Women's Inheritance:

Gender, Space, and Labor in Clorox's *The Laundry Timeline*

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I. INTRODUCTION

On July 18th 2017, the United Kingdom's Advertising Standards Authority made a landmark decision to ban advertisements, on television and in print, that perpetuate gender stereotypes. Beginning in 2018, any advertisement that "promotes gender stereotypes or denigrates people who do not conform to them"[1] will be vetted against a new, more rigorous, set of rules established by the ASA. Not long after this ruling, I came across an American television advertisement for Clorox Bleach, titled *The Laundry Timeline*, from 2007.[2] In thirty-five seconds, this commercial illustrates a serialized narrative of women performing the laundry across the last century, but positions this unpaid domestic labor as part of a broader legacy of middle-class family values and tradition. The pictorial representations of these domestic scenes are marked not only by an inheritance of women's generational knowledge as it relates to domestic labor, but also by distinct classist, racialized and heteronormative coding. In consideration of the ASA's 2017 ruling and this commercial from just a decade prior, it was clear that the United States could benefit from a similar change in advertising standards as the United Kingdom.

After viewing this commercial, I began to consider not only the ways in which western advertisements frequently reproduce heteronormative gender roles, but more specifically, the ways in which advertisements for cleaning products resituate women within the domestic interior by spatially reinforcing their perceived historical relationship to housework. *The Laundry Timeline* fabricates a trans-historical narrative of western progress, in which historicized social norms regarding gender and gendered space collude to dictate homogenized representations of women performing domestic labor. This commercial is predicated on a trajectory of presumed social and

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[1] Iliana Magra, "Britain Cracking Down on Gender Stereotypes in Ads," *The New York Times*, 18 July, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/world/europe/britain-ads-gender-stereotypes.html
[2] The Clorox Company, "The Laundry Timeline," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZeQUxSjHwU

technological development in the west as a way to reaffirm the status of the white, middle-class family. In that, the advertisement capitalizes on a narrative organized around the celebration of family history, intergenerational knowledge and a nostalgia for tradition. I will argue that this insistence on 'family heritage' as it relates to domestic labor functions to resituate representations of women in the home – in contrast to the perceived progress that is demonstrated through the advertisement. In order to argue this position, I will invoke Orvar Lofgren, Henri Lefebvre, Angela Davis and Michel Foucault as theoretical frameworks to identify and deconstruct the structures of power that inform the Clorox commercial. An examination of this advertisement will address how the narrative conveyed effectively recapitulates ideological conventions regarding women, domesticity and gendered labor. As this commercial articulates a symbolic codification of the domestic interior across the last century, it will function as a lens through which to chart and interpret how shifts in domestic architecture are informed by gender and how this, in turn, re-inscribes gendered forms of labor into the home.

II. THE LAUNDRY TIMELINE

The Laundry Timeline depicts six interrelated interior scenes featuring women (and two men) doing the laundry. Each scene rapidly dissolves into the next, demonstrating a teleological index of domestic progress across the last century. As a significant formal device, the action of the commercial is sped up to several times the speed of regular motion, which accelerates the passage of time and indicates that the narrative of western progress, spanning nearly a hundred years, is linear and cohesive – easily consumable for the viewer. The backdrop of each fleeting scene is a middle-class, domestic space that indicates a new decade and cultural era in the west. Every

character portrayed in this commercial is white, so not only is it coded to appeal to a specific class demographic, but also to signify the authority of the white nuclear family within western society.

Temporally mapping performances of domestic labor, the commercial begins in a vague representation of the early 1900s. Two women dressed as housemaids run a white sheet through a laundry press – a technological advancement popularized in bourgeois homes as an alternative to ironing large pieces of cloth. A bottle of Clorox bleach, in its original 1913 packaging, sits on a stand next to the machine. At first, it appears that this laundry set-up sits center in what could be interpreted as a dining room. However, the china cabinet decorated with silver wares is crammed and cluttered, as if used to store extras that were not selected for display in more prominent rooms of the house. The black and white tiled floor and modestly decorated dining table, only set for four, is the most obvious indicator that this space is actually either part of a kitchen and casual dining area or, most likely, the servants' common area in a bourgeois household. Regardless, there is a distinct conflation of space and functionality in this first scene, which sets a romantic and nostalgic tone for the duration of the advertisement.

As the lighting shifts from mid-day to evening, the room transforms into a new, much less spatially ambiguous, domestic setting. It is nighttime, a lone woman unloads laundry from a forties era, barrel-shaped laundry machine. She labors in what appears to be a sparsely decorated central room of the house – a wooden kitchen table with bread on it, and shelves full of cans, pots and pans are stationed to the left of the woman. On her right, the door to the room is wide open – trust and safety are implied as the ever-present Clorox brand quietly ensures the well-being of the family home. Past the door, a large field and hills are revealed – suggesting this scene is set on a rural, middle-class homestead. As the commercial flitters through these shifting domestic spaces, a female voice-over states: *Laundry is not new…*

Again, the light shifts from night to early morning and with it, the space morphs into a much more elaborately decorated room than the preceding modest homestead. The boxy, powder blue, front-loading washer featured in this scene appears to be from the fifties or early sixties, still situated in a central location of the home, at this period in time. To the left of the machine is yet another family dining table, this one in Formica and featuring a bright fruit basket. This space is now much more obviously organized as a kitchen/family area. The clear organization of spatial functions asserts social progress in the sense that westerners are socialized to associate civility with a rational (or familiar) arrangement of the modern family home. While a neatly dressed woman unloads laundry, newly introduced appliances appear, include a large refrigerator, an electric mixer and an electric fan. To the right of the washing machine is a cozy family room, complete with a star clock, quintessential of this era, and the corner of a wooden entertainment center, also newly popularized during this time. The voice-over continues her story: *Your mother, your grandmother, her mother, they all did the laundry…*

As soon as they appear, aspects of the interior decor shift, disappear and transform into a new setting, in tandem with a shifting of light – signaling yet another cultural era. This time a wooden staircase appears, and suddenly the scene has been transported to the basement of a middle-class home. Wood panels line the walls and an orange, tartan-patterned couch sits plumply behind what is clearly the back corner of a television set (the first depicted in the commercial). A brown vinyl washer and dryer are nestled underneath the stairs. To left is the same family dining table from the previous scene, which quickly disappears and is replace with a large punching bag. Behold, the first male characters of the commercial enter the scene, while one (shirtlessly) plays with the punching bag, the other fiddles nondescriptly with something under the stairs. This is a crucial moment in the commercial as the voice-over states: - *maybe even a man or two* – did the

laundry. Contrary to what the narrator describes, no man in this commercial is explicitly depicted tending to the laundry in the same manner as the women; these men are merely commended for being in the vicinity of the machines. The men are quickly replaced by two teenagers sitting on the couch watching television, as an older woman, in a long skirt and turtleneck, descends the stairs to actually turn over the laundry. At this point in the advertisement, the speed of the action is making it difficult to keep track of all the shifts in setting and the comings and goings of various characters, iconic pieces of furniture, appliances and objects. The only noticeable mainstay is the laundry apparatus, always the central focus of the frame, and the bottle of Clorox perpetually sitting close by.

A new decade is signaled with another shift in lighting caused by the opening and closing of a garage door. This scene is set in an eighties-era garage, made apparent by the man who parks a mid-eighties model sports car, as his wife unloads the laundry. This is another crucial moment in the teleological progression of the commercial because the machine has now been cast out of the central living area of the home, and relegated to the garage. Although still a focal point of the scene, with a bottle of Clorox to its right, (now in packaging more recognizable to modern viewers), the white double-stacked washer/dryer is now book ended by a tool bench to its left and an empty shelving unit on its right. Suddenly, a child with a bicycle flits through the scene and the flashy red sports car is replaced by an exercise machine, the shelves are now stuffed with not only boxes, but athletic equipment, picnic wares and camping gear.

The light shifts again to day time as the machines are throttled into a modern day, middle class home. A sleek, front-loading washer and dryer now sit side by side, appearing to be sequestered within their own, minimally decorated private room, contained under a built-in counter top. Shelves filled with cleaning products hang above the counter and a woman folds crisp white

towels, a tub of Clorox bleach powder by her side. A small child observes her mother doing the laundry – insinuating that this 'family tradition' will live on when she comes of age to perform domestic labor. Through the last two scenes, the voice-over concludes her narrative by stating: *Although a lot has changed – the machines, the detergents, the clothes themselves, one thing has not, the bleach most trusted to keep whites pure white is still Clorox Bleach*.

The domestic setting disintegrates entirely and fades into a stark white backdrop (a severe contrast to the endless bric-a-brac that permeated the last several scenes). Featured is a single bottle of Clorox that morphs from its original 1913 packaging, to a mid-century version and, finally, into its current form, as we recognize the packaging today – yet another symbolic depiction of western progress. Text stating "Pure White, Since 1913" appears on either side of the bottle and the commercial fades to black. Surely, the intention behind the tagline is not to articulate an explicitly white supremacist agenda, but considering the unavoidable whiteness that permeates the narrative, it is difficult to ignore the implication that the white nuclear family is the veritable star of, and target demographic for, this advertisement.

III. THE DIVISION OF GENDER ROLES IN THE MIDDLE-CLASS HOME

This narrative concerning the white, middle-class family is predominantly organized around the explicit gendering of women's occupational roles and social value within the domestic realm. The expected function of women; as homemakers, as mothers, as nurturers, is reiterated throughout the commercial by the repetition of linguistic and visual coding. In the middle of the advertisement, a female voice-over states: *Your mother, your grandmother, her mother, they all did the laundry.* This nostalgic historicization of women's intergenerational labor reconstructs the task of laundry as more than a mundane chore – it is a dignified inheritance passed down through

generations of women. In this commercial, the laundry is symbolic of an esteemed family heritage, of western progress – a legacy that must be carried into the future to guarantee the hegemony of the white, nuclear family. The racial and gendered coding in the commercial implies that the target audience for this advertisement is largely middle-class, white and engaged in heteronormative performances of marriage and family life. Therefore, an a-historical figuration of the white, middle-class homemaker is integral to the temporal codification of the narrative, as she herself is not only symbolic of the family and the home, but also the longevity and reliability of the Clorox brand. Clearly depicted in the forties-era scene, a solitary homemaker stoically performs her duties into the night – domestic labor is constructed as an honor, rather than an obligation. In "The Sweetness of Home" Orvar Lofgren remarks that in 19th century Sweden, […] the production of homeliness was woman's work […] qualities of home became the qualities of women. Notions of home and womanhood, privacy and sentiment were strongly interwoven."[3] Underpinned by this Victorian-era definition of feminine duty, the commercial establishes a trans-historical narrative of women's unvalorized labor in order to fortify a sentimental commitment to the Clorox brand.

Spanning across decades, everything around the homemaker adapts – her furniture, her clothes, and her home all reflect a linear trajectory of technological progress, but her role is unaffected by time. She remains static, consistently carrying out her duties, not unlike the bleach product beside her promises to do. As such, the commercial depicts what Lofgren describes as a perversion of "[…] the image of the home or the family as a cultural weapon" a process in which "[…] the past will often be reorganized for the present."[4] The advertisement instrumentalizes both the home and the family as signifiers of stability, but in doing so, they establish a series of a-

[3] Orvar Lofgren, "The Sweetness of Home: Class, Culture and Family Life in Sweden," in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 146.
[4] Lofgren, "The Sweetness of Home," 157.

historical platitudes that conflate and homogenize the varied roles and spaces women have occupied across the last hundred years. In denouncing the actual lived and documented experiences of women in the modern era, this commercial mobilizes and historicizes a nostalgic fantasy of the middle-class white woman as domestic goddess, to reinforce heteronormative domestic conformity. This symbolism is acutely legible in the fifties-era scene of the advertisement, in which the dress and demeanor of the perky homemaker – in her kitten heels and checkered blue dress – becomes synonymous with her powder blue washing machine. The commercial visually demonstrates (and explicitly states) that regardless of the innumerable shifts in technology, trends and tastes in the last ten decades, women continue to choose Clorox as their most trusted bleach brand. As such, the narrative fortifies a correlation between the white homemaker and Clorox bleach, thus becoming a commodity sign that articulates a story about family heritage and the importance of tradition, as integral aspects of western family identity. Goldman and Papson describe this "intersection between a brand name and a meaning system summarized in an image"[5] as the process by which the commodity sign is constructed. Regardless of the reification of middle-class family values, the ideological implication of this commodity sign is that laundry is unequivocally women's work, an unvalorized form of labor, which although still part and parcel of a prevalent form of modern business (laundromats, drycleaners, maid services), is always devalued as legitimate labor when performed by a woman inside her own, private home.

Although the commercial is meant to provide a condensed narrative of western development in the last century, pivotal moments in American history that would ultimately contribute to the restructuring of normative gender roles in the west are entirely erased. There is hardly a reference to the Second World War, during which many women left the home to take up

[5] Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, "Advertising in the Age of Accelerated Meaning," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt (New York: New Press, 2000), 82.

positions in factories, field hospitals and other war-related organizations.[6] Additionally, the cultural climate of the sixties and seventies in the United States, often epitomized by civil unrest, is severely depoliticized in this commercial. Women, especially women of color, played instrumental roles in the power and proliferation of the various Civil Rights, Anti-War, and Women's Liberation movements of the time. However, the commercial echoes strategies often used in television and film, which characterize men, specifically white men, as the forerunners of a toned-down, consumable portrayal of social 'progress' during these decades. This misrepresentation is demonstrated in the commercial in what Lofgren describes as a "[…] discrepancy between the ideal and the real"[7] – a fracturing between the conventionally historicized roles of women, and their actual, lived experiences. In the seventies-era vignette, the commercial makes a negligible attempt to reference a subversion of gender norms by introducing into the scene a man with long hair and bellbottoms. At this moment, the voice-over quips that *maybe even a man or two* did the laundry – as if this constitutes a justified disruption of the hegemonic gender binaries reinforced throughout the course of the advertisement. Further, the representation of white men milling about near a washing machine does not count as a legitimate acknowledgement of social change during this era. Of course, men across the last century have done laundry, that fact is not in question. What is under speculation, is that the seventies-era scene of this commercial depicts the affable progressiveness of white men at the expense of women's social stagnation. Portrayed as tolerant and liberal, the men in the commercial are afforded a certain depth of character not available to the women. In erasing the plurality of women's occupations, both in the workplace and in the home, they are subjected to stasis, although everything else around them is

[6] Let it be acknowledged that many of these opportunities were only afforded to white women. Discrimination against women of color – who, unlike white middle-class women, were no strangers to working as wage laborers outside the home – prevented them from having the same visibility in wartime efforts.
[7] Lofgren, "The Sweetness of Home," 148.

constantly evolving. As Lofgren notes, implicit in the reinforcement of these gender tropes is "[…] a moralizing hiding behind the dominant culture's definition of normality."[8] In this way, the commercial deploys representations of the past to normalize the present. The relationship between family heritage and the Clorox brand is insisted upon by the representation of normative gender roles as a historical duty to which women must conform, thus assigning a moral value to the preservation of family tradition. By coding domestic labor as a family inheritance that women are obligated to uphold, the advertisement legitimizes a strict separation of gendered labor within the domestic. This regulation of gender roles functions to resituate women within the home – in contrast to the other forms of western development upon which the narrative is predicated. So, although this narrative is teleological in many ways – charting a progression of domestic architecture, decorating trends, modern appliances and clothing – the lack of accounting for significant cultural and social shifts in the last century denies the same mobility to women, who remain socially inert in their traditional, domestic roles.

IV. THE GENDERED ORGANIZATION OF DOMESTIC SPACE

In *The Laundry Timeline* space is explicitly used as a medium for the production of history. Throughout the commercial, variations on middle-class domestic space are repeatedly erected, disassembled and reconstructed. This formal visual strategy is significant because the continual collapsing of space elicits a cohesive teleological index of domestic progress across the last century. By consistently fixing a woman and a washing machine at the center of each new space, the commercial reiterates an ideological correlation between domesticity and women that corroborates the narrative that laundry is part of a larger generational inheritance amongst women.

[8] Ibid., 157.

In the first three scenes, spanning from the early 1900s to the 1950s, the female characters and the washing apparatuses are situated in an explicitly central location of the house – in a communal area used for eating, socializing or entertaining. Thus, imagery of women laboring in or near the kitchen and/or dining area legitimize essentialist notions of women as nurturing figures, and continually resituates them within the home, conforming to their traditional domestic duties. In "Home-Making: An Architectural Perspective" Lynne Walker notes, "[…] the different roles and capacities of men and women in culture and society were coded (architecturally and linguistically) and built into the fabric of the home through the two essential elements of Victorian planning, *segregation* and *specialization*."[9] The impact that Victorian architectural design still has on the spatial arrangement of the modern family dwelling, in terms of the gendered separation of space, is made visible in the commercial by continuously situating women in proximity to the laundry machine throughout the advertisement, functioning to associate women, as opposed to men, to the performance of domestic labor. As Rashad Shabazz remarks: "Space is one of the most important and significant illustrators of uneven development, access and social order. Its organization and how people are situated within it reflect social hierarchies."[10] Shabazz's observations specifically comment on the impact that the kitchenette had on the identity formation of black men in Chicago, but his description of space as a fundamental means of organizing social hierarchies is pertinent to the commercial's representations of gendered spatial confinement. By spatializing femininity, the advertisement portrays housework as intrinsic to women's identities and repackages this socially devalued labor as part of a grander narrative regarding women's intergenerational kinship. So, although the image of the home is often feminized in popular media, it is, in fact, patriarchal

[9] Lynne Walker, "Home-Making: An Architectural Perspective," *Signs* 27, no. 3 (2002): 824.
[10] Rashad Shabazz, "'Our Prison': Kitchenettes, Carceral Power and Black Masculinity During the Interwar Years," in *Spatializing Blackness* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015) 45.

authority that informs the spatialization of gender, produced through architectural boundaries that codify functional divisions of space. As evidenced in the commercial, echoes of this ideological dogmatism regarding the explicit separation of gendered space, remain prevalent within current western modes of spatial organization.

In the earlier vignettes of the commercial, the central location of the washing machine within the home (functioning as a symbolic hearth) codes it as an apparatus of family togetherness – thus associating the Clorox brand with stability and family values, the bedrock of an orderly domestic space. However, the latter half of the advertisement demonstrates a cultural shift in spatial designations. The act of doing the laundry is displaced from the heart of the home, and relocated to more peripheral areas such as the basement in the seventies scene, or the garage in the eighties scene. As Henri Lefebvre observes in *The Production of Space,* in terms of spatial organization, perfunctory bodily functions such as eating, sleep and sex "[…] are thrust out of sight. Adjudged strictly crude and vulgar, they are relegated to the rear of the house, to kitchens, bathrooms, water closets and bedrooms […]"[11] For Lefebvre, the performance of these acts are what produce lived space, which is organized through an interrelated system of symbols and signs that constitute representational space. Moving out of the midcentury and into the present, like the bodily functions described by Lefebvre, laundry came to be viewed as a shameful kind of labor that needed to be hidden from potential house guests, spatially disavowing the necessity of this labor as a part of daily routine. Particularly in the eighties scene of the commercial, the spatial segregation of the laundry from the rest of the household suggests that, in the modern home, cultural norms dictate that the laundry should be concealed from public view because dirty clothes are a reminder of the bodily functions described by Lefebvre. In this way, social propriety is

[11] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 315.

imbedded into the architectural design of the home, while also reflecting dominant ideological conventions regarding gendered labor. Thus, in the commercial, the homemaker is subjugated in the social organization of the home because she is forced to covertly perform her labor in the garage, a marginalized area of the house. It is in the final scene, in which the machines are sequestered in their very own laundry room, that this return to Victorian-style specialization of space as described by Walker and Lefebvre, with its strict division of functions, is most evident. In western society, many contemporary middle and upper-middle-class homes have rooms specially designed and designated for doing the laundry. As represented in the commercial, the laundry room in the final vignette is equipped with shelves, filled with cleaning products, and a large counter top for folding. In modern homes, the laundry room is also often removed from more publicly accessible areas of the home, tucked away in a marginal part of the house – in a basement or at the end of a long hallway. As such, the social and spatial subjugation of women, synonymous with domestic labor, is emphasized by the shift from central to peripheral location of the laundry machines in the latter half of the commercial.

The advertisement depicts how domestic architecture can be utilized not only to reinforce an association between women and the home, but to dictate the distinctly gendered roles that men and women inhabit within the domestic sphere by inscribing those roles into the spatial design of the home. Lefebvre states, "A characteristic contradiction of abstract space consists in the fact that, although it denies the sensual and sexual, its only immediate point of reference is genitality: the family unit, the type of dwelling (apartment, bungalow, cottage, etc.), fatherhood and motherhood, and the assumption that fertility and fulfillment are identical. The reproduction of social relations is thus crudely conflated with biological reproduction […]"[12] This observation is accurately

[12] Lefebvre, "The Production of Space," 49.

demonstrated in the last two vignettes of the commercial, in which the presence of children is emphasized so that the image of family can be symbolically used to denote the importance of sustaining family heritage through biological reproduction. In the eighties-era scene, the man's red sports car, a symbol of male virility, is replaced by an exercise machine, a symbol of mortality. As the mother does the laundry, a young child rides through the garage on a bicycle, signaling the ushering in of a new generation that will take up and carry out the moral and social obligations of their parents. In tandem with the presence of the child, the garage suddenly becomes filled with all the residues of a wholesome family life – camping gear, sports equipment, boxes full of outgrown toys and clothing, all make reference to normative middle-class family values, which is no longer symbolically insisted upon by the centrality of the machine in domestic space. The shift in the use of this space indicates not only the passage of time and development of western technology, but the perceived development of family, which must be explicitly illustrated due to the now peripheral location of the washing machine. In reconciling with the reality that the social formation of many modern families is not as neat and tidy as those depicted in this commercial, the re-occurring representation of the white, heteronormative family unit reflects the current waves of moral panic in the United States, expressed in response to the now tenuous authority of the white, nuclear family. By restoring traditional roles to the family unit, this commercial mobilizes the gendered organization of space to indulge in a nostalgic fiction of white, middle-class family values, a fantasy in which women are subjugated and instrumentalized in order to support men and the development of the population. Ultimately, the commercial illustrates the ways in which the architectural and spatial arrangement of the domestic space constitutes a form of socialization that dictates social and cultural norms around the separation of gendered labor.

V. GENDERED LABOR IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

By instilling a strict division of social roles and spatial organization, *The Laundry Timeline* unequivocally designates the laundry as women's work. Although the over-arching narrative of progress indicates a trajectory of social and technological development throughout the last century, it is contained within a classist, racist and misogynistic definition of progress that, even in the present, stages women within the home as domestic laborers. Although the architecture, technology and clothing may shift in each scene, every female character is situated in the same position, repeatedly doing the laundry in virtually the same manner. In "The Obsolescence of Housework" Angela Davis describes how economic institutions of the west depend upon women's unpaid housework, which is why capitalist society is resistant to the total industrialization of domestic labor. As Davis states, "Since housework does not generate profit, domestic labor was naturally defined as an inferior form of work as compared to capitalist wage labor."[13] And thus, the homemaker became ideologically equated to domestic life, and the unvalorized forms of labor that take place within the domestic realm. Even though the commercial portrays the laundry as a time-honored tradition, it simultaneously devalues domestic labor and its association to femininity by refusing women, as socially produced subjects, the same trajectory of development afforded to technology, architecture, clothing represented in the commercial. The homemaker is the only aspect of the commercial that remains static because her labor is the only thing that does not directly benefit capitalism. The commercial thus produces a fiction that claims, by purchasing Clorox bleach, a woman's participation in consumerism will transform her socially devalued labor into a dignified contribution to family legacy.

[13] Angela Y. Davis, "The Approaching Obsolescence of House Work: A Working-Class Perspective," in *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1983), 228.

It is crucial to acknowledge that in this commercial, domestic labor is only coded through figurations of white, middle-class womanhood. In her essay, Davis observes that although white housewives became "a symbol of the economic prosperity enjoyed by the emerging middle classes"[14] black women were not similarly coded because, in addition to their own domestic labor, many black women also worked in the industrial-capitalist complex; "they have thus carried the double burden of wage labor and housework."[15] The commercial demonstrates this subjugation of women of color by only representing white women doing the laundry as if it were part of an esteemed family heritage to be passed down through generations. The complete lack of representation of people of color in this commercial also revitalizes a fantasy devised by mid-century advertising campaigns in order to sell domestic technologies such as dishwashers, vacuums and laundry machines to homemakers. As Lofgren remarks, the homemaker became a new demographic for household appliances, as "modern living was equated with investing in new technology."[16] These advertisements presented domestic labor as a luxurious pastime for the idle woman. The appliances were advertised as antidotes to the laboriousness of manual labor – with these advances in technology women could still fulfill their roles as domestic guardians, without breaking a sweat. In this way, by purchasing home appliances, domestic labor was sold to white women as an opportunity to exercise their middle-class affluence. By solely portraying white women, the commercial reflects similar strategies as its predecessors, suggesting that only white women have the economic and social privilege to indulge in the laundry as if it were part of a celebrated family inheritance – a ritual to be performed with reverence.

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[14] Davis, "The Approaching Obsolescence of House Work," 229.
[15] Ibid., 231.
[16] Lofgren, "The Sweetness of Home," 155.

It is worth noting that, in the first scene of the commercial, two housemaids crank a large piece of white cloth through a laundry press. As employees of a bourgeois household, these are the only women in the entire commercial that are assumed to be compensated for their domestic labor. This initial representation of housework as paid labor legitimizes an association between women and domesticity. Suddenly, transported through the forties, fifties and into the present, the two maids are replaced again and again by women who appear to be doing the laundry in their own homes, not as wage laborers for someone else. As such, it is presumed that these women are not being financially compensated to perform the same labor as the maids in the first scene. This 'bait and switch' technique continuously reproduces the hegemonic gender roles that socially designate domestic labor as women's naturalized duty. In *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault discusses the idle woman as a figure made synonymous to domestic labor. As he states, "It is worth remembering that the first figure to be invested by the deployment of sexuality, one of the first to be 'sexualized,' was the 'idle' woman. She inhabited the outer edge of the 'world,' in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations.[17] Foucault explains that women's bodies are socially produced to be read through their heterosexual functions – childbirth, development of the population, child-rearing, and by association, all the related domestic labors such as cooking and cleaning that subtend these primary occupations. As such, women's bodies are compulsively managed by socially enforced moral and biological obligations, focused entirely around the development of the population. During the seventies-era vignette of the commercial, a feeble attempt is made to demonstrate social progress by associating men to domestic labor. This deviation from the norm is quickly refuted in the eighties scene, as the narrative reverts back to a

[17] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 121.

portrayal of a woman loading laundry in the garage, while a man parks his bright red sports car and walks right past her, paying her labor no attention. As Foucault explains, this demonstrates how women's conduct is shaped by social discourses administered by the family. Decentering the site of power, this democratic administration of social norms is productive, rather than repressive. It doesn't tell women how they shouldn't behave, it reinforces how they should through the discursive reproduction of social norms, exemplified by the man in the eighties vignette who completely ignores the laundry because it doesn't pertain to his role in the family. In a blurring of public and private space, the advertisement acknowledges the social, political, and economic policing of women's bodies within a knowledge/power discourse, in which knowledge is regulated by the family unit through the enforcement of social norms that organize sexuality and gender.

The last of the six eras featured in the commercial is, in some ways, the most disturbing. In this scene, a blonde-haired child, implied to be a small girl, watches on as her mother unloads the laundry. Mid-century advertising for domestic appliances also often invoked the presence of a female child. This characterization affirms domestic labor as a generational inheritance, but also reflects Foucault's observation that the family functions as an administerial proxy of the state, to regulate social norms. Acting as a diffused surveillance structure, the social construction of the family unit functions to prescribe the gendered norms and traditions to which women must adhere. The child's presence in the commercial suggests that this is part of her education on the domestic labor she too will be expected to perform one day. In this way, domestic labor becomes ritual; the homemaker washes, dries, irons and folds clothing only for the rest of her family to dirty the items again and again. The futility of her cyclical labor affirms a paradigm in which the act of labor is fetishized because it can never be fully realized. The ritualization of gendered labor in the commercial is also indicative of the perpetual cycle of consumption that underpins western

capitalist culture. The evolution of consumer culture is demonstrated in the commercial through the advancement of washing machine technology – the shapes, sizes, colors and abilities of each machine progress across time, while the homemaker is emphatically arrested in her position as domestic labor. Not only does this scene solidify the gendered expectations that the homemaker must fulfill, it suggests that when this figure is no longer capable of performing her domestic duties, they will inevitably be inherited by her offspring, who has been conditioned to perform the same gendered tasks. This thematic fictionalization of domestic labor as a celebration of intergenerational knowledge is asserts through a homogenized representation of history, in which underlying social norms fix women in a state of social and cultural stasis.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Laundry Timeline deploys the domestic space as a site through which to reinvigorate ideological associations between women, the domestic and housework. By reprising linguistic and visual coding often invoked in mid-century advertising, this commercial invokes antiquated gender roles and imagery of gendered domestic space, in order to reinscribe unpaid domestic work as not only women's obligation, but part of an esteemed intergenerational legacy of women's contributions to home life. In this essay, I analyze the ways in which representations of gender roles, domestic spatial organization and domestic labor are mobilized to construct a narrative of technological and social progress in the west as a means of reaffirming the authority of the white nuclear family. As such, the domestic is activated as a social container that demarcates ideological norms. Through these means, the commercial evokes a teleological narrative of western development that capitalizes on platitudes of family history, generational inheritance and a nostalgia for tradition, in order to reinvest in the cultural status of the white, middle-class family.

This exploitation of the family heritage narrative legitimizes the resituation of women within the home – in contrast to the perceive 'progress' that is demonstrated through the advertisement. As such, doing the laundry is perpetuates as a subject-forming structure, through which women are given distinguished purpose and families are able to manifest their shared identities, reformulated and standardized through domestic ritual. The treatment of domestic labor as a time-honored feminine tradition invokes the washing machine as both an object and a social force that helps the family to regulate social norms. Throughout the commercial, the inconsistency between laundry as a physical act and laundry as a social act is exemplified through a sustained narrativization of family unity and gendered separation. Paradoxically, domestic labor is called upon to maintain harmony of the family unit, while simultaneously enforcing hegemonic gender roles and divisions of labor. By re-signifying the act of doing the laundry as part of a dignified family heritage, the anachronous narrative of this advertisement is relevant to 21st century audiences in the United States because it reflects moral anxieties conservative members of the population have regarding the status and privilege of the white middle-class family as a hegemonic symbol of wholesome American values. As such, *The Laundry Timeline* instrumentalizes a transhistorical account of housework to bolster the image of the white middle-class family, at the expense of disavowing women's fraught relationships to domesticity and unvalorized forms of labor.

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