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The persistence of British ethnicity : British war brides in the USA

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THE PERSISTENCE OF BRITISH ETHNICITY:
BRITISH WAR BRIDES IN THE USA

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Christina Maestre Sidlow

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ABSTRACT

The Persistence of British Ethnicity: British War Brides in the USA

By Christina Maestre Sidlow

During World War II, thousands of American troops stationed in Britain married local women. Once the war ended, 70,000 war brides immigrated to the United States, representing the single largest emigration of British women in one decade. Their history as an American immigrant group has escaped previous scholars' consideration. This thesis examines war brides as an immigrant group and explores their assimilation into the United States. Three areas in particular are discussed: the effect of brides' expectations, their immediate physical adjustment, and the long-term emotional strain of leaving their homeland. This study is largely based on information obtained from brides. Nineteen oral interviews and sixteen survey responses provide insight into an immigrant group's painful adjustment to a new culture.

Although the brides emigrated from an English-speaking country with a cultural heritage similar to the dominant U.S. culture, many have not completely assimilated. Several brides continue to feel a strong connection to Britain and have refused to incorporate aspects of American culture into their own identities. Their experiences challenge the concept of an American melting pot.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my grandfather, Reverend Alexander Anderson. Like the women in this study, he left the British Isles to come to the United States and created a new life for himself. His love, support and encouragement throughout my life helped me achieve any goal I set for myself. I will always hold his memory close to my heart.

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CHAPTER ONE

DISCOVERING BRITISH IMMIGRANTS' ETHNICITY: THE EMERGENCE OF WAR BRIDE SCHOLARSHIP

From early 1942 to the end of World War II in Europe in May 1945, approximately two million American soldiers crossed the Atlantic to Britain before going into combat in either North Africa or on the European continent. British communities, most of which had never experienced prior contact with Americans, were inundated with loud, brash, gum-chewing servicemen. Most of the soldiers, in their early twenties, quickly began pursuing young British women. Courtships and relationships developed on various levels of intimacy. Some consisted of a few dates and perhaps a brief correspondence. Others created lasting bonds. As early as 1942, American GIs began petitioning their commanding officers for permission to marry local British women. By the end of the war, 70,000 marriages had occurred.¹

Many of these women made the decision to marry an American and leave their homeland at the average age of nineteen or twenty. After the war, they started their married lives on the other side of the Atlantic separated from family and friends. War

¹ No specific records were kept on the exact number of war brides, but Jenel Virden's calculated number of 70,000 seems to be the most plausible. She stated that the U.S. Army war bride transport system brought 35,189 adults during May 1945 to June 1946 from Britain to America. The U.S. immigration records indicated that 34,944 brides entered the United States under the War Brides' Act from June 1946 to June 1950. These two figures do not include the single women who entered the country as "visitor immigrants" and later married their GIs. The Army's figure also does not include the women who traveled on commercial flights. Virden conceded that the two numbers stated may overlap to a certain degree, but overall the total number of brides appears to be around 70,000. Jenel Virden, Good-bye, Piccadilly: British War Brides in America (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 3.

brides endured painful emotions, such as loneliness and homesickness, and yet remained in their husbands' country. As the years passed, some women voiced regrets, while others found their new lives in America a great pleasure. Brides entered the work force, purchased homes, and most bore children. The facts of their lives have led scholars to assume that these women completely assimilated into American society; however new evidence points to another possibility. Brides' experiences and responses to questions pertaining to their transition from Britain to the United States reflect an immigrant group that has never severed its ties with its homeland. A significant portion of the women have not completely accepted American culture or "melted" into the United States and are still proud of their national heritage. Their immigration experience adds to the latest arguments against the vision of the United States as a giant melting pot.²

The "Melting Pot Myth," as it is termed today, has a long history in our nation. Although first used by J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur in 1782 to describe the people in America, the concept did not become popular until the production of Israel Zangwells' play The Melting Pot in 1908.³ Zangwell idealized the United States as a country that fostered good will to all who came to its shores. Once in America, people from all over the world would forget their differences and become one homogeneous group. Ethnic differences would disappear as people intermarried and all immigrants gradually became American. Zangwells' play attempted to diffuse the nation's negative reaction to the

² Mary C. Waters, Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 3. Waters conducted a large-scale study using two affluent communities; a suburb of San Jose, a fairly new community and a suburb of Pittsburgh, an older immigrant area. The information gathered from both test regions indicated that in the 1980s successful, mobile Americans still identified with their immigrant roots and had not lost the view of themselves as Irish-Americans or Italian-Americans.

³ Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 120.

large influx of Eastern and Southern European immigrants at the turn of the century. These “new” immigrants spoke different languages and retained customs that seemed unusual compared to previous immigrants. The public and government officials feared their inability to assimilate. The play raised hope that these immigrants would eventually “Americanize” like earlier groups.

During the 1920s and 1930s sociologists began examining the immigrant assimilation process. These early scholars concluded that most immigrant groups completed the assimilation process and integrated into the larger part of the population as early as the first and second generations. Sociologists argued that as immigrants moved out of ethnic neighborhoods and into suburbs composed of various groups, immigrants lost their connection to their roots. Also, the decline in immigrants’ work being dictated by their ethnicity enabled them to branch out into different professions and interact with people of other ethnic backgrounds.⁴ The relationships formed in this new environment led to ethnic intermarriages. These events supported the concept of the melting pot and the discontinuation of ethnic identity.

The melting pot idea eventually came under attack in the 1940s. Scholars noticed that although many immigrants married outside of their national origins, they still married within their religious faith. Instead of a single melting pot based on intermarriage of various ethnicities which eventually resulted in Anglo-conformity, academics began to base their examination of immigrants on a triple melting pot. Three groups, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, became the focus of their studies.⁵

⁴ George E. Pozzetta ed., Ethnic Communities: Formation and Transformation (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1991), vol.3, American Immigration and Ethnicity, 99.

⁵ Gordon, Assimilation in American Life, 123.

By the 1960s, an entirely new approach toward immigrant and ethnic studies emerged as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. The discrimination experienced by African-Americans throughout American history contradicted the concept of the melting pot.⁶ Although many in this group had wished to assimilate into mainstream America, they were prevented from doing so by the prevalent racism and the Jim Crow laws. Their fight for equality brought forth evidence of the lack of cultural uniformity within the United States. Not every immigrant group eventually assimilated and conformed to the Anglo community. For two hundred years African-Americans resided in the United States, yet they created their own separate African-American culture.

Following the lead of the African-American community, other ethnic movements of the 1970s, like that of Native Americans and Chicanos, also verified this lack of assimilation. These groups all demonstrated evidence of a continued connection with their ethnic heritage through language, food, and clothing; however, at the same time they possessed a desire to contribute to the nation as a whole.⁷ They proved that ethnicity had survived and was becoming a strong force.⁸

These groups' decision to fight against their unjust treatment brought about another revision of the melting pot theory. Sociologists began to study the differences between groups and this led to their re-examination of several immigrant groups believed to have already completed the assimilation process. Irish, Italian, Jewish and Slavic immigrants, all previous targets of discrimination, became the new focus for academics.

⁶ Melvin Steinfeld, Cracks in the Melting Pot: Racism and Discrimination in American History (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1970), xvii.

⁷ David R. Colburn and George E. Pozzetta, eds., America and the New Ethnicity (Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1979), 9.

⁸ Ibid., 10.

They re-evaluated their histories, while sociologists studied their descendants.

Surprisingly, they discovered that third and fourth generation immigrants still identified with their ethnic heritage. The idea of melting into American society vanished; instead, the persistence of ethnic traits and the view of the United States as a culturally pluralist society emerged.⁹

As the new ethnic studies appeared, academics began looking at what are considered the non-ethnics, people of British ancestry. Often considered “real” Americans by earlier scholars, their adjustment process is absent from most studies. It is assumed that the common language and similar historical background made the transition for these immigrants relatively painless and quite fast.¹⁰ Several reasons, such as the lack of nativist attacks and the positive response by Americans to British immigrants have been cited as explanations for the lack of scholarship. Previous academics also assumed that they submitted to the assimilation process without complaints and adopted American customs quickly. Immigrants from the British Isles epitomized the immigrant group that completely submitted to the American melting pot scheme.

Today scholars have uncovered evidence that disputes these previous notions. Eighteenth and nineteenth century immigrants from the United Kingdom-Scottish, English, or Welsh-all had their own languages and customs that greatly differed from each other and from Americans. They overcame different types of adjustments problems and did not assimilate more quickly than other immigrants. And like other ethnic groups,

⁹ Douglas C. Nord, “In Pursuit of ‘Invisible’ Immigrants: The Case of British Immigration to the United States,” in Contemporary American Immigration: Interpretive Essays (European) ed. Dennis Lawrence Cuddy (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 207.

¹⁰ Maxine Schwartz Seller, To Seek America: A History of Ethnic Life in the United States (Englewood, N. J. : J.S. Ozer, 1988), 8.

they retained a connection to their homeland.¹¹

The re-evaluation of ethnic groups and the recent examination of British immigrants played a role in bringing about a new field in American immigration history, war bride scholarship. As with early immigrant studies of the 1920s, sociologists took the lead in examining the war bride phenomenon. The first and only sociological study conducted on war brides appeared in 1948 as a Master's Thesis from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill written by Eulalia Street, and entitled "The Adjustment of Foreign War Brides."¹² Street recorded the experiences of twenty brides from various European countries and disproved the following myths: the women came from the poorest families in Europe, the women married GIs just to get to America, and the marriages were all "shotgun" weddings.¹³ The importance of this study is not in the analysis, rather in the time frame within which it occurred. Unlike later studies which began collecting data forty years after the brides' arrival, Street gathered her information within two years of their introduction into American society. It showed the women's immediate concerns and problems which they were attempting to resolve in order to remain in the United States.

The history of war brides, left virtually untouched by scholars with the exception of Street, finally began to appear in the early 1980s. In 1984, Pamela Winfield, a war bride herself, wrote the first history of these women's experiences, entitled Sentimental

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Eulalia Street, "The Adjustment of Foreign War Brides" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1948).

¹³ Ibid., 11.

Journey: The Story of the GI Brides.¹⁴ She chronicled the relationships that developed between “goggle eyed girls”¹⁵ and the Yanks who were “too difficult to resist.”¹⁶

Winfield emphasized the naivete of the women who chose to marry American GIs during the war. She also effectively described the pain and suffering brides endured when they left their family and friends and entered often unfriendly in-laws’ households. Through these passages Winfield revealed the strength and determination of some brides who remained in America, and those who returned to Britain, leaving behind failed marriages.

Winfield’s work uncovered the great effect that the presence of the American GIs in Britain had on her generation of young women; not only the women who married and left the British Isles but also those who stayed behind. Some refused to leave Britain and divorced their husbands, others never married, but bore a GI’s child. These forgotten children grew up either receiving letters from an absent father or, in some instances, never even knowing their father’s last name.¹⁷

Sentimental Journey does not place the brides’ experiences into a historical context as an important part of American immigration; instead its relevance lies in the author’s voice. As a war bride, Winfield revealed her own experiences and feelings towards the GIs through other, unidentifiable, brides. Throughout the book, her own painful memories and regrets come out. However, she only referred to one of her own experiences as she described watching the movie, Yanks, as tears streamed down her

¹⁴ Pamela Winfield, Sentimental Journey: The Story of the G.I. Brides (London: Constable and Company, 1984).

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷ Ibid., 183.

cheeks.¹⁸ Although Winfield's own story eluded the pages of the text, this work should be read as one woman's testimony interwoven within the pieces of other brides' stories.

Another war bride work appeared the following year. In 1985, Helene Lee, an American war bride, published Bittersweet Decision: The G.I. Brides Forty Years Later.¹⁹ Lee chronicled the experiences of not only British brides, but also European and Asian brides. Like Winfield's book, Lee's work is a non-scholarly look at the lives of these women. Throughout the text she exposed the sadness that many brides found when they arrived in the United States. Several GI husbands either lied to their wives about their economic status, beat their young brides or, in many instances, left the women divorced and stranded in America.²⁰ Instead of finding happy endings, Lee concluded that most women regretted their decision to marry a GI and emigrate to the United States.²¹

Lee's ability to reproduce a large number of brides' voices made this text invaluable for war bride scholars. The women's quotes often filled two or three pages and revealed brides' emotions and views of their own experiences. Menus or newsletters from ships that carried thousands of brides to America were reproduced in full, giving further insight into their history. These rare pieces of war bride history may have disappeared completely if Lee had not preserved them.

¹⁸ Ibid., 182. Yanks examined a war time love affair between two fictional characters; a GI, and a married British woman. At the end of the movie, the GI returned to the United States and his old life. The woman remained in Britain and never recovered from her great love affair.

¹⁹ Helene Lee, Bittersweet Decision: The War Brides Forty Years Later (Lockport, N.Y.: Roselee Publications, 1985).

²⁰ Ibid., 338.

²¹ Ibid., 340.

Another version of the war bride story was published in 1988. Co-authored by two daughters of German war brides, War Brides of World War Two included an examination of not just British brides, but brides from all over the world.²² This work contained more government documentation than the two previous works. Moreover, the authors contacted, through either telephone conversations or written correspondence, approximately two thousand brides. Like the other two works, this study described the history of brides, but with a less pessimistic perception of the women's lives. Rather than discuss the women's lives only in the terms of their marriages to GIs, the authors wanted to show that brides had greatly contributed to the United States as a whole. Their unique experience as war brides should not limit the reader's view of their accomplishments. Many women went on to become doctors, teachers, writers, and mothers.²³

These first works laid the path for more in-depth studies. They discussed the general background of war brides but lacked analysis into the meaning of the brides' experiences. Finally in 1996, Jenel Virden, a daughter of a British war bride and an historian, published the first academic work that placed brides' experiences into the context of female immigration history and, at the same time, discussed their role as British immigrants. Virden's work, Goodbye, Piccadilly: British War Brides in America, examined six main issues unique to the brides' immigration experience, and at the same time, effectively showed their similarity with other immigrant groups.²⁴

²² Elfrieda Berthiame Shukert and Barbara Smith Scibetta, War Brides of World War Two (San Francisco: Presidio Press, 1988).

²³ Ibid., 258.

²⁴ See also Jenel Virden, "British War Brides of World War II: A Passing Fad With Post-War Complications" (Master's thesis, Washington State University, 1983).

Virden's extensive research in the national archives revealed the prevalence of the United States government's involvement in the marriages between American servicemen stationed in Britain and British women. Before the marriages occurred, the United States military attempted to discourage as many unions as possible. They relied on chaplains to dissuade the soldiers and the women from marrying.²⁵ Enormous amounts of paper work and interviews with commanding officers were also designed to prevent the marriages, but often to no avail. Once hundreds of these couples had wed, the American Red Cross (ARC) and the U.S. government set up "war bride schools" and conducted classes throughout the British Isles in an attempt to dispel any Hollywood images the women might possess and to educate them on American society.²⁶ No previous immigrant group received such instruction by the United States government before leaving the shores of their homeland.

These marriages also brought about the first non-restrictive immigration legislation of the twentieth century. The Johnson Reed Immigration Act of 1924 had restricted the entrance of immigrants from all non-Western hemisphere countries to a mere trickle. Once the war ended, thousands of brides sought admission into the United States in order to reunite with their husbands. With most countries' quota number much smaller than needed, the United States Congress found it necessary to pass the War Brides' Act in December 1946. The Act allowed all war brides to enter the United States as non-quota immigrants for the duration of one year and eliminated many immigration formalities.²⁷

Virden also extensively discussed the uniqueness of the brides' transportation.

²⁵ Virden, Good-bye, Piccadilly, 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

For the first time in American history, the government created a transportation system to bring immigrants to its shores and paid for the entire process. As wives of servicemen, the women were entitled to free passage to the United States and a majority crossed the Atlantic on one of the several “bride ships” provided by the military.²⁸ Before brides boarded the ships, they first arrived at one of two staging areas, either the Bournemouth Hotel or Tidworth Barracks, both located in Southampton and jointly run by the United States military, the ARC, and British authorities. The women spent from two to five days waiting before they sailed on converted army transports, such as the Queen Mary or the S.S. Alexander. While at the staging areas, the ARC often conducted more lectures pertaining to the United States.²⁹ Once on the ships, further attempts were made to educate the women.³⁰ The United States government actively sought to begin the process of assimilating these new immigrants before they reached American soil.

The brides’ arrival in America brought massive media coverage. No other immigrant group had received such a positive response from the public or as much publicity upon their arrival. In the past, immigrants had generally been scorned as different and undesirable, yet these women sailed into New York Harbor and heard bands on shore playing Here Comes the Bride and God Bless America. Newspaper reporters greeted the ships and photographed the women with, in many cases, their small children as they walked the gang plank.³¹ As many brides boarded trains to take them to their final destination, reporters waited at the railroad stations. Various newspapers published

²⁸ Ibid., 77.

²⁹ Ibid., 71.

³⁰ Ibid., 109.

³¹ Ibid., 81.

numerous articles and photographs of America's newest immigrants, the war brides. Some brides even felt like local celebrities when asked to be interviewed on the radio. Most small communities held large celebrations which often included parades in honor of the women.³² In-laws also hosted post-wedding receptions for their sons and their new daughters-in-law.

Unlike other immigrants, brides did not settle in established immigrant communities. American soldiers had either volunteered or been drafted from all over the United States and their hometowns crossed the entire nation and reached into every state. This geographic distribution of the soldiers' homes often brought about the isolation of brides from any other British immigrant. They also lacked the traditional female immigrant networks associated with ethnic neighborhoods, which had generally smoothed the transition of other groups into American society.³³ Brides' feelings of homesickness and isolation brought about the creation of war bride clubs throughout the United States. These clubs attempted to replace the immigrant communities that were lacking in their assimilation process.³⁴

Virden finally noted the uniqueness of the war brides' motivation for immigration. Most immigrants had chosen the United States as their destination for economic reasons. America symbolizes economic opportunities and wealth to citizens of other countries. Previous British immigrants often had chosen the United States for these reasons, yet the brides did not. These women emigrated as a function of their gender. They had fallen in love with and married American citizens. As wives of these men, brides had no choice

³² Ibid., 115.

³³ Ibid., 117, 119.

³⁴ Ibid., 134.

but to follow their husbands. They did not come to the United States for economic reasons, but out of love for a man.³⁵

Viriden concluded that like other immigrants, brides had not completely lost their ethnic identity and continued to identify with Great Britain. Most women did not consider themselves American, but at the same time they did not believe they were completely British either. They found themselves torn between two countries and stranded on an island located somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic.³⁶

Viriden's work has opened the door for additional research relating to war brides as immigrants. The study that follows adds new voices and includes a more in-depth discussion of some issues unresolved in Viriden's work. An examination of brides' past experiences, present actions and attitudes towards American culture demonstrates their lack of complete assimilation. Three divisions have been used to show different phases of the brides' adjustment process; the effect of their expectations upon their new lives, their immediate physical adjustment upon arrival, and their methods of overcoming their separation from Britain. Exploring these topics illustrates the brides' first attempts at severing their ties with their homeland, but more importantly, many women's inability to assimilate completely. Their connection to Britain still persists.

This research, like previous scholarship, relied on information from the brides themselves. The author conducted nineteen interviews and received sixteen survey responses. Seven interviews took place in the author's room at the Colorado Bell Hotel and Casino during a war brides' reunion in Laughlin, NV, 19-23 October, 1996. Three of the women interviewed had responded to other war bride surveys in the past. The other

³⁵ Ibid., 10.

³⁶ Ibid., 141.

four had not. Though the first three had already been exposed to other sources that describe war brides' experiences, their responses to questions were similar to the latter group of women, suggesting that their answers were not biased from reading other information. The other ten interviews occurred in the brides' homes located throughout California between September and November 1996. Nine of these women had never responded to or received questionnaires pertaining to their experiences as war brides. Two interviews were conducted on the telephone due to lack of financial resources and time constraints. Although these interviews took place fifty years after the events in question, the women remembered a remarkable amount of detail when relating stories of living through the war, the courtship with their husbands, and their adjustment problems when they first arrived in the United States. Information on brides who returned to Britain for various reasons could not be obtained due to a lack of funding for this study.

The sampling of women interviewed represents a wide variety of experiences. They came from several different locations in England and Scotland and settled throughout the United States. Many brides crossed the Atlantic on war brides ships in 1946. Others also sailed to the United States after the war bride shipments ended in 1947, and a few brides flew by plane. Not all the brides were married prior to their arrival. Some entered the United States as immigrants with the intention to marry.³⁷ Seven of the women interviewed in their homes did not actively seek association with other war brides and some did not consider themselves war brides. Two of the women interviewed had divorced their husbands but had remained in the United States.

The brides' British social class also varied greatly. The author determined the brides' class background through information pertaining to their mothers' and fathers'

³⁷ See Appendix 2, Table 1.

education and occupation. The brides' own education and occupation were also examined closely. Other considerations, such as the employment of domestic help, like cooks or maids, were used as evidence. Most women fell somewhere in the middle-class spectrum. The term upper-class will be used when referring to brides from the upper-middle-class and lower-class will apply to lower-middle-class and working-class brides.

The brides' education during the 1930s was an important factor in determining their social class. Most women in Britain attended school until the mandatory age of fourteen and then entered the work force. Only fifteen percent went to secondary schools. Even fewer women attended college. Approximately .5 percent of eighteen-year-old women attended college in the immediate prewar years.³⁸ The four brides in this study who attended college mentioned employment of domestics and family-owned business. They were classified as upper-class. Middle-class brides often attended school either to fourteen or continued in secondary school. These women often worked in white collar jobs, for example, as secretaries. Their parents were often proprietors of small businesses, such as a fish and chips shop. Eight women fell into this class. Lower-class brides only attended school until fourteen. Their parents' education often did not reach this level. Their mothers sometimes worked as domestics, and their fathers in manual labor jobs. These brides usually worked in factories before the war began. Seven women were classified in this category.³⁹

Thirty-nine surveys were sent to brides living in California. The names and addresses of the brides came from a war brides' address directory assembled by Shukert

³⁸ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars (New York: Pandora Press, 1987), 138.

³⁹ See Appendix 2, Table 2

and Scibetta. The women included in the directory all participated in this previous study and seemed more likely to reply to a survey of this nature. Sixteen responses were returned to the author, often including newspaper clippings and letters with more information than requested.

Throughout this study, brides will be referred to by their married names. This decision was made, largely in part, by the brides themselves. All of these women have happily used their married names for over two thirds of their lives. This also helps the reader follow each bride's story without becoming confused by multiple names.

The story of war brides' adjustment and assimilation into American society effectively sheds more light on the complications that occur for all American immigrants, including English-speaking groups. The difficulties described by brides revealed the pain and suffering that immigrants undergo and, at the same time, showed the courage of these women who chose to leave their families and their country behind to follow the man they loved across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER TWO

MOVIES, FAMILY AND THE GIS: THE EFFECT OF BRIDES' EXPECTATIONS ON THEIR ADJUSTMENT

We really came in ignorance.

Sylvia Harris

Standing outside of the corner pub, three GIs leaned against a brick wall chewing sweet tasting bubble gum. All three men, bored and anxious to be in combat in Italy, watched as the British people quickly passed. Another group of GIs down the street purchased movie tickets. As they waited to enter the theater, a couple of the men pulled out sticks of gum and popped them in their mouths. Moira Schoenstein vividly recalled seeing GIs like the ones described above. She feared that everyone in the United States constantly chewed gum. After she arrived in New York she realized her mistake and laughingly remembered, "I was pleasantly surprised."¹ Schoenstein's naivete towards her husband's country was not uncommon. Most brides had never met an American and knew very little about the United States before the GIs arrived. Their education included only brief historical information about the rebellious upstart American colony and literary classics, like The Grapes of Wrath and Uncle Tom's Cabin.² After the brides married, they relied on sources around them, such as their families, their husbands, American

¹ Moira Schoenstein of Redwood City, CA, interview by author, 19 October 1996, Laughlin, NV, tape recording, in author's possession.

² Eileen Orton of Cove Junction, OR, interview by author, 20 October 1996, Laughlin, NV, tape recording in author's possession.

popular culture, and the American Red Cross, to educate them and shape their ideas about their futures in America. Once in the United States, in most instances, lower-and middle-class brides' expectations were fulfilled and, to some degree, helped them accept American culture; however, some upper-class brides' expectations did not occur and caused them to initially reject their husbands' homeland.

Some brides first learned about the United States from their own families. In several instances a mother, grandmother or father had traveled to or lived in America prior to the war. The stories they told to the brides most often instilled a positive impression of this far-off land. America seemed to be an unbelievable paradise where there were numerous parties for young people and everyone owned their own automobiles.

Eloise Howell's father had immigrated to the United States after World War One, but had fallen ill and was forced to return to Britain. Howell remembered her father's stories of a land of opportunities, a country that fulfilled each person's aspirations. He had always wanted to return to America, but the opportunity arose only after Howell herself immigrated.³ Sylvia Gutierrez's father spent thirteen years in the merchant marines before he married. His travels had taken him all over the world. For a short while he had lived in San Francisco, and he had spent time in New York City. She could not recall any specific stories, but she remembered believing that the United States was a wonderful country.⁴

Valerie Barnett reacted differently from the other brides towards her mother's

³ Eloise Howell of Bullhead, AZ, interview by author, 20 October 1996, Laughlin, NV, tape recording, in author's possession.

⁴ Sylvia Gutierrez of San Ramon, CA, interview by author, 22 November 1996, San Ramon, tape recording, in author's possession.

stories. Her mother had frequently visited the United States and always returned with tales of the wonderful parties and the beautiful clothes that the young women wore. Barnett, an upper-class woman, did not enjoy the idea of living a life full of parties and party dresses, possibly because her own life already included similar activities. She recalled. "The more I heard of this the more I thought, 'Oh, this is one place I don't want to go.' It didn't sound appealing at all."⁵

The reaction of the brides' parents towards the presence of the American GIs in Britain during the war affected how these women viewed Americans. The British government's propaganda emphasized that the British people should welcome the GIs into their homes.⁶ The government reminded the citizens that the American soldiers were far from home and many were homesick. Inviting a soldier for a home-cooked meal could help alleviate the soldiers' loneliness. Following this advice, some parents opened their homes to the GIs.⁷ Often the daughters of these parents dated GIs. Other parents ignored the government propaganda and openly disliked the soldiers. These parents discouraged their daughters from interacting with the young men.⁸ These women tended to ignore the GIs and usually married the only GI that they dated.

The favorable attitude of Howell's father toward America easily transferred over

⁵ Valerie Barnett of Pacific Palisades, CA, interview by author, 17 November 1996, Agora Hills, CA, tape recording, in author's possession.

⁶ David Reynolds, Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945 (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 188.

⁷ Norman Longmate, The GI's: The Americans in Britain 1942-1945 (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1975), 176.

⁸ Juliet Gardiner, 'Over Here': The GIs in Wartime Britain (London: Collins and Brown Limited, 1992), 140.

to the thousands of GIs that were stationed in Britain. Howell described a typical occurrence, "Every Thursday night my father played the piano and we'd invite some of the American boys. . . . Maybe half a dozen or something We'd have fish and chips."⁹ Harris described a similar scene, "When [my father] would go to our Synagogue and no matter who was there, whatever country they were from. . . he would bring a couple home to eat with us. . . . He brought home French air force men, American GIs, English, whatever."¹⁰ Maureen Roth, while working at the American Red Cross, met GIs on a daily basis. Her father always encouraged her to bring some soldiers home for dinner. Some GIs came with special food items unavailable in rationed Britain. Roth remembered, "This was always a big hit."¹¹

On the other hand, Muriel Rodriguez's father disapproved of the GIs. He warned her to keep her distance from the American soldiers. Rodriguez's father believed that, "they dated the English girls for one reason and one reason only." She explained his attitude, "He had met them during World War One so he figured they were all alike. . . . I wasn't supposed to talk to them. I was supposed to ignore them."¹² Rodriguez accepted her father's view for a long time, but without any English men to date she went against his instructions. Instead of ignoring any GI that spoke to her, Rodriguez decided to respond one evening at the movies. The first GI that approached her and asked her out

⁹ Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

¹⁰ Sylvia Harris of San Mateo, CA, interview by author, 20 October 1996, Laughlin NV, tape recording, in author's possession.

¹¹ Maureen Roth of Sunnyvale, CA, interview by author, 20 September 1996, Sunnyvale, tape recording, in author's possession.

¹² Muriel Rodriguez of Sunnyvale, CA, interview by author, 30 October 1996, Sunnyvale, tape recording, in author's possession.

on a date later became her husband.

Like Rodriguez, Josephine Thorn's father adamantly discouraged his daughter from socializing with the GIs. He told her "they weren't any good."¹³ When asked if she believed her father's statements, she flatly responded, "Yes, I believed him. I didn't talk to them."¹⁴ The first GI she dated had followed her home from the bus stop and pleaded that she go out with him the next night. She finally agreed, and her father immediately thought the worst of the young man. The GI told her he was from West Virginia, and when she repeated this to her father, he responded, "There probably isn't any such place as West Virginia."¹⁵ Fearing that her father was correct, Thorn went to the library, examined a map of the United States and discovered that West Virginia did exist. Thorn's father confronted the young GI the next evening and warned him, "Boy, if anything happens to her I'll kill you. I don't give a damn if you are from the United States of America."¹⁶ Thorn later married the GI.

After the brides met their future husbands, the women's parents' influence dissipated. The parents who objected to GIs sometimes changed their perspective after they became acquainted with the soldiers who eventually married their daughters. Rodriguez's and Thorn's parents grew to love their son-in-laws and claimed they were different from other GIs. These sentiments indicate that although their daughters'

¹³ Josephine Thorn of Fayetteville, WV, interview by author, 22 October 1996, tape recording, in author's possession.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

husbands were American, some parents continued to dislike Americans.¹⁷

Once the couples married, some brides' parents enthusiastically supported their daughters' decision. Roth's father lived through WWI and distinctly recalled the Depression of the 1930s.¹⁸ He wanted his daughter to escape a similar situation.¹⁹ Gwen Bradley's father also remembered the effects of WWI and gave his daughter the same advice. He told her, "There's nothing left here in England. Make a new life for yourself."²⁰

Personal experiences and interaction with GIs also caused brides to form strong opinions about Americans. Some brides were insulted by the GIs' arrogance. Other brides responded in the exact opposite fashion. They saw the Americans in Britain as a saving grace to the war effort. Not only were these men going to help win the war, but they also brought new life into the tired and depressed British home front.

The American troops' behavior while in Britain caused British citizens to make up a funny rhyme to describe the GIs: "Overpaid, Oversexed, and Over here." Compared to the British soldiers, Americans received a much larger salary.²¹ The Americans also dated many of the British women while British troops were stationed abroad. This view of the Americans sums up some brides' first impressions of the GIs. Both Harris and Eileen

¹⁷ Thorn interview, 22 October 1996. Rodriguez interview, 30 October 1996. Ann Cisneros of Pomona, CA, interview by author, 16 November 1996, Pomona, tape recording, in author's possession.

¹⁸ Robert W.D. Boyce, British Capitalism at the Crossroads, 1919-1932: A Study in Politics, Economics, and International Relations (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 37.

¹⁹ Roth interview, 20 September 1996

²⁰ Gwen Bradley of Bullhead City, AZ, interview by author, 22 October 1996, Laughlin, NV, tape recording, in author's possession

²¹ An American Private received \$13.85 a week, while a British Private received the equivalent of \$2.82 a week. Longmate, The GIs, 278.

Orton recalled the attitudes expressed by many GIs. Harris angrily described how some arrogant GIs acted: "They had come over here to fight our war that we had been fighting for three years before they set foot on English soil."²² Orton spoke of the insulting sexual advances made by GIs and the vast difference between the salaries received by American soldiers and those of British soldiers. Like Harris, she believed the GIs thought "they had come to save [the British]."²³ Orton also expressed disgust with the Americans, "Here we had been fighting for a number of years, and all of a sudden here comes the 'Cavalry'."²⁴ These first experiences with Americans left a negative view of the United States for these brides. Instead of a wonderful new ally in the fight against Hitler, this country appeared to be made up of young, cocky, upstart men. However, like some parents, these brides stated that their GI husbands were different from other Americans.

Other brides found the American soldiers to be great people and gladly welcomed their presence. Instead of being insulted by the GIs' easy-going attitude, these women enjoyed their outlook. Howell commented, "As far as I'm concerned they treated us English girls like ladies. They wanted to treat us and be nice to us. . . . They were so nice, so friendly."²⁵

Three years of bombings, blackouts, and rationing had tired the British population

²² Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

²³ Orton interview, 20 October 1996.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

physically and mentally.²⁶ The influx of the new American troops in 1942 was seen as very beneficial. Bradley reminisced about the GIs' ability to help the British, "The Americans were happy people and I guess we had so much, three years of war. We were just about worn out until they came. It was a different way of life for us to see the way they lived and listen to their brogue and their lingoos."²⁷

The American soldiers' absence of class stratification and lack of adherence to British convention also created a positive view of America for some brides. Bradley, a lower-class woman, recalled seeing the American officers in the British pubs socializing with the enlisted soldiers. She stated, "What I liked about it was. . .there was no class distinction."²⁸ Bradley explained that the British officers did not do the same.

Barnett, an upper-class woman, also remembered the GIs going against traditional British practices. Instead of being insulted, as one might expect, she saw this behavior as a liberating experience for her country. She eloquently explained,

Oh, they were very different from anybody we'd seen before. Their whole casual manner. English, especially before the war, were very reserved and quiet and kept to themselves and very class conscious. You didn't talk to people other than people of your own class level. You didn't talk to strangers. . . . All of a sudden here were these groups of young carefree men saying, "Hi kids! Want some gum?" and talking to everybody. It was like a breath of fresh air.²⁹

²⁶ Tom Harrison, Living Through the Blitz (London: William Collins Sons, 1976), 90.

²⁷ Bradley interview, 22 October 1996.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Barnett interview, 17 November 1996.

The American officers' actions, as witnessed by Bradley and others, reinforced and created the idea for many brides that the United States did not possess a strict class system. For lower or middle-class brides dissatisfied with their social class, America represented a place of great opportunities. The class that they were born into, they hoped, would be meaningless once they arrived

American popular culture also influenced brides' expectations of American life. Movies during the 1930s and 1940s exposed brides to several aspects of American culture. Hollywood's visual images created some women's expectations about their futures in the United States. Others believed it had no effect on their visions of America.

Between the wars, American popular culture overseas expanded rapidly. Hollywood movies acted as the catalyst, bringing American music, slang, and fashion to the rest of the world.³⁰ People went to movies and saw images of "American values, styles, their speed, humor, brashness, their satire and violence, their open spaces, and glittering cities, their cowboys and entrepreneurs."³¹ Several British government officials feared American culture's infringement on traditional British values. They disliked the influence of American mannerisms and language that crossed social boundaries. This resulted in Parliament's passage of the Quota Act of 1927. Under the system introduced by this law, American films, which represented eighty percent of the movies shown that year, would slowly be limited in number, enabling the British film industry to expand its market share. Hollywood executives at studios, such as Fox and Warner Brothers, found ways around the Quota Act by creating film company subsidiaries in Britain that

³⁰ Robert Sklar, Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 215.

³¹ Ibid.

produced “quota” films.³² In 1938 the British film industry reached its peak, creating twenty-nine percent of movies shown, yet half were “quota” films backed by Hollywood.³³

All the brides admitted that they attended movies frequently during the 1930s. For Roth, the big family outing was a trip to the movies.³⁴ Margharita Shellberg also remembered going out to eat and then to the latest film on Saturdays with her family.³⁵

The age difference of the brides seems to have affected the extent of the brides’ exposure to American culture as seen in Hollywood films during the war years. Younger, unscripted brides stated that after the beginning of the war, they frequented movie theaters more often.³⁶ Howell claimed to have seen every movie shown in Britain during the war. Orton explained, “It took your mind off what was going on.”³⁷ Patricia McLellan also stated, “We lived for the movies because it was an escape from the war. . . . If we were feeling flush, we would go to the movies more often.”³⁸ Older brides, like Veronica Eason, who was twenty-three when the war began, commented, “We were

³² Ibid., 220; Iain Chambers, Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience (London: Methuen and Co., 1986), 82,

³³ Ibid., 221.

³⁴ Roth interview, 20 September 1996.

³⁵ Margharita Shellberg of Santa Cruz, CA, interview by author, 11 November 1996, Santa Cruz, tape recording, in author’s possession.

³⁶ Starting in 1941 British women between the ages of eighteen and forty were conscripted into war work.

³⁷ Orton interview, 20 October 1996.

³⁸ Patricia McLellan of Pasadena, CA, interview by author, 22 October 1996, Laughlin, NV, tape recording, in author’s possession.

conscripted. We had fire duty. We had to go out and help the Red Cross in the bombings. There wasn't all that time for movies."³⁹

Along with Hollywood films, American popular music and American dances also "invaded" the British Isles during the 20s, 30s, and 40s. Dances like the foxtrot and the bunny hug originated in the United States.⁴⁰ Ragtime, jazz, and eventually swing music, also American inventions, crossed the Atlantic.⁴¹ Several brides remembered learning the American dances from the movies. The invasion of the GIs made American popular music easily accessible to the young women through the radio station American Forces Network (AFN).⁴² Some brides stated that they loved to listen to this station and hear big bands, like Glen Miller's. When asked about their favorite songs during the war, all the brides mentioned big band songs, such as, We'll Meet Again and I'll Be Seeing You, and White Cliffs of Dover.

As with the movies, the music and dancing were forms of escapism. The lyrics of I'll Be Seeing You and We'll Meet Again reflected how many people felt during the war. They referred to absent friends and future reunions. With thousands of British and American soldiers being transferred into combat, these words meant a great deal to the women left behind. I'll Be Seeing You stated, "I'll be seeing you in all the old familiar

³⁹ Veronica Eason of Long Beach, CA, interview by author, 20 October 1996, Laughlin, NV, tape recording, in author's possession.

⁴⁰ Chambers, Popular Culture, 134. Michael Watts, "The Call and Response of Popular Music: The Impact of American Pop Music in Europe," in Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975), 126.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Watts, "Popular Music," 127.

places that this heart of mine embraces all day through.”⁴³ Although soldiers were gone, these women would not forget them. We’ll Meet Again emphasized the reunions that would take place. It stated, “We’ll meet again, don’t know where. Don’t know when, but we’ll meet again some sunny day.”⁴⁴ The White Cliffs Of Dover, written in 1941, mentioned the end of the war and the soldiers coming home and “peace ever after.”⁴⁵ The hope and faith that the war would soon be over helped people survive the six years of uncertainty. These songs reinforced this idea.

The GIs’ dancing brought fun and laughter for many brides. Howell happily described her first experience hearing the song Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B. “It was at the Rainbow Club,⁴⁶ and one of the Americans sat down and started playing the piano. . . . I was in awe. It was catchy. I liked it.”⁴⁷ Bradley loved to watch the GIs jitterbug and learned the newest dance steps from the young soldiers.⁴⁸

The effect of the American culture on brides’ expectations about their future in the United States varied greatly. To a certain degree, this can be categorized along British social class lines. Brides from the upper-class and some from the middle-class tended to respond positively to questions pertaining to the influence of the movies on their images

⁴³ Irving Kahal and Sammy Fain, I’ll Be Seeing You (New York: Williamson Music, Inc., 1938).

⁴⁴ Ross Parker and Hughie Charles, We’ll Meet Again (London: The Irwin Dash Music Co. Ltd., 1939).

⁴⁵ Nat Burton and Walter Kent, The White Cliffs of Dover (New York: Shapiro, Bernstein and Co Inc., 1941).

⁴⁶ The Rainbow Club was an American Red Cross club located in London.

⁴⁷ Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

⁴⁸ Bradley interview, 22 October 1996.

of America. They expected their lives, with regards to housing, clothing, and their status as housewives, to be similar to the Hollywood version of America. Coming from a high-social level in Britain where one “dressed” for dinner every evening, these brides did not find the lifestyle portrayed in the movies to be that unrealistic.

Teddi Naar, an upper-class bride, admitted that the movies left a great impression on her. The movies displayed images similar to her own experience.⁴⁹ Harris, also from the upper-class, stated, “I didn’t expect *all people* to actually live the way some of them were depicted in the movies. There were poor people.”⁵⁰ Harris observation is quite revealing. She understood that there were poor Americans, but she implied that she believed some people *did* live as glamorously as in the movies.

Not all upper-class brides were impressed by the beautiful movie stars. Barnett was disgusted with Americans. When asked what were some false images she acquired from the movies, she explained,

They make Americans appear flip, casual and superficial. They make them appear very materialistic without much depth. . . . At least that’s the way it appeared to me when I was watching American films. They just seemed to be very superficial sort of people who were always concerned with clothes, furniture, and jewelry and status things, like cars. They didn’t seem to have that much depth and that’s totally wrong, I think.⁵¹

This insightful observation comes from a bride who possesses, not only a bachelor’s degree, but also a master’s degree, both from Oxford University.

⁴⁹ Teddi Naar of Agora Hills, CA, interview by author, 17 November 1996, Agora Hills, CA, tape recording, in author’s possession.

⁵⁰ Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

⁵¹ Barnett interview, 17 November 1996.

When asked if Hollywood films influenced their image of America, several lower-class brides stated that they knew “nobody actually lived like that.”⁵² These women attended school to the mandatory age of fourteen and then entered the work force, often in factories. The Hollywood images of women living the life of luxury seemed ridiculous. To them, no one could possibly live that way. They came to the United States without the illusion that their new lives would be like the Hollywood images.

Different American agencies, primarily the ARC, feared that American popular culture, especially the movies, were creating false expectations about the United States for brides. The ARC launched a campaign to educate the GIs’ wives and dispel any “Hollywood” ideas. The concept of teaching these women about the United States was not unique to the war bride experience. Throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century, the United States government and other organizations put forth “Americanization” programs to help assimilate the large influx of eastern and southern European immigrants pouring into the country.⁵³ States passed laws that established classes and immigrants received instructional booklets.⁵⁴ The ARC’s decision to educate America’s future immigrants, the war brides, followed the same philosophy of the previous decades.

Hundreds of orientation classes were held throughout the British Isles. The “war bride schools,” as they came to be called, included lectures on American culture, small

⁵² Rodriguez interview, 30 October 1996.

⁵³ George E. Pozzetta, ed., Americanization, Social Control, and Philanthropy (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), vol 14, American Immigration and Ethnicity, 233.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

town life, and the American educational system.⁵⁵ However, most brides surveyed were unaffected by these efforts.

ARC workers at Tidworth Station and on the ships sponsored numerous orientation lectures. Only four women in this survey recalled attending any lectures in Britain or on a ship. Most stated that they never realized these meetings were being held but wished they would have known. The women who heard the speeches claim it helped a little and clarified their expectations about their futures.

Gutierrez remembered attending the orientations at Tidworth Station and on the S.S. Washington but cannot recall any specific details. She said the lectures were on indoctrination into American life. They focused on what the brides might expect in different areas of the United States. She believed that “it kind of gave us an idea what to expect. [For example] how vast the country was compared to our little England.”⁵⁶

Like Gutierrez, Muriel Rodriguez also attended the orientation held on the S.S. Argentina. She remembered specific details of the orientations. Though they did not pertain to her situation, they created ideas about what she might expect. She explained,

They were mostly talking to those going to New York. They thought they were going to have the hardest time. . . .Even in those days they were trying to tell them you didn't walk in New York by yourself in the dark. . . .That it was a melting pot of the world. They were going to meet all sorts of people and they were all going to be different.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Virden, Good-bye, Piccadilly, 107.

⁵⁶ Gutierrez interview, 22 November 1996.

⁵⁷ Rodriguez interview, 30 October 1996.

The advice of the ARC may have helped brides settling in large cities, but for those going to small towns, like Rodriguez who came to Santa Clara, California, the information only confused their expectations of America.

Howell remembered attending a lecture at the ARC's Rainbow Corner in London. Eleanor Roosevelt spoke to the wives and explained what to expect when they arrived in the United States. She instructed the women on what slang terms not to use and explained that some American women might not like war brides because they had married their boys. American women also had not had the same war experiences and probably would not understand the trauma that most brides endured.⁵⁸ Howell, a lower-class bride, said she always remembered the conclusion of the lecture: "That it was up to us to prove ourselves."⁵⁹ Roosevelt's statement indicated to Howell and possibly other brides that in the United States their social class would be irrelevant. The idea that America held numerous opportunities persisted.

The overall lack of brides' participation in the ARC orientations on the ships is confirmed by a narrative report of one worker on the Alexander. The report stated that attendance at the lectures was low even though Red Cross workers had arranged for the classes to be held at times that "did not conflict with the feeding and bathing of babies."⁶⁰ However, large numbers of brides did attend the evening movies. The report maintained that the brides would have learned a great deal from the lectures, including information on citizenship, educational and health systems, currency, history, and the customs and

⁵⁸ New York Times (New York), 25 January 1946.

⁵⁹ Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

⁶⁰ "Narrative Report U.S.T.E.B. Alexander," 11 April- May 1946, box 985, American Red Cross, Record Group 200, File 618.4/ 08, War Bride Ship Reports, NA. 2-3.

habits of American people.⁶¹ Both this report and the surveyed women's responses indicate that few brides probably heard the advice given by the ARC. Possibly, in the excitement of reuniting with their husbands many women did not find the lectures necessary and did not attend.

For the brides who came on privately chartered flights or after the war bride ships stopped sailing, these orientation classes at Tidworth Station or on the ships were not available. While in Britain, they could have attended a class at the ARC "wives' school" if informed, but many were not. These women did not receive any instructions about the United States, and the ARC did not play a role in shaping their ideas about their new lives in America.

Harris never attended a war bride orientation or a "wives' school," not because she did not find it necessary, but because she had no knowledge of their existence. However, several brides of American GIs in Liverpool did form their own club without the help of the ARC. Harris and a few other women met once a week at an apartment in the city. The young women spoke of their fears and hopes. Afterwards the women danced and drank a little tea. Although the women settled in different parts of the United States, this short acquaintance with other brides helped Harris. She concluded that it was only a support group and did not affect her ideas about the United States.⁶²

Like the ARC's plan to educate the brides before arriving in America, the United States government's Office of War Information, in conjunction with the British Good Housekeeping Magazine, also attempted to reach all the women with their informational

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

packet, A Bride's Guide to the U.S.A.⁶³ The Guide, divided into several sections and accompanied by many pictures, depicted different facets of life in the United States. First the pamphlet explained the differences between American and British people, discussing shyness, humor, language, and manners. Next the Guide turned to different regions of the United States, examining small towns, city life, and the mobility of American people. Finally, it concluded with a discussion of household budgeting, meal times, and shopping.⁶⁴

The Guide provided some useful information about the differences in the two cultures, but it also attempted to instill the idea that the brides' primary function would be in the home. In 1945, this type of propaganda was not uncommon. Towards the end of the war, both the American government and mass media began emphasizing women's return to domesticity.⁶⁵ The government no longer needed women in the work force and feared mass unemployment if women remained in male occupations. The propaganda insisted that women resume their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Returning veterans were favored over working women and thousands of women either voluntarily left their jobs or were laid off.⁶⁶

⁶³ A Bride's Guide to the U.S.A., British Good Housekeeping Magazine and the United States Office of War Information, n.d.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ William Chafe, The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 146, 177; Sherma B. Gluck, Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 16.

⁶⁶ Gluck, Rosie the Riveter Revisited, 17; Chafe, The American Woman, 179.

To those women who received a pamphlet, it probably helped a great deal, but many brides did not receive the Guide. Only one woman responded in a written survey that she may have received it and indicated that the army chaplain distributed it. Roth still had a copy of the Guide yet could not remember how she came into possession of the booklet.⁶⁷ Roth did not travel on a brides' ship and came in 1947 as an immigrant, not a war bride.

Brides described their exposure to American culture and the formation of their expectations, but when asked about their main source of information, all brides admitted that their husbands played the most important role. Their husbands spoke of their home towns and their families. Many husbands attempted to dispel Hollywood images and explained to their wives that the United States was not as glamorous as depicted in the movies. Ann Cisneros's husband educated her about American hygiene, such as the importance of bathing daily and brushing teeth several times a day.⁶⁸ Thorn's husband described the mountainous region of West Virginia, his home state. He also explained that school buses were used to take his two younger sisters to school. This seemed a little odd to Thorn because people in Britain, especially school aged children, always walked or rode bicycles.⁶⁹ Orton recalled her husband's description of his family farm in Iowa. The farm had no running water or electricity. Obviously, this rid Orton of any Hollywood images that she may have possessed.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Roth interview, 20 September 1996.

⁶⁸ Cisneros interview, 16 November 1996.

⁶⁹ Thorn interview, 22 October 1996.

⁷⁰ Orton interview, 20 October 1996.

Whether or not a bride attended a lecture or was educated by her husband, in the long run did not make a difference. The overriding factor that affected brides' expectations and determined whether their ideas were met was their British social class. When asked questions pertaining to expectations and the reality of their experiences, upper-class brides tended to be disappointed that they had to work or lacked a maid. On the other hand, lower-class brides focused on the opportunities and freedom that they expected and found in the United States.

Although there was a resurgence of domesticity after the war ended, eleven of the women interviewed and four of the women who responded to the written survey indicated that they sought employment upon their arrival. Seven stated that they worked to keep busy, while the other eight mentioned financial reasons. None of the brides mentioned feeling pressure to remain in the home.

An immigrant woman's decision to work outside of the home is often derived from her "old world" experience.⁷¹ The concept of working was not foreign to brides. During the war, brides had either volunteered or were conscripted into war work. Many women found themselves in factories, offices, or in the armed forces. Depending on their age, some had worked all six years of the war, while others only one or two years. Also, the type of employment an immigrant found suitable can also be traced to her experience prior to her arrival.⁷² It is not surprising that many brides sought employment in America as receptionists or secretaries.

⁷¹ George E. Pozzetta, ed., Ethnicity and Gender: The Immigrant Woman (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), vol. 12, American Immigration and Ethnicity, 157.

⁷² Ibid., 135. Bradley interview, 22 October 1996. Bradley worked at a laundry in England before she sailed to the United States. Once she arrived, Bradley immediately sought employment at the Blue Jay laundry in Los Angeles.

American GIs were paid very well regardless of social class and tended to be rather generous with their earnings while in Britain. This made it difficult for British brides to gauge accurately their husband's economic status in the United States. Teddi Naar assumed she would live in the same comfortable lifestyle as she had in Britain, but when she arrived, she was greatly disappointed. She described her ideas and the reality of her situation,

I did expect to have a good standard of living because I had been accustomed to it. . . . I'm not talking about food now. I'm just talking about comforts. . . . Just the sort of things you grow up with. I didn't know we were going to be so broke. . . . [The apartment was] one room with a pull down bed. . . . I had never lived that way. I just couldn't handle it.⁷³

Naar was forced to find employment and worked until her first child was born.

Gutierrez also found herself employed outside of the home for several years. As an upper-class bride, like Naar, she did not expect to work this hard. She explained, "You work so many hours and earn so much money. . . . I don't think I would have had to have worked as hard [in Britain]. . . . Looking at all my cousins, I don't think any of them have ever had to work."⁷⁴

Some middle-class brides, when asked about any misconceptions about their lives in the United States, also complained of working much harder than expected. After the war many GIs took advantage of the newly passed GI Bill that helped pay for veterans to continue their education. This new law was a strategy employed by the government to prevent thousands of men from entering the work force. Officials hoped this would help

⁷³ Naar interview, 17 November 1996.

⁷⁴ Gutierrez interview, 22 November 1996.

stop another depression.⁷⁵ Roth's husband decided to return to college. He acquired his Bachelor's degree at Occidental College in Los Angeles and continued in graduate school, eventually completing a Master's Degree and a Ph.D. at Stanford University. She admitted,

I didn't know he was going back to school. It wasn't the usual thing in those days. The usual thing was you got married, the wife stayed home and you had your family. That's what I expected. To be a housewife and to have children right away. This we couldn't afford. . . . So I went to work.⁷⁶

Roth worked for seven years before she became a housewife. Other aspects of American homemaking also differed from her expectations. She explained that in Britain, "Even people who weren't terribly well off had a maid or a cleaning woman come in. I thought this would continue over here."⁷⁷

Orton's husband also decided to return to college after the war. Orton remembered struggling financially. Her husband worked nights as a desk clerk at a motel, and if a maid called in sick, she took over the job. She stated, "This was not what I expected to do, but it was a way to get by."⁷⁸

Even though they did not complain as strongly, Margharita Shellberg and Margaret Rovick also worked harder than expected. Shellberg came from a middle-class background and arrived in the United States to find that her husband's income could not

⁷⁵ Ronald Lora, "Education: Schools as Crucible in Cold War America" in Reshaping America: Society and Institutions, 1945-1960, eds. Robert Bremner and Gary W. Richard (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 234.

⁷⁶ Roth interview, 20 September 1996.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Orton interview, 20, October 1996.

pay all their expenses. She started working as a receptionist at a real estate office. Once she had children, Shellberg took in sewing and worked out of her home. She stated that she expected her new life to be “just basically the same as in England.”⁷⁹ Yet it was not.

Rovick, an upper-class bride, discussed her dire economic situation in the United States and her refusal to seek employment outside of the home. Rovick sadly remembered being raised in Egypt by nannies, not her own mother. Her father’s exploitation of the servants disturbed Rovick. She grew to detest every aspect of the lifestyle of the upper class. She did not want her children to be raised by nannies: instead she wanted to be the primary care person. To remain in the home, Rovick learned to budget money stringently. She grew vegetables in a garden and made all her children’s clothes. Once her children became young adults, Rovick sought employment. Her life in America was quite different from her upbringing, but it appears that she had wanted it this way.⁸⁰

Lower-class brides did not complain of working hard in the United States; instead they spoke of expecting their lives to improve in America. Both Bradley and Cisneros stated this and believed their dreams had come true. Cisneros described her life in America, “I knew that it was a better life right from the beginning. No matter how bad it is here it was still a better life than it was at home.”⁸¹ Although Cisneros worked the night shift full-time while raising nine children, she did not mention working as contradicting her expectations. Instead, she explained, “I knew I would like to work

⁷⁹ Shellberg interview, 11 November 1996.

⁸⁰ Margaret Rovick of Capitola, CA, interview by author, 29 November 1996, Capitola, tape recording, in author’s possession.

⁸¹ Cisneros interview, 16 November 1996.

because I always worked. . . . I liked to work outside of the home. . . . I wanted [my children] to have the good things. I wanted them to be American.”⁸² Her working enabled her family to rise economically above her original social class. She wanted her children to be like other American children and not be poor immigrant children.

Lower- and middle-class brides both commented about the opportunities and the new freedom they discovered in the United States. Like immigrants before them, the brides’ image of America as the “land of opportunity” mostly came true.⁸³ Some brides, like Orton and Howell, continued their education which was an option not possible in Britain at the time.⁸⁴ Schoenstein remembered thinking that in the United States a person willing to work hard could accomplish anything.⁸⁵ Rodriguez explained her ideas about the United States, “More freedom. Do what you want, when you want, how you want. . . . I assumed everybody over here did what they wanted.”⁸⁶ She remembered believing that once she arrived in the United States she would be able to smoke cigarettes without hiding from her family. Also, the freedom to dress as you wished held great appeal. Women wore pants during the war because of factory work, but Rodriguez expected this to end after the war. Women would again be forced to wear only dresses. She happily reminisced, “I couldn’t wait to come [to America] and live in pants all day long.”⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ George Pozzetta, ed., Ethnicity and Gender, 258.

⁸⁴ Orton interview, 20 October 1996. Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

⁸⁵ Schoenstein interview, 19 October 1996

⁸⁶ Rodriguez interview, 30 October 1996.

⁸⁷ Ibid. During the interview, Rodriguez sat opposite the author wearing pants.

One idea crossed class lines; America represented an escape from a war-torn country. All the women described their desire to come to a country that had not endured extensive German bombings. From September 7, 1940 to November 13, 1940, Germany dropped 27,500 high explosive bombs on the residents of London during the Blitz. Londoners attempted to keep their lives as normal as possible by still going to work or frequenting the local movie theaters. Yet, many lost friends, family members, and more often, their homes. After the Blitz ended, 300,000 people found themselves in need of new housing.⁸⁸ Naar, an upper-class bride, lived through the Blitz and mentioned the loss of her flat (apartment) and close friends during the nightly attacks.⁸⁹ McLellan, a lower-class bride, also described the night that her house was bombed and related how she survived the attack in the basement. She recalled anticipating a life without war in the United States.⁹⁰

All of the various means in which brides learned of the United States, in most instances, did not profoundly affect the brides' adjustment to American society. Only one factor, their British social class, played an important role. When lower- and middle-class brides arrived, many found their new lives to be similar to what they had imagined. This made it easier for these women to accept their new surroundings and adjust to the new society. However, many upper-class brides believed their new lives in America, economically, would be similar to what they had left behind in Britain. For many this was not the case. Cultural assimilation became a painful process as brides struggled to

88 Philip Ziegler, London At War: 1939-1945 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995), 118.

89 Naar interview, 17 November 1996.

90 McLellan interview, 22 October 1996.

accept their new lives. They rejected their lower economic status and never identified with this aspect of their lives in America. Today, many of these brides have acquired a higher standard of living than when they first arrived, yet they continue to harbor unhappy memories of their transition from Britain to the United States.

CHAPTER THREE

A NEW AND STRANGE FRONTIER:
BRIDES' IMMEDIATE ADJUSTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

It was like coming to a different planet.

Ann Cisneros

Slowly stepping off the train onto the Los Angeles platform, Gwen Bradley nervously looked around. She had patiently waited several months and traveled five thousand miles to start a new life in this strange country. After a moment she noticed her husband and his sister quickly approaching. Happy to be reunited, but apprehensive about her future, she looked fearfully at the shanty town structures across from the train station and blurted out, "If I have to live in one of them bloody things. . .I'm going home."¹ Gwen Bradley's reaction toward her new home town was not uncommon among those brides who found themselves in less than desirable circumstances. Yet other brides discovered a completely different America. Unlike other immigrants, brides did not settle in ethnic neighborhoods. Instead, their husbands' hometown dictated the location of their first homes. Dispersed throughout the United States, these women encountered several different aspects of American culture. Some easily overcame obstacles; however many brides continue to reject different facets of the United States and have not completely assimilated.

The United States, a union of forty-eight continental states in 1946, spanned

¹ Bradley interview, 22 October 1996.

1,600 miles from North to South and 2,780 miles from east to west, overwhelmed many of the brides who traveled across the country by train to meet their husbands. Compared to their homeland of Britain, containing approximately 58,000 square miles, a country smaller than the state of Wyoming, the United States's 3,022,387 square miles seemed endless. Many brides noted that visual images of the open plains seen in the movies did not compare to the reality.

Brides who settled on the East Coast did not comment upon the size of the United States. Other brides who settled farther west and spent up to five days crossing the country by train clearly remembered the discovery of the vastness of their new home. Two different reactions emerge from this latter group. Some brides relished the magnificent countryside. Others feared the expansive open plains which appeared more like a dead country than a land rich in natural resources.

Impressions of the countryside may be linked to their mode of transportation or the time of year the brides traveled. Eloise Howell came in March 1946, the end of winter and the beginning of spring. She fondly reminisced about her train trip,

I remember thinking, "My God! The scenery!" I woke up in the morning and I looked out and there were mountains and snow. It was fabulous. . . . It was beautiful. Then I remember also little farm houses way, way out from anywhere. It was interesting. Kind of fabulous.²

On the other hand, Muriel Rodriguez traveled by train during February. Cold winter blanketed the countryside and Rodriguez complained the entire trip from New York to California. She had "never seen such a dead country in [her] whole life. [She] never saw animals. [She] never saw trees. [She] never saw grass." GIs on the train told her, "Wait

² Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

until you get to California.”³ At first she did not believe them, but once in Santa Clara the sight of the beautiful orchards changed her mind.

Valerie Barnett and her husband crossed the United States in a car, not by train. They drove through many small towns, but the space between towns alarmed Barnett. She explained,

One day, I think we were going through Kansas or Nebraska or something, we drove the whole day and didn’t go through a single town. That was frightening to me. I just thought, “My goodness! What have I come to? What kind of country is this?”⁴

Unprepared for the vast size of the United States, thousands of brides who traveled to western states found they had to reevaluate their ideas about the size of their world. The small island country that had encompassed their universe disappeared.

Many brides also faced a completely different climate in their new homes. Britain is a cool island country. The ocean’s fog covers the coast line many months of the year. The average temperature in January is forty degrees Fahrenheit, but it has been known to get as cold as sixteen degrees below zero. The warmest month of the year, July, averages sixty degrees, but on rare occasions can reach into the high nineties.⁵ Brides who settled in warmer climates emphatically complained about the unbearable heat, while those who settled in coastal cities with climates similar to Britain did not find this to be a problem.

Several brides who settled in Los Angeles, California discovered disagreeably

³ Rodriguez interview , 30 October 1996.

⁴ Barnett interview, 17 November 1996.

⁵ Great Britain Meteorological Office, Climatological Atlas of the British Isles (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1952), 31.

warm weather. During the warmest months, the temperature averages seventy-two degrees, but often reaches into the low hundreds in a heat wave. In winter months the temperature dips into the fifties.⁶ Brides related stories of their difficulties adjusting to these temperatures and often stated that they still prefer cooler temperatures. They have never become accustomed to this aspect of their adopted homeland.

Teddi Naar's adjustment to the heat of Los Angeles affected her not only physically, but also emotionally. As a woman from the English upper-class, she believed she needed to be dressed properly for all occasions. She brought a suitcase full of tweed and wool clothes, fabrics that did not suit the warm climate. She also arrived unaware of her husband's tight financial situation. Faced with overbearing heat, she could not afford to buy new cooler clothes more appropriate for the climate. She sadly remembered,

I got here to find the heat was so intense that I couldn't even go out and buy a wardrobe. I would walk around in my tweeds. It was something of a trauma in my life, really. I couldn't agree with the climate because we were used to the cold and all of a sudden it was sunny and you were immersed in this burning raging fire.⁷

Ann Cisneros, who first settled in Rochester, New York and later relocated to Pomona, California, not far from Los Angeles, complained, "I still haven't gotten used to the summers."⁸

Unaware of the heat in Texas, Veronica Eason dressed her young infant in clothes more appropriate for a foggy London climate. On the train trip from New York to

⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstracts of the United States 1946 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1946), 148-151.

⁷ Naar interview, 17 November 1996.

⁸ Cisneros interview, 16 November 1996.

Lindale, Texas, Eason's daughter became very ill. Upon arrival, she immediately sought a doctor who insisted, "'Undress this baby! . . . Get these clothes off the baby'. . . [she responded] 'I haven't got anything else but these woolens.' [He said] 'In this country we let our children go naked. Let her go naked.'"'⁹

Brides who settled in coastal cities did not mention the climate as a problem in their adjustment. Maureen Roth, Margaret Rovick, and Moira Schoenstein all arrived in San Francisco and enjoyed the weather. The average temperature range of fifty to sixty-two degrees and the heavy fog that covered the city mirrored the environment of Britain.¹⁰ When asked about the climate, all the women agreed that the similar conditions actually helped in their adjustment to the United States.¹¹

Some of the brides faced not only new weather conditions, but also completely different types of communities. Those who came from large industrial cities sometimes found themselves in small rural communities. Unaccustomed to immigrants, citizens in some small towns did not welcome the brides. Brides who arrived in cities similar in size to their home towns in Britain did not experience the same assimilation problems. The larger cities, already accustomed to large influxes of immigrants, enabled the brides to blend into the communities.

The transition from London, a population of three million, to Lindale, Texas, a

⁹ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstracts of the United States 1946, 148-149.

¹¹ Roth interview, 20 September 1996. Rovick interview, 29 November 1996. Schoenstein interview, 19 October 1996.

population of 820 in 1946, was difficult for Eason.¹² She missed the cultural variety of London and did not appreciate being the “town oddity.”¹³ Margharita Shellberg, a Birmingham native, believed she received her first job as a receptionist at a real estate office in Napa, California, a small community of 7,740 in 1946, due to her accent.¹⁴

Sylvia Gutierrez discovered that the women in her new home of Trinidad, Colorado were angry that some GIs had married foreign rather than American women.¹⁵ In addition, Colorado did not have a large immigrant population.¹⁶ Gutierrez angrily recalled hearing the snide remarks young women her own age directed at her husband, “Why couldn’t you marry an American? . . . How come you had to marry a foreigner? . . . I really didn’t expect the negativism. . . . To me it was rudeness and I wasn’t used to it.”¹⁷ Once she and her husband relocated to the more diverse state of California, she did not experience the same kind of reaction.

To make matters worse, some brides could not seek refuge from a hostile community within the security of their immediate family. Gutierrez faced difficulties with her in-laws who also disapproved of her husband’s decision to marry a foreigner. Prior to her arrival, Gutierrez’s brother-in-law filled his mother with inaccurate stories

¹² World Book Encyclopedia, 1948 ed. S.v. “Texas.”

¹³ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

¹⁴ World Book Encyclopedia, 1948 ed. S.v. “California.”

¹⁵ Trinidad, Colorado in 1946 contained 13,223 inhabitants. World Book Encyclopedia, 1948 ed. S.v. “Colorado.”

¹⁶ Colorado recorded 23,662 immigrants compared to California’s 542,464 in 1940. U.S. Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1946, 118.

¹⁷ Gutierrez interview, 22 November 1996.

about the British. Without ever meeting a British person, her mother-in-law feared the worse. Gutierrez sadly explained,

His brother had told his mother, "Well, you know they have out houses. They don't have inside toilets." Somebody told her they kept coal in the bathtubs [and] they live like animals. They didn't know. So this was the impression they had expecting me to go there.¹⁸

Her husband corrected the stories before Gutierrez arrived, but his mother never completely accepted the daughter-in-law from England.

Josephine Thorn came from Leicester, England, an industrial city with an approximate population of 258,000 in 1946 and discovered that her husband's home town of Fayetteville, West Virginia consisted of only 1,347 residents.¹⁹ Like Gutierrez, Thorn encountered other young women who, as she called them "were trouble makers." Problems also immediately arose with some in-laws. She remembered an incident when she met her brother-in-law and his wife,

She came in and looked at me and said, 'What did you marry her for. Weren't the American girls good enough for you? I remember he stood there for a minute and looked at her. . .[and said] 'She's the one I fell in love with. She's the one I'm going to spend the rest of my life with and if you don't like it then get the hell out.' ²⁰

Although she never encountered the rude couple again, this negative reception upset and baffled Thorn. She had risked everything, leaving her family and country to be with the man she loved. Fifty years later, she still did not understand the cruelty of this woman.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ B.R. Mitchell and H.G. Jones, Second Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 321; World Book Encyclopedia, 1948 ed. S.v. "West Virginia."

²⁰ Thorn interview, 22 October 1996.

Thorn also faced other obstacles that most brides did not. Her new home with her in-laws, located in the mountains of West Virginia, did not possess indoor plumbing or electricity. Raised in a middle class home in a modern city, Thorn recalled her shock, “Oh, Lord! These people must be awfully poor.” Her husband had failed to inform her of the situation before she arrived. She sadly remembered her frustration, “I’d start to try to build fires. . . .I couldn’t get them to go. I’d sit on the floor and cry about it.” Luckily, they lived with her in-laws for a few weeks, thus enabling her to learn from her mother-in-law how to adjust to the lack of amenities.²¹ It took sixteen years before she finally had running water and electricity in her own home. Thorn found the lack of modern conveniences tolerable because she loved her husband. She repeatedly commented, “I’d have lived under a rock with him.”²²

Although Britain is an English-speaking country, some brides experienced language problems with Americans because of the differences between British and American slang. The presence of GIs and Hollywood films in Britain had exposed many brides to several American phrases, but the Americans were unprepared for the British terms. Not all brides experienced this problem, possibly their husbands or the Red Cross orientations warned them not to say certain things.

Sylvia Harris who arrived in Chicago in 1946, clearly remembered the embarrassing mistakes written in letters she sent to her in-laws during the war. She eloquently explained, “I remember [writing]. . . .Stanley knocked us up at three o’clock.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

So and so got a new job and gets a pretty good screw. . . . [and] keep your pecker up.”²³

“Knocked us up” did not refer to becoming pregnant, instead it meant to wake a person up from sleeping. A “pretty good screw” was a salary and to “keep your pecker up” meant to keep your chin up or keep smiling. Before she arrived, Harris’s husband explained to his family the meaning of the terms. Once reunited with her husband, she quickly learned not to use such phrases.

Shellberg who settled in Napa, California recalled an experience when she used one of these terms and unknowingly shocked her mother-in-law. While at a banquet dinner for her husband’s work, Shellberg became violently ill. A doctor attending the dinner directed her to go to the hospital, but she did not trust him and refused. Later, while telling her mother-in-law the story, she commented, “I felt he was trying to screw us for everything we had.” Her mother-in-law responded, “Oh! What an expression.”²⁴ Embarrassed, it took some time for the older woman to explain that “screw” in the United States referred to sexual relations between a man and a woman. Shellberg, amazed, informed her mother-in-law that it meant only to swindle in Britain.

Regional terms and accents in the United States also caused problems for brides who settled in Southern states. Eason, the bride who came to Texas, remembered an incident while shopping with her sister-in-law. After choosing a couple of new outfits, Eason paid for the items and began to walk away. The saleswoman called out, “You all come back now.” Eason stopped, turned around and walked back to the woman at the

²³ Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

²⁴ Shellberg interview, 11 November 1996.

counter. The woman asked her, "Did you forget something?" Eason responded, "No. You called me back." The saleswoman denied this and repeated, "You all come back." Annoyed by now, Eason said, "I'm back. What do you want?" Embarrassed, her sister-in-law grabbed Eason's arm and led her out of the shop.²⁵

Roth remembered experiencing language barriers while living in Columbus, Georgia. After the war, her husband remained in the Army Reserves, and they spent one summer stationed in Georgia. When Roth tried to speak to local women in the stores, confusion crossed their faces. They could not understand anything she said. When they responded that they did not know what she wanted, their broad southern drawls in turn created confusion for Roth. Finally, her husband intervened and became a translator between the southern women and his English wife, both sides speaking different dialects of the English language.²⁶

Certain British accents created problems for brides. Patricia McLellan, originally from Birmingham, England, remembered language barriers that interfered with her work. Working in the customer service department at Sears Roebuck required a lot of interaction with people, and on several occasions customers complained that they could not understand what she said. At the time McLellan became very upset, but now she understands. Fifty years later, she returned home to visit and found it difficult to understand her own family because of their heavy accents.²⁷

Once in the United States, some brides unexpectedly discovered that their in-laws

²⁵ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

²⁶ Roth interview, 20 September 1996.

²⁷ McLellan interview, 22 October 1996.

were first-generation immigrants like themselves. In some cases this helped the women adjust because their American family and British family shared a common cultural background. However, added cultural and language differences sometimes required brides to learn more than a few new phrases.

Odette Diamond's in-laws, like her mother and grandmother, escaped the Eastern European anti-Jewish pogroms in the early 1900s. They came from Poland and never spoke fluent English. Diamond remembered that their ideas were very 'old world' and they seemed much older than her parents. Yet, neither their ideas nor their language were that unfamiliar to her.²⁸

Before arriving in Santa Clara, California, Rodriguez knew that her in-laws spoke only Spanish, and her sister-in-law translated their correspondence during the war. Rodriguez claimed that she did not experience cultural problems with her in-laws and that adjusting to being married and a wife caused more strife. She learned a few Spanish words which enabled her to communicate to a certain extent and she credited her understanding mother-in-law, "I learned where I could grasp a lot of what she said. . . .She didn't talk that fast. . . .We'd go shopping together and I'd speak English and she'd talk Spanish, but we always knew what we were talking about."²⁹

Cisneros left her grandmother's boardinghouse in Scotland and found herself immersed in an Italian neighborhood, living with Italian first-generation immigrant in-laws. Both the neighborhood and her in-laws greatly affected her adjustment. She knew her husband's ethnic background, but she did not realize that separate ethnic immigrant

²⁸ Odette Diamond of Agora Hills, CA interview by author, 17 November 1996, Agora Hills CA. tape recording, in author's possession.

²⁹ Rodriguez interview, 30 October 1996.

communities existed in Rochester, New York. Before she arrived, Cisneros pictured an America where everyone lived in harmony without racial distinctions. She sadly discovered the truth. Every few blocks a new ethnic group, such as Irish, German, Italian, or Jewish, dominated stores and housing, creating entirely different worlds.³⁰

Spoiled by her grandmother, Cisneros never learned how to cook, clean or do laundry. Her mother-in-law quickly realized her new daughter-in-law's inadequate abilities and told her, "You stay here for one year. I'll teach you everything that I can and after that you're on your own."³¹ Cisneros learned to cook Italian food, a great feat for a woman who had never seen spaghetti and who became terrified when she thought the noodles on her plate were worms moving. Cisneros believed that her mother-in-law's status as an immigrant woman without any family in America created a common bond between them.

Although her in-laws did not speak English, Cisneros learned to communicate with them. Every day her father-in-law taught her one new Italian word. Cisneros soon learned to understand this strange language, but admitted she could never speak it fluently. The different sounds of the Italian language were too difficult to master.

Food, something greatly desired after years of rationing during the war, did not fulfill Cisneros's expectations. Everything tasted different. She sadly remembered,

I couldn't eat the food. The eggs tasted different and I loved eggs. The meat tasted different. Everything had a different flavor. . . . The first maybe year or year and a half I had a terrible time eating. I drank milk. Even it was rich to my taste. I ate cheese. I liked vegetables, but everything tasted different.³²

³⁰ Cisneros interview, 16 November 1996.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Eating became a tortuous chore. Her mother-in-law tried to help by making anything Cisneros requested, but it never seemed to be right. Cisneros wanted a potato with cheese melted on it, she got mozzarella cheese, not cheddar. She said she liked roasted chicken. Her mother-in-law prepared this, but instead of seasoning the chicken with only a little salt and pepper, she covered the entire bird with garlic. Cisneros finally adjusted to the different tasting food and commented, "After I learned to eat Italian food, I could eat it in the morning, the afternoon, and at night time."³³

Gutierrez was aware of her husband's Spanish background, but she did not realize that his entire family was bilingual and spoke fluent Spanish and English. Gutierrez did not receive a warm welcome from her in-laws who spoke fluent Spanish when they did not want her to understand the conversation. Gutierrez's husband always reminded his family to speak English but often to no avail.³⁴ Without their support, Gutierrez never learned to understand or speak the language.

Like Cisneros, Gutierrez also faced terrible obstacles concerning the new ethnic meals served by her mother-in-law. Afraid of offending this woman and making a less-than-perfect relationship worse, Gutierrez ate all the different meals foisted on her. As a result, she suffered an extremely painful kidney infection. The doctor told her, "Well, the only thing wrong with you is you've been used to a bland diet and you are eating all this spicy food."³⁵ This gave Gutierrez the excuse she needed. She no longer ate the strange tasting enchiladas or chili.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gutierrez interview, 22 November 1996.

³⁵ Ibid.

The daughter-in-laws of first-generation immigrants faced all these problems and many more. But adjusting to a new culture sometimes paled in comparison to trying to understand and navigate the hostilities that often existed between cultural groups in the United States. When brides arrived in 1946, racism plagued the country and a strict color line existed in the Southern States. Brides who settled or visited the South sadly discovered the situation. Brides who settled in Northern States do not recall witnessing racism first hand, but like the other brides, they soon realized the depth of prejudices. Two brides did acknowledge the existence of racism in Britain, but for the most, their previous experiences in Britain did not prepare them for this aspect of American culture.

Before 1939 approximately 8,000 Africans and persons of African descent resided in Britain, a country of 41 million.³⁶ Given such a small number, it is not surprising that most brides had never seen a person of color until African-American GIs arrived in 1942.³⁷ Diamond, an exception, remembered that her mother had become acquainted with various international dignitaries while working at an elite golf club. These visitors often found their way into Diamond's home for a cup of tea or dinner. She fondly reminisced about the men she called "uncles" and as she put it, "[her] cosmopolitan upbringing."³⁸

Two-upper class brides, Barnett and one who wanted to remain anonymous, admitted that prejudice against people of color did exist in Britain. Barnett did not cite any specific examples, but calmly stated that racist attitudes were present in England.

³⁶ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, 216.

³⁷ The term African-American will be used to describe people whose ancestors were brought from Africa to the United States. In their descriptions of events, the women rely on other terms, such as black or colored. The author has decided not to alter their words. In 1946 black or colored were the terms used, and it seems fitting that their memories rely on the words used at the time.

³⁸ Diamond interview, 17 November 1996.

The anonymous bride commented, “We had terrific racial discrimination in England.” In her community, an illegitimate black African girl who lived with her white father was ostracized by everyone. She thought the girl must have had a terrible life because of the discrimination. This bride also remembered dances with African-American soldiers. Besides the black girl, the soldiers were the first blacks she, and probably her community, ever saw. She remembered that at the dances “only a certain type of girl would dance with [the soldiers].”³⁹ If a woman did dance with an African-American soldier “forget about dancing with the whites, especially Englishmen. . . . any girl that danced with them was ostracized [by men and women].”⁴⁰ The bride said she stayed away from the African-American GIs.

Other brides’ first introduction to African-Americans came in the context of racial discrimination. Harris remembered being on a double date with her friend and two American soldiers. She quickly discovered her date’s racist views,

I didn’t know he was from the South. . . .and we got into a discussion. . . . He didn’t like Niggers. . . .I happened to say it was only by good fortune and good management that you were born white instead of black. Well, that was the worst thing I could have said. He left flat there.⁴¹

Schoenstein recalled watching Southern white GIs forcing African-American GIs off the sidewalk and into the street. She admitted she did not realize that racism existed in the United States. She summed up what many brides emphatically stated, “We didn’t have this color thing in England at that time. We never grew up with any of these prejudices. .

³⁹ Anonymous Bride

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

. . . When we did see it, it came as a shock to us because that was something entirely new.”⁴²

Once in the United States, some brides stated that their first impressions of this country were of the thousands of African-Americans in Chicago and New York. Gutierrez recalled that “it seemed like there was two to one. . . . [she] got a little scared. . . . but [she] didn’t know what to expect.”⁴³ Even Diamond, the bride who had known Africans in Britain, also commented that she was overwhelmed by the thousands of people crowded in the train depot in New York. She particularly noticed, “millions of black people” and admitted that her limited exposure in Britain had not prepared her for this sight.⁴⁴

Eason, unaware of racial tensions before arriving, recalled being shocked when almost forced to abide by the racist laws in Texas. One day while getting on a bus, a young pregnant African-American woman stood up to give Eason her seat. Eason refused to sit down because in Britain pregnant women were treated like queens. The African-American woman begged her, crying, “Please don’t do this to me. . . . It can cause me an awful lot of trouble.”⁴⁵ Luckily, a man sitting near the two women offered his seat and got off the bus at the next stop. Eason never realized that her actions could have created serious problems for the very woman she was trying to help.

Eason also complained about the contradictions that existed in Southern racism.

⁴² Schoenstein interview, 19 October 1996.

⁴³ Gutierrez interview, 22 November 1996.

⁴⁴ Diamond interview, 17 November 1996.

⁴⁵ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

Her mother-in-law and other women of her husband's generation employed black women to raise their children, even nurse the babies, yet "that colored person wasn't allowed to walk in the front door."⁴⁶ Eason never understood the color line or the prejudices of her in-laws.

Bradley, uninformed about the racist laws in southern states, innocently suggested the unthinkable to her husband's cousin: to sit in the colored area of a Texas Woolworth's lunch counter. The cousin responded, "Those are for the colored people," Bradley stated, "Well, I'm colored. . . .I'm white and to me white's a color. . . .The Lord didn't make us all the same. He made the whole world different."⁴⁷ She emphatically repeated in the interview that while the cousin and her friends called themselves Christians, in Bradley's mind this racist perspective completely contradicted the teachings of Christ.

Both Harris and Eileen Orton witnessed enforced segregation while visiting Tennessee. Driving through the South on their way to Florida, Harris and her husband stopped at a gas station in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She went to take a drink and saw two water fountains, one with white, the other with color written above. Harris understood what the signs meant, but in defiance, she proudly drank from the colored drinking fountain. Because of her Jewish background, Harris stated that she empathized with African- Americans. She concluded, "Being Jewish, we have been discriminated against. I could see these people were discriminated against because of the color of their

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bradley interview, 22 October 1996.

faces.”⁴⁸

A Thanksgiving Day parade in Tennessee opened Orton’s eyes to the serious racial discrimination that permeated the South. Each white branch of the military service marched separately down the street and entered the town square. Afterward, African-American soldiers from all branches marched together, but were diverted and not allowed to enter the town square. Shocked, Orton stated, “What is the matter with these people? Those soldiers were good enough to fight with them. Why aren’t they good enough to pray with?”⁴⁹ She remembered being told very sternly not to say that again. She began to watch what she said but did not change her view of the situation.

Discrimination against groups was not limited to skin color. Some brides also experienced or witnessed discrimination because of religious affiliations. Several members of Eason’s Catholic family refused to attend her wedding or acknowledge her marriage because she married a Baptist. Eason also faced a negative reception from her husband’s family for the same reason. She repeatedly sent letters to her relatives in England, but it took several years before they ever responded. She believed they finally changed their attitude, “because by that time their children had grown up and some of them had married non-Catholics. That made a difference. . . . I was the first one to marry a non-Catholic.”⁵⁰

Harris married a man of the Jewish faith, like herself. This did not create problems in her relationship with either family, but she did experience discrimination when trying to buy a home in a suburb of Chicago in 1947. She remembered showing up

⁴⁸ Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

⁴⁹ Orton interview, 20 October 1996.

⁵⁰ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

at houses advertised in the paper and discovering that they were restricted to “White Anglo Saxon Protestants. No Jews.”⁵¹ Never having experienced this attitude in Liverpool, Harris was shocked and angry but could do nothing.

Naar first witnessed American racism when she arrived in New York on a chartered flight from Britain in 1946. While going through customs, a Jewish rabbi who had been on their flight was harassed by the customs workers. She could not understand why the men treated the rabbi this way. She recounted her reaction,

I remember crying and I remember turning to my husband and saying, “What on earth, darling? What on earth is happening here? I want to go talk to those men.” He said, “No, you better not interfere.” It was awful. It was shocking.⁵²

Fifty years later, this incident still appears to affect her.

The abundance and variety of goods found in the United States and the wastefulness of Americans also shocked the brides who had survived during the war for a quarter or more of their young lives with so little. At the onset of World War II, the British government instituted strict rationing of most foodstuffs. The original list was short, but as the war continued additional items were added. Rationing also extended to almost every aspect of the economy. Electricity, gas, coal, water, and gasoline were among the limited supplies. One of the hardest hit areas, consumer goods, made it difficult for most citizens to replace any broken items. The production of items unessential to the war effort ceased and other types of basic goods, like kitchenware, were cut by between thirty-three and seventy-five per cent. The consumer goods still

⁵¹ Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

⁵² Naar interview, 17 November 1996.

produced lacked design or variety. In 1942 the rationing of clothes tightened, and styles became regulated. These measures limited the number of pleats, length of seams, and style of pockets manufactured.⁵³ Classes called “Make do and Mend” taught women how to redesign old dresses or to make an old shirt into baby clothes. Veronica Eason described how women acquired new winter coats,

Blankets weren’t rationed. If we could get a blanket, we’d have a short coat made out of the blanket or we would turn our coats inside out. . . . We didn’t do it personally. We would have a dress maker do it.⁵⁴

Brides left Britain knowing that the United States had been at war for four years, not six as Britain had been. They knew that the United States also rationed food and consumer goods, but they did not realize the extent of the difference between the two countries. The American Office of Price Administration (OPA) rationed twenty essential items, ranging from sugar to gasoline. Unlike Britain, an island country, the United States possessed vast amounts of natural resources. As a result, not nearly as many goods required rationing, and quantities were not as limited.

Due to the size of the United States and the lack of transportation, rationing varied from state to state and county to county. The goods listed as mandatory by the OPA were rationed everywhere, but the amount of the available products and the number of coupons required for each item varied by region.

As a result of the unstructured rationing in America, an exact comparison between Britain and the United States cannot be done. Yet, an example of California’s rationed

⁵³ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁴ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

goods during August 1943 compared to the average British rationing reveals a vast difference. During the week of August 1, 1943, the OPA removed coffee from the rationed list, thus making all coffee available.⁵⁵ The Safeway store in Sacramento, California ran an advertisement that week promoting four brands of coffee with prices ranging from twenty cents to thirty-three cents a pound.⁵⁶ At the same time, Britain lacked coffee, and people there used a substitute mixture. In the United States, each individual received a coupon for five pounds of sugar for a six-week period. In Britain, in January 1940 each person received twelve ounces of sugar a week, but as the war continued, this amount was drastically reduced to three or four ounces a month. Soap, a scarce commodity in Britain, was rationed at four ounces per person per month. The same Sacramento Safeway advertisement for August 1943 showed a sale of three six-ounce bars of Ivory soap for seventeen cents; no coupons were required. Obviously, the rationing experience in the United States in no way mirrored the British rationing experience.

Many women first experienced a taste of American wealth when they boarded the ships taking them to the United States. Some ships boasted small canteens or stores that sold baby clothes, chocolates, silk stockings, and even men's cologne. Brides fondly remembered buying anything they wanted without coupons. Moira Schoenstein, deprived of sweets for six years, bought several boxes of chocolates and ate most of them before arriving in New York.⁵⁷ Ann Cisneros, only nineteen when she left, clearly

⁵⁵ "Here Is Table Of Dates For Ration Coupons," Sacramento Bee, 4 August 1943, 2.

⁵⁶ "Safeway Homemakers' Guide," *Ibid.*, 3 August 1943, 6.

⁵⁷ Schoenstein interview, 19 October 1996.

recalled waiting in line at the ship's store to buy a brassiere. Because of the scarcity during the war, she matured physically without ever wearing a brassiere. She did not know what size to request, but she knew she wanted one. She quickly found a solution, "The girl in front of me said, 'I'll have a 36B bra.' [The store clerk] said to me, 'What size bra?' And I said, 'A 36B.'"⁵⁸ She confessed that it did not fit, but it was exciting to own one.

Other brides remember the food served in the dining hall during the crossing. Those who did not find themselves too seasick to eat found the choices on the menu amazing. The Queen Mary's breakfast menu for Saturday, February 2, 1946 included an apricot compote, oranges, and four choices of cereal. Eggs and bacon, a rare treat in Britain, also adorned the menu. Rolls or scones with preserves, and beverage choices of tea, coffee, or cocoa were listed at the bottom of the menu.⁵⁹ Howell happily recalled drinking wonderful-tasting cocoa when she sailed on the ship.⁶⁰

One bride, Gutierrez, remembered the dining experience on the ship differently. It was her first encounter with American wastefulness, a strong complaint made by other women once in the United States. Like many brides during the trip, she suffered from seasickness, but her father, an ex-British Merchant Marine, gave her instructions to eat every day, even if she felt sick. After forcing herself to eat dinner one night, she walked out on the deck and saw the ship's crew dumping huge amounts of the leftover dinner into the ocean. She could not believe that the Americans would throw away all this food.

⁵⁸ Cisneros interview, 16 November 1996.

⁵⁹ R.M.S. "Queen Mary" Breakfast, in Lee, Bittersweet Decision, 136.

⁶⁰ Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

Standing with other women on the deck, they “watched all that food just float away for the fish and [Gutierrez] said ‘There’s enough to feed England for a week after each meal!’”⁶¹ To Gutierrez, who endured deprivations for six years, this careless disregard for fruits, vegetables and meat seemed almost criminal.

Other brides explained that they felt disgusted at restaurants in the United States that served, in their view, far too much food. Howell remembered going to a restaurant with her husband and ordering steak, a rare treat in Britain. Without steak for so many years, she ate only a small portion and brought the rest home. The enormous portion of meat shocked her and seemed wasteful.⁶² The “All You Can Eat” signs offended many brides and reminded the women of the differences endured by the British and the Americans during the war. Diamond claimed she eats every mouthful of food on her plate even today because she cannot forget how little food she had during her youth in Britain.⁶³

Brides’ first experience in a grocery store or large department store left a strong impression of the vast supply of goods available in the United States. At this time, British grocery stores contained either bakery goods, green groceries, or meat. In the United States, all of this and more could be found under one roof. Barnett recalled the first time she walked into a grocery store in Southern California, “They were like dream palaces. . . . I was just standing around like Alice in Wonderland. I couldn’t believe this

⁶¹ Gutierrez interview, 22 November, 1996

⁶² Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

⁶³ Diamond interview, 17 November 1996.

place where you just walk along and take things.”⁶⁴ Orton who settled in Iowa remembered buying a dozen eggs, a pound of butter, and a whole roast at the local market and not realizing until that moment how severely food had been rationed in Britain.⁶⁵

Naar, who eventually settled in Southern California, remembered her first impression of American wealth at Plum’s in New York. She watched the people standing in line waiting for service at the candy counter. As the clerk asked each customer what they wanted, people often requested one or two pounds of chocolates. It all seemed unreal to her. She admitted that of course she had seen candy in her life, but not so much in one place in several years. Instead of being excited about the prospect of buying whatever she wanted, she thought about the Britons who had so little. She recalled that, “it was so plentiful that I would step back in kind of horror.”⁶⁶

Howell, who arrived in Seattle, Washington in March 1946, clearly recalled a shopping trip to the local Woolworth store. While ordering an ice cream soda, she overheard a mother asking her young son if he would like some ice cream. The little boy responded to his mother, “What kind?” Howell commented, “It always impressed me. ‘What kind!’ [she thought] You’re lucky you’re getting ice cream.”⁶⁷

The attitude of some Americans towards the variety of goods angered Harris and amazed Gutierrez. Harris, who arrived in Chicago 1946, recalled walking into the local

⁶⁴ Barnett interview, 17 November 1996.

⁶⁵ Orton interview, 20 October 1996.

⁶⁶ Naar interview, 17 November 1996.

⁶⁷ Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

grocery store and being completely shocked. At the time, tin fruit and washing soap were in short supply, but she remembered all the other wonderful things on the shelves. While waiting in line to pay for her groceries, she overheard the women in front of her complaining about the lack of things to buy. Listening to these women gripe over not being able to buy a tin of pears really angered Harris. She hastily interrupted the women and said,

Excuse me madam. . . Look around this shop. What do you see? Shelves filled with food stuffs. Things you can buy. Are you giving up coupons?. . . No! You should've been in England for the last seven years. Then you would know what doing without is like.⁶⁸

On the train trip to Colorado, Gutierrez explained that the dining car ran out of several breakfast items but still served eggs, bacon and salted crackers. The waiter profusely apologized for the inconvenience. The brides found his comments ridiculous. Choosing off the menu was an extreme luxury in Britain, not something these women expected.

Unlike other immigrant groups who came to the United States, the brides did not settle in ethnically British communities; they were dispersed throughout the entire country. They faced many different challenges, but overcame these problems by quickly altering their behavior. Certain aspects of American society, however have not been accepted by brides. As immigrants, they have a choice to adopt or reject parts of the new culture. Many chose to defy American racist Jim Crow laws, while others openly complained to their new families, but found no solace. Their responses to questions pertaining to rationing expressed an attitude of moral superiority towards Americans. They condemned the citizens of their adopted country for their lack of understanding of

⁶⁸ Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

the abundance that existed in this country and their wasteful actions. Brides' memories of suffering during the war continue to haunt them and have prevented many from accepting this aspect of American society. Brides' assimilation process revealed the painful process of immigrants attempting to create new lives in a strange and, in some cases, unwelcoming country.

CHAPTER FOUR

LONGING FOR THE LAND OF THEIR BIRTH: COPING STRATEGIES OF BRIDES SUFFERING FROM HOMESICKNESS

I was so homesick that I went down to ninety pounds.

Teddy Naar

As the ship carrying hundreds of British war brides and their children pulled away from the Southampton harbor and headed towards America, Eloise Howell felt a tinge of guilt. Other brides openly wept as their homeland disappeared on the horizon, but she did not. Six years of war and uncertainty had instilled in Howell the need to live for today because the future was uncertain. The sadness of leaving her home faded into the background of her mind as just another casualty of life. The mourning would come, but not right away. It took time in the United States before Howell understood the grief of the brides on the ship. One day while ironing, she burst into tears, "I was homesick, and I was missing England and my parents."¹ Most brides, torn between the husband they loved and the country they called home, were plagued with homesickness. Out of necessity, these women, like other immigrants, sought various methods to cope with this traumatic side effect. An examination of these tactics reveals the painful transition and healing process that all immigrants must undergo and, at the same time, uncovers those women who continue to long for the land of their birth.

¹ Howell interview, 20 October 1996.

Like other immigrant women, brides suffered from homesickness.² Brides' experiences can be divided into two groups: those who desperately missed their families, and those who felt the same loss over their families, but also longed to be back in Britain. The differences in their responses to questions on homesickness may be a result of their various life experiences.

The first group of women either lived abroad or moved frequently while growing up and lacked a connection with a single place in Britain. Margharita Shellberg's father worked as a commercial artist, and her family relocated several times.³ Margaret Rovick, the daughter of a British soldier and an Irish noblewoman, was raised in Egypt. For a short time during her youth she attended private school in England, but she did not return to Britain until just before the war began. She stated that she never felt a connection to the country of her father's birth.⁴

Odette Diamond did not miss Britain at all. Her mother and grandmother had immigrated from Russia to Britain at the beginning of the 1900s. During World War One her mother married a Spanish soldier. When the marriage failed, Diamond's mother and grandmother raised Diamond and her younger sister. Diamond's unique first name and Spanish last name created problems for her at school. The other children teased her unmercifully. She commented, "[I] never really felt English. [I] never felt [I] belonged."⁵

² Pozzetta, *Ethnicity and Gender*, 163. Pozzetta cited an example of a woman who emigrated with her husband from Serbia. The woman later visited her homeland and never returned to the United States, leaving behind a daughter and a husband.

³ Shellberg interview, 11 November 1996.

⁴ Rovick interview, 29 November 1996.

⁵ Diamond interview, 17 November 1996.

Diamond also lived abroad with her family in Portugal from 1937 until the summer of 1939 when the British consul advised them to return to Britain before the war began. All of these women's experiences of living in several different homes or residing in another country resulted in a type of homesickness that did not include a longing to return to Britain.

The second group of women had neither traveled extensively abroad nor frequently relocated within Britain. When asked about place of birth and location of residence when the war began, many brides stated identical addresses for both questions. Their entire support network of family and friends could be found within a couple of miles of their homes. The loss of everything familiar frightened the women and sometimes worsened their homesickness. Sylvia Harris had lived in her parents' home in Liverpool. Her extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins all resided within a few blocks. She remembered how difficult it was in America without this close kinship network to support her, especially when adjusting to being a wife in this strange country.⁶

The most obvious method of dealing with homesickness is to return to the place that is missed. Some women, after a few years in the U.S., were able to afford a trip to Britain. Such a journey often helped brides accept their life in America.

Teddi Naar recalled the painful experience of trying to cope with being away from her family and her beloved country. An upper-class woman in Britain, she lived in a lower social class in America. She constantly complained about the loss of her lifestyle as the main problem in adjusting. She became depressed and stopped eating. In the first

⁶ Harris interview, 20 October 1996.

year she lost so much weight she resembled a prisoner-of-war. Her husband did not know what to do. When Naar's mother saw a picture of her, she sent a telegram that read, "Come home immediately. You are sick. There's something the matter with you."⁷ Naar and her husband returned in 1948 and she admitted this helped. Her family and friends happily greeted the couple. She slipped back into her old lifestyle. At the time Britain still suffered from postwar shortages of food and consumer goods. Naar commented that "it wasn't terribly great to go back from that point of view. . . . Just going back to familiar faces."⁸ This unpleasant aspect of Britain helped Naar cope with homesickness. She found that the advantages in her new country outweighed the difficulties faced by her friends and family in Britain. When she returned to California, she forced herself to adjust and stopped making herself sick.

Eileen Orton also returned to Britain in 1948. Like Naar, she suffered from homesickness, though not as severely. She remembered "only thinking of the good things and when I went back and saw there were more things that were not as good." This cured her of her desire to live in Britain, and she enthusiastically stated, "I couldn't get back [to the United States] fast enough."⁹ She still returns to Britain to visit family but has never felt homesick again.

The early trips back to Britain reminded the women of the years of suffering they had endured during the war. Seeing their families again helped, but did not change the dire economic situation that persisted in Britain. Materially the women were better off in

⁷ Naar interview, 17 November 1996.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Orton interview, 20 October 1996.

their new country. Only when faced with the obvious differences did they remember that their new homes held many benefits.

Immigrant groups often arrived either with family members or were reunited with their families already in the United States; however, most brides left the shores of their homeland completely alone. Without cheap commercial airplane flights, most brides and their families feared that they might never be reunited again. With this in mind, several parents decided also to emigrate to America. Four of the women interviewed were followed to the United States by their immediate families. As in the case of other immigrant groups, the arrival of the brides' families alleviated the women's' pain and helped ease their adjustment.¹⁰

Howell's parents lived in the United States after World War One, but were forced to return to Britain when her father became ill. Howell's father always dreamed of returning. His daughter's decision to marry an American and emigrate pushed him to finally fulfill his dream.

After Diamond left Britain, her mother desperately missed having her close and decided to emigrate to America. When asked if she experienced any difficulties in her adjustment, Diamond answered that once the arrangements were made for her mother to come, nothing else mattered.¹¹

Sylvia Gutierrez's mother, like Diamond's, also suffered from the separation. Her father wrote, "She's just going downhill."¹² The inability of Gutierrez's mother to cope

¹⁰ George E. Pozzetta, ed., Ethnic Communities: Formation and Transformation (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), vii.

¹¹ Diamond interview, 17 November 1996.

¹² Gutierrez interview, 22 November 1996.

with the loss of her daughter resulted in her father's decision to sell his antique business and relocate the entire family, including a younger brother and sister, to the United States. Gutierrez admitted that she felt homesick, but she believed her mother experienced greater difficulty.

Occasionally, even when family followed, the brides remained homesick. When Valerie Barnett set sail for the United States, she never expected to remain in this country. After marrying her husband, the two decided to visit his parents in California before they opened a private school in England. The visit turned into fifty years. Because Barnett never intended to remain, her continued homesickness is perhaps more understandable. Barnett's parents also emigrated to the United States once they realized their daughter was never coming back to Britain. Her father believed it was more important to have the family together, even if it was not in Britain. Barnett never recovered from leaving her country. She still telephones her old friends and reminisces about the past. Because of her situation she commented, "I think all English women really never get over their homesickness."¹³

Many brides who could not return home or bring their families with them kept in contact through letters. Prior to her family's arrival in the United States, Gutierrez wrote home every other day. Moira Schoenstein commented, "I used to get homesick, every once in a while. I was always looking for mail and writing letters."¹⁴

For one bride who found herself disillusioned by her marriage and stranded in the United States, writing poetry became a method to cope with her homesickness. When

¹³ Barnett interview, 17 November 1996.

¹⁴ Schoenstein interview, 19 October 1996.

sent a questionnaire by the author, Marguerite Jauncey responded that she did not want to complete the form because some of the questions were too personal. Yet, she did comment that she is “still terribly homesick for the land of [her] birth.”¹⁵ She also directed the author to her book of poetry, Wrapsody: A Poetic Journey to a Different Life and commented, “The answers to nearly all your questions you will find there.”¹⁶

The collection of poetry encompasses four phases of Jauncey’s life and are appropriately titled, “England,” “Love and War,” “To a Different Life,” and “Cheers.” The third section, “To a Different Life” discussed her experiences as a war bride. In the poem, “The Challenge,” Jauncey expressed her fears during her journey to California and her reunion with her husband. The poem stated that the man who meets her only resembled the man she married during the war and the marriage was fraught with uncertainties. Instead of returning to “I told you so,” she remained in the United States and “rode [her] fate to the end.”¹⁷

The unhappy marriage worsened Jauncey’s homesickness. After several years, the two parted. Jauncey longed to return to Britain but could never turn back time. The poem, “Homesick,” described her dilemma. She longed for “the wild winds, soft rain, everything green.” She asked herself, “Why do you stay?...Why wait, and wait and wait?”¹⁸ She answered the questions with, “Dreams get lost in time, age is death and

¹⁵ Marguerite Jauncey, Marina Del Rey, to Christina Sidlow, Boulder Creek, 5 November 1996, transcript in the hand of Christina Sidlow, Boulder Creek, California.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Marguerite Jauncey, Wrapsody: A Poetic Journey to a Different Life. (Huntington Beach, CA: GEM Publishing, 1995), 52.

¹⁸ Ibid., 55.

then, too late, too late to try. . . .”¹⁹ Too many years passed, and Jauncey could never return to the Britain of her youth. She now had roots in the United States: two daughters, grandchildren, and friends. Yet the longing has never subsided.

Some of the women’s in-laws unknowingly helped them cope with their homesickness. Brides’ experiences during the war, the bombings and the rationing, interested many Americans. People also wanted to know about the differences between the two cultures. In-laws often suggested or asked brides to speak to their local clubs or schools. Talking about their old life in Britain and the war years actually became a form of therapy.

For Veronica Eason, the public speeches began when she and her daughter were asked to do a television broadcast for the Easter Seals campaign. Next, the men’s Rotary Club requested that she give a talk and “from there it snowballed.”²⁰ She spoke at many high schools, teaching the civilian side of war in Britain. She also remembered being asked to speak at an African-American church. Eason claimed to never have been an organizer or a public speaker before she arrived in the United States. The decision to speak about her experiences to groups arose out of necessity. It became a way to deal with the loss of her country and to laugh at the differences between the two cultures. Sharing her stories helped her audience grasp all the problems faced by war brides and other new immigrants in the United States.

Gutierrez, like Eason, spoke to different groups, but this activity did not help her cope with her homesickness. Her mother-in-law urged Gutierrez to give lectures at the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

local women's groups. She agreed, but when she finished speaking "[she] wanted to end up in tears because [she] was homesick."²¹ It had the reverse effect. Instead of being comforted, the lectures intensified the feeling of loss. It forced Gutierrez to think of her family and her country, the two things she was trying to put out of her thoughts. For her, adjusting to being in the United States meant not dwelling on the past but focusing only on today. Once she found a job, life became easier and the homesickness faded into the background.

Brides who could not afford a trip back to Britain and whose families did not emigrate sought the company of other war brides. Sociologists believe that, "Immigrants can become interpersonally integrated within the 'native' community, within his [or her] ethnic community, or within a group of immigrants of an ethnicity other than his [or her] own."²² Different characteristics of the immigrant may affect this outcome, such as educational background, age, or motivation for migrating.²³ The relevance of the brides' education or class distinction lost its importance as they coped with their pain.²⁴ These

²¹ Gutierrez interview, 22 November 1996.

²² George E. Pozzetta, ed., Ethnic Communities: Formation and Transformation (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), vol. 3, American Immigration and Ethnicity, 23.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jenel Virden stated in her book Good-bye, Piccadilly that upper-class women tended to stay away from war bride clubs. This conclusion is not confirmed by this study. Veronica Eason, an upper-class woman, arrived in a rural Texas community and created a war bride club. Sylvia Harris, also an upper-class college-educated woman, did not join a war bride club because she had no knowledge that they existed. She stated that she would have liked to have joined this type of group. On the other hand, Valerie Barnett, also from the upper class, did not join a club because she believed she had nothing in common with the other women. Some lower and middle class women also refused to participate in the organizations. Maureen Roth, a middle-class bride attended one meeting and like Barnett, believed she had nothing in common with the other brides. Thus the brides' British social class had no bearing on whether they participated in a war bride club.

women chose to seek association with others who shared the common experiences of marriage to an American soldier and emigration to the United States. War bride clubs quickly sprang up throughout the United States.

The creation of these organizations was not unique to the war bride experience. Previous female immigrants had created many different types of clubs ranging from charitable groups to social clubs.²⁵ Self-help often dominated these immigrant women's organizations.²⁶ Homesickness motivated brides to come together and help each other through a difficult transitional period in all of their lives. Communicating with other women in circumstances similar to their own helped many brides deal with their pain. Two types of clubs existed: clubs established by an official organization, such as the English-Speaking Union,²⁷ that only targeted British brides, and grass-root clubs founded and organized by war brides themselves that welcomed brides from all countries.

Before the women left Britain, the English-Speaking Union's leaders realized that the brides would not be settling in ethnic enclaves and would be spread throughout the United States. They feared that the brides would endure loneliness, isolation, and homesickness. In response the organization stepped in and created several "Overseas Brides Clubs." They wanted to help women adjust to American society. The clubs' organizers believed that meeting American women would help brides learn how to be "good" American wives. Also the clubs would enable brides to keep in contact with other

²⁵ Seller, Beyond the Stereotype, 256.

²⁶ Maxine Schwartz Seller, ed., Immigrant Women (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 174.

²⁷ An organization founded in 1920 to foster good relations between the English-speaking countries of the world.

British women.²⁸

To introduce the women to the clubs, the English-Speaking Union distributed flyers at the staging centers in Britain, such as Tidworth Station, before the women left on the ships. The flyers posed several questions,

Do you want to learn to cook the American way?
Do you want to meet other wives who have come from your own country,
possibly from your own 'home town'?
Do you want to meet some American girls who can tell you how they do things?
Do you fear you may ever be homesick?
Maybe it would help to talk to someone who has been homesick too and can tell
you how to get over it.²⁹

In 1946, the Union established clubs in thirty-five cities throughout the United States. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Red Cross also sponsored clubs. These organizations emphasized women's domestic roles as wives and mothers. Classes on cooking and sewing were included in the clubs' agendas.³⁰

Interestingly, none of the women in this survey remembered seeing such flyers or hearing about the English-Speaking Unions' clubs. Possibly in the excitement or anxiety about their trip, brides easily overlooked a trivial flyer. As a result, none of these women joined the official clubs when they first arrived.

The grass-roots clubs organized by the brides attracted many more women. The motivating factor for the women who began the clubs appears to have been their desire to communicate with other women in the same situation. These clubs became support

²⁸ Virden, Good-bye, Piccadilly, 122.

²⁹ "Overseas Wives: A Cordial Welcome Awaits You," English-Speaking Union in Virden, Good-bye, Piccadilly, 123.

³⁰ Virden, Good-bye, Piccadilly, 124.

groups for the women involved. Although most members came from the British Isles, brides from other countries did join the organizations. Gwen Bradley remembered that an Egyptian bride joined her club and Eason recalled having members from Belgium, Iceland, Austria and Germany in their group.³¹

To start a club, a bride often placed an advertisement in the local newspaper announcing the time and place of meetings. Word of mouth also helped. Several women remembered meeting other brides through neighbors or a husband's co-workers. Even while shopping, the sound of a foreign accent called for an invitation to join a club.

The decision to start a club sometimes arose because of a specific incident. The idea to organize a club came to Eason when she participated in helping another bride leave a bad marital situation and return to Britain. Eason's sister-in-law received a telephone call concerning a British woman who had married an African-American GI. The caller discovered that Eason was a British bride from an article written about her marriage in the Longview, Texas newspaper. Eason's sister-in-law arranged for an afternoon tea and invited the young woman and Eason. Eason learned of the terrible circumstances of the woman and helped contact the British Embassy.³² The bride returned to Britain. The entire ordeal made Eason wonder if other brides, like herself, were having difficulties adjusting in their new home towns. Maybe this woman is "not the only one that's in trouble who may need the support of the rest of us."³³

³¹ Bradley interview, 22 October 1996. Eason Interview, 20 October 1996.

³² Eason did not explain the problems the bride faced. She only implied that the different skin colors of the husband and wife were causing great strife for the bride. In Texas in 1946 marriages between African-Americans and whites were illegal.

³³ Eason interview, 20 October 1996.

Eason commented that her desire to meet other women also arose out of “a need for friendship with people who had the same culture. . . .Not necessarily British because, you see, we had Italian, [and] Icelandic [brides]. Anybody who came from another country. Anyone who wasn’t American born.”³⁴ Her situation of moving from the populous, culturally varied London and ending up in Lindale, Texas, population 820, resulted in extreme homesickness. She stated in a calm voice, “I did it to keep from going crazy.”³⁵

The size of the clubs varied greatly. Eason’s club, according to an undated and untitled newspaper clipping, included only eleven women. Yet Bradley stated that the club she belonged to in Los Angeles was comprised of possibly one-hundred-and-fifty members.³⁶ Muriel Rodriguez’s Santa Clara club consisted of around forty women.³⁷ The Santa Rosa paper, The Press Democrat ran an article in September 1996 entitled, “Tea, Crumpets in Sonoma County for British Brides.” The article included four interviews with women who were members of a war bride club. The picture shown of the members in 1950 included sixteen unnamed women.³⁸

Clubs usually met once a month in various locations. Some meetings were held in local church parish halls, but more often than not, the women congregated in each others’ homes. Tea and cake were always readily available as they spoke of their problems with

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Bradley interview, 22 October 1996.

³⁷ Rodriguez interview, 30 October 1996.

³⁸ Gaye LeBaron, “Tea, Crumpets in Sonoma County for British Brides,” The Press Democrat, 15 September 1996.

in-laws, husbands or reminisced about Britain and “the good old days.”

Not all brides found the clubs beneficial. Maureen Roth discovered that she did not have anything in common with women who belonged to the war bride club in Longview, Washington. With three boys at home to raise, she decided not to waste her free time with the group.³⁹

Curiosity about other brides' adjustment spurred Rodriguez to join a club in Santa Clara, California. An unknown British bride telephoned Rodriguez and asked her to be part of the group. After attending a few meetings, she learned that most of the women went to air their problems. Rather than a support group, Rodriguez saw it as a “grievance group.” Several brides complained about their in-laws or their husbands. Other brides who had already returned to Britain for a visit often spoke of their trip, making those who had not been able to return feel terrible. The group eventually broke up. Rodriguez is not sure exactly why, but added, “frankly a lot of them did get divorced and that could've been the reason.”⁴⁰

Brides who did not participate in the grass-roots clubs stated several different reasons for their absence. Many claimed to have had no knowledge of their existence but wished they could have joined. Other women refrained from joining the groups because of financial responsibilities. Some stated that they had nothing in common with club members, and still others disassociated themselves from war brides because they do not consider themselves a war bride. This idea was often stated by women who did not travel through the war brides' transportation system or who married their husbands after the

³⁹ Roth interview, 20 September 1996.

⁴⁰ Rodriguez interview, 30 October 1996.

war ended.

The groups that formed in the first years after the brides' arrival in America seem to have been a way to help cope with homesickness and other adjustment problems. To talk with other women in similar circumstances motivated many brides to join. Other brides, unaware of the existence of these clubs, sometimes joined clubs fifteen or twenty years after they had been here. These clubs do not appear to have had the same function. Instead of being a real necessity for survival, as in the case of Eason, the groups became a way to socialize with other British women.

Nineteen years passed before Ann Cisneros discovered a war bride club. While working at a hospital in Southern California in 1965, a patient heard Cisneros's accent and suggested she join the Daughters of the British Empire.⁴¹ This club was not a grass-roots club, but did include chiefly war brides. Many of the women who belonged came from the upper class, and they spoke of their first experiences in the United States, usually in not very positive terms. These women had already divorced their GI husbands. Cisneros believed, "a lot of them just got married to come to America, I'm sure."⁴²

From this original club Cisneros and around twenty other women formed their own grass-roots group that still gets together every month in each other's homes. They call themselves the tea-aholics because they consume vast amounts of tea when together. The group functions as a social gathering where they talk about what is happening in their lives. Their daughters and granddaughters also join the women. The children and

⁴¹ The Daughters of the British Empire, founded in 1909, includes five thousand members residing in thirty-two states. Women born in Britain or the British Commonwealth or wives of British men all qualify to join the organization.

⁴² Cisneros interview, 16 November 1996.

grandchildren of the brides may attend the gatherings because they feel a strong connection with their British heritage.⁴³

Women who did not join official or grassroots clubs, nevertheless, sought the company of other British women. Schoenstein, upon arrival in the United States, was introduced to other brides through word of mouth. The women used to get together for a *Kaffeeklatsch*.⁴⁴ Then the women shopped and took their children for walks. The young brides did join the established club, Daughters of the British Empire, but did not attend the meetings. Schoenstein commented, “At that time it seemed rather stuffy to us. You had to wear hats and gloves. It wasn’t too interesting.”⁴⁵

Naar, unaware of any war bride clubs, may have been helped by joining a group when she first arrived. She did meet four other British women through chance encounters, but not until 1949, three years after she left Britain. The women celebrated holidays together and often talked about how much they missed Britain.⁴⁶

One bride, Diamond knew that clubs existed, but refused to participate. She did not actively seek the company of other British people. Instead her few friendships with other British women came about by chance. Diamond vehemently stated, “I had no interest in [war bride clubs] at all. Not at all. I said to myself, ‘I’ve left England, I’ve got lovely new friends. I don’t need or have the need to sort out or reach out to other English

⁴³ Not enough research has been conducted on the children of the war brides. This is another topic waiting to be explored.

⁴⁴ *Kaffeeklatsch* is a German term used to describe a social gathering.

⁴⁵ Schoenstein interview, 19 October 1996.

⁴⁶ Naar interview, 17 November 1996.

people.”⁴⁷

Other brides also explained that homesickness lessened once they started their new lives with their husbands. Either finding a job or taking care of children kept the brides very busy. Without time to dwell on the past, the pain of the separation from their families was not a primary concern. When Cisneros first arrived, she met another British bride through word of mouth. The two women socialized frequently, but Cisneros did not believe her relationship with this woman helped her deal with her homesickness. She stated, “It was just a normal thing I had to go through. It lasted about maybe a year. Then I got all tied up with my life here.”⁴⁸

Out of all the strategies used by brides to cope with their loss, time became the most potent method. Many expressed the view that their years in the United States lessened the pain and their longing to return to Britain. However, a small group vehemently stated that they continue to struggle with homesickness. America will never be their home; rather these women view themselves in the United States as visitors always on the outside looking in and never getting past the painful memories of loved ones, friends, homes, and a culture they left behind. These brides cling to their identities as British subjects and refuse to “melt” into American society.

⁴⁷ Diamond interview, 17 November 1996.

⁴⁸ Cisneros interview, 16 November 1996.

WAR BRIDES FIFTY YEARS LATER: AMERICAN OR BRITISH?

If a stranger would ask me, what country I am citizen of, I would say I am an American and if, as they often do say, "Where are you from?" I would say, "I came here from England. I am a war bride."

Doris Reeg

From the living room voices could be heard in the kitchen as people shuffled in and out of the garage carrying boxes of unsold garage sale items. Valerie Barnett, an elderly woman with beautiful silver hair sat in a large comfortable brown chair attempting to ignore the bustling noises from the other room. An interviewer's questions solicited a long pause before Barnett gave a carefully considered response. Many of the questions took Barnett back fifty years to a time before her life in America had begun. The memories of England, the war, and the painful process of adjusting to life in the United States conjured up painful feelings that hurt as she expressed them aloud to the curious interviewer. Towards the end of an hour she was asked, "Are you an American citizen?" Barnett replied very seriously, "No, because I'm British. I know that sounds strange, but your citizenship doesn't depend on where you live. It depends on your emotional and cultural inner harmony. . . .I know I'll be British all my life. I just happen to be living in America."¹ Barnett's response represents many war brides' view of their lives; however, others disagree. Most brides who have lived over two-thirds of their lives in the United States related that although they no longer feel completely British, they still feel a

¹ Barnett interview, 17 November 1996.

strong connection to Britain. As in the case of other immigrant groups, these women have not succumbed to the melting pot.

As English speaking immigrants who share a common history with the United States, British immigrants were believed to simply become Americans when they arrived. This was not the case for war brides. These women endured deep emotional scars and a long, painful adjustment to a new and strange culture that some continue to reject today.

Once brides chose to marry an American GI, their lives were immediately altered. Their childhood dreams and expectations of married life never came to fruition and their familiar world vanished as the shores of Britain faded on the horizon. After their arrival in the United States, in many cases, brides' preconceived ideas did not come true. Several struggled to reconcile their dreams with the reality of their situation in order to remain by their husbands' side. Brides from the upper-class often found the transition much harder than middle-and lower-class brides. Upper-class brides based their ideas on their own experiences and expected a life similar to their existence in Britain; however, this rarely occurred. Middle-and lower-class brides arrived with less grandiose notions, and after time in the United States, their lives often surpassed any expectations. As newly arrived immigrants, war brides suffered deep emotional distress that affected their view of their lives in America. Those who found it extremely difficult to accept their fate appear to identify more strongly with the land of their birth than those who expected less upon arrival.

The immediate physical adjustment and assimilation of immigrants can vary greatly. If no language barrier exists then the process may be easier, but not entirely without problems. British brides spoke English and shared a common heritage with

Americans, yet they still found aspects of the United States difficult to accept. The climate, especially the heat seemed unbearable, while others found the small isolated towns extremely lonely. Racism and the blatant discrimination in the United States disturbed many women as they struggled to reconcile themselves to their new lives.

Brides had survived six years of rationing during the war and discovered great material wealth in their husbands' homeland. The shock of finding so many goods available affected how brides viewed Americans. Instead of embracing the plentiful goods, brides often shunned certain Americans who appeared wasteful and unappreciative. They never forgot their years of suffering and refused to incorporate American's materialistic culture into their own identities.

Emigration includes leaving behind friends or family for a new beginning in a strange place. Many brides found themselves completely alone in the United States without any support networks. A deep sense of loss crept into their lives, and many women suffered extreme homesickness. The emotional pain of separation from all things familiar caused many women to seek out methods to cope with their struggle. Visits home, writing letters, and most importantly war bride clubs became outlets and therapy for their despair. Their efforts to resolve their situation revealed an immigrant group's inner turmoil during their adjustment in the United States, while also proving that some brides continue to suffer to this day. For these women, the Britain of their youth will always be a painful memory of which they can never rid themselves.

A complete examination of brides' expectations, immediate adjustment, and long term emotional ties reveals an immigrant group with a strong connection to their homeland. Other questions outside of these three areas posed to the women support this

conclusion. In the past, academics used citizenship as an index to measure the level of an immigrant's assimilation. New findings have shown that this method is invalid.

Immigrants desire for citizenship has more to do with self-interest than with their integration into the society as a whole.² Brides' citizen status supports this conclusion. All but two women claimed to be American citizens; however, when asked for their reasons for becoming citizens, none of the women revealed an inner desire to be an American. Rather, they chose to become citizens to participate in the political system, to have the same country as their children and husbands, or to acquire the ability to work in the United States. Brides' motivation for citizenship had little connection to their cultural assimilation or their emotional break with Britain.

Exploring how these women felt fifty years after their arrival is also an important clue into understanding if they have assimilated. The majority of the women interviewed indicated that they felt both American and British. Only three felt completely American and three completely British. Many have accepted their lives in the United States but have not forgotten their roots.

Over the years, several brides traveled back to Britain on more than one occasion to visit family and friends. Some recalled finding it very easy to adapt to the culture, while others found it difficult to adjust. For those brides who slipped back into their old speech patterns and customs, it appears that they have a stronger link to Britain than those who could not.

An immigrant's assimilation process consists of an individual's ability to adapt to and take on characteristics of the receiver culture, not only in the terms of outer

² William S. Bernard, Americanization Studies: The Acculturation of Immigrant Groups into American Society (Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1971), vii.

appearances, such as clothes or customs, but also on an emotional level. To completely assimilate, immigrants must break with their former country and internally identify with the receiver country. Past studies on American immigrants have shown this process is neither quick nor easy. The United States, founded by immigrants, consists to this day of several groups that have not undergone this process. British war brides continue to, and may always, identify with Britain.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE I

Please answer as many questions as possible and feel free to include additional pages and information that you feel is important.

General Background Information

Birth date:

Place of Birth:

Father's Level of Education:

Mother's Level of Education:

Father's Occupation Prior to War:

Mother's Occupation Prior to War:

Were you raised in the city or the country?

Please list siblings from oldest to youngest, including yourself:

Did any of your family members pass away before you immigrated to the US? Who?

What is your level of education?

How many children do you have?

Did you have children before you came to America?

Where were you living when the war began?

Did you continue in school or work after the war began? If you worked, what did you do?

How did war rationing effect your life? What specific items did you miss the most? Why?

Meeting Americans and the Trip to the US

When was the first time you saw an American in Britain?

How did this first meeting with Americans affect your view of American GIs?

What were your first impressions of the GIs?

Was there an American military installation near your home?

Did you attend Red Cross or any other mixed American/British dances?

Do you recall learning new American dances from the GIs? Which ones?

Did you have regular contact with GIs through your war work?

Did you date any of the GIs that you met? If yes, how did they affect your image of America?

How did your parents, siblings, and community feel about the GIs?

Where did you meet your husband? How?

Why did you begin dating him and how long did you date him before becoming engaged?

When you became engaged, how did your parents, siblings, community react?

When and how did you finally emigrate? What year and mode of transportation?

Where did you get your visa?

When you applied to emigrate did you think that you would never return to Britain?

How did your parents feel about you coming to America?

How did your friends and community view your decision to come to the US?

Do you think that the rationing and devastation of Britain affected your decision to leave and marry an American?

Images of America Before Leaving Britain

Do you remember reading books about America before you came to the US? (such as Gone With the Wind, Grapes of Wrath, The Yearling, The Virginian, Cross Creek) If yes, what were your impressions?

Can you name any other books that you read?

Can you recall specific images about American life from these books?

How do you think these books influenced your expectations about American life?

Did you listen to the American GI radio broadcasts while in Britain?

Do you remember any specific broadcasts, or radio personalities that made a lasting impression on you?

Did you prefer American music to British?

Can you recall favorite songs?

Do you recall seeing any American entertainers touring Britain before or during the war?

How often did you go to the movies during the 1930s?

How often did you go to the movies during the war?

During the war, how far away was the nearest movie theater?

Do you recall seeing newsreels about the US?

What about these newsreels impressed you the most?

Do you recall Hollywood films that you saw before the war? (such as Holiday, Bring up Baby, Gone With The Wind, The Grapes of Wrath, Betty Grable, Betty Davis, Joan Crawford movies or melodramas or musicals etc.)

What impressed you most about American men and women as seen in the films? (such as clothing, make-up, hairstyles, work, attitude, poverty, wealth, class structure)

Did the films leave you with an impression of America as glamorous? If yes, how? If no,

how?

To what extent did you expect American to be like what you saw in the movies?

What false images did Hollywood give you about America?

What true images did Hollywood give you about America?

Do you think Hollywood films tainted your image of America? If yes, in a good way or in a bad way?

Do you think the image of America you saw in the movies influenced your decision to travel to America?

Husband's Images

Before your arrival, what did your husband tell you about America?

In what way did you expect your new life in America to be different than life in Britain?

How different or similar to the movies was your husband's description of America?

Did he properly prepare you for meeting his family?

Were you prepared for his social class, level of income in the US?

Did he truthfully tell you where you would be living?

Did you and your husband have trouble finding your own home upon arrival?

Was your first home in America smaller or larger than in Britain?

Did you expect to have to work in America? Did you end up working once you arrived? Why?

Did your husband, movies, or books prepare you for racial discrimination in the US?

Red Cross/ Government Agencies

Did you attend any of the Red Cross "wives schools" in Britain?

What useful information did they provide?

What information was misleading?

What did you feel was the main emphasis of the orientations?

Did the Red Cross help you with your immigration to America?

Can you remember the images, ideas that the Red Cross wanted to instill in the wives?

How did this influence your images of what your life in America would be like?

Did you ever hear any of the American women guest speakers at the clubs? (i.e. Eleanor Roosevelt, Adelaide Astaire)

Do you remember your impressions of what they said?

How did their descriptions of America differ from what you saw in the movies?

Did you receive the GI Brides Guide to America? If yes, how did you get it?

Do you believe the information helped you adjust to America? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Real Images of Your Experience

What was your first impression of America when you arrived?

What specific images or thoughts do you recall?

Can you recall any specific disappointments upon your arrival?

Once in America, what struck you the most about American consumer goods?

What was your first purchase in America?

Was the food in the stores as plentiful as you expected?

In your new hometown, were the clothes in the shops similar to those you saw in the movies in Britain? Were you able to buy any?

Did your new home have all the modern appliances/conveniences seen in the movies? (such as coffee brewer, refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, dishwasher)

What did you think of your husband in civilian clothes?

Did you have to travel across the US to get to your husbands home?

What specific impressions do you have of your journey? (such as, size, people, climate, cities, cleanliness, countryside, mountains, stores)

What were your impressions of your new town and home?

Do you recall any specific disappointments?

Were you welcomed by your new family? How? Were they nicer than expected or not?

Did you expect to be welcomed by your new community?

How were the people in your new community different from the community you left in Britain?

Were you treated differently? How?

Were you surprised by the way Americans acted or treated you?

Were you able to make American friends easily?

Did you join a war bride club?

Do you recall specific problems adjusting to life in America? What kinds of problems?

Did you expect to experience these problems?

In what way did you expect your life in America to be better than the life you would have had, had you stayed in Britain?

Do you think the real America lived up to your expectations?

What has to be some of the biggest misconceptions you had about life in America?

Did American culture as seen in movies, books and music, influence your decision to marry an American and emigrate to the US?

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE II

Are you an American citizen? If yes, when and why did you become a citizen?

[Please explain]

If you are still a British citizen, can you please list the reasons why you have not become an American citizen?

Although you have been in the United States for fifty years, do you still feel a connection to Britain? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?

Do you still write letters to friends and family? If yes, how many and how often?

How many of your friends in the United States are British?

How many reunions have you attended? When and where did they take place?

Have you ever returned to Britain? When and how often do you make these trips?

Has your family or friends visited you in the United States? When and how often?

Do you consider yourself an American or a British subject? Why?

Do you feel both American and British? (Somewhere in the middle) How so?

APPENDIX 2
TABLE 1

	BRITISH HOME TOWN	AMERICAN HOME TOWN	MARITAL STATUS UPON ARRIVAL	METHOD OF TRAVEL/ YEAR
VALERIE BARNETT	London, England	Los Angeles, California	Married	Airplane 1947
GWEN BRADLEY	Birmingham, England	Los Angeles, California	Married	<u>S.S. Hollbrook</u> 1946
ANN CISNEROS	Glasgow, Scotland	Rochester, New York	Married	<u>Queen Mary</u> 1946
ODETTE DIAMOND	London, England	Los Angeles, California	Married	<u>S.S. Washington</u> 1946
VERONICA EASON	London, England	Lindale, Texas	Married	<u>Queen Mary</u> 1946
SYLVIA GUTIERREZ	Cheshire, England	Trinidad, Colorado	Married	<u>S.S. Washington</u> 1946
SLYVIA HARRIS	Liverpool, England	Chicago, Illinois	Married	<u>Queen Mary</u> 1946
ELOISE HOWELL	London, England	Seattle, Washington	Married	<u>Queen Mary</u> 1946
HANNA LOCKSHIN	Liverpool, England	Chicago, Illinois	Married	<u>James Parker</u> 1946
PATRICIA MCLELLAN	Birmingham, England	Yreka, California	Married	<u>S.S. Aquitania</u> 1946
TEDDI NAAR	London, England	Los Angeles, California	Married	Airplane 1945
JOYCE NIEBLES	Nottingham, England	Santa Anna, California	Married	?
EILEEN ORTON	Wembley, England	Iowa	Married	<u>S.S. John S. Erikson</u> 1946
MURIEL RODRIGUEZ	Norwich, England	Santa Clara, California	Married	<u>S.S. Argentina</u> 1946
MAUREEN ROTH	London, England	San Francisco, California	Single	<u>Queen Mary</u> 1947
MARGARET ROVICK	London, England	Pacifica, California	Married	? 1946
MARGHARITA SHELLBERG	Birmingham, England	Napa, California	Single	<u>Marine Marline</u> 1947
MOIRA SCHOENSTEIN	Cheshire, England	San Francisco, California	Married	? 1946
JOSEPHINE THORN	Leicester, England	Fayetteville, West Virginia	Married	Airplane 1946

? represents unavailable information

TABLE 2

	BRIDE'S EDUCATION	FATHER'S EDUCATION	MOTHER'S EDUCATION	FATHER'S OCCUPATION	MOTHER'S OCCUPATION
VALERIE BARNETT	College	College	College	Civil Servant	Housewife
GWEN BRADLEY	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	Factory Worker	Domestic
ANN CISNEROS	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	Bartender	Waitress
ODETTE DIAMOND	Primary School	?	Primary School	?	Secretary
VERONICA EASON	College	?	?	?	?
SYLVIA GUTIERREZ	Secondary School	Secondary School	Primary School	Business Owner	Housewife
SLYVIA HARRIS	College	Primary School	Primary School	Custum Taylor/ Furier	Housewife
ELOISE HOWELL	Secondary School	Primary School	Primary School	Printer	Printer
HANNA LOCKSHIN	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	Business Owner	Housewife
PATRICIA MCLELLAN	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	Construction	Domestic
TEDDY NAAR	College	Secondary School	Secondary School	Business Owner	Housewife
JOYCE NIBLES	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	?	?
EILEEN ORTON	Secondary School	Primary School	Primary School	Civil Servant	Housewife
MURIEL RODRIGUEZ	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	Mattress Maker	Housewife
MAUREEN ROTH	Secondary School	?	?	Business Owner	Housewife
MARGARET ROVICK	College	Secondary School	Secondary School	British Military Officer	Housewife
MOIRA SCHOENSTEIN	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	Worked on the Docks	Housewife
MARGHARITA SHELLBERG	Primary School	Secondary School	Secondary School	Commercial Artist	Housewife
JOSEPHINE THORN	Primary School	Primary School	Primary School	Small Business Owner	Housewife

*Primary Education -----Mandatory schooling through the age of fourteen.

*Secondary Education-----Schooling through the age of sixteen.

APPENDIX 3
WAR BRIDE POETRY

WAR BRIDES, 1946-1996

We are not alike, and yet we are the same
We came from other lands to one to change our name,
With hope in our hearts, that a mistake we had not made.
So young, so scared, yet trusting that this new life wouldn't be too strange.
With our mates at our side love would conquer all
If we could but smile and believe, we could stand tall,
For we were strong, we were brave,
Not alike, but yet the same.
We were pioneers struggling on, we were war brides.

The years have passed, we have moved and moved again,
A few have fallen, but many made the game,
Each with our own story, some happy, some sad,
Of homesickness, loneliness, worry, grief of lost loves,
Of friendships, loving hands, and help from above
Most of all, our families, our anchor in this land.
But our hearts reach back to the land from whence we came
And we understand each other for now we are the same.
A bit older, a bit wiser, a few wrinkles and a touch of gray,
Happy to be alive and live another day.
For proudly we are- the War Brides.

Sunny Sansing

I WAS THERE

The hatred of war and the longing for peace
The wish for the day when it would all ease
It seemed to be more than the spirit could bear
I remember so well.....for I was there.

The bombs as they fell with a shuddering sound
Crumbling the buildings, upheaving the ground
The whining of death which fell from the air
I can see it so clear.....for I was there.

The waiting, unsleeping through dark, lonely nights
For the planes, and the men who were lost on their flights.
The aching of parting, the whisper of prayer,
And I know why they prayed..for I was there.

The wondrous relief when the end was declared
The joy and contentment, the happiness shared.
The end to the heartbreak and making of prayer
To give thanks to my God...that I was still there.

Eloise Howell

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