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Consuming Women:

Images of Americanization in the "American Century"

> Once we cease to distract ourselves with lifeless arguments about isolationism, we shall be amazed to discover that there is already an immense American internationalism. American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products, are in fact the only things that every community in the world, from Zanzibar to Hamburg, recognizes in common. Blindly, unintentionally, accidentally and really in spite of ourselves, we are already a world power in all the trivial ways – in very human ways. (Henry R. Luce, "The American Century")

Luce's famous essay "The American Century" called on Americans to accept their special "duty and opportunity" in the post-World War II era. They should, he wrote, exert "the full impact" of their influence on the world in four ways: through promoting systems of free enterprise, propagating training in practical, technical skills, becoming the Good Samaritan to the entire world in times of hunger and need, and spreading their ideals of freedom and justice. A central premise of Luce's essay was its identification of American power with the attractions of its culture. Luce's American Century was not articulated as a vision resting on arms buildups, nuclear capacity, covert intrigue, or other forms of realpolitik. It stemmed from the long tradition that identified American influence (or Americanization) with an inevitable and presumably welcomed process of cultural and economic modernization.

Luce's essay provides an embarkation point for considering the ways in which visions of modernity and Americanization interrelated with messages about gender roles, particularly changing roles for women. Representations of "modern" women provided powerful tropes within the discourse of "Americanization" and "modernization" that many Americans projected overseas.[1] As

1. There is a substantial theoretical literature discussing the relationship between "Americanization" and "modernity." Is modernity a process that takes firmest root in America and thus becomes confused with a unique national culture? Is Americanization a process that becomes so globalized that it comes to be recognized simply as modernity? An introduction to some of the

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a consequence, controversies over "Americanization" in many countries interlaced in some measure with debates over what constituted proper gender orders and relationships. This gender dimension added considerable heat to foreign debates about American influence.[2] Presenting the projection and reception of Americanization as, in part, a process that involved messages about gender is not explicit in Luce's essay, but because women were so often symbolically identified with mass consumption, his vision of a new, consumer-driven Americanized international culture *implied* new gender orders.

Clearly, this brief essay cannot offer a comprehensive history of the significations of gender in the idea of an "American Century" throughout all of the globe. I seek not to trace out all of the possible contexts within which such investigations might be set but merely to *exemplify* the predominance of tropes about women in certain larger discourses of Americanization and modernization and to suggest their relevance to histories of international relationships.

"DE DÍA EN DÍA AUMENTA EL NÚMERO DE DAMAS QUE MANEJAN EL FORD"

Even before the "American Century" there was a strong tradition in Western, and American, culture in which representations of women's roles served as emblematic markers for the degree of "civilization" reached by society as a whole. William Cronin points out, for example, that early English colonists saw American Indian women doing agricultural labor as a sign of a degraded gender inversion. In their eyes, tilling the soil was manly work, and men who would command women to tend the fields could only be uncivilized. (Indians, of course, correspondingly looked down on Englishmen as feminized because they did the kind of field work that native cultures took to be the domain of women.)[3]

Western evolutionary science, gaining currency in the late nineteenth century, similarly helped cement an equation between the evolutionary status

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literature on these issues is John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore, 1991). While I am mindful of the various objections to either term, and the ideological implications of linking them together, I am nonetheless using the terms "modernity" and "Americanization" to signify similar discourses that describe the culture (elaborated in America) that accompanies modes of mass-production/mass-consumption/mass-mediazation, a culture in which advertising and communications and transportation revolutions have led to greater physical and psychic mobility. It is this culture, I believe, that has marked both the American Century and the more globalized process that Arjun Appadurai describes as *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996).

2. Frank Costigliola, " 'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History* 83 (March 1997): 1309–40, argues that tropes related to gender can heighten the emotional content of structured images.

3. William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), 52. Acceptance of the idea that slave women should work in the fields (denying them, in effect, status as "women") similarly confirmed and reinforced, among white Southerners, the essential inequality of people of African descent that was the foundation of race-based slavery. See Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985).

of a particular "race" of people and the status of women. In this evolutionary discourse, "civilized" societies relieved women of the burdens of work and accorded them special respect. Reflecting these views, purity crusaders in the United States linked the eradication of male oppression (whether from drunkenness, domestic violence, polygamy, patriarchal economic control, or harmful factory-labor conditions) to the advancement of civilization. Reformers dedicated to Americanizing new immigrants often fought to eradicate what they saw as old-country gender oppression in favor of heterosocial partnerships formed within the ideal of companionate marriages. Similarly, U.S. missionaries in China, India, and Africa (as well as among American Indians at home) often concentrated their efforts on women's uplift and on removing the visible signs of subordinated status: footbinding, sati, load-carrying. Spreading the gospel of Christianity and Americanism also often meant spreading the "gospel of gentility," in which women were accorded special physical protection because of their importance in reproduction. The identification between Americanization, at home or abroad, and the uplift of downtrodden women strengthened the discourses of American mission, helping to cast Americanization as a heroic enterprise. In short, the idea that the spread of American culture would improve the lives of foreign women comprised a consistent trope of American exceptionalism.[4]

The role that women's images played in representations of progress remained important to twentieth-century visions of modernization. Especially after World War I, as modernity increasingly came to mean the spread of systems of mass production and consumerism in the United States, the "new woman" became a preeminent symbol of the "new era." This "new woman," however, was hardly a stable signifier. It could be used to mean a professional woman who took on mannish characteristics by trying to enter a sphere of public activity; a "flapper" projecting a blatant sexuality; an urban working-class woman with some discretionary money and time; a wife who tried to manage the home according to new "scientific" principles. In most all representations, however, the "new woman" symbolized the expansion of consumption, greater independence, and the power to command relatively unsupervised leisure time.

The consumer revolution, with its engines in advertising, mass merchandising, and media culture, fed on images designed to sell goods to women. Women's roles and identities increasingly shifted away from an emphasis on production, with the home being a primary site for sewing, food preservation and preparation, and childrearing, to an emphasis on consumption, with the home being a base from which to stage family purchasing expeditions and a place in which to display and manage the new commodities that had been obtained. The "new woman" – who could be identified with the right to vote, greater equality before

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4. These ideas are developed in Ian R. Tyrrell, *Woman's Work/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1800–1930* (Chapel Hill, 1991) and Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the Century China* (New Haven, 1984). Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, 1997), 75–81, discusses such views in the context of what she calls "feminist Orientalism."

the law, more access to public realms, more sexual freedom and mobility – also remained circumscribed within a doctrine of separate gender spheres by the modern era's overriding emphasis on consumption as a particularly female activity.

Above all, the "modern" woman in America was constructed as the woman who consumed; who had the power, through purchasing, to change her image and, by so doing, possibly to change her life as well. A *McCall's* ad in 1937 expressed the new gender division: "Categorically . . . man is always the producer . . . woman, the consumer."[5] More athletic, more independent, more mobile, more outspoken than in the past, the slim "American woman" who sprang from the pages of mass-circulation magazines and motion pictures, especially after World War I, presented both a contrast with earlier ideals of femininity and a continuation of separate gender roles. In all its complexities, however, her new image as a consumer often served as a symbolic marker of progress and modernity.[6]

Images of modern, mobile, consuming women became standard icons within American representations of modernity. These images then traveled into foreign markets along with American products. The semiotic equation

America=modernity=consumption=modern women

is exemplified, for example, in images from early international advertising by U.S. automobile companies, Ford and General Motors. These ad campaigns during the late 1920s and early 1930s provide windows into the ways in which new roles for women often emblemized the processes of both modernization and Americanization, what Luce would later call the "immense American internationalism" that he believed had spread through the world even before World War II.

Domestically, automakers began to build their market appeal around the idea of women drivers during the 1920s. An automobile – a fairly complicated machine that stood for geographic movement – could easily have developed an image that was gendered male. Early critics of women as drivers had stressed the dangers of women being away from home and in "the streets"; the potential problems with women's presumed emotionalism and frailty behind the wheel;

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5. Quoted in Roland Marchard, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley, 1985), 162.

6. Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago, 1983), 187–225, Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York, 1998), and Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis, 1995), 6, all discuss the meanings of the "new woman." Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York, 1988) emphasizes the connection between projections of modernity and thin body images. It should be noted that throughout the foregoing discussion the emblem of the American "new woman" was clearly (at least into the late Cold War period) bound by race. Since the 1970s, with the "Madonna revolution" and the growing prominence of African-American models, a somewhat different international projection of the "American woman" may have emerged, but this essay will concentrate on the earlier periods when American nationality was almost exclusively represented abroad in terms of "whiteness."

and the simple bad taste of women driving too fast and having their hair blow in the wind. In the mid-1920s Henry Ford was reluctant to associate his car with fashion and obsolescence, which he considered frivolous and opposed to rational practicality. But as automobile makers began to struggle under surplus inventories, they astutely realized that an appeal to women would considerably broaden the potential market. By the late 1920s both General Motors and then, reluctantly, Ford embraced new marketing techniques of selling "style." (Henry Ford subsequently complained that he was now less in the automotive business than the millinery business.)

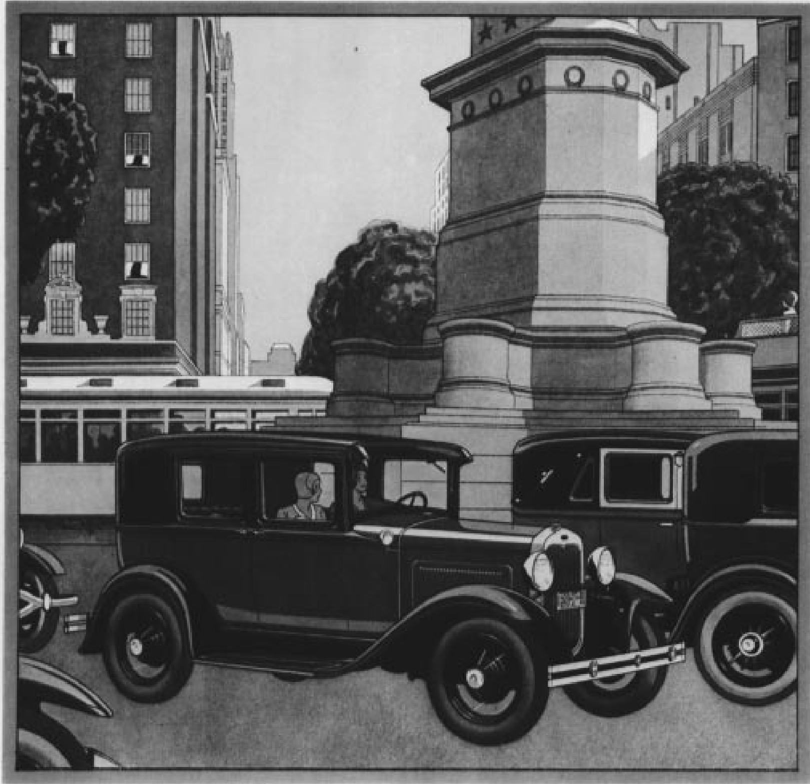
This new selling appeal overtly fostered the image of the "new woman." In a pamphlet titled *The Woman and the Ford,* for example, Ford Motor wrote that in the change toward the new woman "the automobile is playing no small part. . . . It has broadened her horizon – increased her pleasures – given new vigor to her body – made neighbors of faraway friends – and multiplied tremendously her range of activity. It is a real weapon in the changing order. More than any other – the Ford is a woman's car." At the same time, many very different kinds of women eagerly appropriated automobiles to their own lives. Demonstrations on behalf of suffrage prominently featured cross-country automobile caravans; self-proclaimed "feminists" flaunted their automobiles as a symbol of their independent lifestyles; and even less "radical" women also came to emphasize their individuality and new mobility through use of an automobile.[7]

The cultural congeniality between automobile culture and the "new woman" did not stop at the water's edge. Powerful sets of images in the international advertisements of both Ford and General Motors from this era illuminate the equation between independent women, modern lives, and the purchase of U.S. automobiles.

A series of Ford ads for Latin America, from N. W. Ayer and Son, for example, featured glamorous women driving Ford automobiles and, quite overtly, promoted the idea of women driving.[8] In nearly all of the ads, slim young women occupy both the driver's and the passenger's seats and travel unescorted through an urban setting. The headline on one, which was marked for distribution in Montevideo newspapers, reads (in translation): "The Number of Fords Driven by Women Increases Every Day." The text below it states that the day when autos were complicated and women were content to let men drive had passed. "Modern women throughout the world" now wish to drive their own autos and "the women of this country are no exception." Taken together, the Ford advertising campaign provided a primer for how a "modern" woman might use an automobile: shopping, visiting, impressing her relatives. Most also suggested an independent, single lifestyle, showing the automobile and its passengers

7. Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York, 1991), 53–54 (quote), 85–87, 115; Marchard, *Advertising the American Dream*, 158, 161.

8. N. W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.



Un Coche de Fácil Manejo para las Damas

EL NUEVO FORD merece especial estimación de la mujer que maneja tanto por la facilidad de su manejo, como por la seguridad en su funcionamiento. Particularmente en las secciones de intenso tráfico es donde mejor se aprecia por su rápida aceleración, admirable agilidad, eficaces frenos en las cuatro ruedas, facilidad en el cambio de velocidades y sencillez en las maniobras para estacionarse.

Otro factor que contribuye al aumento de su confianza y seguridad al manejar el nuevo FORD es el parabrisa de cristal inastillable TRIPLEX. Esta innovación disminuye el riesgo de resultar herido, como frecuentemente sucede en los choques de automóviles. La FORD MOTOR COMPANY ofrece esta mejora para contribuir así a la seguridad del automovilista en todos los caminos.

FORD MOTOR COMPANY, S. A.

MEXICO, D. F.

Fig. 1: This Ford ad, part of a broader campaign to appeal to women drivers, suggests that Ford has made a car that appeals especially to women because of its ease of handling. Both the Ford and GM ad campaigns featured women as potential consumers and as emblems of modern lifestyles. N. W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, National Museum of American History. Used with permission of Ford Motor Archives.

going or coming from leisure activities – tennis, the beach – with male heads turning in appreciation. In an ad designated "Mexico Branch, Newspapers," one of the women was touching up her lipstick as she sat in the driver's seat, parked in front of a beach hotel. Another headline read "El Camarada de los Deportistas Jóvenes" ("the companion of sporty young women") and mentioned the car's "spirit of youth," its grace and agility. These ads consistently stressed qualities that would also presumably appeal to women. "BELLEZA que cautiva a la mujer," stated one headline. Security, easy handling, beautiful lines, varied colors, and quality with economy were mentioned repeatedly as being especially important to women. In these ads, "new women" were clearly positioned as consumers with discretion over how to use their leisure time in order to enhance their own pleasure.

The images from General Motors's international advertising, devised by J. Walter Thompson, had a similar tone to Ayer's ads for Ford. Although they did not directly mention women in their headlines (as nearly all the Ford ads did), most GM ads similarly featured slim, sporty, "modern" women in the cars, many driving. In one ad, as two smartly dressed women drive along, the driver speaks the ad's headline: "We changed to Chevrolet because we wanted a thoroughly modern car." Unlike auto ads in the domestic market, none of the ads showed children or depicted the women engaged in family responsibilities. GM's Oakland was especially marketed as a woman's car, both at home and abroad. "Good taste with a sparkle – that's Personality. Any successful woman knows just how greatly it counts. . . . That's why the new Oakland V-8 interests smart women." The text of this particular ad, placed in Australia, goes on to explain that a man will examine the engine, the car's weight, the upkeep costs, "but a woman prefers to *feel* all this." Although ads for Egypt contained no women (or placed them only in the back seat), women were prominently featured in every other GM market – in Western and Eastern Europe, South America, South Africa, Greece, and Australia.[9]

Although the intervention of these ads into established gender norms sometimes appears (to me) to be jarring, J. Walter Thompson's research on international markets stressed the importance of appealing to women. Ads were placed internationally in women's magazines as well as in general newspapers, as J. Walter Thompson's market surveys showed that women had substantial, and growing, influence on purchasing decisions.[10]

The impact of these ads on automotive sales, however, is not my point here. (The mounting depression of the early 1930s would surely complicate any

9. J. Walter Thompson Archives, microfilm, reel 41, International Advertisements, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

10. A discussion of the market research is in Jeffrey L. Merron, "American Culture Goes Abroad: J. Walter Thompson and the General Motors Export Account, 1927–1933" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1991), 142–51.

It adds an extra grace to life . . .

feel the sparkling "Pound Power"

of this new OAKLAND V8

GOOD taste with a sparkle—that's Personality. Any successful woman knows just how greatly it counts. Sparkle and taste in the cut of her sports suit, in the way she carries herself, in the car she drives. . . . That's why the new Oakland V-8 interests smart women.

For the new Oakland V-8 is like no other car you've ever seen. It's alive and looks alive. It's the "pound power" car, sparkling with [illegible] any car of its class ever built (racing cars alone excepted).

A new Eight-cylinder car of utterly modern beauty—with pointed silhouette and smart economy of line—built for those who set the smart and dashing standards of to-day.

One Horsepower for each 37 Pounds Weight

A man will examine the new Oakland's V-type 8-cylinder engine. He knows it was created by General Motors world-famous engineers, men with sixteen years' experience of 8-cylinder design. He is in- [illegible] every 37 pounds of car weight, over 70 measured miles an hour. . . . He knows the low engine speed and low piston travel of the new Oakland V-8 give it longer life and lower upkeep costs than other cars. But a woman prefers to *feel* all this. Telephone your local dealer. Fix a time. Take the wheel yourself. Feel the ardent power of the new Oakland V-8.

Attractively Priced

You will appreciate the smooth and exquisite balance of the car; the sureness of its internal expanding four-wheel brake action. In tangled traffic, you will praise its quick obedience to a finger touch. Enjoy the road-hugging security of its long wheelbase. No strain, only the easy flexibility of a needle through [illegible] the advantages of this newest 8-cylinder car; particularly when you can enjoy them at a price no greater than many Sixes, and with no extra running cost.

Sold under General Motors One-Year Standard Warranty, the new Oakland V-8 may be purchased out of income on the liberal G.M.A.C. plan. Oakland service available everywhere. Buy from your local dealer.

GENERAL MOTORS (AUSTRALIA) PTY. LTD.

Brisbane - Sydney - Melbourne - Adelaide - Perth

"More Wealth for Australia—More Jobs for Australians"

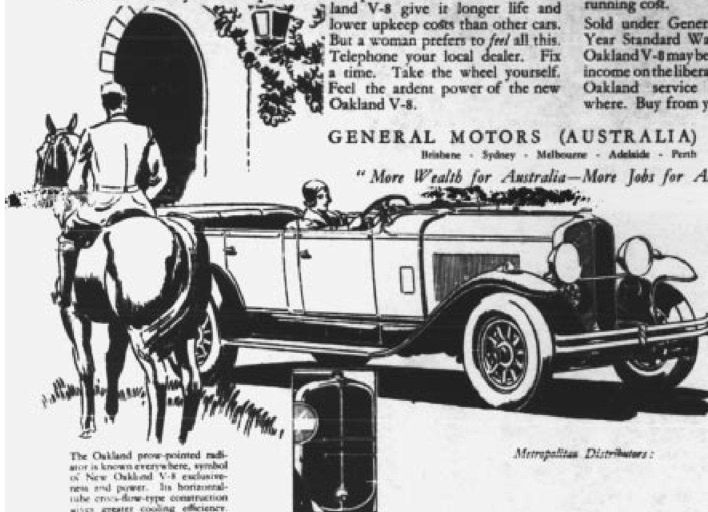


Fig. 2: This ad for the GM Oakland emphasized the car's "personality" and "sparkle," qualities thought to appeal especially to "smart women." J. Walter Thompson Archives, Duke University. Copyright 1978 General Motors Corp. Used with permission of GM Media Archives.

assessment of impact on sales, in any event.) It is, rather, to stress the iconography (taken into international markets) that equated modernity with American lifestyles, emphasizing leisure and consumption, and to illustrate the way in which "modern" women were constructed to exemplify this American style. J. Walter Thompson's other advertising campaigns, for Kodak cameras, Johnson and Johnson's Modess, and Johnson outboard motors, also featured "modern"

women – mobile, slim, independent, and enjoying leisure.[11] These ads help reveal how the products of American mass culture – the movies, popular slang, machines, and patented products that Luce would come to celebrate as "common" to communities throughout the world in "trivial" but "human" ways – contained messages about gender roles that were hardly "trivial" at all. Whether it was called "modernization" or "Americanization," the products of American mass production/consumption and their cultural images clearly projected gender norms for women that could be potentially controversial.

KHRUSHCHEV: "LET'S DRINK TO THE LADIES!" NIXON: "WE CAN ALL DRINK TO THE LADIES!"

If automobile advertisements may illustrate gendered images associated with Americanization in the interwar period, household consumer goods – especially the accoutrements of modern kitchens – provide a similarly suggestive icon for the Cold War period. Images from propaganda and advertising campaigns during World War II and the Cold War promoted America, above all, as a land of abundance and consumption, both of which were generally equated with freedom. Again, representations of American women continued to be a central icon in this equation.

America=modernity=consumption=freedom=modern women

Focusing on the famous "kitchen debate," it is possible, once again, to telescope the patterns of Cold War cultural themes, highlighting a gender analysis. In this celebrated conversation between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the American National Exhibition at Sokoliniki Park in Moscow in 1959, the two superpower leaders formulated their respective countries' claims to progress and goodness in representations about women's lives. They engaged in an our-women-are-better-off-than-your-women-no-they-aren't-yes-they-are kind of masculine display.

During this debate Nixon often used "freedom" and consumer choice as nearly synonymous. And the home, the special domain of women, became the exemplar of standards of living, of the abundance and leisure that the United States stressed in all of its informational campaigns during the period. Under Eisenhower, the United States Information Agency had refined its propaganda themes to focus on America's widespread prosperity – what it called "People's Capitalism." Though the term "people's capitalism" was subsequently dropped, the emphasis on consumer plenty remained.[12] During Nixon's radio-TV address to the Soviet people, he proclaimed that the United States had nearly achieved "freedom and abundance for all in a classless society."[13]

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11. J. Walter Thompson Archives, microfilm, reel 41, International Advertisements.

12. Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York, 1997), 133–41.

13. Richard Nixon, "Russia as I Saw It," *National Geographic Magazine* 116 (December 1959): 717.

Even before the encounter in Moscow, kitchen appliances, ready-to-wear women's clothing, and cosmetics had become powerful American icons of freedom. Newly designed, so-called Freedom Kitchens were prominent in the advertisements of women's magazines at home. And in postwar Europe, these sleek American kitchens held special fascination for would-be foreign consumers. Historian Reinhold Wagnleitner, whose work contains suggestive examples of the coming of the American Century as the consumer century, emphasizes the special attractions of the American kitchen to war-weary and impoverished audiences in Austria.[14]

A year before the kitchen debate, at the 1958 Brussels International Exhibition, the Soviets had featured Sputnik, the Bolshoi Ballet, and heavy machinery, while the United States had showed off such things as a pink built-in oven, a dishwasher, and frozen food packages grouped in "islands" throughout the pavilion. Under the influence of Katherine Howard, a prominent Republican who was appointed second deputy commissioner, the exhibition had become a showcase for the diverse accomplishments of ordinary women in America – and for the household appliances and practical clothing styles that provided them with greater freedom. According to Howard, modern kitchens were one of the most important weapons in the "psychological battle to win the uncommitted nations to the free way of life. . . . It is one of the wonders of the world that Americans in every economic strata have kitchens with labor-saving devices which free the American woman from drudgery, which make the kitchen the heart of the home." The Sears, Roebuck catalog was especially popular at Brussels. And at the center of the circular American pavilion *Vogue* staged a daily women's fashion show emphasizing "the Young American look" – an array of clothing for various social roles, from jeans and plaid shirts, to tennis attire, to the functional and inexpensive "sack dresses," to evening gowns. Orchestrated by Lee Canfield (the sister of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy), the *Vogue* show underscored the "freedom" of ordinary, modern, American women to slip easily among a variety of social roles simply by changing clothes. Directed at a non-elite audience, this exhibit was the fourth international show that *Vogue* had arranged for the U.S. government's Cold War campaigns on behalf of people's capitalism. According to Robert Rydell, the entire American pavilion projected "a dream world premised on the freedom to consume and spend time in the pursuit of leisure."[15]

For the Moscow exhibition of 1959, U.S. planners again drew on themes that highlighted consumerism as an exemplification of freedom and emphasized

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14. Reinhold Wagnleitner, "The Irony of American Culture Abroad: Austria and the Cold War," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago, 1989), 285–301.

15. Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 43–49; Robert Rydell, *Worlds of Fairs: The Century of Progress Exhibitions* (Chicago, 1993), 193–211 (203, quote). Robert H. Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture abroad in the 1950s* (Washington, 1997), 104–68 (159, quote) discusses the roles of Katherine Howard and Lee Canfield.

consumer products directed toward women. *Three* model kitchens displayed an array of appliances, home gadgets, and convenience foods. Fashion shows again featured stylish clothing produced for a mass market. Leisure attire – for the beach, for golfing, and for other kinds of play – particularly surprised Russian visitors, who, according to Helena Rubenstein, considered such leisure activities for women unrealistic.[16] And U.S. planners, working with Coty cosmetics, readied $150,000 worth of free samples of make-up to be given away, a plan that Soviet officials forbade. Soviet women lined up so eagerly to get a free beauty shop demonstration by Helena Rubinstein that Soviet authorities banned this treatment as well.[17]

At the Moscow exhibition, the Cold War became refracted through images of the slender, youthful, colorful Pat Nixon versus the heavier, darkly clad wives of Soviet officials. U.S. magazines celebrated American labor-saving devices while showing disdain for the Soviet system in which women might do manual labor and other "men's" jobs.[18] The contrasts in women's images fed the gendered discourse of American exceptionalism about removing women from drudgery and became explicit the day that Nixon and Khrushchev had their celebrated "debate." The two superpower leaders stood in the kitchen of the model six-room ranch-style home.

Nixon (pointing to a washing machine): "In America these are designed to make things easier on our women."

Khrushchev: "A capitalist attitude."

Nixon: "I think this attitude toward women is universal."

Khrushchev: "These are merely gadgets."[19]

Expressing Cold War rivalries in terms of the status and roles of women, Nixon had shifted the emphasis from political contests to the dynamics of the private home. More precisely said, he embedded the political contests within a tableaux of private life. As Karal Ann Marling suggests, "The model kitchen was also a model of appropriate gender roles" (a producing male; a wife who organized consumption at home). And it "provided a working demonstration of a culture that defined freedom as the capacity to change and to choose."[20] To Nixon, "our" modern, consuming women fulfilled a "universal" male aspiration to elevate women above the burden of hard work. America's roles for women continued to mark its civilization and progress.[21]

Early U.S. automobile ads and Cold War consumer pavilions, though providing only two sets of images, exemplified a common structure of metaphors

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16. Picture captions in Richard Nixon, "Russia as I Saw It," 718, 721.

17. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain,* 185–213.

18. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York, 1988), 18–19. See also Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1991), 73–75.

19. "Encounter," *Newsweek* (3 August, 1959): 16–17 (and section heading quote).

20. Marling, *As Seen on TV,* 281, 283.

21. On the display of the ideology of universalism in the Cold War international exhibit "Family of Man," see Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and 1950s America* (Albuquerque, 1995).

that often accompanied the flow of American culture and products abroad. They aligned "modernity" with images of "modern women"; they made consuming women into icons of freedom and progress. But what Nixon had regarded as the universality of this American projection was by no means uncontested. In Moscow, Khrushchev tried to debunk America's path to modernity by suggesting that Russians were too serious about economic development to care about trivial "gadgets." Such counterpoints to American discourses about modernity and progress – and the role of the consuming "new woman" – had long been standard fare in all kinds of commentaries about America.

"WHAT BETTER SYMBOL OF [THE FUTURE] COULD THERE BE THAN THIS MADLY RUSHING MACHINE, TURNED LOOSE AT FULL SPEED BETWEEN TWO PASTEBOARD LANDSCAPES, STEERED BY A CHARMING WOMAN"

After both World War I and World War II, debates over the consequences of "Americanization" became prominent among citizens in many countries. These debates often raised issues of political or strategic balance. They often involved issues of economic organization and financial muscle. As the examples of the interwar automobile ads and the Cold War exhibitions may suggest, however, they also derived much emotive power because they could be framed as cultural and even gender issues. Luce, like Nixon, may have believed that the world's peoples shared a kind of fundamental cultural universalism. But reception of the American Century was considerably more complicated.

Metaphors about America and the meanings of Americanization that have circulated outside the United States are, of course, complex and culture-specific. I would like here to focus only on Europe in both postwar periods, drawing on several excellent studies that help elaborate some of the complexities in this particular region.

Before discussing the diversity of European responses to the image of America's "new woman," one thing should be clarified. I am not referring here to European responses to the actual conditions and situations of American women, any more than the automobile ads or the Moscow exhibition represented actual American women. The lives of American women widely varied along lines of race, class, region, age, and temperament. Rather, as before, I am addressing persistently oversimplified tropes of "the American woman" that circulated widely as parts of larger metaphors about "America" and about the presumably desirable or undesirable consequences of "Americanization."

Europe's America had long been less a geographical place than a metaphor of otherness. European visions of America characterized the describer by counterpoint; America became the definition of what was, in Richard Pells's words, "not like us."[22] This complex metaphor of America could have both positive and negative elements. Opponents of the culture of capitalist mass

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22. Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York, 1997).

production highlighted "Americanization" as a principal threat to alternative visions of national tradition or destiny. Others sought to learn from American techniques in order to transform their own economic and political systems or were simply attracted to American mass culture. In these debates, the American woman became, in some measure, emblematic of the supposed consequences of Americanization.

A number of historians have explored the metaphorical repertoire of European anti-Americanism. They generally agree that a diverse group of European intellectuals produced what J. P. Mathy has called a pervasive "intertext" about America – a collection of textual references, influencing each other and sharing similar features. This European intertext has had a distinct structure of meanings, a discursive formation that constructed America as restless, anti-intellectual, conformist, hedonist, technological, materialistic, consumerist, and beset by bad taste. Americans lacked a sense of history and led standardized, stupified, and shallow lives.[23]

All of these attributes tended to be expressed as the product of feminization or, at least, of emasculization. Male pursuit of profits in America, in this discourse, left social direction and even culture in the hands of women, often assumed to be by nature less intellectually adept, more emotional, and more easily taken in by advertising. The resulting feminized society could not perpetuate any particularized *Kulture;* nor could it advance any worthwhile vision of *civilization.* American mass society itself was cast as feminine and contrasted with a Europe that was refined, aesthetic, spiritual, rooted, civilized, and appropriately masculine.[24] (It is interesting how both Americanizers and their critics structured metaphors to assign femininity to other cultures and masculinity to their own.)[25]

This intertext about America emerged from influential European commentators who were positioned broadly across the political spectrum. During both postwar eras, the critique blurred lines between America/modernity/capitalism, and both left and right advanced a vision of America-as-social-devolution to combat the liberal capitalist culture that was transforming Western Europe. Both Marxists and right-wing nationalists used anti-American constructions to reinforce their own claims to cultural – and also political – authority. But even Social Democrats, labor, and those business groups who tended to admire

23. This common description of America is discussed, for different countries, in many works, including Jean-Philippe Mathy, *Extrême Occident: French Intellectuals and America* (Chicago, 1993); Pells, *Not Like Us*; Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York, 1994), 108–27; Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana, 1996), 1–42; Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, 1993); and Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, 1994). The following paragraphs rely heavily on these works.

24. Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman, Modernism's Other," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture,* ed.Tanya Modleski (Bloomington, 1986), 188–207.

25. Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York, 1992).

America's productive capacities and its techniques of industrial organization feared the social and cultural consequences of a mass-production, "Americanized" economy. The creation of "America" as a metonym for whatever was advertiser-driven and "inauthentic" advantageously positioned the critic as the embodiment of cultural authenticity.

European images of "America" thus involved less the geographical place called America than domestic cultural fears and political contests. The notion of America, as Rob Kroes has written, was a "symbolic invention made in Europe… a metaphor made to serve in the context of essentially intra-European debates." Richard Pells points out that the cultural battle over "Americanization" in Europe was not primarily one *between* the United States and Europe but one that inscribed generational, class, political, and cultural divisions within Europe itself. Mary Nolan argues that in post-World War I Germany, the debate about domestic "economic reform was conducted in the idioms of Americanism and Fordism." Reinhold Wagnleitner also discusses attitudes toward Americanization as marking a domestic cultural divide in Austria. And Richard Kuisel shows how alignments in French politics likewise often coalesced around claims about and fears of Americanization.[26]

American women often emerged, in these contests, as symbolic carriers of the consumerist, mass society that European commentators saw as quintessentially American. Foreign observers throughout the nineteenth century (and even before) had persistently commented on what they saw as an outspokenness, even brashness, among American women. The international spread of American mass production and mass culture in the post-World War I era, with the implicit or explicit tropes about consuming "new women," further highlighted such commentary and, for many observers, brought the consequences closer to home.

To many European intellectuals, from conservatives to Marxists, America's new woman became the exemplar of all the evils of mass society. The French commentator Georges Duhamel in his influential and controversial book *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future* (1931), for example, recounts a sight-seeing trip in which he "risked my life in the automobile of Mrs. Graziella Lytton":

> My eyes, tired of the hoardings with their advertisements, turned to the interior of the car and I suddenly saw in it a symbol of the world of the future. What better symbol of it could there be than this madly rushing machine, turned loose at full speed between two pasteboard landscapes, steered by a charming woman with manicured nails and beautiful legs, who smoked a cigarette while traveling between fifty and sixty miles an hour, while her husband, seated on the cushions of the rear seat, with a set jaw scribbled figures on the back of an envelope.[27]

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26. Kroes, *If You've Seen One You've Seen the Mall,* xiii; Nolan, *Visions of Modernity, 5.*

27. Georges Duhamel, *America, the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future,* trans. Charles Miner Thompson (London, 1931), 70–71.

The intertext of such critiques, which symbolized mass-modernity as a woman, clustered into two common tropes.

First, the American woman was a superficial, hollow product of mass-produced images. Many European commentators portrayed Americans in general as becoming undifferentiated and standardized by mass consumption, but often their critique pointed especially toward women. One American reporter in 1929, for example, wrote that the fear of Americanization in France had become a "national obsession" and that a major complaint was that "the modern woman tends even more [than Americans generally] toward uniformity: everywhere her hair and line of clothes are the same."[28] Shaped by advertising culture and driven by consumerism, according to this trope, she *posed* human relationships and independence but actually lacked both. Where the American idealization of the "new woman" exalted her freedom and independence, critical Europeans often suggested that such a pose was simply a false-front for a shallow enslavement to material things and appearances – an unfree and insecure condition that the women were too superficial even to understand. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, visited the United States and quickly developed a disgust not only for America but especially for its "new woman." In her controversial travel account, *America Day by Day* (1948), de Beauvoir recounted how she was initially impressed with the appearance of health and independence among women at Vassar College but subsequently realized that they seldom dressed for themselves but for the gaze of men. Beset by feelings of inferiority and by a Puritanical inability to express physical love, she concluded, American women wished to attract men in order to dominate them, and relations between men and women "consist in endless small vexations, disputes, and conquests."[29]

Second, American women were often cast as domineering, even frigid and castrating. European critics had long portrayed democracy as a feminized political order. The leveling of hierarchy, in this representation, had reduced the role of the father, and the penchant for the challenging of authority left the father with so little power in the family that the wife had become predominant. But modern mass consumption brought even darker visions of an American matriarchy. This view constructed a truly monstrous woman whose insatiable consumerism made her a parasite living on the production of males. Destructive of men, of families, ultimately of the very culture that was supposed to be her special domain, modern American women were "consuming," in every sense of the word. De Beauvoir, for example compared the American woman – in control of her husband's check book and dominating her children, especially her sons – to the "praying mantis that devours the male species."[30] De Beauvoir's characterizations, which echoed those of many male critics of the "new woman"

28. *Outlook and Independent* 153 (6 November 1929): 383.
29. Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day,* trans. Patrick Dudley (London, 1952), 254.
30. De Beauvoir, *America Day by Day,* 251; Mathy, *Extrême Occident,* 74–76.

both abroad and at home, portrayed America's "new woman" as both insecure and dominating.

Controversies over the social consequences of modernity, consumption, and "new women," of course, also circulated within U.S. culture throughout the twentieth century. People of various persuasions, from left and right, fiercely critiqued consumerism and warned about how "new women" threatened family, masculinity, and society in general.[31] Similar critiques in international settings, however, intertwined with debates over the consequences of the spread of American influence, sharpening contests over "national culture" and ultimately helping to shape rhetorical structures related to foreign affairs.

If certain groups of Europeans tended to denounce Americanization (mass production, consumption), the same was not necessarily true of all. In an intertext of more positive images that also circulated in Europe, Americans were portrayed as open, flexible, strong, self-made, productive, and prosperous (except during the Great Depression). American mass culture, particularly mass-mediated culture, could have enormous popular appeal.

The film scholar Jackie Stacey, in *Star Gazing,* has provided a detailed study of the popular attraction of the image of the American "new woman" that was projected overseas in American films of the 1940s and 1950s. After studying responses from female British moviegoers to the American stars who populated the Hollywood screens during the World War II and postwar eras, she concludes that the viewers had an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the film stars. Feminist film critics, Stacey argues, have tended to portray many women's film roles in terms of satisfying a "male gaze" and thus as reinforcing traditional roles of female subordination. She argues, however, that this interpretation pays too much attention to the critic's own reading of the plot narrative and too little to the reactions of viewers themselves. Survey data from viewers, she concludes, suggests that the impact of the movies came mainly from the aura of "celebrity" projected by the stars of the age. In this sense, the stars exemplified less whatever lessons might have been embedded in the plot narrative and more a series of attributes that the audiences admired and wished they could emulate. Stacey reports that these attributes included independence, leisure, consumer choice, and attractiveness to men. All of these were especially alluring to British women during the hardship of the war.[32]

The attractions mentioned by the women surveyed corresponded generally to the larger intertext about America as a land of abundance and opportunity. Just as the negative meanings of Americanization were projected onto women, so Stacey shows that the positive ones were likewise projected onto female images. J. Walter Thompson built on the celebrity image of America's female

31. The Cold War classic that popularized an influential critique of "momism" was Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York, 1942).

32. Jackie Stacey, *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London, 1994).

Fig. 3: The J. Walter Thompson agency, by invoking the celebrity image of America's strong and independent stars – such as Joan Crawford – to build the appeal of products, spread images of Americanized modernity. J. Walter Thompson Archives, Duke University. Used with permission of Unilever Corp.

stars to build the appeal of Lux soap in Great Britain. Joan Crawford, the epitome of the glamorous, strong, and independent woman, for example, was

a feature of Lux's advertising campaign in Great Britain during the same period covered by Stacey's study.[33]

Stacey's research confirms what some cultural elites charged and feared: that images from American mass culture held tremendous popular appeal. Most women who admired the household consumer "gadgets" and the beauty parlors at the Cold War exhibitions, like Stacey's "star-gazers," probably saw not standardized, shallow, and devouring "new women," but affluent, healthy, independent ones who, as consumers, could make choices in their own lives.

The ways in which images of women figured in debates over Americanization in Europe fall into even sharper relief in those regions where cultural differences are even more pronounced. In discourses of Islamic fundamentalists such as the Taliban, for example, appropriate roles for women provide the *principal* staging ground for debates over mass culture, political democracy, and even the content of "modernity" itself. Various Islamic traditionalists, less extreme than the Taliban, also denounce the American modernity that, in their view, exploits women's bodies by the commercially driven emphasis on public display and suggestions of explicit sexuality. And Islamic advocates of women's equality have had to struggle to stake out an alternative view of a modern "new woman" that incorporates greater independence but avoids a consumerist emphasis on bodily exposure.[34] The trope that represents Americanization as a consuming-woman-out-of-control can, in many languages and cultures, be invoked as a defense of hierarchy, of patriarchy, of anticapitalist forms of economic organization, of traditional religions.

CONCLUSION

Implicit images of consumerism and mass production pervaded Luce's vision of the American Century as a global path toward modernity. In modern America, there was a strong identification between consumption (the ability to choose products, new images, new locations, new identifiers) and freedom itself. Although women have often tended to be side players in the traditional political realms of diplomacy and realpolitik, images about women's roles have played a central role in the semiotics of Americanization. In this essay, I have not been examining the status of women in the "American Century" but have, rather, sought to explore how images of women have helped to construct the idea of and the responses to an "American Century."

The examples developed here have highlighted the ways in which gender imagery – particularly the iconography of "modern" women – has formed a part of the export of American mass culture and has interlaced with debates over Americanization and modernity. In U.S. culture, images of uplift and modernization were often encoded into representations of American women.

33. J. Walter Thompson Archives, International Advertisements, folder: England, Unilever-Lux.

34. See, for example, Deniz Kandiyoti, "Gendering the Modern: On Missing Dimensions in the Study of Turkish Modernity," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey,* ed. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle, 1997), 126–27.

Women became markers of civilization in such a way that "free" women, empowered by consumer choice and discretionary leisure time, signified advancement. Overseas, debates over modernization and Americanization and over alignments for or against the United States also often invoked images about gender. Anti-American critics, both from the traditionalist right and the anti-market left, often portrayed consuming women as signifiers for social disruption. Others, however, seem to have been often attracted to the representations of women-cum-modernity that came from American cultural products. American movie icons and international exhibitions featuring kitchens, fashions, and cosmetics clearly had popular appeal.

These cultural contests about Americanization underlay politics and diplomacy and provide critical background for even the most traditional of historical questions. Richard Kuisel's *Seducing the French,* for example, shows how the emotional debates over "Americanization" within French culture during the 1950s were intertwined with discussions surrounding a more independent French foreign policy. Walter Hixson's *Parting the Curtain* examines the relationship between the purveyance of American mass culture and the process that slowly undermined the authority of the Soviet state and helped bring an end to the Cold War. In these pathbreaking books, and many of the others cited in this essay, the interrelationships between culture and diplomacy are demonstrated. Pro- and anti-Americanism both consisted of a dense intertext of cultural symbols (including gender images) that could be easily invoked in a wide range of political, economic, international, and personal debates. Discourses about personal gender roles (such as views of appropriate roles for women) and discourses about public policy (such as debates over Americanization) often have dense symbolic interconnectedness.

International relationships in the so-called American Century have thus been accompanied by cultural wars prompted by Americanization: a modern style marked by mass production and mass consumption. With women positioned as the special embodiment of consumer lifestyles, debates over capitalism and modernization – and ultimately over Americanization – often were staged within the highly personal and emotionally charged terrain of appropriate gender roles.