ABSTRACT

CREATING AN ENGAGING TRADITION: N.W. AYER & SON AND DE BEERS’ ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS IN THE UNITED STATES FROM 1939 TO 1952

by Jennifer L. Pequignot

In 1947 “a diamond is forever” became the official slogan of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited and is to date one of the most recognizable slogans in the history of American advertising. This thesis utilizes De Beers advertisements and N.W. Ayer & Son agency records from the Great Depression through the early postwar years to explain how diamond engagement rings became the traditional symbol of love and commitment in American culture. “Creating an Engaging Tradition” also seeks to explain how the success of these campaigns was due to N.W. Ayer & Son’s ability to adapt its De Beers advertisements to changes in the American economy, courtship, and marriage. Consequently, these advertisements reinforced the changing gender roles of the period by portraying a domestic ideal of women as dependent consumers and men as providers.
CREATING AN ENGAGING TRADITION: N.W. AYER & SON AND DE BEERS’ ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS IN THE UNITED STATES FROM 1939 TO 1952

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Introduction

Somewhere in the United States right now a man is walking into a jewelry store to buy a diamond engagement ring for his girlfriend. His fingers nervously tap the glass display counter as the jeweler brings out a tray of rings for him to choose from. After what seems like hours he picks a ring that he is sure his intended is going to love when he proposes. He then proceeds to write a check for an amount that could have easy been confused with a down payment on a new car and leaves. Sometime later he presents her with the ring and says the four words that will change their lives forever, “will you marry me?” What this man has probably not considered is why he is proposing with a diamond engagement ring in the first place. He has grown up with the tradition that when you ask a woman to marry you, you give her a diamond ring. What he probably does not realize is that the idea of proposing marriage with a diamond engagement ring developed as a tradition after 1939. This tradition originated not in the culture of courtship itself, but out of the efforts of the American advertising agency N.W. Ayer & Son to help its client, the De Beers’ Consolidated Mines Limited, bolsters lagging sales by creating advertising campaigns focused on the sale of diamond engagement rings within the United States. This study shows how these advertising campaigns, over a period of only thirteen years, transformed the diamond engagement ring into the traditional symbol of love and commitment in American culture.¹

Previous research on N.W. Ayer’s advertising campaigns for De Beers summarizes the campaigns to analyze the diamond industry or the rise of American wedding industry. The Rise and Fall of Diamonds: The Shattering of a Brilliant Illusion by Edward Jay Epstein is one of the fundamental works on the history and business practices of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited and provides a summary of the campaigns. Vicki Howard’s Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition gives an overview of De Beers’ advertising within the United States in order to support her thesis that consumerism has turned, or in some instances created, America’s wedding traditions into a nearly seventy billion dollar a year industry. Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding by Cele Otnes and Elizabeth Pleck examines the De Beers advertising campaign conducted by N.W. Ayer & Son as part of the

United States’ wedding industry. ² No research to date has analyzed the history and impact of the advertising campaigns themselves. This study builds on this earlier work and then examines and interprets the N.W. Ayer advertising campaigns for De Beers, demonstrating the ways in which these campaigns drastically changed the traditions of courtship in the United States to include diamond engagement rings. This study agrees with Howard, Otnes, and Pleck that the tradition of diamond engagement rings is linked to the rise of the wedding industry, but they are also part of much larger cultural and social trends of the period. By advertising across social and economic lines N. W. Ayer & Son and De Beers reflected the rise of consumer culture in the postwar era. The advertisement campaigns for De Beers also reflected the changing gender roles of the late 1930s through the early 1950s in which women were expected to stay at home and men were expected to provide for their family. My own study furthers the conversation about the history of diamond engagement rings in American culture by looking more in depth at the cultural impact and gender implications that these advertisements had on the American way of life at the end of the Great Depression through the early post-war era.

To provide insight on courtship, marriage, and gender roles during this period I depended on a number of valuable sources. Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era by Elaine Tyler May examines marriage and family life during a time when the number of marriages and birth rates soared in American society. May goes a step further by demonstrating how marriage during this period reverted from a more egalitarian form of marriage in the 1920s to a more patriarchal marriage that was reminiscent of the Victorian era.³ From Front Porch to Backseat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America by Beth Bailey examines how the concept of dating emerged in American culture in the 1920s and how it was transformed over the course of three generations from a private function in the home into a public activity.⁴ Incorporating the impact of the diamond engagement ring into these areas of American culture this study will demonstrate how this object made engagements transform from a private family celebration into a public display of a couple’s intentions to marry encapsulated in a diamond ring. This study

will demonstrate how the expectation of a diamond engagement ring reinforced and came to symbolize the provider role for men and the submissive role for women in a patriarchal marriage.

I have relied on a wide variety of documents from the N.W. Ayer & Son company records located in the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of American History Archives Center. These records consist of company memos, newsletters, a collection of De Beers’ advertisement tear sheets, customer and personnel files, as well as company interviews and photographs. One of the key sources from this collection that I used for my analysis is the advertising tear sheets of De Beers advertisements that N.W. Ayer & Son ran in magazines across the country. 5 Another critical piece of information from the collection that I intend to use in my analysis is the agency’s interoffice newsletter, the Ayer News File. The weekly newsletter contains detailed summaries of N.W. Ayer & Son’s decisions in managing the accounts of its cliental. This collection of newsletters provides insight into the creative direction that the agency took on behalf of De Beers to increase diamond sales in the United States.

Chapter one focuses on the on the rise of the diamond engagement ring in American culture from 1939 to 1952. This chapter demonstrates how, through the power and persuasion of advertising, the diamond engagement ring became the traditional token of love and commitment and remains so in American culture today. Chapter two examines the cultural and consumer environment of the time period and how N. W. Ayer & Son adjusted its work to appeal to consumers during the Great Depression, World War II and the postwar years. This shows how N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers adapted to the changes in the American economy, courtship, and marriage in order to make their campaigns a success. Finally, chapter three is a close reading of De Beers advertisements from several of its advertising campaigns in the 1940s. This chapter demonstrates how De Beers advertisements reinforced the changing gender roles of 1940s America.

While the diamond ring is used today to symbolize an engagement, this was not always the case. By examining the mechanisms through which this tradition came into existence and the role that advertising plays in that process we can develop a more nuanced understanding of U.S. cultural history. The N.W. Ayer & Son’s advertising campaigns for De Beers clearly

5 A tear sheet is a cut or torn page from a publication that advertising agencies use as proof to a client that the advertisement was published.
demonstrate the powerful and enduring ways that advertising has set and shaped American culture.
At the end of a late work night in 1947, Frances Gerety, a young copywriter for N.W. Ayer & Son, scribbled down a few words to finish a new De Beers advertisement. The line she wrote—“a diamond is forever”—soon became the official slogan for De Beers, and is today one of the most recognizable slogans in the history of American advertising. Nine years earlier, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited had acquired the services of N.W. Ayer & Son to help bolster lagging sales numbers. Before this business arrangement, the purchasing and presenting of diamond engagement rings within the United States was virtually nonexistent. N.W. Ayer & Son, one of the most successful advertising agencies in the United States, transformed diamond rings into the traditional symbol of love and commitment in American culture.

Diamonds: A Royal Lineage and a Thriving Industry

Diamonds are the hardest substance in the world. In fact the only material that can cut and shape diamonds is another diamond. The very word “diamond” comes from the Greek word adamao, which means “I tame” or “I subdue.” In ancient times, diamonds were associated with invulnerability, lightning, magic, healing, protection, and poisoning. The earliest known origins of diamond mining and the manufacturing of diamond jewelry originated in India in the fourth century B.C.E. By the thirteenth century, diamonds began to find their way into royal regalia and other state jewelry in Europe. Queen Elizabeth I enjoyed using her diamond rings to carve love messages to her suitors in the windows of her palaces. Due to their rarity, King Louis IX of France reserved diamonds for his exclusive use. By the nineteenth century diamonds were still considered to be the possessions of the aristocracy and wealthy elite, but in the 1870s with the discovery of large deposits of diamonds in South Africa became accessible for purchase. This discovery also established the world’s largest diamond cartel, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited.

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8 Finlay, Jewels, 346.
9 Ibid., 254.
11 The first known diamond engagement ring was given by the Hapsburg Archduke Maximilian I to Mary of Burgundy in 1477. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century,
Rhodes and Oppenheimer: The Race to Control the Diamond Industry

The origins of the cartel began when a young boy first spotted a “glittering pebble” in the dirt and rock on a farm near what became Kimberley, South Africa in 1867. In 1871, Johannes Nicholas and Diederik Arnoldus de Beer, the owners of the farm where the discovery was made, sold their farm to prospectors, but their name remained associated with the area. After the sale of the De Beers farm, thousands of eager prospectors flocked to the site in search of fortune.

One such man was Cecil Rhodes, a twenty-one year old Englishman, who journeyed to the De Beers farm to join his brother in prospecting his claim. By the time Rhodes had arrived, the area was occupied by an estimated fifty thousand people living in encampments, making the De Beers farm the second most populous area on the entire continent of Africa. When his brother’s claim produced only meager results, Rhodes saw an opportunity to turn a profit by servicing the multitude of prospectors that came into Kimberley each week. He began his enterprising scheme by selling ice cream and jugs of water to the diggers. During this time Rhodes observed a growing problem for claim owners; they needed fresh water for their laborers to dig deeper into the ground for diamonds, but too much water could cause the fragile dirt walls of the mines to collapse. With thousands of adjoining mines surrounding Kimberley facing the same problem, Rhodes discovered his opportunity to make a fortune. Investing all his money, Rhodes imported South Africa’s first steam pump. Just as the pump arrived, the Kimberley Big Hole mine was struck by a flood. This left individual claim owners with no choice but to pay Rhodes any price for the use of his pump in order to continue with production. Rhodes then took all the money he had made off the disaster and purchased more steam pumps from England. He then established a water-pumping monopoly for all of Kimberley. As he raised prices for use of his pumps, the small mine owners and some syndicates could not afford to pay him in cash, so as payment Rhodes took a share of their mines. He then continued to obtain larger portions of the mines until, at age twenty-seven, he took control of the De Beers mine and became the largest mine owner in Kimberley.

engagement rings in the United States were typically known as “regard rings,” where the letters of the word “regard” were indicated by the initial letters of the stones set in the ring. George Frederick Kunz, Rings for the Finger (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1917), 199, 226-27.

12 The city was named in honor of Lord Kimberley, the British Secretary of State for the colonies. Cele C. Ottes and Elizabeth H. Pleck, Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 62.; Epstein, The Rise and Fall of Diamonds, 68.

13 Epstein, The Rise and Fall of Diamonds, 67-68.

14 Ibid., 69.
As the Kimberley mines continued to emit tons of diamonds, the price of diamonds dropped to an all-time low and mines were shutdown and abandoned. Rhodes wanted to bring production of diamonds under control to once again raise prices. By 1887, Rhodes managed to buy the all of the claims in Kimberley. In 1888, he established himself as the founding chairman of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. At this time, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited controlled ninety percent of the diamond production throughout the world. In the following decades, De Beers managed to keep the perception that diamonds were a rarity by restricting the number of diamonds released onto the market at one time. This was accomplished by following Rhodes’ marketing principle that the number of rough diamonds on brought to market in any given year should be approximately equal to the number of wedding engagements occurring in that year, thus equating supply with demand.

Once Rhodes had established an iron-tight grip on the diamond market, he focused his attentions on his ambition to expand the British Empire. In less than ten years, under a royal charter granted to him by the British government, he mobilized the colonization of millions of square miles in some of the richest portions of southern and eastern Africa. He was the only man in history to have two countries and a federation named for him: the former countries of Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia, and the former Rhodesian Federation. In 1902, Rhodes died at the age of forty-eight. His remains were buried on a remote mountain in Rhodesia. Since he was never married and had no heirs, Rhodes left nearly his entire fortune to Oxford University to finance the future Rhodes scholars. Without an immediate successor to Rhodes, De Beers was left with a void of leadership that did not remain unfilled for long. Less than a year after Rhodes’ death, a new figure rose to take control of De Beers; his name was Ernest Oppenheimer.
In a manner befitting De Beers’ founder, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer managed to beat out all of his competitors, including Rhodes’ designated successor Frances Oats.\(^{22}\) He was in many ways the very embodiment of the multinational businessman: German by birth, British by naturalization, and South African by residence.\(^{23}\) Oppenheimer was the chairman of the Consolidated Diamond Mines in Namibia, a far richer claim in terms of potential diamond production than the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited. Instead of competing with De Beers, Oppenheimer offered the Namibian diamond mines to De Beers in exchange for a large amount of stock in their company. He was then placed on the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited’s board of directors and continued to buy more shares of De Beers’ stock whenever the opportunity arose. By 1927, Oppenheimer became the controlling figure of De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited and the diamond market. With his power over the diamond market, Oppenheimer merged his company with De Beers and took control over the majority of the diamond industry in 1930.\(^{24}\)

**Selling Ideas to America: The Early History of N.W. Ayer & Son & American Advertising**

As the diamond industry was being established, American advertising itself was being transformed into a significant cultural influence. Until the nineteenth century, advertising agencies did not exist. An individual who wished to advertise had to deal directly with local newspapers.\(^{25}\) In 1869, Frances Wayland Ayer established the United States’ first substantial advertising agency, N.W. Ayer & Son. Ayer chose to name the agency after his father and first business partner, Nathan Wheeler Ayer.\(^{26}\) Possessing no formal knowledge of the advertising industry, Ayer, a Philadelphia native, spent the year before founding his agency scouring the city for clients to advertise in his employer’s newspaper. That year, Ayer earned twelve hundred dollars in commissions and two thousand dollars for his services. Walking away from such lucrative earnings, Ayer decided to start his own advertising agency on April 1, 1869.\(^{27}\)

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 81.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 79.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 82-84.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 25-26.
The early beginnings of American advertising as it is known today began in the 1870s. The earliest goods to be featured in advertisements were for “patent medicines.” By the 1880s, manufacturers in the United States began selling packaged food, drinks, and other consumer items. To ensure the sale of their product, manufacturers began to explore new ways to encourage people to purchase them. Marketers went from coast to coast using advertisements to deliver their message through newspapers, magazines, and in other promotional items. These advertisements helped to shift America from a self-sufficient culture to a consumer culture. This meant that Americans were beginning to buy goods instead of making them themselves. By the late 1890s, packaged, brand-name household products became the first nationally advertised goods. These included items such as cereals, soaps, baking ingredients, and foodstuffs such as Cream of Wheat. During this same time period, magazines became a new medium for advertising.

American consumption in the 1920s allowed advertising to have a greater role in shaping an individual’s lifestyle. As new industries came to the forefront, advertising agencies were responsible for controlling the relationship between big business and the American public. Agencies worked to speed the flow of new products to the public consumers by eliminating potential consumer resistance and conveyed the sense that what was new was desirable. As more brands achieved national recognition, American consumers experienced and abundance of product options. The public’s choices would in turn reward the most desirable brand with the capital to increase their scale of production. These brands would then be able to lower prices and provide consumers with the opportunity to achieve a higher standard of living.

With the onset of the Great Depression, American advertising agencies had to shift the language and focus of their advertisements in order to appeal to consumers during the economic crisis. They did this by focusing on how their client’s product was necessary or attractive in terms of function and price. The ads themselves took on a more somber look as advertisers dramatically reduced the number of colored and illustrated advertisements. The advertisements

30 Ibid., 69.
31 Ibid., 82.
33 Ibid., 2, 9.
now used text in order to grab consumers’ attention. Larger and more forceful headlines accompanied short articles in an attempt to appeal to consumers’ emotions and insecurities. An example of this would be the Scott tissue advertisements that informed consumers about “Toilet Tissue Illness,” a rectal disease which was caused by the use of harsh toilet tissue.\textsuperscript{34}

**A Contract Made in Holy Matrimony: The Beginnings of N.W Ayer’s Advertising for De Beers**

As was true for all other luxury trades, the Great Depression wrought havoc on the diamond industry. High quality, large diamonds were no longer selling in Europe. In France and Great Britain, diamond sales had never extended past the aristocracy. Prosperity in the United States during the 1920s led to an increased popularity of diamond engagement rings, particularly among the wealthier classes.\textsuperscript{35} Even during the Great Depression, Americans still bought diamond engagement rings; these diamonds however, tended to be smaller and of a poor quality. On average, they cost less than eighty dollars a stone.\textsuperscript{36} Oppenheimer believed that he could sell De Beers’ diamonds in the United States to absorb excess production and stabilize the diamond market. In 1938, he sent his son Harry to meet with N.W. Ayer & Son at its central office in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{37} On June 22, 1939 Harry Oppenheimer and the agency’s Executive Vice President, Gerald Lauck, agreed to a one year contract to conduct sales research and generate advertisements based on their findings.\textsuperscript{38} De Beers soon followed up with a ten thousand dollar check for N.W. Ayer to begin the “Diamond Market Investigation Survey and Report.”\textsuperscript{39}

N.W. Ayer & Son proved to be an important liaison for De Beers in the American market.\textsuperscript{40} By maintaining Rhodes’ business practice of limiting the number of diamonds available in the market at one time, the cartel was in violation of the United States’ Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The act stated that any one corporation’s control or restriction of a product was a

\textsuperscript{34} Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes*, 199-202.
\textsuperscript{35} Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 63.
\textsuperscript{36} Epstein, *The Rise and Fall of Diamonds*, 122.
\textsuperscript{37} Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, 63.
\textsuperscript{38} Harry Oppenheimer to Gerald Lauck, 21 June 1939, series 18, box 1, folder 6, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.
\textsuperscript{39} S.A. Springbett to N.W. Ayer & Son, 27 April 1939, series 18, box 1, folder 6, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.
\textsuperscript{40} Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, 49.
criminal offense. This prevented De Beers from retailing its products directly in the country. But it could sell uncut diamonds to United States manufacturers through its Diamond Trading Company in London. N.W. Ayer also provided sales help and educational materials to diamond importers, cutters, wholesalers, and retailers who did business within the United States.

1939 to 1941: The Courtship Phase

When N.W. Ayer conducted its initial market research for De Beers, the agency discovered that consumers perceived diamonds as a symbol of love. It became apparent to the agency that the best way to increase the diamond trade in the United States was to convince men that buying a diamond engagement ring for their fiancées was a necessary way to prove their affection. It was very simple for the agency to create a corollary to this concept: the larger the diamond, the greater the love expressed. The research also concluded that this concept needed to appeal to both the upper and middle classes. It stated that: “Through our surveys it was seen that the great middle class is the backbone of the diamond market in the United States. But, it was also evident that the upper classes set the customs and styles.” The agency then quickly set out to design a campaign to alter the social attitudes about diamonds in the United States. In an effort to convince retailers that advertising would in no way cheapen the image of diamonds, N.W. Ayer ran advertisements in jewelry trade magazines explaining the marketing effort and listing the magazines where advertisements would be placed. The first De Beers advertisement hit newsstands on August 6th in Ladies’ Home Journal. The agency’s initial campaign efforts aimed at men and appeared in September 1939. The advertisements argued that giving a woman a diamond would affirm masculinity by reflecting a man’s financial expertise and achievements. A few years later, N.W. Ayer began targeting women by running

41 Epstein, The Rise and Fall of Diamonds, 199.
42 Bergenstock and Maskulka, “The De Beers Story,” 38.
43 Howard, Brides, Inc., 49.
44 Otnes and Pleck, Cinderella Dreams, 63.
46 Otnes and Pleck, Cinderella Dreams, 63.
advertisements that featured famous churches and cathedrals, associating diamonds with a church wedding.\textsuperscript{48}

One of N.W. Ayer’s more noted advertising efforts on behalf of De Beers was the “Great Artists” campaign of 1939. Featuring paintings by artists such as Pablo Picasso and Francisco Dali, the basic approach was to “marry” diamond engagement rings with images of culture and sophistication. The message was that the diamond engagement ring was as unique and priceless as a work by these artists. N.W. Ayer placed full-page color advertisements in magazines such as \textit{Vogue, Harper’s Weekly, Fortune, Life, Saturday Evening Post, Time} and \textit{The New Yorker} in an attempt to reach a middle and upper-class audience. These advertisements also included a highlight of four diamonds of different sizes: half carat, one carat, two carats, and three carats with the price ranges for each. One such advertisement, entitled “Oh, Time Too Swift!” featured an early Pablo Picasso painting of a mother and child. The mother appears to be caressing the child’s arm as if in comfort. The text conveys that the memories of caring for the child will go by all too soon, but will be cherished for a lifetime. It also implies that diamonds have served to pass on the love of family members through generations.\textsuperscript{49} The “Great Artists” campaign was an instant success, as retail sales for De Beers increased by twenty-five percent in the first six months of 1940 and by fifty-five percent in 1941.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} Otnes and Pleck, \textit{Cinderella Dreams}, 63.


Figure 1. “Oh Time Too Swift!” was one of the advertisements featured in the “Great Artists” campaign by N.W. Ayer & Son for De Beers. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Oh Time Too Swift!,” advertising tear sheet, 1940, series 3, box 148, folder 1, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Diamonds are for Brides and Bombers: De Beers Advertisements during World War II

When World War II erupted in Europe and Asia, De Beers was faced with a rather complex public relations problem that could have potentially threatened its monopoly in the diamond market as well as damaged the credibility of the diamond engagement ring campaign. During the course of the war, diamonds became a strategic material needed for industries of both the Allied and Axis Powers.  

Industrial diamonds cut precision parts needed in weapons.

production. The major warring powers also needed diamonds to create jeweled bearings in guidance systems and instruments in both submarines and airplanes. Concerned that the United States would run out of its stock of industrial diamonds, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the War Production Board to purchase a stockpile of six-and-a-half million carats from De Beers. Oppenheimer resisted with the argument that once the war ended, any remaining diamonds in the United States’ stockpile would be released on the market, making it unstable.\footnote{Ibid., 51.} In a memorandum dated April 16, 1942, U.S. Attorney General Thurman Arnold stated that if Great Britain did not convince the cartel to supply the United States with the diamonds it needed, it would withhold supplying Britain with warplanes.\footnote{Janine Roberts, \textit{Glitter & Greed: The Secret World of the Diamond Empire} (New York: Disinformation Company Ltd., 2003), 116.} Great Britain pressured De Beers to comply, and the company compromised by providing the United States with fourteen percent of the amount of diamonds it had previously requested.\footnote{Howard, \textit{Brides, Inc.}, 51.}

N.W. Ayer’s advertising campaign during World War II sought to dispel growing public criticism of De Beers by making the cartel appear to be supporting the United States’ war goals. Through a national run of trade and retail advertisements that it created, the advertising agency transformed De Beers’ image from that of a hoarder into one of a supporter of the war effort. The agency’s campaign for diamond rings now focused on addressing concerns that purchasing gem-quality diamonds would deplete military stockpiles of the stone. N. W. Ayer produced trade literature to educate jewelers and jewelry departments about the distinction between gem-quality diamonds and industrial-grade diamonds in hopes that they would pass the information on to consumers. According to the agency’s advertisements for the diamond industry, brides did not have to sacrifice their engagement rings for the war effort.\footnote{Ibid., 51.} One advertisement entitled “Grind it to Powder” did picture a bride removing her engagement ring, showing that she was willing to sacrifice her ring to “help give him clearer vision.”\footnote{N. W. Ayer & Son, “Grind it to Powder,” advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.} Advertisements also argued that buying diamonds was in fact furthering the war effort because they were mined in the same mines as industrial diamonds, so diamond ring sales helped to defray mining costs. Other
advertisements asked if diamonds were “For Brides-Or Bombers?” and answered that they were in fact for both. Thus diamond engagement rings appeared to be central to the war effort.\footnote{Howard, \textit{Brides, Inc.}, 51.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{grind-it-to-powder.png}
\caption{“Grind it to Powder” was one of the advertisements the agency used to make diamonds appear to be central to the war effort. N. W. Ayer & Son, “Grind it to Powder,” advertising tear sheet, 1942, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.}
\end{figure}

During the early 1940s, N.W. Ayer also created advertisements that linked romantic love with the American way of life that soldiers were fighting to protect. In the popular culture of the era, World War II was linked to romance. For example, there were a variety of films that captured the potential last goodbyes, the strain of separation, and the joyous reunions between husband and wife when the soldiers returned. N.W. Ayer, like others in the wedding industry, saw the lucrative potential of romanticizing emotions that surrounded the war. Many
advertisements featured images of soldiers in uniform, a common trend in advertising during the war. The agency also produced advertisements that featured soldiers’ fiancées at home waiting for their men to return. One advertisement entitled “Of absence and fond heart,” featured a young woman sitting on a couch gazing off into the distance. Its text implied that her diamond engagement was a star that guided her fiancée’s thoughts to her while he was away. Advertisements for the jewelry trade urged retailers to exploit the “emotional urgency stimulated by conscription.” Diamonds were meant to be a “token of their pledges” until a couple could marry after the war.

Figure 3. “Of absence and fond heart” was one of the World War II advertisements that featured fiancées waiting at home for their soldiers to return. N. W. Ayer & Son, “Of absence and fond heart,” advertising tear sheet, 1945, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

58 Ibid., 53.
60 Howard, Brides, Inc., 53.
N.W. Ayer also created a campaign during the war that linked industrial progress and prosperity with love and romance. The money spent by the United States War Production Board had helped to bring about the end of the Great Depression. United States factories were producing war goods, United States farmers had found a market overseas with the Allies, and the domestic economy as a whole improved. Labor shortages created higher wages, so that suddenly, men and women found themselves with more money to spend on luxury items than they had had in years. The agency ran an advertisement for De Beers that linked this new prosperity to marriage. The “Bugles over America” advertisement featured Cupid flying around the factory smoke that signaled the United States’ economic recovery. The advertisement “Love in Boom,” showed another pairing of weddings with factory imagery with the bride and groom surrounded by wedding bells, rotating machine gears, and smoke stacks. De Beers advised jewelers about the potential rise in the engagement ring market because “as never before the diamond engagement ring becomes a priceless symbol of the deep bonds which men and women cherish most in these times.” In these advertisements, the rising number of marriages and wartime emotions mirrored the industrial activity. By using the language of production, represented by smokestacks, gears, and factory whistles of the nation, N.W. Ayer connected the power of United States capitalism with marriage.

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61 Ibid., 55.
63 Quoted in Howard, Brides Inc., 55.
64 Ibid., 55.
The Rise of the Diamond Lady: Engagement Ring Ads in Postwar America

After World War II ended and millions of soldiers returned to civilian life, N.W. Ayer received an expanded budget from De Beers to continue with the next step in the campaign to link diamonds with the romantic consciousness of Americans. In its 1947 plan, the agency strongly emphasized a more psychological approach to its advertising: “We are dealing with a problem of mass psychology. We seek to… strengthen that tradition of the engagement ring—to make it a psychological necessity capable of competing successfully at the retail level with utility goods and services….\textsuperscript{65}  It defined its target audience as “some seventy million people in fifteen years and over whose opinion we hope to influence in support of our objectives.”\textsuperscript{66} Since the goal was to cultivate a sustainable image in the mind of the public as opposed to merely

\textsuperscript{65} Quoted in Epstein, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Diamonds}, 126.
\textsuperscript{66} Quoted in Ibid., 127.
increasing short-term sales, the agency cautioned its employees that “the ordinary so-called ‘hard-hitting’ techniques are not for you, for they are the very methods that helped to cheapen the diamond in the opinion of the public during the years before our association.”

N.W. Ayer called for a far more subtle program than it had used in previous years. It ordered its public relations department to support fashion shows and other events that featured diamonds. The agency also created a series of seminars on diamond engagement rings that targeted thousands of girls in high schools and colleges across the country. Jewelers gave talks with titles such as “The Right Ring for the Left Hand,” prepared by the agency at service clubs, women’s luncheons, and similar gatherings. Gladys Babson Hannaford, known in the industry as the “Diamond Lady,” covered about twenty-five thousand miles a year for the agency while lecturing about diamonds across the United States. Her diamond lectures featured material covering the history of diamonds, diamond mining and cutting, and selecting diamond jewelry. During the week of March 9, 1953 alone, Hannaford drove over five hundred miles, gave fifteen lectures, and four radio and two television interviews.

In 1947, N.W. Ayer commissioned a series of portraits of “engaged socialites” to create prestigious “role models” for middle class women. The agency also arranged for movie stars and other celebrities to wear diamonds in both movies and at gala events. In 1946 it organized a weekly service entitled “Hollywood Personalities,” which provided the leading newspapers in the country with descriptions of the diamonds worn by celebrities. The agency also persuaded Hollywood to feature diamonds in more films. It even convinced Paramount Pictures to change the title of its film Dangerous Diamonds to Adventures in Diamonds. The public relations’ efforts made by N.W. Ayer & Son in the late 1940s also extended beyond United States borders. In Great Britain, Princess Elizabeth’s 1947 engagement ring and her 1953 coronation jewels swelled the public’s interest in diamonds. Princess Elizabeth also toured the De Beers mines in South Africa and accepted a diamond from Oppenheimer. The 1948 strategy paper was clear: “We spread the word of diamonds worn by stars of screen and stage, by wives and daughters of

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67 Quoted in Ibid., 127.
69 Otnes and Pleck, Cinderella Dreams, 65.
political leaders, by any woman who can make the grocer’s wife and the mechanic’s sweetheart say ‘I wish I had what she has.’”

Besides exploiting the romantic connection the agency had created towards diamonds, N.W. Ayer also found that it could exploit the premarital insecurity felt by many American women. Even though the tradition of diamond engagement rings in the United States, at least in its more popular form, was mainly an invention of the late-nineteenth century, the agency gave it deep historical roots and established it in the public mind as an essential part of the marriage process. By creating these stories the agency was in fact inventing a tradition. Implying that diamond engagement rings possessed deep historical roots the agency in turn ritualized and formalized this invented tradition for American consumers.

Told in different forms, in articles, in short “filler” items, in film, this fiction went from the desks of N.W. Ayer into books, magazines, newspapers, and onto the silver screen. The agency cited as evidence of its success the fact that “newspapers have carried our items about the engagement diamonds of a list of women that range from Mrs. [Harry S] Truman to the ‘glamour girls’ of Hollywood.” The agency suggested that carefully constructed news stories were effective in planting ideas into the public mind: “Such items develop the feeling, more convincingly than mere repetition of the statement could do, that the diamond is in fact the only accepted symbol of engagement.”

Divine Intervention: Frances Gerety and the Creation of “A Diamond is Forever”

Throughout the mid 1940s, De Beers’ advertisements featured diagrams of four different sized diamonds but with no positioning line. Then, on a late night in 1947, Frances Gerety, a high school graduate from Philadelphia who was working as a copywriter for N.W. Ayer & Son for the last four years, was finishing an advertisement that needed a slogan. Gerety said that at the time, “[I] asked for help from above.” She then scribbled down “something, not sure if it was right or not, and went to bed.” The line that she happened to scribble down was “a

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71 Quoted in Epstein, The Rise and Fall of Diamonds, 127.
73 Ibid., 128.
74 A positioning line is a phrase that is meant to draw the consumer’s attention to the product. It is also designed to ensure that the consumer knows what brand of product the advertisement is selling.
76 Frances Gerety as quoted in Ibid., 7.
diamond is forever.” This line perfectly encapsulated both the lasting asset value of a diamond and the romantic aspirations of couples entering into marriage. This slogan also created the notion that once a diamond is received, it should not be resold, thus keeping the secondhand diamond market, and potential price erosion, to a minimum. The agency immediately incorporated the slogan into all of its advertisements for De Beers and within a year “A Diamond is Forever” became the official slogan of De Beers.

Fifty years after the introduction of “a diamond is forever,” Gerety participated in an interview for the agency’s Oral History Program. During the interview, Gerety gave details about her employment with the agency. She mentioned that she was one of only three female copywriters when she started working for N.W. Ayer & Son. Gerety was put on the De Beers account not long after her arrival to the agency and stayed on the account for six months. When the interview turned to the subject of her famous slogan, she said that it was Gerald Lauck’s idea to incorporate a line that would brand the advertisements. She admitted that the slogan was a nice line, but at the time she did not believe it was in any way extraordinary. When she initially showed the line to her colleagues, they too felt that the line was good, but it was not important. When the interviewer brought up the fact that many people were hesitant to credit anyone in particular at the agency for creating the slogan, she stated that the credit really belonged to her boss, Gerald Lauck. Gerety continued to work for N.W. Ayer & Son for another twenty-three years before her retirement in 1970.

1952: The Campaigns are an Official Success

Throughout the early 1950s, N.W. Ayer & Son kept its employees abreast of the latest developments within the De Beers account through company memos. In one work communication dated April 23, 1951, the agency mentioned the results of a recent survey of American jewelers regarding diamond engagement rings. The survey stated that eighty-eight percent of jewelers within the United States felt that the tradition of diamond engagement rings

77 Ibid., 7.
78 Otnes and Pleck, Cinderella Dreams, 66.
79 Bergenstock and Maskulka, “The De Beers Story,” 40.
80 Epstein, The Rise and Fall of Diamonds, 128.
82 Ibid., 7.
83 Ibid., 10-11.
84 Ibid., 13.
was stronger than it had been during World War II. The memo on May 12, 1952 concluded that the sale of diamond engagement rings was intricately linked to the number of marriages within the United States. Nearly eighty-five percent of recorded marriages in the United States resulted in the purchase of a diamond engagement ring. Jewelers reported that sixty percent of their annual diamond sales were dependent on engagement ring sales with another ten percent of their sales being attributed to deferred payments on engagement rings. The memo went as far as to say that the connection between diamonds and marriages was so strong that the seven percent drop in marriages in 1951 was consistent with the slight drop in diamond sales that year.

Conclusion

A diamond, reduced to its most basic elements, is a mere stone. Yet for centuries, these stones have held a unique status across cultures. Once associated with mystical powers, diamonds in the twenty-first century remain associated with love. When economic crisis in 1939 Europe threatened to destroy the diamond industry, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited chose to market its diamonds in the one place that the product was still being consumed: the United States. Through a series of carefully constructed advertising campaigns that resonated strongly in the post-World War II domestically oriented culture, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers managed to expand the exchange of diamond engagement rings among Americans. This convergence of business, advertising, and tradition imbedded the diamonds into the most intimate bond between men and women, marriage. When Frances Gerety established “a diamond is forever” she and N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers made it so and their efforts demonstrate how advertising has been a major factor in altering the way Americans perceived and consumed luxury goods in the postwar era. A gem that was once reserved for royalty is purchased and worn by Americans of every social class. An enduring symbol of romance, courtship, and marriage, diamond engagement rings, perhaps more than any other object in American culture, facilitate our analyzing the construction of an engaging tradition that has become an engrained part of American society.

Chapter 2: Changes for Success:  
Factors that Allowed N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers to Succeed

June 28, 1942, sitting in his bunk at Camp Roberts, California, Private Robert E. Quirk writes a letter to his fiancée Marianne. The letter is about the night of their engagement and his plans to buy her a diamond engagement ring the next time he is on leave. He writes, “You always hear about the fellow’s getting down on one knee and holding his hand over his heart while he’s asking for her hand in marriage…. All I said was: ‘When I get back to Detroit, if I buy a diamond, would you wear it?’ It doesn’t sound like the proposal every girl dreams of, does it, honey?”

Robert Quirk, like many American soldiers drafted in World War II, most likely bought into the idea of giving a diamond engagement ring to his fiancée due to the efforts of N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers. As detailed in chapter one, the efforts of N.W. Ayer & Son and the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited during the Great Depression through the early postwar era dramatically changed the American courtship process with the popularization of the diamond engagement ring. By 1952 over eighty-five percent of American couples purchased a diamond engagement ring. But the success of the agency’s advertising campaigns was not entirely due to their creative efforts. In order for N.W. Ayer & Son’s efforts to be successful they had to adapt to changes in the American economy, courtship, and marriage in order to sell diamond engagement rings to American consumers in the midst of the Great Depression.

Making a Hard Sale: De Beers and N.W. Ayer & Son during the Great Depression

In order to counteract the losses they suffered during the Great Depression, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited turned to N.W. Ayer & Son to begin its work to sell diamonds to the American public. Deriving its inspiration from the Diamond Market Investigation Survey that the agency conducted in 1939, N.W. Ayer & Son created the successful formula of equating diamonds with love in order to sell them to the public. Despite the nation’s economic hardships and the deprivations suffered by millions of Americans, men and women across the U.S. still desired the consumer goods and luxury items that had been introduced to them in

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advertisements throughout the 1920s. Middle-class women were especially targeted in these advertisements and other media outlets to believe that it was the responsibility of their husbands to provide them with a life of security and material comfort. Increasingly an ideology developed that reinforced the idea that if a husband could not maintain his wife in the lifestyle that society expected him to provide, then he would be considered a failure.  

The Great Depression restructured the way that Americans purchased goods and turned Americans into one of two types of consumers: citizen consumers and purchaser consumers. Citizen consumers focused on manufacturing reform and safeguarding consumers and their families. Purchaser consumers contributed to the recovery of the American economy by continuing to exercise their purchasing power. The goal of New Deal programs such as the National Recovery Administration and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration sought to enhance consumer’s purchasing power so that money would continue to be circulated into the economy. Despite their best efforts, the successes of the New Deal programs were crippled by new economic downturns in 1937 and 1938. Towards the end of 1938, government policymakers began to reexamine the work of British economist John Maynard Keynes and his 1936 book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. Keynesian economic theory stipulated that increased purchasing power stimulates and stabilizes the economy. According to Keynes, the solution to ending the depression was in conscientious deficit spending on the part of the government. Deficit spending, Keynes argued, would offset the downturn of the business cycle and stimulate the economy. New Deal reformers quickly started work on a new government spending program aimed at expanding mass consumption to stabilize the economy. Keynes and many of the New Deal government officials, including President Roosevelt, felt that under consumption was one of the primary causes of the economic depression. Theoretically, Keynesianism would bring about greater economic egalitarianism because higher wages (made possible through deficit spending in government programs like the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps) would facilitate a broader distribution of

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93 Ibid., 54-56.
purchasing power and stimulate consumer demand. This theory was especially appealing to Roosevelt New Dealers because it justified their goal of correcting the vast income disparity that had resulted in one percent of the population in the U.S. controlling 44.2 percent of the wealth.

As the 1930s drew to a close, American manufacturers viewed Keynes’s economic theory as an opportunity for their profits to increase. They began to recognize the purchasing power of the American consumer. Their new focus was to make consumers forget about the economic hardships of the times and enjoy buying products again. Manufacturers wanted consumers to look into their pocketbooks and spend what they could to fuel the economy. N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers were quick to recognize the potential in encouraging consumers to spend instead of save. The first De Beers advertisements by the agency featured a highlight at the bottom of the page of four different sized diamonds with price ranges for each stone. The different sizes and price ranges told consumers that diamond engagement rings were available for individuals with different budgets. Stating from the beginning that its target audience was the middle class, the agency nevertheless recognized the reality that it needed to develop mass appeal with consumers by providing a range of pricing options.

As N.W. Ayer & Son adapted to the economic difficulties of the Great Depression in its campaign for De Beers, the agency recognized a number of specific changes in dating and marriage that would impact diamond sales. The economic hardship of the era ended tens of thousands of engagements. The marriage rate plummeted to a record low as young men chose to remain single because they could not financially support a family. Throughout the 1930s women in the United States had noticed and commented on the limited availability of “marriageable men.” One woman remarked in *Time* that “I want to talk to a man so bad I could scream.”

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97 Ibid., 56-60.
102 Quoted in Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 34.
By the turn of the twentieth century, an older system of courtship based on young men “calling” on young women at home was beginning to be replaced by the concept of dating in which single men and women would be allowed to travel outside of the home and get to know each other away from the prying eyes of their parents. The word date entered into the vocabulary of the American middle-class in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, dating had become popular among middle-class Americans, although it began as a working-class practice. The practice of dating for working class Americans was a response to the rise of the urban-industrial setting. Those women and their families who could not afford the luxury of repeatedly entertaining and supervising male callers, like those of working class families, had to adapt by allowing their daughters the opportunity to meet suitors outside of the home.  

One of the most significant changes brought about by the transition from calling to dating involved a couple leaving the young woman’s home to socialize in public. This change removed the supervisory role of a young woman’s parents and allowed the couple to become acquainted in restaurants, movie theaters, and dance halls. Courting in the public sphere offered couples new freedoms and opportunities for sexual experimentation away from the watchful eyes of parents. This new found freedom came with a price, quite literally. All of these public activities cost money. For middle class Americans this change in setting caused a major shift in the power structure of American courtship to favor men. When young men called on their sweethearts at home, young women had a lot of control. They, or their parents, could set boundaries and limits. The courtship took place under the supervision of her family. This allowed women to control the amount of time that the couple would spend together and how long the relationship would continue. Dating shifted courtship out of the home--- an environment that was dominated by other women--- into public spaces where a young woman had less power. Within the calling system, women took the initiative by asking a man to call on her. Dating, though it did not necessarily bar women from making the first move, made it a custom for men to take initiative by inviting a women outside of the home. This change in gender dynamics had a profound effect on the way American men and women initiated courtship and there were other significant changes brought about by the institution of dating as well.  

103 Ibid., 16-17.
104 Ibid., 13.
105 Ibid., 20-21.
By taking courtship out of the home and into public, money became a factor in American courtship practices. The entertainment offered by movie theaters, restaurants, and dance halls all cost money. Funding for these activities therefore became the responsibility of the man and a man’s money took center stage in the dating system. The matter of money became a serious issue in American courtship. Not only did money transform men from guests to hosts, men began to understand dating as a system of economic exchange. Working class single women in 1910s and 1920s Chicago also understood dating as a system of economic exchange. They would allow men to “treat” them to entertainment and meals in exchange for their company. These women would also frequent dancehalls and amusement parks looking for men who would treat them. If one of these women did find a man to treat her, their evening would most likely be spent at a restaurant, followed by a trip to the movies, dance halls, cabaret, or amusement park. All of these activities were of course paid for by the man. Dating made men’s access to women directly dependant on money. Women in the dating system were not viewed as financially responsible; their contribution was their company. By including money in the dating system, men were not only gaining the companionship of the woman they were with, but also power to control important aspects of the relationship. Men would ultimately be the ones to decide where a couple would go on a date, how much money would be spent on that date, and how long the relationship was “worth” continuing. As historian Beth Bailey states: “money purchased obligation; money purchased inequality; money purchased control,” as men usually expected sexual favors in return for the money they spent on their dates. By purchasing diamond engagement rings men were also purchasing women’s obligation to them both sexually and emotionally.

Courtship and Conscription: How Ayer and De Beers Adapted to World War II

When Europe became engulfed in the early years of World War II, the American economy experienced an impressive upswing. Following the same Keynesian economic principals of deficit spending that they had used during the Great Depression, the United States government pulled the country out of the Depression as it prepared for war. Before the United

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106 Ibid., 22-23.
States had officially entered the war, Congress appropriated more funding for armaments than it had during World War I. This focus on war production filled factories with workers who began to have a more stable living than they had in years. With this regained prosperity, Americans were eager to once again spend their income on consumer products. Department store sales in 1941 reached an all time high while cars sales were up by fifty-five percent. When the United States officially entered the war, many of the materials that were used to make consumer goods were needed for the production of armaments. Due to these shortages, many Americans began to show their support for the war effort by practicing responsible consumption.

Established by President Roosevelt in 1941, the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply, or OPA, was responsible for rationing all commodities that were needed for the war effort. In order to show their patriotism, Americans would adhere to the OPA pricing and rationing regulations, participate in scrap drives, and grow their own vegetables in Victory Gardens. In spite of the notion of self-sacrifice that was perpetuated in American culture during this time, many Americans were actually living better than they had during the Great Depression. By 1944, the average factory worker’s wages had increased by eighty percent from 1939 while the cost of living had only increased by twenty-four percent. This meant that Americans once again had more money to spend on luxuries. Many Americans increased their spending on entertainment, clothing, and restaurants during the war. This pattern of consuming such luxury goods and services would continue long after the war ended.

The United States’ entry into World War II brought about a swift change in the American dating system. As discussed, during the Great Depression, young women had noticed a shortage of “marriageable men,” but the war brought with it a new kind of shortage that was even more widely felt. The absence of 16,354,000 men over the course of the war, most between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, greatly diminished young women’s dating prospects. It was understood that the shortage of men was a trivial concern compared to the crisis overseas, but it took a toll on many single women and men who found themselves putting their personal lives on hold, often for years. Young college women experienced this shortage when many coed colleges and universities across the United States saw enrollments of men drop so severely that...

111 Ibid., 65-67.
112 Ibid., 69-70.
113 Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 35.
seventy-five to ninety percent of the student body was female. Without men to date, women on some college campuses turned to one another for social companionship. At the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the women on campus established six sororities between 1941 and 1945. Though men were scarce nationally, they had not completely deserted college campuses. Many colleges and universities across the United States had military training bases on their campuses which facilitated young soldiers to take willing coeds out on a date.\footnote{Ibid., 35-36.}

While the war depleted the number of available men for American women to date, it did not stop couples from marrying. Unlike the Great Depression when couples put off marriage, the war actually made the prospect of marriage more desirable. Between 1940 and 1943 there were over a million more marriages than what government officials had originally predicted.\footnote{May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 59.} In 1942, the first full year of U.S. involvement in the war, the marriage rate rose from 11.9 percent per 1000 population during peacetime to 13.2 percent.\footnote{Katherine Jellison, \textit{It’s Our Day: America’s Love Affair With the White Wedding, 1945-2005} (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2008), 10.} As the number of marriages rose, the age of marriage dropped considerably as young men were drafted and sent overseas.\footnote{May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 59.}

Encouraged by the increasing number of marriages during the war, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers saw a real opportunity to increase sales by selling diamond engagement rings to young couples before their men were sent overseas. As stated in one of their advertisements, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers rather crassly encouraged retailers to take advantage of the “emotional urgency stimulated by conscription.”\footnote{Quoted from N.W. Ayer & Son, “The Marriage Bureau Hums,” advertising tear sheet, 1941, series 3, box 148, folder 2, N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.} Moreover, the agency made it a point to appeal to young couples who may not have the means to purchase a large diamond outright. This marketing strategy mirrored Keynesian economic theory of the 1930s. By allowing younger men the opportunity to buy smaller diamonds, they created a broader distribution of purchasing power that stimulated consumer demand and dramatically increased sales.\footnote{Cohen, \textit{A Consumer’s Republic}, 54-56.; Kennedy, \textit{Freedom from Fear}, 79.} Many of the agency’s advertisements for De Beers during the war featured the same highlight of four diamonds at the bottom of page that it had used during the Great Depression. The major change to this was that the highlight now started pricing diamonds from a quarter carat. By offering smaller, more
affordable diamonds, the agency appealed to younger couples. Other advertisements offered alternative ways to purchase the ideal engagement ring. One such advertisement by the agency pictured a young soldier and his bride as she weeps with joy at the prospect that they will be together forever. The advertisement provides the usual highlight of diamonds at varying price ranges. The text explains that many jewelers would arrange extended payment options. This option made it possible for young soldiers like Private Robert E. Quirk to buy diamond engagement rings for their sweethearts without paying for it upfront.\textsuperscript{120} As the advertisement states, “You are buying now for your life to be.”\textsuperscript{121} The focus is not on the price of the ring or the debt incurred in buying it on time, but rather the prospect of a happy life together after the war.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{“If we could only keep it this way always” is one of the De Beers advertisements that offered smaller stones in order to appeal to younger men. N.W. Ayer & Son, “If we could only keep this way always,” advertising tear sheet, 1941, author’s personal collection.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{120} N.W. Ayer & Son, “If we could only keep it this way always,” advertising tear sheet, 1941, Author’s personal collection.
\textsuperscript{121} Quoted from Ibid.
Room for a New Approach: Ayer & De Beers during the Postwar Years

With the victory of the Allied Forces in World War II, many Americans were eager to return to calmer days. As millions of soldiers returned home, the United States government and manufacturers wanted to ensure that the economic prosperity they had achieved during the war would continue in the following years. To keep millions of soldiers from returning to the work force all at once, the government developed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944. The GI Bill, as it came to be called, kept some returning soldiers out of the job market by offering veterans full tuition and living expenses if they enrolled in college, graduate, law, or medical school.\textsuperscript{122} At the same time the American labor movement argued that the way to keep the economy booming was to maintain high wages through union contracts, increase the market for high-volume goods manufactured in the U.S., lower the unit cost of producing goods, and allow the government to regulate the economy and mediate between capital, and labor when necessary. The years after the war witnessed unprecedented economic prosperity and the quality of life for Americans rose each year between 1949 and 1973.\textsuperscript{123} Between the years of 1947 and 1952 alone, the median household income increased from $3,301 a year to $3,890 a year.\textsuperscript{124}

The appeal that marriage held for Americans did not dissipate once the country returned to peacetime. By 1950 American women on average were marrying at a younger age than they had in the previous fifty years. In that same year, forty percent of American men between the ages of twenty and twenty-four were married. The percentage of married men of the same age range in 1900 only reached twenty-two percent. No longer did Americans have to wait for better economic circumstances, as during the Great Depression, or for armed conflict to end, as during World War II, in order to marry. With the economic prosperity of the postwar years, Americans could marry as soon as they found someone they believed to would be an ideal, or even an acceptable spouse.\textsuperscript{125} By 1959, 47 percent of American brides were married before they turned nineteen.\textsuperscript{126} In fact, marriage among American youth became so dominate a part of domestic culture during the 1950s that a woman over the age of twenty-one could be regarded as

\textsuperscript{122} Coontz, Marriage, a History, 223.
\textsuperscript{123} Cohen, A Consumer’s Republic, 116, 121.
\textsuperscript{125} Coontz, Marriage, a History, 225-27.
\textsuperscript{126} Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat, 43.
an “old maid.” 127 Though more women enrolled in college during the postwar years, these women were less likely to complete their degrees as college was seen by some as the place for young women to find a husband. One survey found that two-thirds of the five thousand women they surveyed that had graduated college between 1946 and 1949 had married within three to six years after graduation. 128 By the 1950s two-thirds of American women that enrolled in college would drop out before completing their degree, the main reason being that they were getting married. 129

With the profits they earned during the war, De Beers was eager to continue their lucrative relationship with N.W. Ayer & Son. The agency’s goal was not to just increase sales, but to cultivate future consumers for the years to come. 130 It was not enough that they were experiencing increased sales from the marriage boom; they wanted to ensure that diamond engagement rings would be part of every American girl’s marriage fantasy. Lectures given by Gladys Babson Hannaford, the agency’s traveling diamond lecturer, at high schools and colleges across the country were one way the agency believed they could achieve this goal. 131 The agency claimed in one of their trade advertisements promoting the lecture series that her talk could be used as part of college courses such as geology, economics, and merchandising. The advertisement also mentioned that Mrs. Hannaford’s lectures were so popular that she needed to be booked far in advance. 132 On November 22, 1949 she gave a lecture at Miami University for the geology and marketing departments. During her talk she presented the audience with replicas of famous diamonds, samples of cut and uncut diamonds, and advised the audience on what factors to consider when purchasing a diamond. 133 In addition to Mrs. Hannaford’s lectures, N.W. Ayer prompted the sale of diamond engagement rings through film. In 1946 the agency created a film entitled The Magic Stone, which ran for four months in over two thousand theaters across the country. This informational film on diamonds was so popular that the agency

127 Coontz, Marriage, a History, 225-27.
128 May, Homeward Bound, 77.
129 Coontz, Marriage, a History, 227.
130 Epstein, The Rise and Fall of Diamonds, 126-27.
131 Otnes and Pleck, Cinderella Dreams, 65.
received requests for five hundred additional bookings after the original run ended in April. In 1947 N.W. Ayer & Son produced another short film entitled *The Eternal Gem*. This ten minute film featured a brief history of diamonds, stories about famous diamonds, and an in-depth look at the diamond cutting process. By October, 1947 *The Eternal Gem* had played in thirty-nine thousand theaters and was seen by an estimated fifteen million Americans.

**Conclusion**

When the Great Depression threatened to destroy the diamond industry, the De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited chose to market its diamonds in the one place that the product was still being consumed: the United States. Benefiting from New Deal deficit spending initiatives, the agency convinced Americans they could buy diamonds that fit their budget. During World War II promoting smaller, more affordable diamonds made it possible for young soldiers to purchase diamond engagement rings before they were shipped overseas. Finally, by taking advantage of the marriage boom in the U.S. in the postwar years, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers not only increased profits, but developed new ways to market diamond engagement rings to the American public. Through skillful marketing, the development of films and lectures, the agency convinced the American public that a diamond engagement ring signified love and commitment, sexual exclusivity, and the intimate promise of a shared life. A brilliant advertising campaign instilled the concept of “a diamond is forever” into the subconscious minds of generations of future brides and grooms. By taking advantage of and adapting to the changes in American courtship, economics, and marriage, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers made their advertisement campaigns a stunning success. They sold diamond rings as they marketed new ideas about courtship and marriage. In the process, they played an important role in shaping and reinforcing the gender roles played by generations of American men and women.

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Chapter 3: Reinforced Gender Roles: 
A Close Reading of De Beers Advertisements between 1943 and 1948

On a clear day in 1945 in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, Sergeant Theodore Whittelsey Jr. and his bride, Alice Edgar, were married at the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Chapel. The young couple exited the chapel as husband and wife, surrounded by family and friends. What is unique about the Whittelsey wedding is that there was one additional guest in attendance, Gladys Rockmore Davis, an illustrator and artist hired by N.W. Ayer & Son to sketch their wedding for a new De Beers advertisement. Davis’ rendition of the Whittelsey wedding became the advertisement entitled “Sunny Wedding.” This advertisement and others produced by N.W. Ayer & Son for De Beers during World War II and the postwar year did more than just sell diamond engagement rings; they reinforced the changing gender roles of 1940s America that promoted a new domestic ideal.

The purpose of advertising is to sell something. Businesses create products and advertising influences the way people spend money. Advertisements work most effectively when they cross class and racial lines and simultaneously reinforce existing gender constructions. A close reading of advertisements from the De Beers campaigns in the years between 1940 and 1948 demonstrates how N.W. Ayer played upon a combination of existing and changing cultural preconceptions regarding gender in order to sell diamonds. This chapter examines the ways that De Beers advertisements reflected the shifting gender roles of the 1940s through the giving and receiving of diamond engagement rings. While advertisements designed to sell diamond rings reached across the barriers of class and race, N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers used explicit language and imagery in their advertisements to promote a specific gender and class performativity that resonated primarily with “white” middle-class Americans.

By examining a sample of five De Beers advertisements used between 1943 and 1948 we can observe how their advertisements not only promoted the sale of diamond engagement rings, but also ideas about what it meant to be male and female in the United States during World War II and the postwar years. In Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, she introduces a concept known as gender performativity. She argues that the concept of what is considered to be distinctively

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137 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 2007), 184-188.
male or female is the product of one’s culture.\textsuperscript{138} Much like a play or sketch, we act out the roles that members of our sex are expected to play within our culture.\textsuperscript{139} During these years the giving and receiving of diamond engagement rings played an important part of the performance of heterosexual gender roles by men and women. Men were expected to buy a ring for their intended, as a tangible demonstration to the woman he wishes to marry that not only does he love her, but he is financially stable and can support a family because he can afford such an item. By accepting the ring a young woman agreed to be the man’s partner and act in a manner that supports her future husband’s goals and decisions. Being engaged indicated that she was no longer expected to act as an individual, but rather as half of a couple and as a supporting companion to her husband. Furthermore, by wearing a diamond engagement ring a woman demonstrated not only that she is in a relationship, but that she belongs to someone. The ring becomes a signifier that the woman is no longer sexually available to other men, often long before a couple was officially married.\textsuperscript{140} At the same time, women were also performing in their role as dependent consumers because while they desire a diamond engagement ring, they need or want men to purchase it for them. The advertisements N.W. Ayer & Son created in this period promoted the sale of diamond engagement rings and also the formulation of gender roles for men and women.\textsuperscript{141}

\textbf{Fiancées Alone with Letters from Their Loved Ones}

With millions of young servicemen fighting across the globe during World War II, women were left at home to keep homes, businesses, and war production going. Thirty-seven percent of American women became employed during the war. Before the war the percentage of employed women was twenty-eight percent. While seventy-five percent of working women at this time were married, there was a general sense of concern in American culture for the unmarried women left at home.\textsuperscript{142} Worried that the freedoms of single life would tempt women to lose their morals, the media urged women to remain “pure” for the time soldiers would be returning. Outside of her films movie star Bette Davis urged young women to not be afraid of protecting their reputations. In an issue of \textit{Photoplay} she told fans that “good sports get plenty of

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., xv.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 184-88.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 184-88.; Bailey, \textit{From Front Porch to Back Seat}, 104-5.
\textsuperscript{141}Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, xv.
\textsuperscript{142} May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 67.
rings on the telephone, but prudes get them on the finger,” a ubiquitous reminder of the increasing importance of diamond engagement rings and female virtue in American culture. N.W. Ayer & Son reflected this cultural expectation for female virtue in its advertisements for De Beers during the war. In chapter one we saw how between 1943 and 1945 N.W. Ayer & Son produced a series of advertisements that featured fiancées staring off into the distance with their diamond engagement ring to remind them of their husband-to-be. Examining a few of these lonely fiancée advertisements demonstrates the cultural expectation for a single woman to remain pure and faithful until her love returns from war.

One such example of these lonely fiancée advertisements entitled “Until Tomorrow,” premiered in 1943 and features a woman staring off into the distance, holding a letter in her left hand with her diamond engagement ring twinkling next to it. The expression of her face conveys a sense of longing for her love that is far away. The text states: “So carefully gay, so brief the hours you spent together. How can you know she understands … the things you will only be able to say when years once more become more calm and tranquil? The steadfast flame of your diamond engagement ring brings deep assurance—a tireless light to the threshold of your life to be.”

The text makes clear allusions to the ongoing war and the separations that it caused for many young couples. The image in the advertisement is of a young woman who is pretty, thin, and handsomely dressed in a skirt, blouse and heels. She is leaning against a wall in a relaxed pose, daydreaming as she holds a letter that is presumably from her fiancé. Reflective and passive, she remains still and inactive, appearing to be lost in thought with nowhere to go and nothing to do. This image conveys the idea that without her fiancé, this young woman is incomplete. She is performing the role of a loyal and devoted woman waiting for her love to return. This image personifies the cultural expectation that once a woman is part of a couple she can no longer act independently. The portrayal of this woman at home and not in public conveys the expectation of fidelity. Her diamond engagement ring serves as a “down payment” for her virginity. By wearing the engagement ring, she would be able to hold off other men’s advances and preserve her virtue for her fiancé. Alone, not interacting with other men, her purity and

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143 Quoted in Ibid., 65.
144 Ibid., 63-69.
loyalty to her fiancé remains firm and intact until the “tomorrow” when he will return from war.  

Another example from this series is entitled “Star of Hope.” Similar to “Until Tomorrow,” “Star of Hope” features a woman staring off into the distance with her diamond engagement ring prominently displayed on her left hand. The text states “The diamond engagement ring on her finger is bright as a tear— but not with sadness. Like her eyes it holds a promise— of cool dawns together, of life grown rich and full and tranquil. Its lovely assurance shines through all the hours of waiting, to kindle joy anew at their reunion.” The text conveys the sense that with the act of wearing her diamond engagement ring she will remain faithful to her fiancé even if he could be absent for years. The diamond on her engagement ring is intended to shine s a reminder of her fiancé’s love for her The image of her outside, but behind a fence, gives the impression that she is corralled or “fenced in,” kept apart from the company of others, especially other men, in order to remain faithful to her intended.

Young women observing these advertisements would have been encouraged to want diamond engagement rings and to see their rings as symbolizing the life that would follow—the marriage, and eventually a family. These advertisements demonstrated the need for young men to purchase their fiancées’ fidelity with a diamond ring. These advertisements did far more than sell diamond engagement rings; they manipulated female gender norms to emphasize loyalty and dependence on a man, even when he was absent, in order to feel fulfilled as well as the ideal of sexual purity before marriage.

As the war began to come to a close with the Allied victory in Europe in 1945, N.W. Ayer & Son worked on a series of advertisements for De Beers that featured couples on their wedding day. What is unique about this series is that it features a fair amount of religious diversity, with couples being married in Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish ceremonies. All of the grooms in the advertisements are represented in military uniform—a common theme in advertising during this period. Instead of referring to the engagements as the previous De Beers advertisements had done, the text of the advertisements links the importance of the diamond engagement ring to the wedding ceremony itself. The advertisements boast at the bottom of the page that the paintings for the advertisements are of actual couples on their wedding day and that the paintings were presented to the bride—such as Mrs. Whittelsey in “Sunny Wedding” as a
wedding present. These advertisements reinforced the gender norms that were being formed for both men and women once the war was over and pushed Americans towards a specific domestic ideal with men as fathers and providers and women as devoted wives and mothers.

One of N.W. Ayer & Son’s 1946 wedding advertisements for De Beers entitled “Bridal Ritual,” features a young soldier named Sergeant Norman Germain with his bride Gertrude Kramer during a Jewish wedding ceremony. The texts states that, “At last they meet beneath the canopy to part no more. And in long awaited vows young hearts find surcease from all the loneliness past and hope postponed… To light the tenderness of such a day, a diamond ring must flame with special purity and joy.” The “Sunny Wedding” described at the beginning of the chapter featured the new Mrs. Whittelsey smiling as she stands behind her husband, she in her white wedding dress and he in his military uniform. The text below states that “whatever care or crisis now betides throughout their lifetime they will meet always together.” Unlike its series of lonely fiancées, the wedding series that N.W. Ayer & Son produced during these early postwar years emphasized couples reuniting after their long separation. These images of young soldiers and their brides reinforced the gender norms of the period that promoted the idea of domesticity and put the large “white wedding” front and center in the changing culture of the postwar years.

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151 N.W. Ayer & Son, “Bridal Ritual.”

152 N.W Ayer & Son, “Sunny Wedding.”
From the immediate postwar period to the beginning of the Cold War, the rise of the formal “white wedding” became one of the most powerful symbols of domestic life with its emphasis on consumerism, gender norms, and the nuclear family. With the knowledge that millions of young American men would be shipped overseas to fight during World War II, young couples often rushed to either become engaged or married in hurried ceremonies. As premarital sex was discouraged, many of these young couples married so that they could have sex before their husbands would have to leave. Brides would wear white wedding dresses to communicate that they were virgins before their marriage. This rush to the altar received national attention as the government and experts became concerned with what would become of these marriages after the war. Many of them suggested that it was better to wait until the war was over before entering into matrimony. During a Sunday evening radio broadcast in 1942, First Lady Eleanor

Roosevelt urged women in college not to marry because of patriotic sentiments. Marriage expert Gretta Palmer advised soldiers to consider whether it would be better for him to hold off on marrying until after the war. The argument was that married soldiers may deter the war effort as they would be less likely to die for their country if they had a family at home to support. The reality was that many of these wartime marriages would end in divorce as the annual divorce rate climbed to eighteen percent by 1950. The reason for these high divorce rates was attributed to the fact that many of the couples that rushed into marriage during the war did not know each other for very long before they decided to marry. Years of separation caused by the war often changed the spouses that they barely knew into men and women that they could no longer connect with or relate to and so they would divorce.154

After the war, young women wanted larger weddings and spent money on the kind of ceremony they could not afford during the Great Depression and could not have during the war.155 Culturally there was an increasing emphasis on embracing domestic life, for both men and women. For women, the pre-war, wartime, and post-war period from the late 1930s to the late 1940s was a time of dramatic transformations. For example, in the late 1930s, women film stars like Joan Crawford and Marlene Dietrich played independent women with minds of their own. During the war films portrayed women in active roles as riveters, welders, nurses on the battlefield, and valiant mothers who kept things going at home. And then another shift took place after the war when film scripts, fiction, and advertising copy all focused on American women as new brides, young homemakers, and mothers. With the rise of American consumerism and the domestic ideal in the postwar years images of devoted wives and domestic consumers played dominate roles in every form of media. With the emergence of television in the late 1940s and early 1950s images of the nuclear family and devoted wives and mothers appeared in hundreds of thousands of living rooms across the U.S.156 The new image of the American woman was the middle class dependent consumer, a wife who is dependent on her husband’s income to buy goods for the home--- from refrigerators and washing machines to electric coffeepots.157 Men experienced dramatic changes in gender roles as well. The war had been a chance for men to

155 Jellison, It’s Our Day, 10-22.
display their masculinity through heroic acts and serving their country and protecting their homes. Like their female counterparts, men after the war were encouraged to get married and start a family to make up for the lives lost during the war. They now had to be more than protectors and soldiers; they had to perform the role of provider as well. The image of the warrior hero was replaced by the image of the husband, father, and “breadwinner.” Men were now expected to join the workforce, a place where a man could display very little authority or individualism. In the 1957 film *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, Gregory Peck plays a man who struggles to adapt to the rigidity of the 1950s. His life consists of riding the same commuter train to the same job where he is surrounded by men in identical grey flannel suits. For men like Peck’s character in *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* the home became the place where men still held some authority as wives and children were dependent on his income in order to survive.

The results from the Kelly Longitudinal Study in 1955 suggested that the majority of the white middle class couples that participated in the survey believed that men should provide the family’s income as well as serve as the head of the family. The Kelly Longitudinal Study was developed by Dr. E. Lowell Kelly, a psychologist at the University of Michigan in the late 1930s. The study consisted of 300 engaged couples that were surveyed from the late 1930s to 1955. By the 1955 survey the majority of the participants had been married for at least ten years. The survey participants were white, Protestant, middle class, and well-educated and were believed to be the group most likely to thrive in the postwar years.

The large white wedding became the couple’s day to assert their independence from their parents to establish their own nuclear family. The American wedding became a send off for the couple into the world as husband and wife, ready to begin their own life together, to start their own family. These images of De Beers’ “Sunny Wedding” and “Bridal Ritual” endorse the white wedding image and the gender norms associated with the new domestic ideal of the early postwar years. The brides in these images are assuming their role as dutiful wives; the grooms are becoming the sole providers for their families. The text of these advertisements directly

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associates the diamond engagement ring with the wedding and the start of a new life together. 162 “Sunny Wedding states that “the wedding day dawns clear and bright…throughout their lifetime they will always meet together…. If a diamond ring is to reflect such clarion joy, obtain it from a trusted jeweler.”163 “Bridal Ritual” suggests to consumers that “To light the tenderness of such a day, a diamond ring must flame with a special purity and joy.”164 In short, the diamond engagement ring is meant to signify their commitment to acting out the roles of husband and wife, provider and dependent consumer.165

Wealthy Engaged Socialites

Around the same time as the wedding couple series used throughout 1948, N.W. Ayer & Son produced a series of advertisements that featured paintings of wealthy engaged socialites and their diamond engagement rings. Using wealthy socialites to sell products was not a new tactic for the agency. During the early years of the Great Depression N.W. Ayer & Son had used the same concept to sell Pond’s Cold Cream. The premise of the advertisements was to make consumers feel that by buying this product they could be like these wealthy women.166 Examining these engaged socialites advertisements demonstrate how they not only promoted a certain type of gender performativity, but class-specific performativity as well.

One of the advertisements from the engaged socialites series features the recently married Mrs. William Budge of San Francisco in 1948. Eznar Hansen painted a formal portrait of the former Miss Willa McNear for the advertisement. The image of Mrs. Budge shows her sitting in a calm, almost regal position with her diamond engagement ring standing out as her left hand is placed on the table in front of her. The text states, “With starlike splendor, the engagement diamond shines its blessing on life’s most cherished contract. To fulfill this proud tradition your diamond, though it may be modest in cost, should be selected with care.”167 The combined image of Mrs. Budge and the text convey the sense that consumers could and should be more like their wealthier counterparts by purchasing diamond engagement rings. Connecting these

163 N.W. Ayer & Son, “Sunny Wedding.”
164 N.W. Ayer & Son, “Bridal Ritual.”
166 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 292-93.
gender roles to wealthy socialites conveys the sense that men and women of other social classes can share in a connection to the elite by buying and possessing something cherished by wealthy members of society. The diamond engagement ring then becomes a symbol of upward mobility. For men, giving a diamond engagement ring communicates to others that he is financially stable enough to afford such a luxury. He is proving that he can provide for the women he loves. For women, accepting and wearing a diamond engagement ring is a sign that someone believes them to be of worth. ¹⁶⁸

The engaged socialites series served N.W. Ayer & Son as a way to sell diamond engagement rings in the postwar years in the same manner that it sold cold cream during the Great Depression. These advertisements demonstrated a desire for upward mobility that was linked to postwar consumerism while at the same time promoting men and women’s new gender roles as providers and homemakers in the new consumer economy.

Figure 11. “Mrs. William Budge” and other advertisements from the engaged socialites series foster a connection between the elite and the rest of the United States. N.W. Ayer & Son, “Mrs. William Budge,” 1948, advertising tear sheet, author’s personal collection.

African American Gender Performativity

While from 1939 to 1952 De Beers’ advertisements circulated through many popular magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post and Life, the imagery of the subjects remained the same in one particular area; all of the individuals featured in De Beers advertisements during this period were racially “white.” In fact the agency and De Beers never specifically targeted African Americans, Asian Americans, or Latinos in any of their campaigns either during the Great Depression or during the postwar years. N.W. Ayer & Son did not place De Beers advertisements in African American magazines such as Jet or Ebony. Instead, like many advertisers of the period, the agency advertised in magazines such as The Saturday Evening Post where it felt that the product would be viewed by the most people. 169 Despite the lack of direct solicitation of African American business by De Beers, African American consumers were targeted by numerous companies advertising diamond engagement rings in black owned newspapers. These advertisements demonstrate that African Americans were subject to the same changes in gender roles and the push toward domesticity during and after World War II.

In the “Chatter and Chimes” column of the African American newspaper, New York Amsterdam News, on December 14, 1940 mentions local gossip at the newspaper and around the nation. One of the pieces of gossip concerns a Miss Olivia Arnold, a woman who worked as a secretary in the newspaper’s circulation department, and Mr. Julius J. Adams, the managing editor of the paper. The young woman was seen by her coworkers as wearing “a beautiful diamond ring on the correct finger.” 170 The ring was from Mr. Adams. This article conveys the sense that African American women and men were aware of the diamond engagement ring phenomenon and active participants in the practice. This type of article reinforced the ideal of matrimony, suggesting that by the “correct finger” the couple demonstrate the appeal of diamond engagement rings among African Americans. With the diamond engagement ring he gave to Miss Arnold and with her acceptance of the ring, Mr. Adams and Miss Arnold are becoming part of an American dream focused on the family. 171

169 Cohen, A Consumer’s Republic, 323.; Otnes and Pleck, Cinderella Dreams, 63-64.; Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 64.
Though N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers did not market diamond engagement rings directly to African Americans, many other companies did. These companies attempted to appeal to consumers that may not have had the same amount of money to spend on an engagement as whites. In 1947 African American households in the United States on average earned forty-eight percent less than white households. In order to attract African American consumers, the prices for diamond engagement rings needed to be more affordable. In an advertisement in the June 6th issue of the Atlanta Daily World in 1945, the House of Diamonds Company advertised diamond engagement rings by mail at bargain prices. Rather than mentioning the quality of the product or the love associated with it as De Beers advertisements did, the advertiser mentions the savings that consumers will receive by buying their diamond engagement rings by mail-order. A person could buy a diamond engagement ring in yellow gold for $5.95 and a wedding band to match for the total price of $10.95. This gives the impression that there was a desire for African Americans to have their own version of the American dream as husbands and wives, though at a much lower price.

Conclusion

While the purpose of advertisements is to sell an object, more often than not advertisements also sell ideas. In the case of N.W. Ayer & Son’s advertisements for De Beers, the agency did more than just sell diamond engagement rings to the American public. The agency’s advertisements for De Beers promoted redefined gender roles in 1940s America. These advertisements conveyed the sense that Americans should aspire to become husbands and wives and in turn assume the gender-specific roles of providers and homemakers who performed as dependent consumers. The images of lonely fiancées in “Until Tomorrow” and “Star of Hope” could have been many young women waiting at home for their fiancés to return from the war. The bright clear morning of the Whittelsey wedding in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania presented in “Sunny Wedding” could have been the wedding ceremony of many young Americans in the

postwar years. The De Beers advertisements took the ideals of matrimony and promoted them across social, economic, and, indirectly, racial lines. As a result, these advertisements did far more than just sell a product; they connected it to emotions and desires of American consumers. N.W. Ayer & Son sold to the United States the idea that the love and happiness found within matrimony could best be achieved by either buying or receiving a diamond engagement ring.

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175 N.W. Ayer, “Sunny Wedding.”
Coda

The De Beers advertising campaigns created by N. W. Ayer & Son continued to press diamond engagement rings onto the American public into the 1980s. The yields were great: the cartel expanded its sales of diamonds in the United States from twenty-three million dollars in 1939, to over two billion dollars, at the wholesale level, in 1979. Within forty years, the value of De Beers’ sales had nearly increased by a hundred fold. A week after N.W. Ayer & Son copywriter Frances Gerety died in 1999, unmarried, at the age of eighty-three, Advertising Age named her phrase, “a diamond is forever,” the number one advertising slogan of the twentieth century. Together N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers made the concept of giving and receiving diamond engagement rings an integral part of American culture that continues to the present day. Recently engagement rings have even been parodied in modern comedies such as Family Guy. Across the U.S., Americans continue to purchase diamond rings: in 2006 U.S. engagement ring sales reached $6.2 billion. The longing for these symbolic rings remains strong and depending on one’s economic status, Americans can satisfy this desire at retail establishments ranging from Wal-Mart to Tiffany’s.

Though the tradition of diamond engagement rings remains popular with American couples, the tradition itself has experienced some significant changes. According to The Knot Inc.’s 2009 Jewelry Study the bride played a major role in selecting a diamond engagement ring. Unlike their grandparents and great grandparents sixty-seven percent of today’s American couples choose an engagement ring together. One aspect of purchasing diamond engagement rings remains the same. Over eighty-two percent of men still purchase diamond engagement rings themselves and make the final decision on how much to spend on the ring.

While brides are becoming more involved in the purchasing diamond engagement rings the overall symbolism of the ring has remained the same. American consumers still associate

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176 Epstein, The Rise and Fall of Diamonds, 139.
177 Otnes and Pleck, Cinderella Dreams, 66.
diamond engagement rings with love even though in the United States in 2008 there was one divorce for every two new marriages.\textsuperscript{180} This demonstrates that although marriages may not last, the idea of love and commitment associated with diamond engagement rings does last. Most people enter into marriage with the best of intentions to remain married to the same person for the rest of their lives. The diamond engagement ring then serves as a reminder of the love and commitment that the couple shared and all of the hopes and dreams that they had for the future. It is this type of optimism that provides hope for future brides and grooms that their marriages will last as long as the diamond in her engagement ring.

From the Great Depression through the postwar years of the early 1950s, Americans experienced massive cultural shifts and changes in everyday life. The nation weathered a severe and long lasting economic depression in the 1930s and a world war in the 1940s, followed by a period of the greatest economic growth in United States history in the 1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{181} Over the course of all of these changes, De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited sought out the services of N.W. Ayer & Son to sell diamonds to the American public. Their efforts resulted in a series of advertising campaigns that embedded diamonds into the romantic consciousness of the vast majority of Americans---and contributed to a culture of consumption that in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century has gone “global” as couples around the world emulate the “white wedding” that became so popular in the U.S. after World War II. Over a period of thirteen years, the campaigns initiated by N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers succeeded beyond anyone’s wildest dreams. Using Francis Gerety’s slogan, “a diamond is forever,” N.W. Ayer & Son and De Beers made Americans believe that diamond engagement rings had always symbolized love and commitment in American culture, although the tradition did not develop until 1939. In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, the reality is that due to the success of De Beers’s advertising campaigns, diamond engagement rings and the idea of “forever” have become synonymous in the social and cultural memory of the American public.

\textsuperscript{181} Cohen, \textit{A Consumer’s Republic}, 116, 121.
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