dinner together for their children and an older family member or two. Some of the existing advertisements would only need a slight modification to appeal more directly to Black Mrs. Consumer. For example, two 1979 Rival Crockpot advertisements already use language that implies that the person responsible for cooking dinner does not have to be in the kitchen while dinner is being prepared ("...has dinner ready for you when you come home;" "...while the

cook's away...")⁹⁷. Adding language to these advertisements that indicates that the reason the cook is away is that she is working at a job outside of the home or volunteering in her community may have aligned the depiction of life in the advertisement more closely to the reality of Mrs. Black Consumer. The omission of these kinds of details does not necessarily indicate malice or an overt attempt at oppression of black housewives on the part of the household technology advertising community. A combination of the pragmatism practiced by Negro market specialists described in Chapter Four, aspirational advertising as described in Chapter Two, and, most probably, ignorance on the part of white advertising agencies are the likeliest contributors to the normative, white-leaning content of household technology advertisements.

The Stereotype of the “Pathological” Black Family Structure

This thesis has described the assignment of the “pathological” label to the non-normative black family structure—e.g., families headed by females, households including multiple generations of family, and households including non-blood relations being treated as family. Family structures such as this are absent from the advertisements in *Ebony*. One proposed reason for this absence employs an idea of Roland Marchand's; that is, that *Ebony* deliberately chose to display only normative family structures in an attempt to idealize them and to encourage black Americans to aspire to have such a family.⁹⁸ However, this approach certainly did nothing to strike down negative stereotypes associated with the structures of many black families. In fact, failing to depict families of a kind that some of its readers would recognize may actually have *furthered* those negative stereotypes. Rather than identifying positive characteristics of non-normative families (e.g., strong community ties, orienting women toward self-sufficiency), *Ebony's* approach instead may have perpetuated the stereotype that anything other than the normative, “white” family structure was undesirable and required “fixing.”

Segregation, Integration, Assimilation, and Racial Pride

Ebony's household technology advertisements do not explicitly address segregation and/or integration, even as the magazine itself tackled those issues month after month. What is

⁹⁷ Rival. Advertisement. *Ebony*, November 1979, 124; Rival. Advertisement. December 1979, p 133.

⁹⁸ Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 165-166.

more noticeable is the alignment of the models' appearances and the advertisements' language with social attitudes regarding the integration and assimilation of blacks into white society. White models give way to light-skinned black models in advertisements using nondescript language; they are later replaced by dark-skinned black models in advertisements using black slang; and eventually, a mix of light- and dark-skinned models return with nondescript language. These transitions reflect the black social experience regarding integration, assimilation, and the establishment of a distinct black identity. While the advertisements do not explicitly take a stand on any of these concepts, they do reflect the social reality of many black consumers during the mid-twentieth century.

Unexpected Findings

The most surprising finding encountered during this course of research was what I learned about black advertising consultants. I assumed that black advertising consultants would have tried to make advertisements reflect black life more accurately to attempt to connect with the emerging black consumer market, using their knowledge of black home life or cultural nuances to inject reality into the advertisements themselves. I had underestimated the degree of discomfort that corporations would have with explicitly marketing to black consumers (as described by Robert E. Weems, Jr.), or how much effort would have to be expended to convince businesses that treating blacks as a distinct market would be a savvy business move, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹⁹ As a result, it is possible that Negro market specialists were willing to accept less-realistic advertisements targeting or featuring blacks if the alternatives were either advertisements containing racist, stereotypical representations of black Americans or the absence of marketing targeting black consumers altogether. Aspirational advertising like that described by Marchand likely played a significant role in the decisions backed by Negro market specialists—trying to convince a white advertising company to create an advertisement depicting a lifestyle described as “pathological” by a prominent social study would probably not be prudent for the market specialist concerned with increasing black advertising but also with remaining on the agency's payroll. In the end, black marketing consultants appeared to be

⁹⁹ Weems, Jr., Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998): 48-55, 70-77.

pragmatic “ad men” at heart, helping their employers sell their products, keeping their own jobs, and gradually introducing advertising agencies to the idea of the black consumer market.

Another unexpected finding relates to what I did *not* find: messages relating to oppression. Since many household technology advertisements include messages about freedom and liberation as they apply to housework, I had thought that I might find parallel messages regarding freedom from oppression in *Ebony*, especially in advertisements during the civil rights era. I could discern no such messages. As in their (non-) treatment of segregation and integration, *Ebony*'s advertisements do not appear to indicate that their readers may have suffered oppression in their daily lives. This revelation allows us to revisit one of the themes Bonnie Fox identified in her work: liberation. As discussed in Chapter Three, the “liberation” promised by household technology advertisements was really only a partial liberation, serving to ease the American housewife's household chore burden while ensuring that she remained responsible for those chores.¹⁰⁰ The apparently narrow definition applied to “liberation” as applied to its use in advertisements for household technologies narrows further when evaluated from the perspective of black American housewives. While the white American housewife was “freed” from the heavy lifting of some chores but still kept in her place as the subservient wife tending to her husband and family, the black American housewife's “freedom” was even further tempered—advertisements appeared to expect that she would continue to serve only her family *and* that she would suppress her non-normative family or professional inclinations. As indicated above, home appliance advertisements did not specifically address segregation, integration, or racial oppression—reflecting black consumers' social experiences indirectly through language and images was probably the most political that advertisers would be. This subdued approach could be an indicator of the socially conservative nature of advertisements in general—maintaining a status quo allows advertisers to market to a known quantity; encouraging social change while simultaneously trying to exploit a market's social characteristics introduces a moving target that could result in less effective advertising strategies.

Recommendations for Further Study

¹⁰⁰ Fox, Bonnie J. “Selling the Mechanized Household: 70 Years of Ads in *Ladies Home Journal*,” *Gender & Society*, 4 (1990), 39.

The evaluation of black housewives' relationships with household technologies would be enhanced with data regarding how many of the technologies were actually in their homes and how the technologies were used. In a household with only a mother and a few children, could the single mother afford to purchase household technologies? Were women who may have used household technologies in the performance of their duties as a live-out domestic servant also using them in their own homes? In the early part of the twentieth century, when electricity was still relatively new and small appliances were being newly introduced into American homes, household technology advertisers had to overcome hesitation on the part of first-time users of their technologies.¹⁰¹ Did the multi-generational family (who may include members who had once performed their chores without the use of newer domestic technologies) adopt technologies at a different rate than the normative family?

Additionally, as is often the case with studies related to housework or household appliances, available material is heavily weighted toward the female experience. While this thesis admittedly focused on "Mrs. Consumer," current scholarship on the topics does not provide much treatment of the male consumer of household appliance technologies. Investigating how and if men used household technologies would provide another interesting dimension to the conceptualization of how household technology advertisers understood their target markets and how they worked to get their products into circulation.

¹⁰¹ Rose, Mark H. *Cities of Light and Heat: Domesticating Gas and Electricity in Urban America*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): xiv.

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