Reading Questions for
Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era
AMH 2042
Dr. Bennett

Chapter 1: Containment at Home
1. How did Americans see the home as a source of stability in the postwar years?
2. How did suburbanization affect ethnic allegiances?
3. What does May mean when she says that “Postwar America was the era of the expert?”

Chapter 2: Depression
1. How did the Great Depression of the 1930s affect gender roles?
2. How did popular culture (films, etc.) reflect changing attitudes about marriage?
3. How did the Great Depression shape young people’s perceptions of marriage?

Chapter 3: War and Peace
1. How did World War II affect marriage rates?
2. How did popular culture shape ideas about gender roles during and after World War II?
3. What anxieties did women’s participation in the paid workforce foster?
4. In what ways did government policy support the ideal of marriage?
5. How did the transformation of men’s working conditions shape perceptions of family life?

Chapter 4: Explosive Issues
1. What does May mean when she says the nation had to be on “moral alert?”
2. Why was marital sexuality considered so important to Americans during the Cold War?
3. What was the ideal “Space Age” mother supposed to be like? Why?

Chapter 5: Brinksmanship
1. Why did young people accept the sexual taboos of the Cold War era?
2. How did differences in gender shape perceptions of premarital sex?
3. What does May mean by the term “sexual brinksmanship?” Why was it so important?

Chapter 6: Baby Boom and Birth Control

1. In what ways were children seen as the solution to the nation’s anxieties?
2. How did perceptions of fatherhood change in the postwar era?
3. What was the “reproductive consensus?”

Chapter 7: The Commodity Gap

1. What does May mean by the term “virtuous consumerism”?
2. How did federal policies support the expansion of suburbanization?
3. How did consumerism shape gender roles?

Chapter 8: Hanging Together

1. How did the function of home and outside work differ for men and women?
2. Why did the divorce rate decline in the postwar years?
3. What explains the rise in popularity of psychology? How did its use differ between men and women?

Chapter 9: The End of Containment

1. What was the impact of Betty Friedan’s book The Feminine Mystique?
2. How did class and race shape reactions to Friedan’s work?
3. How did the postwar experience with marriage shape the institution in later generations?