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### (Re)Imagining the 1950s: The Crux of Board Games, Wonder Woman, and the American Ideal<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

On March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman unveiled his plan to protect the world—and most importantly the United States—from the threat of Communism. With the institution of the House Un-American Affairs Committee, and the infamous blacklist in Hollywood, the country united under the surmise of an intangible threat. This propaganda campaign, to fight communism and protect the national security of the United States, sought to reach every aspect of American life, and the events following the announcement of Truman's containment policy instituted one of the longest and most brutal propaganda campaigns of its kind. The propaganda of the immediate post-war period developed in a systematic manner via a plethora of genres, and agencies by proxy. These depictions ranged from posters crying out for the protection of US children, movies with the "Commie menace" as the protagonist, government sponsored witch-hunts, and the idealization of women as housewives. During these years, society

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This chapter is a partial of chapter three "Redesigning the 1950s American Woman" in my forthcoming monograph, *Undoing Glory: Constructions of US Gendered Patriotic Iconography in the Twentieth Century* to be published by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

viewed women's removal from the home as essential to national security and the protection of American ideals. Yet, with the so-called outbreak of peace and pressures for containment, women—as portrayed via products and elements of popular culture—needed to be re-educated on their behavior. Milton Bradley's popular Battleship game provides a subtle window into this turbulent, and much discussed, soul of the 1950s. The printed and prescribed modes for activities within the home were not the only propaganda waves of the 1950s. Wonder Woman, the valiant and sexy hero birthed during the Second World War, not only fought the commie menace but she (and her alter ego Diana Prince) reinforced the modes of domestic behavior for women and children via exploits to bring harmony and peace and find her own love and man to come home to. The myth of the American family and women was perpetuated via the fantasy orchestrated in comics, advertisements, and sensationalized trials like the Rosenberg's. This dream state of harmony and abundance via suburban homes, cars, and even canned food masked the reality of a growing military superstate and a deeply divided America. Accordingly, this paper examines the dreams and fantasies of the 1950s via the manipulation of the female's image.

### **Keywords**

Wonder Woman, comics, board games, American ideals, feminism, Cold War

### **Özet**

12 Mart 1947'de, Başkan Harry Truman dünyayı ve daha da önemlisi ABD'yi komünizmden korumaya yönelik planını açıkladı. Amerikan Karşıtı Faaliyetleri İzleme Komitesi'nin kuruluşu ve meşhur Hollywood kara listelerinin ortaya çıkışı ile somut olarak görülemeyen, varsayımsal bir tehdit karşısında tüm ülke bir araya geldi. Komünizm ile savaşmak ve ABD'nin ulusal güvenliğini korumak için düzenlenen bu propaganda kampanyası, Amerikan hayatının her noktasına nüfuz etmeyi hedefliyordu ve Truman'ın çevreleme politikasını açıklamasının ardından bilinen en uzun ve en sert propaganda kampanyası ortaya çıktı. Savaşın hemen ardından ortaya çıkan bu propaganda, çok farklı yöntemlerle sistematik bir biçimde genişledi. Amerikan çocuklarının korunması için çağrıda bulunan posterlerden, ana karakterlerinin "komünizm tehdidi" olduğu filmlere, devlet destekli cadı avlarına ve kadınların ev kadını olarak yüceleştirilmesine kadar çeşitli

yöntemler kullanıldı. Bu yıllar boyunca toplum, kadınların evden uzaklaştırılmasını ulusal güvenlik ve Amerikan değerlerinin korunması için gerekli görmekteydi. Barışın patlak vermesi diye adlandırılan süreç ve çevreleme politikasının baskısıyla, kadınlar ticari ürünler ve popüler kültür unsurları üzerinden yapılan çeşitli yöntemler aracılığıyla nasıl davranacakları konusunda yeniden bir biçimlendirmeye tabi tutuldular. Milton Bradley'in popüler Battleship (Amiral Battı) masa oyunu bu karmaşık ve çok tartışılan 1950'ler atmosferine yönelik ilginç bir bakış açısı sağlamaktadır. Evde sergilenmesi gereken davranış biçimlerini gösteren ve dayatan bu gibi unsurlar, 1950'ler propaganda dalgasının tek türü değildir. 2. Dünya Savaşı sırasında ortaya çıkan cesur ve seksi kahraman Wonder Woman (Harika Kadın) sadece komünist tehdit ile savaşmakla kalmaz, kendisi (ve altbenliği Diana Prince), uyum ve huzur sağlama amacıyla kullanılan çeşitli etkinlikler ile kadın ve çocukların aile içinde beklenen davranış biçimlerini de topluma dayatır ve kendisinin de döneceği bir yuva olması özlemiyle bir aşk ve sevgili arayışı da sergiler. Amerikan ailesi ve kadını miti, çizgi romanlar, reklamlar ve sansasyonel bir biçimde sunulan Rosenberglerin davası gibi olaylarla pekiştirilmiştir. Banliyö evleri, arabalar ve hatta konserve gıdalar üzerinden sunulan bu hayali umut ve bolluk durumu, gittikçe militer bir hal alan bir süper devleti ve derinden bölünmüş ülke gerçeğini gizlemiştir. Bu çerçevede, bu makale kadın imgesinin biçimlendirilmesi açısından 1950'lerin düşleri ve fantezilerini incelemektedir.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Wonder Woman, çizgi roman, masa oyunları, Amerikan idealleri, feminizm, Soğuk Savaş

On March 12, 1947, President Harry S. Truman unveiled his plan to protect the world—and most importantly the United States—from the threat of Communism. The Truman administration proposed sending 400 billion dollars in aid to Greece and Turkey, so that it could ward off the Red threat. Shortly after his congressional address, the American press and media dubbed his seemingly progressive plan as the Truman Doctrine or more readily the “Containment Policy.” For the next twenty years, the American public found itself embedded in an intense government sponsored campaign to denounce communism. US officials promoted red-baiting, witch-hunting, and the chastisement

of individuals believed to nurture communist ties, sympathies, or provocations. With the institution of the House Un-American Affairs Committee, and the infamous blacklist in Hollywood, the country united under the surmise of an intangible threat. This propaganda campaign, to fight communism and protect the national security of the United States, aimed to permeate every aspect of American life, and the events following the announcement of Truman's containment policy instituted one of the longest and most brutal propaganda campaigns of its kind (Barson and Heller 8, 55-57).

The propaganda of the immediate post-war period developed in a systematic manner via a plethora of genres, and agencies by proxy. These depictions ranged from posters crying out for the protection of US children, movies with the "Commie menace" as the protagonist, government sponsored witch-hunts, and the idealization of women as housewives. Across the world, women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers during the First and Second World Wars; they managed households, raised children, and freely interacted with every aspect of the public sphere. During these years, the American public viewed women's removal from the home as essential to national security and the protection of American ideals. Yet, with the so-called outbreak of peace and pressures for containment, women—as portrayed via products and elements of popular culture—needed to be re-educated on their behavior. Rosie the Riveter fell to the wayside, as the "eight hour orphans" of the war years were no longer justified. Instead, Betty homemaker arose as the evolved patriotic ideal of wife and mother masterfully doting on the happy family. As expected, the happy and dutiful mother was pictured in ample advertisements of the era. She wore heels and pearls, aprons and ruffled dresses, and perfectly manicured nails and a beautifully coiffed hairdo. This idealized mother—the patriarch of the all-American family—seeped into advertising, television, movies, and even past times, especially family centered activities. Yet, an interesting aspect of how this idealized happy family and home permeated and seeped its way through social discourse is seen with board games. Milton Bradley's popular Battleship game provides a subtle window into this turbulent, and much discussed, soul of the 1950s.

The image of a man and a boy (presumably father and son) posing over the board game and a wife and daughter doing dishes at the family sink in the background leaps off the cardboard box. This

imagery, proposed by board games and scores of other cultural goods, saturated the age. Cookbooks, as Jessamyn Neuhaus discusses, educated on everything from gender roles, to how to throw a girl and boy party, to sex roles in the boudoir (1-9). Of course, printed and prescribed modes for activities within the home were not the only propaganda waves of the 1950s. Wonder Woman, the valiant and sexy hero birthed during the Second World War, not only fought the commie menace but she (and her alter ego Diana Prince) reinforced modes of domestic behavior for women and children via exploits to bring harmony and peace while questing after the love of Steve Trevor. The 1942 birth of Wonder Woman—from the all-female Paradise Island—gave her to America to “protect the last arsenal of democracy” and her patriotic outfit—of red, white, and blue—emblazoned her during the war years. Moreover, alongside this empowered image, Wonder Woman served a key cultural stereotype. Diana—her mortal self—worked as a secretary by day, in dowdy and bland attire, and by callings of urgency and threats to the nation she transformed into an action hero (Babic, “Wonder Woman” 95-97).<sup>2</sup> Yet, throughout it all, she maintained the domestic ideal of attaining love and a family. Diana Prince longed after the handsome, Army officer—a now veteran and hero of World War II—making her an atypical heterosexual female in search of a stable, secure, and red-blooded American husband. Accordingly, the dreams and fantasies of the 1950s via the manipulation of the female’s image drives this essay. The fantasies orchestrated in comics, advertisements, and sensationalized trials like the Rosenberg’s perpetuated the myth of the American family. This dream state of harmony and abundance via suburban homes, cars, and even canned food masked the reality of a growing military superstate and a deeply divided America.

The 1950s also birthed the famed and fantasized suburban ideal of white picket fences, two cars, and—of course—along came the family vacation via the “Great American Road Trip,” with international travel securing you an even higher social totem notch. This era saw the birth of Cold War culture at home and abroad. Leisure and travel stood as booming ideals, and the latter presently serves as an international boom industry. The thrust and pull of travel and leisure was fueled by the prosperity and so-called relief of victory during the Cold War. Of course, having the money to travel meant that one was not only part

2 For more detailed accounts of Wonder Woman’s history see: Kathy Wilmore, “Wonder Woman: The Story Behind the Most Popular Female Superhero of All Time” and Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*.

of but an asset to a healthy, budding economy. In Cold War rhetoric, this notion clearly meant a democratic, Allied power. Travel showcased power and class as the act of travel allows an escape from status, and the interaction with it provides a near immediate perception of wealth and prestige. Most telling, though, is that as cars and airfare became cheaper, travel became another commodity and a must have purchase for the American home (Babic, “Wandering Eyes” 74-76; Bloom 5).

*Travel* magazine and *Reader’s Digest* both published elaborate “how to be an American abroad” pieces in 1949 because, as they put it, Hitler and Stalin instilled a lingering disdain for Yankees across Europe. Mass tourism became an extension of traditional foreign policy concerns (Endy 2). Similarly, houses with yards and fridges became a tangible norm leisure, and access to and use of them also secured the user—nay family— security in the perceived middle class with access to the American Dream (3). Leisure travel, especially for the middle class (and those masquerading and aspiring to be so) stood as a representation of not just education and cultural ease, but it also embodied savings, work and a disposability of income epitomizing a consumer culture just two decades shy of birthing fast fashion. Yet, travel and tourism also provided economic revenue in an era of rising globalization that could virtually be made at little cost to the destination. The fluidity and access to goods, travel, and modes of conduct symbolize the 1950s and its desire to construct the ideal American identity. Yet, even as these goods and services brought cultural moxie, they threatened to contaminate US culture with foreign input. Thus, education via culture became the norm. Of course, this education also rested on asserting the superiority of Americans, their goods, and their lifestyles. Access to culture, and the ability to expend endless leisure hours within it, enabled and fueled the fantasy of a healthy and united post-war front.

Following World War II, men faced strong expectations to “pay the bill,” and those who could not fulfill their manly duties often encountered accusations of homosexuality and nonconformity (Griswold 189). The triumph of the Allied powers and the United States created a belief that manhood had been won in the war, with the expectation that red-blooded males must pass on these senses of duty, responsibility, and national honor to their sons. They—being the collective force of the communal land—had created a powerful and wealthy nation with the aid of “the greatest destructive force ever imagined,” and to prevent a decline in US power and superiority, men

had to embrace their manhood and masculinity (Faludi 5; Eisler 41-2). To maintain this position of grandeur, men had to contain women because of the fear that equality would destroy this newly formed concept of strength, security, and self-assurance seeped into these fragile boundaries. The family became a code word for constraint, and the family developed into a constraining factor for individuals (Cowan 197). As Elaine Tyler May notes in her study *Homeward Bound*, a parallel existed between the “containment” policy of post-war US foreign policy and the ideology of the 1950s family. The family—now a nuclear center—functioned to contain sexuality; therefore, the domestic sphere armored US society against communist subversion and morally askew choices. May discounts the standard argument that the subversion of women derived from prosperity and the wake of war; rather, she asserts that the containment policy justified the repression of women. Additionally, consumerism glorified the home and “happy marriage,” and government subsidies (through VA loans, highway expansion, and higher education) promoted the notion that the “American Dream” existed within the confines of the ideal family (May 3-36).<sup>3</sup>

Institutions manipulated images to force obedience and silence from the public. Michel Foucault states that speaking the truth admits fears and faults. This action recognizes the power of community, a power that prevents truth because it implants fear into individuals so that they will not deviate from customary expectations (Foucault 53-4). These silences enabled socially constructed agencies to hold power, and as Betty Friedan remarked in her best seller—*The Feminine Mystique*—these structures facilitated the “feminine mystique,” which encouraged women to ignore the question of their identity (Foucault 26-7; Friedan 71; Butler 96).

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3 See Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* for her detailed survey of the evolution of American women’s housework. Particularly, she notes that post-war women worked more in the home than before as the employment of servants greatly decreased in favor of so-called time-saving and money saving goods like dishwashers and microwaves. Also, Susan Strasser’s provocative account *Never Done: A History of American Housework* focuses on how removing production from the home created an avenue to become a purchasing mecca, with the thrive, desire, and competition for goods serving as litmus markers for middle class status, displayable wealth, and even the love of a spouse as these household items showed devotion of home and devotion of keeping the spouse in the proper social status and sphere.

## 1. Consumables

As Betty Friedan remarked in her infamous 1963 bestseller, women “were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy woman who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents” (15-16). Scholarship and social commentary, since Friedan’s work, has also commented on the perceived mindsets and beliefs of women. Examinations of popular culture (primarily via printed mediums of women’s magazines, newsprint, and advertisements) show that modifying terms like pretty, motherly, shapely, happily married, petite, charming, and soft voiced continually described the ideal woman (Meyerowitz 1460). These images also began to change because technology alleviated a woman’s work within the home.

Dishwashers and washing machines reduced physical labor, and a woman could easily work outside the home and still maintain her middle-class domestic ideal. This outside the home work also elevated the standard of living, thus creating a grand dynamic within middle class life itself. The secondary incomes then allowed for the procurement of more home products, vacations, ready-made clothing, cars, and so forth. Of course, tiered levels of goods—for middle class riches—allowed further complexities to the litmus value of goods. The rise of consumer goods, new homes, and an increased standard of living began to mandate a two-income household. The expansion of suburbia, attempts to solve the housing shortage, and promises for a more egalitarian and democratic society ignited community expansion. Oddly, purchasers were viewed as more connected to the larger community than political participants, and images of hearth and home perpetuated from World War II propaganda continued the mindset that good consumers and patriots saved during the war years to buy later (Cohen 14, 19, 75). Purchasing power represented a Consumer’s Republic because economic abundance became symbiotic with political reform as the 1950s were a boom time for these procurements (127). Of course, purchasing these goods did more than just affirm the victorious nation. These consumer acts allowed the purchase of free time to be—literally—bought as washing machines reduced hours of wringing, scrubbing, and hanging laundry. Microwaves allowed meals to be prepared in minutes and not hours, and packaged foods took the guesswork out of crafting a “good” meal. Yet, with each time saving device elements of social life eroded. Running water and washing machines removed women from water wells, streams, and clotheslines, where chats over buckets, fences,



and rails connected them on a gendered social sphere. On the other side, the microwave and packaged rice dish allowed her to sit with her family longer—and more frequently—in the evenings. Thus, those board games buoyed in the post-war era as this was the generation that made the home television a must have and not an exception to the rule, and it *was* the first to have color television. These children of the 1950s are also that last moment before video games captivated youth, transforming interactions with each other, violence, and family life dynamics (Brookhaven National Laboratory).

Within the republic of strip malls and cheap goods, board games captivated a still uncorrupted mind. The Golden Age of board games really occurred at the turn-of-the-century, between the 1880s and 1920s, with the height around the 1880s. Middle class families had an increased access to leisure time, as transportation and life became somewhat easier with technology. Of course, electricity in the home cannot be understated as a source of added leisure as it literally lengthened the day with added light. These board games, starting around 25 cents, featured bold colors, were affordable, and came contained in a box. However, certain games like Checkers date back to the ancient Greece and therefore not all games were new manifestations. These pastimes reflected an ideal to bring together groups of people and teach family values. For instance, Jim Crow Ten Pins—from 1900—featured young players knocking over pins resembling minstrel figures (black faced, black men figurines). Thus, board games came with a side of educating racism (Hofer 13-17). These games also fell to the wayside as their cultural reference and niche became moot with more modern references. For instance, the now forgotten game “20 to 2”—popular during the 1940s—had one player with twenty ships and the other with two submarines. The goal was to sink the other player. Subsequently, “Battleship” (1967) really usurped the market for this type of game as it still volleys on the American market. Moreover, in the 1950s, *Annie Oakley TV* proved a popular show and the board game entertained viewers with board moves to capture thieves and bandits (or escape capture) in the “wooly west.” When the show was cancelled, the board game quickly fell out of fashion as it became another casualty of cultural pertinence and relativity (“Board Games that Bored Players” 2015).<sup>4</sup> The birth of cable, watching movies at home, and the invasive

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<sup>4</sup> Also, see David Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games* for a catalogue of the surprisingly dense collection of them.

video game killed the board game's gusto. Yet, they were still popular as a secondary entertainment ... as a way to enhance and supplement TV time so to speak. However, later generations saw them fade into the limelight with so much bravado that bored 20-somethings, fashioning themselves as hipsters, now play them as "ironic" past times.

## **2. Civil Defense to Protect the Home, Family, and Housewife**

Popular memory generally categorizes the post-war years as "an age of anxiety." Michael Sherry attributes these apprehensions to the effects of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's welfare state programs, which after World War II united the country under pretenses of collective and community actions (Sherry 57). These programs called for individuals to work together and always be on the alert. If something or someone out of the ordinary appeared, community groups were supposed to investigate. The atomic bombings of Japan shocked the world with their destructive force, and the United States faced the brunt of this terror-stricken new world order. With rising tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, many individuals anxiously feared the outbreak of nuclear war, and accordingly federal, state, local, and public agencies instituted civil defense drills. These "safety" drills became "cultural pageants" because they united citizens in a common cause—survival (Sherry 57-60). This "cultural pageantry" enforced political agendas through domestic containment. This overriding political agenda, instigated by the Truman Doctrine, lasted for several decades. On the home front, the Second Red Scare became an everyday reality of McCarthyism, as Hollywood, advertisers, and various other agencies attempted to construct the image that All-American women conformed to the duties of domesticity.

Vicissitudes of Civil Defense first—or perhaps appeared to—outlaw war via political action, geographic boundaries, and linguistics global institutions redefined with legal means enabled this universal approach to neutralize war threats. Civil Defense then became about lines of demarcation (Végsö 75). These lines serve as exclusionary markers—albeit clandestine ones—promoting senses of mystery and urgency demanding compliance. The post-war era saw the rise of genres like spy novels, as they fueled the need to fight and hunt for the Commie Menace. Thus, just as the federal government created Rosie the Riveter for the war, in the post-war era it had to develop propaganda and disseminate it.

In 1951, President Harry Truman established the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), which replaced the already disbanded World War II Office of Civil Defense (OCD). The OCD and FCDA aimed to quickly disseminate information to the public, but in the 1950s, the federal government changed its propaganda protocols. Federal offices no longer allocated funding to promote community defense programs. Instead, the FCDA merely produced propaganda and educational material (Brown 69-70; McEnaney 10-17; Kennedy, Executive Order 10952; Truman, Executive Order 10222).<sup>5</sup> This new defense program, of civil defense, required volunteer efforts and work within the home.

As the FCDA promoted literature about building bomb shelters in backyards and basements, the agenda of the post-war civil defense campaign took on a clear and pointed note. This campaign reflected the consumer culture of the 1950s, the rise of suburbia, and the glorification of the female homemaker. The program aimed to instruct and encourage the average homeowner to build his own fallout shelter, which protected the miniature replicas of the nation's cities. In theory, a bomb would hit a city—for greater potential for damage—and the protection of the suburbs equaled protecting the ideals of the United States. The biological nuclear family would be kept intact because they would be the ones holed up in their bomb shelters, and by instructing homeowners to build their own shelters, they could exercise personal power with the construction of homesteads within their homesteads (Zarlengo 932, 939).

Citizen involvement would establish a cultural belief in uniformity and stability, with women as the leaders for the construction and upholding the volunteerism of civil defense. Suburbia became citadels for defense, and the controlled home environment represented national stability. Atomic age women dominated the household structure, and civil defense leaders came to believe that the household was as much a political, gendered, and military sphere as it was an arsenal of familial defense. As shown throughout this discussion, government publications,

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<sup>5</sup> Truman's Executive Order derived from the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950, which enabled the president to consolidate offices and divisions of the federal government into central agencies. Here, Truman united organizations holding (and creating) information for civil defense under the auspice of the Federal Civil Defense Administrator. In 1961 President John F. Kennedy expanded the role and responsibility of the FCDA and Administrator by establishing offices of support for issues concerning nuclear attack.

advertisements, and popular culture continually showed the home as a single family unit in the post-war era. More so, symbolism of “home sweet home” invoked sentiments of gentility and normalcy (Zarleno 940, 950-1; Cohen 73).

The federal government and the nuclear power industry had to instill a sense of “understanding” to the public that embraced the prowess of newer technological triumphs, while also embracing the sense that capitalism and freedom combined via consumption to facilitate the American way. Throughout these drives, and near urgent calls, to unite under the national front of atomic protection, a sisterhood, *per se*, emerged. This community, as Lin Nelson remarks, emerged at the “Atomic Sisterhood” that provided the message of liberal feminism appeals to the mother, especially as—by the 1960s and 1970s—revolt on consumerism and back to basic society contingencies became more vocal. The industry, as with the federal government, focused on the female as purveyor of the family good. Her station, within this social hierarchy, allowed her to provide love for her family via well prepared meals and consciously stocked pantries. In this case, those pantries concerned ample canned products and goods that would feed and fuel them in potential times of national crisis. Alongside this rhetoric, forces of technological determinism and a healthy dose of the economy (of course dependent on energy expansion and consumption) would secure hi-tech and fast economic jobs.

The bomb, and its effects, remained elusive to the public’s mind because the FCDA feared providing the American public with too much information. The FCDA feared that the public would become hysterical if it knew the full ferocity of the bomb, and the FCDA instituted a woman’s program by 1953. The use of female volunteers sought to end the “welfare” problem of civil defense, and the FCDA’s creation of a female identity for civil defense heightened the sense of family unity. Also, the female initiative of the program linked with popular culture articles of the period. One of these pieces derived from a Val Peterson’s 1953 essay in *Collier’s*. His essay, “Panic: The Ultimate Weapon?” remarked that women were more prone to panic than men, and it claimed that only fifty-five percent of women could overcome their panic (McEnaney 89; Peterson 99-109). The belief that women still remained fragile continually manifested itself, and these beliefs for familial harmony and gender coding continued to shape national ideologies. The 1959 “Kitchen Debates” between Richard Nixon

and Nikita Khrushchev showed national (and international) beliefs about post-war society. These debates portrayed economic freedom, capitalism, and increased technology as creating a more harmonious world. More importantly, they enabled viewers to compare the United States to Communist Russia and see differences in lifestyles. The debates provided another reason for the need for nuclear power and weapons, and the fear of communism and destruction heightened the perceived need for dutiful women within homes much like civil defense reinforced the social urgency that women *had* to be near the home in order to prepare it for possible fallout.

### 3. Wonder Woman and Post-War Ideals

Just as advertisements and governmental propaganda campaigns targeted their messages to post-war ideals, the *Wonder Woman* comic book series changed its storylines and messages to promote the domestic ideal. By 1948, comic books, in general, had taken a nosedive in sales because superheroes were associated with World War II and crime and western genres skyrocketed in sales. In 1949, the writers of *Wonder Woman* began to give the series a more romantic tone, and the question of Wonder Woman marrying Steve Trevor appeared more in the books. The original purpose of her dual identity, as Diana Prince and Wonder Woman, was so she could be close to Steve Trevor, but it gradually evolves into a justification for her fighting against evil. In March 1953, the writers had Wonder Woman explain her dual identity as “Revealing my secret dual identity would hinder me in my battle against crime and injustice—because it would rob me of the element of surprise when I change from one identity to another” (Daniels 93; “Seven Days to Doom” n.p.). Beginning in the 1950s, her “man’s world” jobs changed. With her incorporation as a full-length book, she took on the identity of Diana Prince, a nurse. Within a few episodes, she is a secretary for Steve Trevor, and in 1958, she becomes a lieutenant for military intelligence (Fleisher 219; “Top Secret,” n.p.). Her evolution and manipulation into society are reflective of her creator’s feminist ambitions for her and they reflect the mindset of wonder women in society all along. The metaphorical Wonder Woman fought for suffrage and entered new and challenging positions when the nation needed them during wartime. (Lepore, “Rereading Wonder Woman”). These subtle changes also reflect the personality and origin changes of Wonder Woman in the 1950s and subsequent decades.

The wholesome image of Wonder Woman continued to do service to her adopted country, but unlike the World War II years, she was not routinely fighting monstrous foes. Instead, she was often saving swimmers from bolts of lightning, cars from falling over cliffs, and rescuing Steve Trevor. Her battles had slowed down so much so that on Paradise Island's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Wonder Woman fretted "our hundredth anniversary—and nothing exciting has happened to me!" Then, in her first escapade of the story, she saves a space shuttle from going awry, but the cloud of exhaust fumes obscures her from the video cameras built into her bracelets. Paradise Island sent her a message saying they needed another adventure for their archive and anniversary celebration. Comic book moments passed, Wonder Woman worried about not having an adventure for her sisters and of revealing her dual identity, and then she saves a skin diver and battles an octopus. Yet, again, Paradise Island's cameras could not see through the octopus' black ink. Therefore, Wonder Woman had to find another adventure. This time, just in the nick of time, a tidal wave approaches Paradise Island. With her magic lasso, Wonder Woman sends the tidal wave back to sea and saves the island ("Wonder Woman's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!" n.p.; Babic, "Wonder Woman" 98-99).

The fret and fear that Wonder Woman would not have an exciting adventure for Paradise Island's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary reflects the image of the 1950s. The era of complacency and restraint aimed to give the image of being calm and peaceful, but bomb shelters and civil defense campaigns continually let individuals know that the post-war world was one of different political makings. As advertisements and articles instructed women to stay at home to maintain their families and ensure family unity, comic books and heroines like Wonder Woman and other comic superheroes came under fire. In 1954, Dr. Frederic Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent*, which stemmed from a series of articles he first published in *Ladies Home Journal*. He argued that comic books corrupted young readers, remarked that *Wonder Woman* contained lesbian innuendos and called the Holliday Girls "gay party girls." Wertham's book is noted to have given fuel to the critics calling for a ban on comic books.

On April 21, 1954, the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency began its hearings to examine the comic book industry. This event was not the first time comics had come under political fire. In 1948, the industry devised its first "Comics Books Code,"

which prohibited sexy comics, scenes of torture, vulgar or obscene language, discussion of divorce, and ridiculing religion (Association of Comics Magazine Publishers Code; Daniels 103; Nyberg, "Comic Book Censorship" 42-50 and *Seal of Approval* x, 104-106; Wertham, "Comic Books" 24-29, "What Parent's Don't Know" 50-53, 214-20 and "Readers Write" 4-6; Wright 154-55;).<sup>6</sup> The Senate hearings on comic books were overshadowed by the sensationalized Army-McCarthy Hearings, which began on April 22, 1954, but Wertham and other civic groups continued to argue for legislation against comic books. The comic book industry feared that it would be shut down under such heavy criticism from a noted psychologist, and it established its Comic Code Authority in 1954 to govern such matters. *Ladies Home Journal* and other magazines began to publish "respectable" comic type books of their own (Nyberg, "Comic Book Censorship" 42-50; Wright 156-157). These so-called respectable books are much like "respectable" girls. They look pretty, wear skirts, abide by social boundaries and expectations, make a mean pot roast, always look prim and proper and do not cause a ruckus. Accordingly, these comics served the purpose of the ladies' magazines in similar ways that advertisements hoisted the value of goods and wartime posters conveyed national urgency. They performed as another layer of propaganda, promoting the national whole, the ideal, and the pressure to conform.

The US Senate adjourned its hearings on June 4, 1954, and it said it would release its findings in early 1955. There was no official stance after the hearings, but an increased desire to curtail comic books and horror literature prevailed. Reacting to increased pressure from civic groups, wholesalers, and retailers, the comic book industry announced a new code in September 1954. It devised the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA), and New York City magistrate Charles F. Murphy was appointed to head the new organization. The CMAA differed from the ACMP because it associated with smaller comic publishers, and it attempted to bring in all elements of the comic industry. On October 26, 1954, the CMAA released its new code for publishers, and the new guidelines were more restrictive. The revised code prohibited racial slurs, kidnapping, excessive violence, and the use of the words horror or terror in the title. In February 1955, the Senate subcommittee released its findings. While it did not wholly

<sup>6</sup> Some of the groups to advocate regulation of comic books were the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the American Legion, and the Catholic National Organization for Decent Literature.

embrace Wertham's findings, it did declare a need to regulate and curb the production of literature promoting crime. The committee defended its report by asserting that the juvenile mind and "America's image overseas" needed to be protected (Code of the Comics Book Association of America, Inc.; Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency*; Wright 172-174).

Comics were then as much about anti-communism fears as they were about the proliferation of pro big business politics. Hence, the US Senate investigations produced in-depth testimony about distribution credits and the functioning of the business model itself. The timing of these hearings—during the same three-month window of the Army-McCarthy hearings—and the aim to "improve upon the product's level of taste and moral turpitude" (Kidman 24) as a selling point for national and domestic harmony speaks volumes to this moment of critique and hysteria. Small publishers stood with the greatest losses as fights for newsstand space and approval made competition fierce and—at times—nonexistent. The push to keep established names—i.e. brands—dominant is also highly reflective of anti-Communist fears post-war. Independent—non-vented—publishers posed the threat of promoting ideals deviant to the American mainstream. Thus, comics became safe venues of capitalism and consumption once the threat of the unknown was removed (23-33). Amid this volatile atmosphere, Wonder Woman's creators faced serious concerns. Her exploits, assertiveness, non-reliance on a man, and overall demeanor frightened a public already rife with internal suspicion (Pollitt 50-53; "The Man Behind Wonder Woman" 2014). Thus, in many ways the post-war Wonder Woman side-stepped, becoming axed by the censors by being coy and, even, fresh about marriage, men, and her own identity.

Partly battling critics, and somewhat reflecting ideals of the era, Wonder Woman's creators gave the idea of her marrying Steve Trevor even more of the storyline after 1955. The increased presence of this narrative helped silence critics who said Wonder Woman gave young girls an unfavorable image of womanhood. Trevor called Wonder Woman "Angel," and in numerous episodes, he expressed his desire to marry her. In a 1958 story, he exclaimed his exasperation at her avoidance of his marriage proposals, while holding an outstretched hand toward the fading tail of her robot plane. As Wonder Woman took off, Steve exclaimed, "Someday I'll marry that Angel! If I can only get her to stop in one spot long enough—without her having to answer



some SOS or another!” (“The Forest Giants” n.p.). The exasperation of Trevor is shown in continuous stories when he asks, begs, and tries to trick Wonder Woman into marrying him. In 1954, Wonder Woman comes very close to marrying Trevor. The story began with him saying that if Wonder Woman was not needed for three days to battle justice, then they would get married. Wonder Woman lay idle for three days, promised to marry Trevor, but at the last moment, she was needed to fight off a foe (“Wonder Woman’s Wedding Day” n.p.).

In “Top Secret,” Steve Trevor actually attempts to trick her into marrying him. He tells her that if he can find her three times in one day then she will have to marry him, and he gives her an engagement ring. She tells him he must keep the ring until he has won, but unbeknownst to Wonder Woman, Trevor has lined the ring with a glow-like substance. He easily finds her on the beach and in a costume contest before she realizes what he had done. Instead of getting enraged at him, she decides to find a better way to conceal her identity from him. This she does by competing for a lieutenant position in the military. She wins the competition and becomes his new assistant, as Lt. Diana Prince (“Top Secret” n.p.).

While the text of “Top Secret” contradicts the earlier version of Wonder Woman’s dual identity, her desire to avoid marriage with Trevor prevails.<sup>7</sup> The storylines show fantasies of Wonder Woman being overtaken by Trevor, as if the implication is that she wants Trevor to love her only if she can be freed of the responsibility for falling for a man. Her frequent excuse, aside from needing to fight for good, is that the law of Aphrodite said she could no longer be an Amazon if she married. Therefore, Trevor had to fall in love with Diana Prince so that Wonder Woman could marry (Fleisher 224; Daniels 101). This concept made the subject of her identity a strong subject matter because similar to superheroes like Superman, who hid his identity from his love interest, Lois Lane, Wonder Woman kept her identity from Steve Trevor secret (Daniels 100). Her dual identity compares to women of the 1950s. Women who left the workforce for the home, women who longed for a return to work, and women who worked for the benefit of their families all showed elements of Wonder Woman. They longed for something that went against the status quo, and sometimes, like Wonder Woman did every day, they kept their aspirations or work hidden from those closest to them.

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<sup>7</sup> See “The Return of Diana Prince,” *Wonder Woman* 9 (DC Comics, September 1942): n.p.

Thus, through civil defense literature of defending the home from nuclear attack, purchasing goods for the family, and supporting a bread-winning husband, women, in general, continued the tradition of domestic ideology. Wonder Woman, even though fictional, also represented this mindset because she could not/would not marry if she could not work. Hence, she continued to fight for the forces of good and democracy so that she would not have to give up her job. Women post World War II represented the new face of the patriotic female: The face of the ordinary woman, who served her family, and lead a seemingly happy and healthy home life. The 1950s brought us the so-called Golden Age of modern society with an idealized memory of the era, which as we know was not the reality. Board games, a Wonder Woman looking for a home and family, and bomb shelters all conjoined to promote a sense on home front domestic tranquility and harmony.

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