

Gender, Culture and the Economy in the Post-War United States

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BRIEF OVERVIEW

This teaching module explores the intersection of gender and consumer culture during the postwar period in the United States. Through an analysis of Ford Motor Co. print advertisements students will explore the shifting economic, cultural and social landscape in the United States in the decade immediately following the conclusion of the Second World War.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Primary Source Literacy:

- **Identify** and communicate information found in a primary source.
- **Critically evaluate** the perspective of the creators of a primary source.
- **Situate** a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created.

Students Will:

- **Recall** the changes of the post-war period, including changes in gender roles, the rise of the suburbs, and the rise of consumerism.
- **Compare** the portrayal of men and women in Ford Motor Co. advertisements as well as any changes in those portrayals, over the period 1945–1955.
- **Analyze** the United States's postwar economy, culture and society.
- **Evaluate** gender roles in the immediate post-war period, as they were tied to and influenced by economic, social and cultural forces.

Source Digital Collection

The J. Walter Thompson Co. advertising agency became the agency of record for Ford Motor Co. during World War II. This digital collection represents all of the print advertising prepared by the agency for Ford cars, trucks, vans, and beyond. In most cases, the advertisement is the final proof—the advertisement as it appeared in print—with insertion details.

- [J. Walter Thompson Co. Ford Motor Co. Advertisements](#)

The Rubenstein Library also offers several introductory videos to our digital collections on our Instruction web page. They include useful information on refining search results, navigating digitized items, proper citations, and copyright.



Ford Motor Company, 1946, JWT. Ford Motor Co. Advertisements Digital Collection

SESSION OUTLINE

Activity:

Students will break out into assigned groups, each of which will be assigned one advertisement to discuss in-depth, following the questions below. Student will then present their findings to the group. While each group will focus on one advertisement, groups should browse other advertisements to provide greater context to help them assess change over time.

Group Discussion Questions:

- What do these advertisements reveal about the Post-War United States? Consider context such as consumer culture, the rise of the suburbs, and the baby boom for example.
- How were Ford automobiles marketed to men? To women? How did this change over time (or did it)?
- What does the way women are represented in in these advertisements reveal about gender roles in the immediate post-war period?

Assessment & Evaluation:

Students will be graded upon completion of the assignment. They will not turn anything in, but will be responsible for leading discussion on their assigned advertisement. While there will not be a specific follow-up assignment on these materials, other in-class and out of class assignments could build on the skills they learned during this lesson. Students will gain skills in visual literacy and text-based primary sources which they will use to produce a research project at the end of the semester.

This module was developed as part of a Business History Conference Workshop, 2020.

QUESTIONS?

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