

The Citizen Treatment:  
Media, National Identity, and Citizenship Discourse in the USA from 9/11 to Obama's  
Election

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Communication)  
in The University of Michigan  
2010

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To my cousin Ami

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of the first odd joys I found when starting grad schools was taking the time to read the acknowledgements on works of scholarship. Sure, there is information in there that tells you who knows who and studied under whom, but there are also so many funny parts that show you how a person is awkward and yet so perfectly themselves. I hope I can do this fine tradition justice.

I'd like to begin by thanking my grandma, Suzanne Kuivinen Hutchinson, for her love and support. You're the best grandma on the planet! They just assigned me an alumni number. It's 8-million-and-something. What's yours, Grandma? #1?

Second, I would like to acknowledge my parents. My mom, Ruth Currie, is glorious. She is shy in her own way and probably wouldn't want me to tell you anything about her, so you'll just have to trust me that she is an amazing teacher, human being, friend, and parent. My dad, Don Hutchinson, is to be commended for surviving for so long on this planet when he's clearly from a distant place. My dad thinks and talks in straight lines, but he loves in sweeping, unchartable ways. And, it must be said, he sure can cook.

My brothers, Ben and Colin: older and younger, smaller and bigger, testy and punchy, funky and funny, the cool and the warm, the best and the best. To Ben, who gives the world's warmest hugs, writes beautiful music, and sees right to the heart of the matter. And to Colin, who is the smartest of us all and therefore focuses on beer, dogs,

and having a good laugh. You are my dears. I promise to be better about calling and visiting now that this thing is done!

To Chuck and Mary, my uncle and aunt, who never mind when I show up at their house, crazy dog in tow, disrupting everything, making faces, and stealing their kids away for adventures. Chuck is one of my bulwarks; he is always ready to help me and has a great sense of fun just under that serious surface. Mary is one of the finest people I know, her goodness and her mindfulness have helped me to be a better person.

To Chuck and Mary's kids—Sarah, Ian, Ami, and Elli—you have all been incredibly important to me. The sweetness of Sarah, the marrow-deep kindness of Ian, the ferocity of Ami, and the wise playfulness of Elli; watching you all grow up has helped me to become myself. And Ami, my cheerleader, my watcher, my noisy friend, this project is dedicated to you. Sail on silver girl.

To the rest of my family: I love you! You're the bee's knees.

To my Ann Arbor peeps: thank you for keeping me happy and human. I'd like to especially thank Fernando Velasquez, Lauren Guggenheim, Andre Cavalcante, Megan Biddinger, Miranda Boshart, Sarah Crymble, and Ann Williams. I'd be the hermit queen of A.B.D.-land without you.

And last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my committee. Susan, thank you for always pushing me to make the sharpest possible argument. Some of the best ideas in this dissertation began in your comments about my work. I'm eternally grateful for all your time and hard work. Nick, thank you for your warmth and honesty throughout this process. You have always been incredibly generous with your time and your ideas. Your faith in me kept me going! Julie, there were times in writing this where

a comment you had made months previous—which hadn't been fully comprehensible at the time—would come back up and I would suddenly understand the point you had made and how it brought together disparate pieces of this work. How is it that you're always eight moves ahead? Russ, I couldn't have finished without your kind support and guru-style coaching. I hope someone writes your biography someday, I get the sense that there are some eternal truths to be learned from your life and world-view.

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## ABSTRACT

The Citizen Treatment contributes to our understanding of the mass media and citizenship by discussing the ways in which citizenship is continually managed, manipulated, and contested in a variety of media texts. Focusing on American television, looking at the time between 9/11 and Obama's election, I examine both informational and entertainment texts, tracking the ways in which citizenship is called forth and acted upon in the media. In the news and in entertainment programming, American audiences are continually presented with conflicting citizenship forms and the media privilege some forms over others. As I analyze the reality television show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, and the action-adventure drama *Heroes*, I track a shift in dominant discourse away from private citizenship, toward public citizenship.

Having distilled into three complexes the ways in which the discourse of citizenship can announce itself within a text, I introduce the notion of "the citizen treatment," which refers to a privileged position some individuals are given in media texts. This position is produced through interactions of the characters with the complexes of citizenship as well as the character's treatment in the narrative and by the television lights, cameras and microphones. As citizenship discourse changes, the types of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that earn characters the citizen treatment are transformed.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction: 9/11 and Citizenship Discourse

Heading to a New York City hospital on September 13, 2001, Margie Meyer tells an NBC news camera, “I want to be able to see; I don’t care what they look like.” Margie is searching for her husband, Dave. Dave Meyer’s office was on the 105th floor of One World Trade Center; he is missing. Married for thirty-one years, Margie has a photograph of herself with Dave pinned to her blue T-shirt. In the picture, Dave, tall with a white beard and glasses, is wearing a suit and a corsage; he looks like a nice man. As Anne Thompson narrates, the camera shows another picture of Dave, this time in a T-shirt surrounded by his three daughters. Then, the audience is shown video of a newborn baby and they are told it was that just two weeks ago the family first welcomed this little girl, the second of Dave’s grandchildren. “I’m so glad he saw and got to hold her,” his daughter tells the camera, “and he would do absolutely anything for us and for my two girls.”

As his daughters and granddaughters keep vigil in New Jersey, Margie goes to the city to search for Dave. The police ask her what brand of underwear he wore. They ask her about any medications he was taking. As she moves around the city, Margie puts up flyers with pictures of Dave. The camera watches as she tapes one to a wall; the reporter says there are thousands of flyers in the area. “He’s always been good,” Margie says,

“he’s always helped anybody who asked him.” Margie explains that Dave was in the World Trade Center when it was bombed in 1993 and he had made it home. She thinks he will make it home this time, too. “He’s a little late” she says, “but anytime is good, he’ll come home.”

This short news story is typical of many that came out of New York after the attacks. It depicted a sad yet calm family working to locate a missing loved one. Like the New York skyline with its new gap, what the audience is asked to witness is an absence. Explaining what is absent—*who* is absent—is done not with details of Dave Meyer’s public life but with images of his private life with his wife, daughters, and granddaughters. Margie goes to the hospital in the hopes that there is something to see, but there is nothing for her to see but images of a private past.

While photographs and images were an essential part of the coverage of the September 11 attacks, they were limited in scope and what could not be seen was as important as what repeated across television screens, computer monitors, and front pages. As Barbie Zelizer (2002) wrote in her piece on the attacks, there were only a few basic photographic templates used in 9/11 coverage: images of the attack, of people witnessing the attack, and of people working at the site of the attack. In contrast, images of bodies, body parts, people jumping from the towers and other visceral horrors appeared very rarely and only in the early days (Ibid., p. 65). While Zelizer argues that this caused the image of the towers to reign, displacing the image of the bodies (Ibid, p. 65), it also, importantly, caused images of the type that Margie Meyer shared to reign: the thousands of victims of the attacks on the Twin Towers were represented through snapshots of them

in their private lives—dressed up for weddings, surrounded by their children, smiling for the camera.

From flag-draped newsrooms, these intimate images were broadcast alongside stories of how nationwide travel was being affected, of what the President was saying, of questions being asked by Congresspeople, and of investigations into terrorist networks. Congress moved to give victims of the tragedy the same benefits as soldiers killed in combat—calling them all “heroes of war” who “gave their lives” (NBC, 9/13/01). These victims, who exist for the audience in terms of their private snapshots, are equated with soldiers. Suddenly, weddings and gatherings in suburban kitchens are rendered as battlegrounds and carrying on with one’s family is made into a heroic act.

These highly privatized visions were in keeping with a citizenship form that had prevailed since the 1980s: private citizenship. In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, Lauren Berlant (1997) argues that conservatives of the Reagan era used the media and a variety of political movements (such as anti-abortion initiatives) to transform citizenship from something that one enacts publicly by marching, voting, making speeches, convincing neighbors, and otherwise being actively engaged with political ideas and the mechanisms of power, into something that one enacts privately and bodily by building families, adhering to certain values in one’s home and one’s place of worship and otherwise being actively engaged with faith, family, and feelings (p. 4-8).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In her project, Berlant (1997) seeks to understand how sexuality ended up at the site of citizenship and how disciplining action around sexuality can be resisted. Given her focus on the sexual, Berlant mentions consumption only briefly, but does recognize mass consumerism as prescribed by private citizenship (p. 178). Also, while recognizing that anti-abortion supporters often demonstrate publicly, Berlant focuses on the human fetus and how elevating the fetus to personhood (and citizenship) privatized citizenship.

Ideas about how citizens should look, think, act, and feel are always in transition, but can be seen taking on recognizable types. These specific constellations of notions of proper citizenship are called citizenship forms. They contain ideas about how citizens should think, act, and feel in relation to the nation-state and provide individuals with scripts that they can play out as they interact with each other, and with what Aihwa Ong calls “the webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society” (1999, p. 264). They rule in certain ways of acting and rule out other ways of acting.

The media’s role in the struggle over ‘how citizens should be’ is the focus of this dissertation. The media continually offer meditations on citizenship forms, shaping how people think about themselves as citizen-subjects and what attributes and behaviors they see as proper or ideal for citizens. Yet, few studies explore this link (Berlant, 1997; Billig, 1995; Gans, 1979) and none demonstrate it empirically. I will lay out with conceptual, descriptive, and definitional clarity the ways in which the discourse of citizenship can announce itself within a text and how the media can be seen weighing in, adding to, or transmitting that discourse. This work is intended to define citizenship as it appears in the media so that future work can test the effects of the presentation of different discourses on citizenship. I present a series of textual analyses focused on the discourse of citizenship from 9/11 to Obama’s election; I chronicle the myriad ways in which citizenship can be evoked and worked on by entertainment and news media.

This dissertation develops the notion of “the citizen treatment.” The citizen treatment refers to a privileged position in a mediated narrative in which a character (whether fictional or actual) is shown being recognized as a citizen and conferred the special rights of a citizen. The citizen treatment can be seen when the individual interacts

with agents of the state (broadly defined) or with the national symbolic. The citizen treatment is also evidenced by the text's treatment of the character within the narrative and other story-telling technologies of the medium which can be analyzed through film grammar, narrative analysis, and the character's agency within the text.

Berlant's (1997) approach to citizenship makes use of Michel Foucault's (1972, 1991) concept of discourse. Foucault uses the term discourse to describe shared understandings that are produced within cultures through what people say and do. Foucault's research on the history of mental illness demonstrated how discourses were historical in nature (i.e., each discourse belongs to a particular time and place) and illustrated how a change of discourse about mental illness resulted in very real changes for the people being defined as mentally ill (including first whether they are seen as mentally ill and secondly how they are treated). Thus, discursive analysis in the Foucauldian tradition seeks to historicize discourses and to attend to ways in which the knowledge produced by discourses contains the power to regulate behavior.<sup>2</sup> Berlant is working in this tradition when she first identifies private citizenship as a discursive form and then traces its implications.<sup>3</sup>

### *Privatized Citizenship and the Infantile Citizen*

This dissertation takes some of its analytical cues from Berlant (1997), but also, importantly, picks up the chronology of citizenship discourse where Berlant left off.

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2 For more on Foucault and discourse, see the primary texts Foucault (1972, 1991) as well as Danaher, Schirato, & Webb (2000), especially pages 30-46; Hall (1997) p. 44-51; McNay (1994).

3 Berlant also credits Walter Benjamin, Antonio Gramsci, Eve Sedgwick, Hortense Spillers, Fredric Jameson, Michael Warner, and Judith Butler with enabling her understanding of national culture (see Berlant, 1997, p. 12).

Berlant tracked the private citizenship form to Reaganite discourse and argued that it survived past the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations as Clintonite liberalism found “a middle ground on the right” (p. 4) On September 11, 2001, less than a year into George W. Bush’s presidency, the discourse of private citizenship was readily available; as I explore in this introductory chapter, it would be plumed to great affect by the Bush administration as they responded to the terrorist attacks. In the second chapter, I will analyze *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, a reality TV program which doubles down on privatized citizenship as it idealizes nationalist obedience and passive patriotism. In chapter three, I examine news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, arguing that it constitutes both a discursive eruption and a disruption to the discourse of private citizenship. In the fourth chapter, I analyze the television program *Heroes*, a drama which illustrates the struggle to re-publicize citizenship in the post-Katrina era. In the concluding chapter, I summarize the arguments and lay out, with precision, the ways in which I have discovered the discourse of citizenship announcing itself within a text as well as the methodological tools that enable an analysis how media speak to citizenship forms.

In her essay on infantile citizenship, Berlant (1997) examined a variety of media texts and public movements, tracking the impact of Reaganism on representations of citizenship. Berlant identified privatized citizenship as a discursive form and specified the infantile citizen (a specific type of private citizen) as the idealized citizenship form in 1980s and 90s America. The infantile citizen avoids education on political issues and favors passivity, naiveté, and distance from government (p. 35). The infantile citizen is epitomized by a child (or even a fetus); they are obedient, unquestioning, and in need of protection. The infantile citizen, Berlant argues, has a faith in the nation that is based on



“a belief in the state’s commitment to representing the best interests of ordinary people” (p. 27). This belief mirrors a child’s faith in his or her parent’s best intentions.

The link between family relationships and the relationship of individuals to their nation-state is long-standing. The words “patriotism” and “paternal” stem from the same Greek words—*patris*, *patrios*, *patria*, *patios*—fatherland, of one’s fathers, family, people (Chantrell, 2002, p. 366). In infantile citizenship, one’s position in relation to the nation can be expected to be that of an obedient child to his/her parent: loving and unquestioning. However, being childlike in relation to the nation is, in the eyes of some thinkers, an abandonment of best principles and constitutes a betrayal of the nation. Writing in 1884, Friedrich Nietzsche argued that “[being] nationalistic in the sense in which it is now demanded by public opinion would, it seems to me, be for us who are more spiritual not mere insipidity but dishonesty, a deliberate deadening of our better will and conscience” (1982, p. 442). Attacks on blind, childlike patriotism have been launched by well-regarded thinkers throughout history (see Nussbaum, 1996).

While much of the work on critical citizenship has developed in veins that is distinct from and differently motivated than Berlant’s work on infantile citizenship, comparing the two forms is instructive. In many ways, the critical patriot (adult and active) is the opposite of the infantile citizen (childlike and passive). To be a critical patriot is, as Berlant (1997) has suggested, to have an adult relationship with one’s nation (p. 51). Critical patriotism pairs a love of country with a love of principle; a critical patriot compares the actions of their state to moral and ethical standards and stands ready to criticize the state when it falls short (see Nussbaum, 1996). Infantile citizenship, by

contrast, expects the citizen to go along with whatever the state suggests and construes criticism as unpatriotic betrayal.

In her essay on infantile citizenship, Berlant (1997) reviews a series of mediated fables, most notably an episode of *The Simpsons* entitled “Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington.” Each of the movies or television shows that Berlant discusses contains a character who travels to Washington, D.C., and, while there, is forced to realize that the real is not the ideal: “[t]he crisis of her/his innocence/illiteracy emerges from an ambivalent encounter between America as a theoretical ideality and America as a site of practical politics, mapped onto Washington itself” (p. 28). This confrontation throws the perils of infantile citizenship into sharp relief. Crucially, the resolution of this problem does not involve the citizen’s development of a critical consciousness or adult relationship with the state, but a return, through a variety of plot contrivances—including being literally knocked unconscious—to their previous state of innocence and passivity (p. 50). In this way, the stories Berlant has identified position infantile citizenship as the natural, best, and most comfortable position for citizens to take.

The discourse of private citizenship doesn’t just idealize the docile, unconscious, obedient citizen; it also moves the site of citizenship from the public sphere to the private realm. Discourses operate by ‘ruling in’ certain ways of talking and behaving while simultaneously ‘ruling out’ (i.e., limiting, restricting, punishing) other ways of talking and behaving (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Berlant (1997) argues that in the 1980s and 1990s, public acts of citizenship were regularly “demonized” as “mob activity” and made to seem “deranged, unclean” (p. 179). While Berlant presents scant evidence for this assertion, it does seem to hold in my analysis of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*.

However, as *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* is a reactionary text that promotes a hyper-privatized citizenship, it should not be taken as a proxy for all texts appearing during eras in which private citizenship prevails. It seems likely that while the celebration of the infantile citizen benefits heartily from derision of critical patriotism, it does not depend on their wholesale rejection. In my analysis, I found that *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* occasionally presented acts of public citizenship, but was careful to transmogrify them into private acts before celebrating them. In 9/11 news, very few acts of public citizenship were celebrated. The “heroes” celebrated in the news were either private citizens (mostly dead) or authorized persons such as police officers and firefighters who were functioning as agents of the state, not as idealized models for everyday Americans.

### ***Citizenship in 9/11 News***

In post-9/11 discourse, private citizenship discourse was in evidence: the coverage idealized infantile citizens, explicitly ‘ruled in’ responses from the private realm, and ‘ruled out’ public sphere activity and critical patriotism. President Bush was quick to focus on national identity in his rhetorical response. A content analysis of 9/11 coverage in *Time* and *Newsweek* found Bush continually affirming U.S. identity; Bush used language that fostered, maintained, and reinforced a collective American identity in 97% of articles in which he appeared (Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeau, and Garland, 2004, p. 30, 35). Bush’s themes included affirmation of “American values” such as individualism, liberalism, and equality; affirmation of the U.S. role as international superpower; and an emphasis on the unity of all American people, regardless of ideology or

race (Ibid., p. 30). With questions of national identity brought to the fore, Bush and his administration tied questions of loyalty to a demonization of the enemy and a wholesale shifting of blame away from the United States (Ibid, p. 30). The media, who had from the beginning spoke of the attacks as directed at the nation (as opposed to symbols of economic or military power), repeated the Bush administration's portrayal of America as a blameless victim and parroted Bush's good/evil and security/peril binaries (Krebs and Lobasz, 2006; Coe, Domke, Graham, John, and Pickard, 2004). Over time, the media's themes became more similar to the administration, as opposed to other elites and citizens who appeared in the media and were not as likely to frame the attacks as national (Hutcheson et al, 2004, p. 37.)

Coverage of 9/11 held policy and other non-domestic, public sphere concerns outside of the proper, normalized, patriotic role for citizens. Instead, the media furthered private citizenship. This was accomplished through the prevalence of private snapshots and by parroting the Bush administration's messages about the attacks (America as good and blameless, being attacked by evil, irrational terrorists). In addition, they furthered private citizenship by portraying the attacks as motivated by activity in the private sphere, and suggesting that Americans respond to the attacks by continuing to perform personal acts as they had before the attacks.

In 9/11 coverage, journalists continually asserted that the attacks were motivated by hatred for Americans and their way of life. When CBS anchorman Dan Rather appeared on the *Late Show with David Letterman*, he explained the terrorists' motives as follows: "Well, they hate America. They hate us. It isn't... This is one thing that makes this war different. They don't want territory. They don't want what we got. They want to

kill us and destroy us” (2001). In one study of 9/11 coverage, researchers found that 34% of articles suggested that hatred motivated the attacks; only speculation over the exact methods (40.4%) and identities (38.4%) of terrorists were mentioned in more articles; in contrast, U.S. international policies that might help explain the terrorists’ actions were discussed in only 8.4% of articles (Traugott & Brader, 2003).<sup>4</sup> Responses from participants in a national telephone survey illustrated the power of the “hatred” explanation: 48.4% of them mentioned the terrorists’ hatred while trying to explain the attacks, by far the most widespread idea; 22.5% of respondents mentioned some aspect of U.S. international policies when explaining the attacks (Traugott & Brader, 2003). This suggests the American people were more interested than the media in political and historical explanations.

Rather than pursue their interest in these explanations, however, Americans were told that the best thing they could do—how they could help—was keep on with their lives as they had before the attacks. President Bush urged people to shop; businessmen were celebrated for going back to work and thereby denying the terrorists any “satisfaction” (Begley, 2001, p. 40). In *Time*’s first big story after the attacks, Nancy Gibbs (2001) wrote that there wasn’t much for people to do except “exactly, as precisely as possible, whatever they would have done if all this hadn’t happened” (p.14). In a column published just days after the attack, Jonathan Alter (2001) said that the “fat and happy” chapter of “our national experience” had closed, but he then argued that the “national shallowness and amnesia” that “the terrorists so despise” should be held fast: “Maybe

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<sup>4</sup> Researchers conducted a content analysis of articles contained in US News and World Report between September 10, 2001 and April 17, 2002.

some of our ‘innocence’ and capacity for denial is worth clinging to. Maybe the best approach is to retaliate, then sublimate” (p. 50).

Thus, the emphasis on citizens’ private lives was threefold. How were victims seen? Through images from their private lives. What motive did the media most commonly ascribe to the terrorists? A hatred for the way Americans live their private lives. How should Americans respond? By carrying on, with unaltered courses, in their homes, businesses, shopping malls, and places of worship. While the level to which private citizenship permeated coverage of the event made it seem natural and inevitable, discourse also delegitimized other citizenship forms and worked to contain the revolutionary potential of the attacks. The attacks had the potential to spur massive debate over the American government’s foreign policy, economic reach, and cultural imperialism.

Idealized citizenship forms say ‘this is how you should be.’ In times like those which followed 9/11, we find an increased sense that non-conformity to the idealized standards imperil the nation-state and its population (Baker & O’Neal, 2001; Chapman & Reiter, 2004; Schubert, Stewart & Curran, 2002). Thus, alternate forms are rooted out and disciplined. In 9/11 coverage, alternative citizen forms were resoundingly punished.

In *The Terror Dream*, Faludi (2007) documents the disciplining of numerous media personalities and public intellectuals who discussed facts and sought to understand why 9/11 happened (pp. 27 – 32). Susan Sontag was called “deranged” and “an ally of evil” after she suggested, in a piece published in *The New Yorker* that “a few shreds of historical awareness might help us to understand what just happened” (quoted in Faludi, 2007, p. 27). Sontag would also be attacked by John Podhoretz of the *New York Post*, Jay

Nordlinger of the *National Review*, and even Jonathan Alter of *Newsweek*, who called her “haughty” and equated her call for historical awareness with blaming America. He went on to write that it was “ironic” that “the same people urging us not to blame the victim in rape cases are now saying Uncle Sam wore a short skirt and asked for it” (quoted in Faludi, 2007, p. 27-28). Sontag was far from alone in these retributions. Barbara Kingsolver was continually maligned for suggesting, among other things, that there “are a hundred ways to be a good citizen” (Faludi, 2007, p. 30). And, in perhaps the most famous case, Katha Pollitt was eviscerated when she expressed conflicted emotions about hanging a flag in her window after the attacks (Ibid, p. 30).<sup>5</sup>

Imagine for a moment how different 9/11 coverage would have been if Americans and the media had worked from a different, less privatized citizenship form as they responded to the attacks. First, we might see Margie Meyer or others in her position asking hard questions of the government: given that terrorism was seen as an imminent threat, what had been done to protect the American people? Why didn’t President Bush jump immediately to action when he heard about the first crash at the World Trade Center? Why had the U.S. been pursuing policies that might cause this kind of attack? Second, stories about the terrorists’ motives would include the ideas, histories, and policies that motivated them: the terrorists couldn’t be painted into a private corner where feeling alone provoked such atrocities. Third, suggestions of citizens’ proper response would include education and action in the public sphere and would anticipate public input in the state’s response. The government’s and the media’s preference for private

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<sup>5</sup> Faludi’s thesis centers on the ways in which women in particular were cast in passive and unquestioning roles after the attacks.

citizenship ruled out this type of coverage and the revolutionary responses it might have roused.

### *Arguments, Claims, and Interventions*

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the mass media and citizenship by discussing the ways in which citizenship is continually managed, manipulated, and contested in a variety of media texts. Focusing on American television, looking at the time between 9/11 and Obama's election, I examine both informational and entertainment texts, tracking the ways in which citizenship is called forth and acted upon in the media. In the news and in entertainment programming, American audiences are continually presented with conflicting citizenship forms and the media privilege some forms over others. Ultimately, this representational labor shapes the potent political and personal force of nationalism.

Coverage of 9/11 was notable for the extent to which it overwhelmingly presented a single citizenship form and idealized the docile, un-questioning private citizen. In the other media texts from other times, different citizenship forms are displayed. Through the use and placement of national or state symbols, with camera angles and lighting choices, with rhetorical switches and narrative battles, both entertainment and news programs contribute to shifting representations of the ideal citizen. The citizenship forms presented in the media do not simply mirror the realities of life in American society, but selectively present and distortedly reflect different forms.

There is a tradition in communication studies of exploring the meanings and implications of the way texts represent social identities and ideal types. Hall (1996)



noted an explosion in attention to the concept of identity in a cluster of fields and disciplines (p.1). As Hall outlined, identity was deconstructed in a variety of literatures, with feminist studies, cultural studies, and postmodern studies all moving away from thinking of identity as a stable characteristic which one always possesses and responds from identically (Ibid, p. 2, 15). Instead, in the new conception, identity is seen as changing over time; it is seen as constructed “on the back of” a recognition of some commonality (Ibid, p. 2), but actually shifting in meaning as discourses pull different constellations of characteristics and inclinations from “the resources of history, language, and culture” (Ibid, p. 4). The changed view of identity affected how media scholars analyzed texts; the analytical practices developed in media studies in response to this conception of identity are the practices that I will bring to bear on citizenship in this dissertation. However, citizenship is not typically described as an identity, but rather as a differentiating status within the state and the site of a struggle to claim and define that status.

Citizenship should be thought of as a legal status, a discourse, and an identity. In legal terms, a citizen is a full member of society, entitled to speak, to be heard, to take action and to be protected from the violent actions of others. When, in the wake of the Enlightenment, with the French Revolution, the enlightened ideas of popular sovereignty and constitutional rule were solidified (Eley & Suny, 1996, p. 19), citizenship emerged as a way to constrain the universal rights suggested by Enlightenment doctrines. Citizenship thus creates a boundary between the people the state is responsible to, and those it is not; it becomes a technology for differentiating full members of society and constraining the state’s responsibilities.

In practice, citizenship becomes far more than a status that one may simply and straightforwardly claim based on their birthplace or blood. Claims to citizenship are challenged not only in word, but also in practice, as some individuals are denied voice, audience, sovereignty, or protection.<sup>6</sup> Thus, citizenship is a discourse--a site of contest wherein people (individually and in groups) struggle to be recognized as citizens. In struggling, the boundaries and criteria for recognition are discovered or changed. As a site of contest, citizenship is a discursive realm in which who can claim citizenship and what it means to be a citizen are continually reworked.

At some times and in some places, citizenship also functions as an identity. In the United States, during the time frame considered in this dissertation (2001-2008), citizenship has functioned as an identity. In her definition of citizenship, Berlant (2007) states that citizenship is many things, including “a relation among strangers who learn to *feel it as a common identity* based on shared historical, legal, or familial connection to a geopolitical space. Many institutional and social practices are aimed at inducing a visceral identification of personal identity with nationality” (emphasis added, p. 37). This suggests that where the state and the nation coincide, nationality, citizenship, and personal identity collide. When the state and the nation are largely overlapping, construction of the ideal national subject and construction of the ideal citizen are the same project.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the group referred to as “the Birthers” who claim that President Barack Obama’s birth certificate is fake and that he is not an American.

There is surprisingly little work that examines media texts as they construct ideal citizens (or construct nationality).<sup>7</sup> In *Deciding What's News* (1979), a ground-breaking investigation of how news organizations define newsworthiness, Herbert Gans argued that despite the more explicit focus on people and their activities, the underlying subject of the news was “nation and society—their persistence, cohesion, and the conflicts and divisions threatening their cohesion” (p. 19). Gans saw the nation as composed of symbolic complexes such as government, religion, science, medicine, and education; threats to or shifts in these complexes were automatically newsworthy because they affected the underlying fixation of the news—the nation. Thus, in Gans’s view, all news stories were fundamentally about the nation; the reason certain trends and events were deemed newsworthy was because they reflected a tension which the nation was experiencing and seeking to resolve. It is a fascinating suggestion, but it is followed up on through an examination of general values in the news (i.e., small town pastoralism), rather than a description of how particular identities are represented or what citizenship roles are prescribed and proscribed across time.

As already discussed, Berlant (1997) sees the media contributing to the discourse of citizenship. In her view, the media “micromanage how any controversial event or person changes the meaning of being ‘American’” (p. 7). However, while her work

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<sup>7</sup> While there are times when citizenship, nationalism, and patriotism operate differently and can have distinct definitions attached, there are also times when the terms collapse onto each other and need to be treated as overlapping or synonymous. Distinctions between the terms are not always useful. I use the term nationality to refer to the subject-position of the individual in relation to the nation and state (felt as an identity). Because the ever-evolving American mythology is inscribed with both American nationality and the discourse of citizenship, analysis purporting to be of one or the other is often of both. I am not addressing nationalism as an ethnocentric devotion. Rather, I am focusing on identification with the nation as a symbol and on dividing practices within the nation-state which recognize some individuals as full members (i.e., citizens).

provides much of the inspiration for my research, Berlant's study is not about the media per se. Her archive contains all sorts of mediated texts (along with consumer goods and historical data), but the analysis of mediated texts is always directed towards an explanation of sexual politics and citizenship, not an understanding of how media construct and communicate meaning. In a thought experiment, Berlant attributes "unjust sexual power" to a series of sources: an individual, patriarchy, and "the nation itself," are on the list; the media are not.

One study of citizenship in media texts is Michael Kackman's *Citizen Spy* (2005). This book examines representations of citizenship in the American media, tracking the rise and fall of the suave, masterful American spy. Kackman looks across the decades at a series of programs. Mixing the narrative sense-making of a variety of shows with an account of each show's production environment, Kackman argues that the individual spy is "the principal site through which 'appropriate' American citizenship is modeled" (2005, p. xix). Kackman's own work, however, points out the ways in which the highly capable spies in early Cold War programs were quickly supplanted by bumbling or soulless spies like Max Smart or Jim Phelps. Painted by their own narratives as feckless or disturbingly robotic, these new types of TV spies were not model citizens. Thus, Kackman doesn't so much track idealized American citizenship, but how spies have been used to make sense of citizenship in recent American history. Because of his exclusive focus on spy programs, Kackman cannot tell his reader whether model citizens might be embodied in another type of program. In addition, he pins the spies' ideal citizenship mostly to his or her avocation (a self-possessed individual who is an agent of the state);

Kackman doesn't tell his readers how to find ideal citizens or idealized citizen behaviors in other genres.

Who was held up as a model citizen during these times when spies couldn't suffice? If we wanted to look for ideal citizens on another type of program, how would we identify them? Kackman focuses on spies because of their unique position in relation to the nation and state: being at once exhilaratingly free, thereby representing the "possibility of limitless willful action," (Kackman, p. xvii) and simultaneously contained-anonymous agents of the government, simply following orders. This focus on spies limits Kackman's analysis because as TV spies stop being treated as idealized forms, he can't look elsewhere. If an idealized citizen were to appear on a show like *Bonanza*, how would we recognize him or her? Because the spy's ideal citizenship is detectable mostly through his or her avocation, Kackman doesn't tell us how to find ideal citizens or ideal citizen behaviors when they crop up in other types of programs. When is a cowboy an ideal citizen? A cop? A journalist? A teacher? A mom? Part of the work here, then, is to fill in the gaps on how to recognize idealized citizenship forms as they appear in media texts.

Nationalism studies have much to offer on this point. Nations were originally seen as natural groupings of people like families, inherently possessing physical similarities and shared cultural interests. The definition was essentialist. Since at least the mid-1980s, and the near-simultaneous publication of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, the dominant view in the academy has been that nations are constructed and contingent. Hobsbawm, for example, argued that most of practices which are presented as ancient

and claimed as inherent to a nation are recent in origin and not particular to one nation or shared by the whole of the nation.

This view of nationalism, which is called modernist because it was attached to the work of historians of the Industrial Revolution and modernist era, argues that nations are like any large social grouping: they exist because they are thought to exist. As Anderson famously writes, nations are “imagined” (1983). In stating that nations are imagined, Anderson does not mean to imply that they are “imaginary” or don’t exist, rather, he is asserting their constructed nature. In the modernist perspective, nations are just one possible way to organize people; the emergence of nationalism as a means for organizing sovereignty as well as the outlines and contents of particular nations are all seen as contingent.

The hypotheses proposed by the modernist perspective on nationalism have typically been tested by examining the historical emergence of both nations and the ideology of nationalism. This literature has been largely developed by historians; their focus has been two-fold. First, they have collected evidence that suggests that the ideology of nationalism rose in response to the challenges of the modern world and is contingent, manufactured, and imagined.<sup>8</sup> Second, historians have chronicled the contingencies which precipitated the emergence of particular nationalities. In this vein, historians have mostly attended to the ways in which historiography—the academic practice of history writing—has invented national traditions, histories, and peoples (see Eley and Suny, 1996). Existing work in nationalism studies suggests—through an absence of discussion of nationalism past the moment of solidification—that nations,

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<sup>8</sup> See Smith, 1998, p. 16 and Ozkirimli, 2000, p. 36 for an overview.

once formed, are stable in the ideas, histories, and peoples attached to them. Nationalism studies have been focused on moments of national creation, often in the distant past, and on written histories as the vehicles for national meaning. In contrast, my work focuses on the present and recent past, on moments of national transformation and on mass media texts as the vehicles for national meaning.

Nationalism studies have not paid much attention to the mass media. Nationalism is an object in motion and its path is largely determined by the mass media's treatment of the nation and nation-members. Published works in nationalism studies discuss the ability of novels, dictionaries, and theater to manufacture a national tradition, but pay little attention to more modern vehicles of storytelling such as news and dramatic television programs. Unlike books and plays, the texts that appear on television have an ephemeral, immediate quality; they are produced quickly, distributed widely, and then mostly disappear. They are importantly dissimilar from the more-permanent, less-consumed cultural forms already being studied.

When modern mass media have been discussed in the nationalism studies literature, they have not been talked about as vehicles for national meaning-making. Anderson famously addressed print capitalism in his book *Imagined Communities* (1991), but he discussed the newspaper only as (1) a medium for standardizing language and grammar (2) an object which, when carried, makes one identifiable as a nation-member (3) a first place for undifferentiated Latin-American colonies to suggest geographic boundaries and (4) a place which opens the imagination up to the simultaneous

happening of disparate events. Anderson links communication and the nation, but does not talk about the media as vehicles for meaning or sentiment.<sup>9</sup>

More recent work from Michael Billig (1995) has taken us a step in the right direction as it begins to attend to the ways in which the media continually reconstitute the public as national through the continual use of “us” and “we” as well as the general use of symbols such as national flags, landscapes, and mascots. However, Billig’s project draws attention only to the continual maintenance of loyalty in nation-members; he does not conceive of the object of that loyalty to be shifting nor suggest that the emotions, attitudes, or behavior demanded by that loyalty are mutable or managed.

In mass communication studies, nationalism and national identity have been given short shrift. While concerns about nationalism and observations on the nation surface across the discipline, the central tendency is to talk about nationalism in passing and without engaging the relevant theory, as with Gans’s work. A second tendency in mass communication studies is to treat the national as an unproblematic (or, perhaps, the least problematic) category of cultural belonging. For example, in Joseph Turow’s widely-read book *Breaking Up America* (1997), the author argues that target-marketing is undermining the “ideal scenario” in which national identity dominates and “interest group” identities are useful in that they work to prevent marginalization and stereotyping so that all groups can be centrally and fully engaged in the national project (1997, pp. 3-4). Turow’s ideal scenario is fully within the ideology of nationalism; the central problem he describes in the book is a loss of nation-ness. Much of the literature of

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the limitations of Anderson’s interpretation, see Barker (1999) and Thompson (1995).



globalization and internationalization of media texts shows a similar bias towards the national category: the flow of texts between nations becomes problematic when it contributes to a loss of nation-ness (see, for example, Barker, 1999; Straubhaar, 2007).

This dissertation seeks to problematize the category of nation within communication studies while simultaneously injecting modern mass media as a crucial category of interest for nationalism studies. Given that most modern warfare is conducted in the name of a nation (Billig, 1995, p.1), communication scholars must stop skating by the national category; if Turow and others like him want to privilege the nation, they need to justify that treatment. While scholars in nationalism studies understand the weight of national issues, they don't pay adequate attention to the media or popular culture. Even Billig, who emphasizes the importance of the banal, misses the ideological implications of media content, exploring texts with word counts uncomplimented by sophisticated analysis. My argument builds on but also challenges work in American cultural studies and cultural theory on citizenship. My challenge comes from bringing the analytical practices of media and communication studies to bear as well as a focus on movement at the center of constructions of citizenship, rather than at the boundaries.

Initially emerging as a means of constraining the universalism of the Enlightenment, citizenship has always depended on exclusions to be effective. As discussions within the academy have attempted to trace the grounds upon which citizenship is granted or withheld, terms such as cultural citizenship, consumer citizenship, sexual citizenship, and economic citizenship have been explicated (Berlant, 2007, p. 38). These terms organize the myriad boundaries defined by constructions of

citizenship and provide focus when thinking about how some ways of thinking, acting, and feeling are honored as inherently “American.” The result of this valorization is an uneven social and legal terrain wherein some individuals are rendered as citizens. Much of this work stems from Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, where he described a realm of activity wherein individuals engage as equals on explicitly even terrain.

Habermas outlined his theory of the public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* which was published in 1962 and translated into English in 1989. Habermas described a public sphere that existed outside of state control, where ordinary people set aside most differences in status in order to discuss their opinions and knowledge. Habermas portrays the people as affecting political change by means of that discussion. While Habermas’s description of the past is roundly criticized as idealized, his concept of the public sphere continues to be an indispensable resource for scholars as they look to describe how people (as individuals and groups) engage with and change their governments (Fraser, 1992). In challenging Habermas and pointing out the exclusions that constituted the public sphere, work by Nancy Fraser (1992), Joan Landes (1995), Mary Ryan (1992), Geoff Eley (1992) and others has illuminated the ways in which only some people were considered properly part of the public sphere and included in the category of persons who are full members of society (i.e., citizens). Thus, Habermas and criticisms of his historical description of the public sphere laid the groundwork for understanding not only what is at stake in constructing citizenship (authorization to affect society and government) but also how citizenship can be withheld. Fraser (1992), for example, pointed out how gender and class were used to

exclude people; Michael Warner (1992), noted how entry into the public sphere was sometimes premised on concealing characteristics such as homosexuality.

The focus of American cultural studies and cultural theory work on citizenship has been to examine these practices of exclusion and struggles for inclusion. This focus, therefore, has been on the boundaries of citizenship: people who are being excluded, people who are working to be included, and on penetrations into the hegemonic discourse. This dissertation takes as its primary focus the image of a person who is not having their Americanness contested by others, but is rather questioning what to do with their national identity; or, to put it another way, struggling to understand what their citizenship asks of them. My focus on the unquestioned American is rooted in the fact that I'm examining popular television texts which hail the audience as unquestioned Americans. Some of the meaning being made within the texts is generated by exclusions or binaries, but the focus in my analysis is on the citizenship form that the texts attempt to put forth as assumed, un-noteworthy, ordinary, un-contested, and unproblematic.

It is important to note that citizenship often operates as an aspirational concept, making the citizen an idealized person and, as such, gaps between a particular individual's experiences within the nation or state might be routinely ignored by that person in favor of an imagined version of their future citizenship. In discussing the idea of the American Dream (i.e., hard work pays off), Berlant (1997) argues that choosing the political optimism of the American Dream forces the adoption of a fear of "being saturated and scarred by the complexities of the present" (p. 4). Berlant argues that in order to hold onto the American Dream (and therefore have a chance of achieving it), people have to deny the inequities and vulnerabilities that are inherent in America's

economic and political system. As such, one of the fundamental myths of American nationality has people denying their own experiences of citizenship in favor of an imagined version to which they aspire. This oft-rehearsed denial of reality affords an interpretation of media texts from the authorized-citizen position to almost everyone.

The many systems in which citizenship is contested, as identified by cultural theorists, inform the analysis of television texts. Berlant (2007) calls these systems “vectors of normative and legal adjudication.” They include “human rights, family law, public education, military conscription, real estate zoning, tax structure, religion, and various state entitlement programs” (Ibid, p. 40). All of these vectors differentiate people and are linked to the nation-state or civil society (Ong, 1999, p. 264). While not focusing on exclusions and binaries to the same extent as most work in cultural studies, I will attend to dividing practices as they appear. Thus, when characters (or everyday people seen in the news) interact with the police, teachers, and other figures of authority, the way that authority figure treats the character can be taken as a judgment on the character’s citizenship. Is the character treated with respect by the authority figure? Do the police extend their protection to the character or see the character as a threat?

Thus, in addition to the textual analysis that is suggested by studies of identities and representation in communication studies—and the attention to the national historical myths and invented traditions suggested by work in nationalism studies—my methods include an attention to the web of power linked to the nation, the state, and to civil society. In making sense of citizenship within my archive, moments and stories where people engage with the many institutions and representative of the nation and state will

receive particular attention. These include the military, school, police, fire departments, city clerks, tax collectors, and religious institutions.

### *Discussion of Archive*

The relationship between citizenship and the media of the modern age (radio, movies, and print journalism) is under-developed; this is particularly the case when it comes to television, even though television is particularly national and nationalist.

Structurally, television is intrinsically national, being mostly produced and watched at the national level (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 33). While this is a global feature of television, American television is especially national in origin. In a study of US television programming that examined five years (1962, 1972, 1982, 1991, and 2001) 100% of primetime broadcast programming and 98-100% of total broadcast programming was occupied by US-produced programs (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 262).<sup>10</sup> With the rise of cable and satellite television, not to mention internet feeds from around the globe, transnational television is on the rise and access to multinational and international networks is ever-increasing (Barker, 1997, p.48; Parks and Kumar, 2003; Sinclair & Turner 2004). However, the extent to which the people this dissertation is concerned with—Americans in America who consider their nationality unremarkable—view transnational, multinational, or international television is undocumented; most studies of the global television environment viewership examine diasporic populations.

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<sup>10</sup> The United Kingdom, by comparison, had 26-52% of nationally-produced primetime programming and 34-57% of total programming was nationally produced. All other Anglophone areas (Australia, parts of Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and Jamaica) had percentages around or below the United Kingdom's statistics. Around the world, statistics vary from 11-100% with most nations occupying the territory between 50% and 75% (Straubhaar, 2007, p. 262).

Most people get their news from TV. The Pew Research Center has found in survey after survey a higher consumption rate for TV news than for news in other media: in surveys from 2001-2008, the time period covered by this dissertation, an average of 75% of survey respondents reported getting most of their news from television, as compared to an average of 22% for the internet and 41% from newspapers (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press [Pew], 2008b, p. 1). During that time, the audience for television news held relatively steady. It stayed between 73% and 82% from 2001-2007, then dipped to 70% in 2008 (Ibid.). In the same time period, newspaper readership declined from 45% to 35% (Ibid.). Internet news started at 13% in 2001, hung out in the lows 20s from 2003-2007, then jumped to 40% in 2008 (Ibid.). Of course, Internet news is not always a distinct offering; it often entails online publication of stories from established newspapers and videos from mainstream television broadcasters.

The American preference for television news is heightened in times of crisis. In a survey conducted in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, 90% of respondents reported getting their “terrorism news” from television (30% from network TV, 17 % from local news outlets, 45% from cable news networks) compared to just 11% who turned to newspapers and 14% who listened to radio (Pew, 2001). By the end of November of 2001, the percentage of people getting their “terrorism news” from newspapers had risen to 34%, but 85% of people still reported consumption of television news (Ibid). It is likely that the preference for television news during times of crisis is due to how quickly it can be produced and distributed.

The same temporality that leads to television’s expanded audience in times of crises also enables it to have a special relationship with nationalism that the cultural

forms more typically studied by nationalism studies scholars (novels, theater, histories) cannot. Television can be delivered as it is being created and can adjust its message to the moment in which it is being distributed. If cultural moments are quickly changing, then television is far better able to respond to those movements than older media technologies.

Television is also exceedingly fleeting. Unlike theater, dance, and written communication, most television texts are in our home for only the hour or so it takes to watch them. Then they mostly disappear. It is easy for television's inconsistencies to go unnoticed, as very few people watch news from the past or attend closely to the reruns of scripted programs.

In addition, it is worth pointing out that there is limited choice to television. Even those of us with hundreds of cable channels, TiVo, and on-demand services have far fewer choices at our disposal than are contained in even the small local library I pass on my way to the gym. It is for all these reasons that my archive is constituted almost entirely of television texts.

### ***Methods***

This dissertation uses textual analysis to explore the discourse of citizenship as it appeared in a series of offerings on American television. Textual analysis has been used to study television since the 1960s when it emerged from a vast collection of methods culled from semiotic theory, Russian formalism, Marxism, and psychoanalytic theory (Hartley, 2002, p. 30). In its current incarnation, textual analysis borrows from an ever-increasing range of disciplines. John Hartley (2002) lists seven in his discussion of

textual analysis in television studies—close reading from literary criticism, semiotic analysis from linguistics, analysis of the visual derived from art criticism and film studies, cultural analysis from the work of the Birmingham school, social-structural analysis from Marxist sociology, feminist criticism from a variety of disciplines, as well as historical investigations (p. 32-33).

My textual analyses pay particular attention to a close reading of the narrative, but also draw upon film grammar. Narrative analysis involves tracing a story in order to understand how it explains causes and effects (Gillespie, 2006, p. 83). A narrative is a “chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1990, p.55). Careful attendance to a story allows the scholar to detect what sorts of being or behavior earns rewards and what earns punishments. Television narratives often rely on the grammar of lighting, framing and camera movement in order to communicate mood, power, and other elements of the story.

Textual analysis has mostly been developed by scholars working on fictional programs. However, as reality television has increased in popularity and television news has received increasing attention, the tools of analysis developed for fictional programs have been applied to new genres. As Gary Burns and Robert Thompson (1989) argued:

The contrived nature of fictional programs is something the viewer takes for granted. In the case of non-fiction, most audience members probably understand that a similar process of fabrication or editorial tampering occurs, but the extent and effectiveness of the deception are easily overlooked and seldom exposed. Examining nonfiction programs as constructed texts, rather than as “20/20” refractions of reality, reveals part of a vast apparatus of institutions and practices lurking behind the programs.



Thus, I apply the same modes of analysis to news programs as I do to reality television and fictional programming. Central to this approach is seeing the news as a human, literary creation.

The parallels between historiocity and journalism provide further the justification for this approach to news. Writing about histories, Kemp said “[it] is a literary structure whose literariness must always be denied; its grip on the imagination and on the whole perceived structure of the world is so great that its human origin, its createdness, cannot be acknowledged” (quoted in Suny, 2001, p. 336). Perhaps even more so than histories, news stories deny that they are created and lay claim to objectivity. Like historians, news reporters cannot show you every facet of a story, they must choose camera angles and interview subjects, they must ask some questions and not others, and they must assemble their raw materials into some sort of sensible story--and that story will privilege some places, people, and ideas.

Just as we should not think of news as completely tied to objective reality—a mirror which portrays events just as they occur and people just as they exist and ideas precisely to the extent that they are important or true—we should not think of entertainment texts as random acts of imagination which are completely unrelated to the anxieties, interests, and inclinations of societies. Entertainment texts should be seen as tied to the moments in which they are created, the people who create them, and even the audiences that consume them—with television, the audience has a particularly important role in determining what is produced because American broadcast television series depend on popular support in order to continue to tell their stories.

The inclusion of three television genres—reality, news, drama—is purposeful. Top political communications scholars—Jack McLeod (2001), Diana Mutz (2001), and Dhavan Shah (1998)—have called for an expansion of the study of entertainment within the field of political communication, arguing that public discourses do not contain themselves to nightly news programs and morning newspapers, so neither should researchers wishing to track these discourses. Critical and cultural communication researchers have studied the news alongside entertainment for some time (see Condit, 1990; Dow, 1996).

Textual analysis is the best method for uncovering meaning within televisual texts. Unlike content analysis, which can only discover and communicate countable attributes of a text, textual analysis can speak to almost every attribute of the text. Content analysis's strength lies in its use of coders and, therein, its ability to measure and communicate the study's reliability. While textual analysis suffers for its inability to offer such transparency, using Atlas.ti and data matrixes (following Miles & Huberman, 1994) has helped to ensure the reliability of this study.

Atlas.ti is a computer program for qualitative data analysis. By entering all of my notes on each televised scene or story into Atlas, I was able to code where each scene was set, what characters appeared, what was discussed, as well as what visuals, music, and sound effects were used. While scenes were the original unit of analysis, Atlas enables the researcher to use any code as the unit of analysis. Thus, one can just as easily compare attributes of stories along a specific variable (for example: setting) as they can attributes of characters along a variable (for example: gender). This makes the data highly visible and penetrable to the researcher, in spite of its vastness.

As Matthew Miles wrote in 1979, “the analyst faced with a bank of qualitative data has very few guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of unreliable or invalid conclusions” (quoted in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.2). To guard against the “serendipitous” but “wrong” finding, Miles and Huberman urged qualitative researchers to continually revisit all of their data, seeking out all relevant information.

Using Atlas can help to ensure a reliable, reproducible analysis because it enables the researcher find all relevant cases. For example, in the course of writing about *Heroes*, I became interested in the relationships between adult children and their parents. Because I had coded all the characters and then arranged them in family trees, I was able to generate a list of all the parent/child dyads within a few minutes. Then, from the hundreds of scenes I had coded, I was able to pull up all of the conversations between adult children and their parents. Thus, I was able to very quickly move from an hypothesis about these relationships to the data needed to confirm or deny my hypothesis, even though the data was not originally recorded or organized around this purpose.

Of course, as with all qualitative research, assessments of the reliability and validity of the work largely depend on assessments of the researcher-as-instrument (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 38). Thus, I have provided thick descriptions alongside my conclusions. These descriptions should allow the reader the opportunity to assess my conclusions and me as an instrument.

## *Chapter Summaries*

My archive consists of three sets of texts. Each was chosen for its preponderance of citizenship discourse. While the amount of discourse is extraordinary, I believe the type to be ordinary—each set of texts being representative of the historical moment from which it was drawn.

The first texts examined are episodes of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* which aired between 2003 and 2008 (new episodes are still being produced). Ostensibly a home improvement show, on each episode the cast of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* renovates an American family's home. In the chapter focused on this show, I unpack the conventions of the show, demonstrating how the show idealizes an aspirational, privatized citizenship, bracketing the iniquities faced by the makeover recipients and making a spectacle of their original, "exceptional" condition (which is usually being on the verge of homelessness as their home falls apart). *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* is taken as an example of post-9/11 meditations on citizenship.

At the center of each *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* episode is a home, perhaps the most powerful symbol of the American Dream. And while the show contains the potential to expose the fantastical, obfuscating nature of the American Dream, it ultimately renovates and rebuilds that fantasy by making the circumstances that landed each family in dire straits seem exceptional and alien. Recipients who have been living on "how things should be" are rewarded for that faith. *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* demonstrates new and myriad ways to arrive at old myths and conclusions.

*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* is in keeping with texts from the 1980s and the intervening decades; it idealizes private citizenship forms. The program keeps the site of

citizenship at the home and in the private sphere, often transmogrifying public service into private service. This is a crucial attribute for the show, given its appearance after 9/11, as America began its “war on terror.” Makeover recipients “earn” makeovers by being good family men and exceptional mothers, usually to large families. Recipients are shown as hard-working, generous, and capable people who have been victimized (usually by disease or crime) and need what is almost always referred to as “a little help.”

*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* is a high-impact, fast-paced, jam-packed show in which the families and the television personnel are all afforded the citizen treatment. They are well-lit, seen in close-ups, allowed to say their piece and to direct the cameras. They are shown embedded in Americana and being treated courteously by authorities. In the chapter on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, I explore the story-telling practices that obscure systematic social injustice and suppress representations of public citizenship as well as the sentimental, predictable aspects of each episode that give the audience ample opportunity to identify with the families and the citizenship form they represent.

The second set of texts, news footage from Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, contain forceful challenges to these forms. Hurricane Katrina hit American shores in the fall of 2005 and resulted in the flooding of New Orleans. In the days following the storm, Americans watched their televisions in horror as people stranded in New Orleans suffered in the summer heat without food, water, medicine or a way to get out of the city. The government officials appearing on the television knew less about what was happening in the city than the reporters. When the stranded residents of New Orleans began to question their treatment, they did so in terms of their nationality. Stranded victims of the storm continually looked into television camera lenses and said things like,

“Look at how we’re being treated. We’re citizens of the United States!” (CNN, 2005f). The handling of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath constituted an occasion upon which, quoting Berlant, “the national body [was] exhumed from the crypt of abstraction and put on display,” therein making “everyone’s story of citizenship...vulnerable to dramatic revision” (1997, p. 8). The handling of Katrina shattered citizens’ ability to take refuge in private and infantile citizenship.

News coverage of Hurricane Katrina was gradual in its exhumation of the national body. Coverage from before the hurricane as well as the first 48 hours after the hurricane privileged those people who were able to evacuate and emphasized their desire to return to their homes and businesses in order to protect and work in them. Also privileged were government personnel of all types (the President and other elected officials, bureaucrats, and military personnel); they often appeared simply to say that the situation was still developing and they did not yet have a grasp on the full scope of the disaster. Obscured from view were those residents of New Orleans who had not evacuated the city.

Over the week in which the major events of Hurricane Katrina played out, these un-evacuated residents came into focus. News organizations interviewed more and more of them, giving them voice, showing their faces, affording them some of the privileges of citizenship. As the news programs increasingly recognized the citizenship of the un-evacuated residents, the ways in which the state, its agencies, and personnel were denying these citizens were thrown into sharp relief. Unfed, without water, forced to line up in the heat, prevented from saving themselves by walking out of the city, these citizens were shown trying to help the sick, the elderly, and the children amongst them. As the situation continued and worsened, the news organizations abandoned the private

citizenship forms they had idealized in the past. Instead, they celebrated citizens who took action to help each other, especially those from outside the area hit by Katrina who left their homes, struck out on their own, basing their action on their own conceptions of what was right and what was needed.

By the close of the week, who was allowed to speak, who was questioned, who was allowed to show their face and tell their story was transformed. Media organizations had recognized the citizenship of the un-evacuated residents of New Orleans and in advocating on their behalf had come to embrace a new ideal citizen: one who leaves their home, attends to their private convictions, and tries to make a difference.

The chapter on Hurricane Katrina news is arranged chronologically and documents the discursive eruption which was followed by the twinned shifts in who was afforded citizen treatment and what citizen form was celebrated. Unlike *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, where all the major players are given the citizen treatment and only one citizenship form is presented, Katrina news contains both public and private citizenship forms and only some people are given the citizen treatment. Additionally, Katrina news is a pivotal moment for the discourse of citizenship in the USA as it contains a turn from the discourse of private citizenship to the discourse of public citizenship.

The final set of texts I will address are episodes from the first season of the television show *Heroes*. This show is fractured in its meditations on citizenship, pushing back on both private and public citizenship forms. *Heroes* premiered a year after Hurricane Katrina and is an hour-long drama that tells the intersecting stories of scattered individuals who have spontaneously developed supernatural powers—some characters

can fly, others can heal themselves, or read minds, or travel through time. The central tension of *Heroes* is over action in the public sphere: the storylines demonstrate time and again how dangerous it is to leave one's private life in an attempt to help others.

However, alongside the continual presentation of the perils of public citizenship, is a rather unromantic portrayal of the private sphere. The nuclear family is presented as built on deceit and composed of power struggles as Machiavellian as anything the characters encounter in the larger world.

In my analysis of *Heroes*, I argue that after Katrina, both public and private citizenship forms are presented. This stands in stark contrast to both 9/11 news (in which public citizenship was disciplined) and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (in which only private citizenship could be seen). *Heroes* seems to function mostly as an expression of anxiety over both public and private citizenship forms. The citizen treatment is retracted as quickly as it is extended and few lasting morals surface.

In my conclusion, I summarize the arguments of the previous chapters and turn my focus to Obama's people-powered election as President. I distill into three complexes the ways in which the discourse of citizenship can announce itself within a text and review the dimensions of the citizen treatment. I suggest future research that could test the effects of representing different citizenship forms, especially in this moment, as an activist, progressive President works to encourage public action.



## CHAPTER 2

### **Bulldozing the Political, Buttressing the Private: Citizenship on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition***

The American Dream promises prosperity to people who work hard. The family home—safe, warm, spacious, clean—is a powerful symbol of having achieved the American Dream. In this chapter, I analyze the television program *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (*EMHE*) in which a cast of travelling tradesmen and designers help families whose homes have failed to live up to their dreams. Ostensibly a home improvement show, the *EMHE* team renovates a family's house in each episode. Unlike other home improvement shows, *EMHE* spends little time demonstrating how to renovate or build; instead, *EMHE* focuses on a set of rituals that buttress the American Dream and reinforce private citizenship discourse.

In its meditations on American citizenship, *EMHE* is in keeping with texts from the 1980s and the intervening decades as it elides and derides politicized citizenship, and promotes focus on the self and immediate family. Premiering after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, as America fought in Afghanistan and prepared to invade Iraq, *EMHE* is an exaggerated, hyper-saturated example of these meditations. In many ways, *EMHE* embodies a doubling-down on private and aspirational citizenship forms. While the Bush administration and the corporate media largely managed the challenges 9/11 posed to status quo citizenship forms, alternative explanations for the attacks (ones including

historical awareness) and different suggestions for citizen responses (such as research and debate) were available; survey evidence suggests that Americans were disproportionately more likely to repeat contrary views (i.e., ones which acknowledged that some U.S. foreign policies may have precipitated the attacks, see Traugott & Brader, 2003). Thus, in an increasingly hostile environment, where Americans were ever more aware of the limits of private citizenship, *EMHE* represents an unrestrained and extraordinary argument on behalf of private and aspirational citizenship forms.

After a brief introduction to the show, this chapter examines *EMHE*'s focus on the worthiness of the makeover recipients and the ways the narrative works to exceptionalize their vulnerable condition, allowing for the maintenance of the American dream and the families' individualism in spite of their destitution and dependency. I then discuss the myriad ways in which *EMHE* established the families as full citizens as the conventionalized, sentimental narratives work to include the audience in the expanding national family of *EMHE*. Combined, these elements reinforce conservative forms of nationalism and paralyzing forms of citizenship. Throughout the program, politicized citizenship is repressed as ethnicity is transubstantiated into a sort of hobby and set of consumptive practices and public service is transmogrified into private service.

### ***Show Information***

Since premiering in November of 2003, *EMHE* has been one of the most popular television shows of any genre, ranking in the top 25 programs for its first five seasons (Hernandez, 2005; Hollywood Insider, 2009). An Emmy and ratings winner, the one-hour reality program was credited with changing the face of reality television by "ending

the mean streak” and bringing about a “feel-good fad” (Frutkin, 2005). Even as it has declined in rankings (the 2009-2010 season finds it ranking in the 40s); ABC continues to promote *EMHE* heavily and to use it to anchor its Sunday night line-up.

Episodes of *EMHE* are organized around a series of set moments, phrases and rituals. Most of these have existed from the first episode with the exact wording of catch phrases evolving over time, with certain parts of the story receiving increased emphasis as time has gone on. By and large, however, the forms and meanings put out by *EMHE* have existed from the first episode, which aired in December of 2003.

The plot of each episode is highly conventionalized. At the beginning of each installment, the host explains to the design team where they are going and who they are going to help. Then the design team and host arrive at the home of the family that has been chosen for a makeover. As the family and design team meet, the family’s story is retold. Before long, the family is sent away on a week’s long vacation. Alone at the home, the design team decides what repairs are needed and divides up the tasks; they typically decide to demolish the existing home and rebuild from scratch. *EMHE* often invents new and interesting ways to demolish homes--monster trucks, tractor pulls, falling trees, and tanks. This cartoon-like destruction obscures the violence and waste inherent in this practice.

As the show continues, members of the design team work on special projects as hundreds of laborers construct a new home. Discussing special projects provides the design team with another opportunity to revisit the family’s story; they refer to it continually as the reason they have to make a room special. Labor is usually directed by a third party company that is donating both labor and supplies. The design team isn’t

involved with the house until the keys are handed over on the fifth or sixth day. During the building process, the design team is in occasional contact with the family, giving them clues about what is being done to their home. On the seventh day, the family returns home and has their house revealed to them, often room by room, always to great joy. The first reveal is of the home's exterior, which is blocked from view by the *EMHE* tour bus (thus the famous catchphrase, "Move that bus!" which is yelled by not only the family and the designers, but the builders and the community which has swarmed the area). The final reveal is usually the special project taken on by the host, Ty Pennington. Often, a celebrity guest with a special message or performance appears to celebrate the family. Throughout the final scenes, interviews with family members, neighbors, and the design team are intercut; through these interviews the family's story is retold and the family expresses gratitude to ABC, Sears, the design team, and the audience.

As with *EMHE*'s televisual predecessors, the post-WW2 shows *Queen for a Day*, *Glamour Girl*, *Strike it Rich*, *The Big Payoff*, and *High Finance*, real-life troubles are exposed on air and material goods are offered as solutions to these problems (Watts, 2009, p. 302). In these earlier programs, contestants would compete with each other, usually by telling their story of hardship, and the studio audience would pick a winner to receive the item they had asked for—bunk beds, tuition for beauty school, a transistor radio (Ibid., p. 307). *EMHE* is an update on those shows. Unlike its predecessors, *EMHE* does not air the competition for the makeovers, preferring to make constant reference to how families has "earned" their makeovers without showing those families that fell short.

*EMHE* also differs from the earlier programs because instead of offering relatively simple material goods to people (usually women) who aspire to the middle class, *EMHE* delivers new homes, filled to the brim with appliances, clothes, and gadgets to families who are portrayed as being tragically separated from their true, middle-class selves. As part and parcel of portraying the worthy citizenship of the families on *EMHE*, they must be portrayed as typical American consumers—people whose natural state includes a wide variety of commodities that have been purchased with expendable income. This is crucial to maintaining the portrayal of the makeover recipients as citizens because in the U.S. of 2003 consumption was promoted as the single-most important civic duty (McGovern, 2006, p.3). In contrast, in the post-WW2 era when *Queen for a Day* and its ilk aired, consumption was portrayed as a tool for making better citizens, but had not yet been elevated to the ultimate duty of a citizen (Ibid.). As *EMHE* seeks to portray the families as citizens from the outset, they must portray them as consumers from the outset. Thus *EMHE*'s attitude is not one of class elevation—as with previous shows—but of class recognition. This is just one element in establishing the families' deservingness.

Continually referenced and retold, the families' stories play an important part in each episode of *EMHE*. Unraveling them is tackled in the next section. The content of these stories is crucial to *EMHE*'s ability to speak to American citizenship.

***Families “Earn” Their Home Makeovers through Good Acts and Faith in the American Dream***

On March 27, 2006, “The Smoking Gun” website published an email that an

*EMHE* casting director had sent to ABC affiliates. In the letter, Charisse Simonian asks the affiliates to let her know if any families in their area are “trying to overcome adversity, but need a little help.” Included in the email is a list of things Simonian is “especially looking for.” The list that follows names rare diseases and crimes that may have befallen the families, as well as how the family should have responded. For example, “MADD / Drunk driving – Family turns tragedy into triumph after losing a child to drunk driving,” and “Extraordinary Mom/Dad recently diagnosed with ALS.” As this call suggests, *EMHE* is cast very carefully; ABC chooses from thousands of applicants. They select families who have been visited by horror and responded, not with the mindset of victims, but that of victors. Families who appear on *EMHE* have typically been visited by a series of unfortunate events; random crimes combine with rare illnesses and conspire with bizarre weather to bring these families low. In the face of these challenges, however, the family strives to overcome adversity, often serving others before themselves. These attributes allow *EMHE* narrative to sidestep political issues. Because the poverty displayed is not systematic in origin, *EMHE* can show the run-down homes without suggesting that certain Americans are routinely deprived of economic justice. The altruism of the families and their refusal to take the role of “victim” allows *EMHE* to tell their story without stirring in the audience a desire to advocate for the poor.

On *EMHE*, the families’ stories receive far more attention than the construction projects. Each episode begins with Ty telling the design team about the family, both by way of his own story-telling and by playing videos that have been submitted to *EMHE*. These videos are homemade testimonials wherein parents, children, and others describe a family’s current circumstances and the events that led to their problems. When the

design team meets the family, they ask to hear the story again, sometimes having the youngest family member explain what happened. When designers meet with individual family members to talk about what they think the house needs, that person's perspective on family's troubles is explored. Even after the family has gone on vacation, the designers continually bring up their story as they explain their drive to finish projects on time or get a particular bedroom "just right." Each narrative is treated with great care, bringing out how the family has served others, how nobly they have faced challenges, and how extreme their suffering has been.

In news coverage of and political speeches about the terrorist attacks of 9/11, it became routine for reporters and politicians to heroicize the victims of the attacks. In *EMHE*, this conflation persists, aided by the presentation of the families as a very specific type of victim—the type that can simultaneously keep their chins up and heads down. This uncomplaining, unquestioning, optimistic response to trauma mirrors the role prescribed for Americans after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

The Nutsch family provides an example of how the family's response to their problem is emphasized above all. The Nutsch family lost almost everything they owned when a propane leak caused their home to explode, leaving only a gaping house-sized hole in the ground. Even as the family is split between the in-law's basement and an old bus parked on the family property, the Nutsches have found a way to give some of what they have to others: the family took some of the clothes and supplies that had been donated to them and gave them to survivors of Hurricane Katrina. This one act is mentioned throughout the episode; it is the special thing that has "earned" this family a makeover. Ty says, "here's the amazing thing about this family, rather than feel sorry for

themselves, they decided to pitch in.” *EMHE* continually positions feeling sorry for oneself or taking an accusatory stance of victimhood as the ‘wrong’ response to hardship. This paints politicized racial groups and others who fight economic repression through political action and the practice of public citizenship as outside of acceptable norms.

The families are never seen making demands. That these families usually give help and are reluctant to ask for help is a dominant theme. Even in their audition tapes, which are pleas for help, families are seen explaining why, in this case, they are willing to ask for help. Typically, parents say that ‘it is all for the kids.’ Or, in families with ill or disabled members, their desire to have a safe environment for that person trumps their usual desire to stand on their own two feet. The stories on *EMHE* have to walk a fine line as they simultaneously violate the norms of individualism and seek to portray the makeover recipients and existing within those norms. Continual reference to the families’ reluctance to ask for help and illustrations of their essential goodness and deservingness allow for this contradiction. This enables *EMHE* to portray the makeover recipients as ideal citizens who conform to traditional American values and the norms of private citizenship.

Pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps, or expecting only what one has earned, is part of the ethos surrounding the American Dream (Hochschild, 1995).<sup>1</sup> Because *EMHE* buys into the idea that prosperity will be delivered to anyone who works hard, they must

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the long historical legacy of the American Dream, see Cullen (2003), but especially the first chapter of Hochschild (1995), which chronicles expansions and retractions of the dream.



explain why these deserving families could be both hard-working and in dire straits. The show's ability to bridge this gap in logic is crucial to their ability to further an aspirational citizenship and the American Dream. Thus, *EMHE* continually refers to the family's desire to be of service and the family's reluctance in asking for or receiving help. These references illustrate that the makeover recipients are within the traditional American ethos.

The Nutsch family's history of service is rather slight, but receives constant reference. Other examples are more compelling: Sweet Alice Harris lives in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, where she is a community leader and activist. Sweet Alice volunteers at a community center, organizes a holiday gift drive that benefits thousands of children, and regularly feeds the homeless at her dining room table. Flash flooding in Watts has ruined her home, causing her to remove most furniture, carpet and drywall; the stripped down condition of the home has caused some of her family members with asthma to move out. The mayor of Los Angeles, a Congresswoman, and other notable figures appear on camera to explain how exemplary Sweet Alice is; "Sweet Alice is a mother of the community," one man testifies.

In both the Nutsch family and Sweet Alice's story, it is clear that an important part of what their freak circumstances have done is separate them from their middle-class existence. Both of these families had bought homes, furnished them, and taken care of them; then, because of circumstances outside of their control, these once-livable homes have been obliterated or gutted. While a few installments of *EMHE* include building homes for people who had been homeless or renting, the vast majority of the makeovers are done for the benefit of people portrayed as 'suddenly not middle class' or 'middle

class but struggling,' not as 'the deserving poor.'

The families' stories not only establishes them as hard-working, virtuous and ideal 'American dreamers,' it also, by cataloguing the rare illnesses, sudden deaths, freak accidents, horrible crimes, and random weather that have struck the family, demonstrates how extreme and bizarre a plot has to be before the American Dream can fail. Berlant (1997) has argued that for the American Dream to persist, "the vulnerability of personal existence to the instability of capitalism and the concretely unequal forms and norms of national life must be suppressed, minimized or made to seem exceptional, not general to the population" (p. 4). In order to justify its own existence, *EMHE* cannot suppress or minimize the conditions in which these families live; instead, they go to great lengths to find stories so dramatic that they will appear exceptional.

The effort expended to portray the makeover recipients as hard-working, deserving, and undemanding not only buttresses the American Dream, but also establishes the families as within a the very important American norms of individualism and consumerism. Portraying the families as conforming to this norm is only one of the ways in which *EMHE* affords the makeover recipients with the full citizen treatment.

### ***The Citizen Treatment in Full Effect***

The citizen treatment operates along three key dimensions: those associated with the state (a governmental entity), those associated with the nation (a cultural symbolic), and those inherent to the medium in which they appear. We might consider each of these dimensions as being composed of what Berlant (2007) called "vectors of adjudication." A vector of adjudication is any person, institution, technology, symbolic object or space that can be seen granting access or conferring status to some people and not others.

Citizenship in the first dimension (that associated with the state) is evidenced when government officials are responsive to people and the police protect them. Citizenship in the second dimension (that associated with the nation) appears when visuals and narratives embed people in the national symbolic. In the case of television, the third dimension is demonstrated by the subject's ability to command the attention of the camera and microphones, how they are framed and lit, and their access to the overall narrative.

The government agencies and officials that issue building permits and inspect homes as they are built are fairly traditional adjudicators of citizenship because they are linked directly to the government. Given the speed with which *EMHE* is able to demolish and build, it is clear that these government agencies fast-track *EMHE*'s requests. Mayors and other local officials often appear on the show itself to lend a hand. They are joined by firefighters, police officers, teachers, and others who are invested with responsibility by the state.

*EMHE*'s cameras and lighting conventions are an important vector of adjudication; they treat the families with the same respect with which they treat the design team. Designers and family members are both shot in their personal spaces, moving around their homes, and in interview settings. Family members are treated to flattering lighting, allowed to tell their stories in their own words, and allowed to direct the cameras (they often ask to be followed or point to things out of frame, which the camera then focuses on). Typically, poor people are objects of the camera. For *EMHE* to treat them as subjects is a crucial component in the show's illustration of the families as citizens.

Iconic American landscapes are used to demonstrate that the makeover recipients are citizens. After the first few seasons, where makeovers were mostly in California, *EMHE* began, in the fourth season, to find one deserving family in each of the fifty states. In these episodes, Ty usually says his opening line (“I’m Ty Pennington and the renovation starts now”) while embedded in an iconic landscape. In Alaska, Ty stood in the mountains and was filmed from a helicopter; in Wisconsin, Ty put on a Packers jersey, ran around Lambeau field, and then sped along country roads, past fields of corn, red barns, and tall silos. The implication here is clear: these families are “of” these lands and part of America in the same way that purple mountains and amber waves of grain are.

The personal histories of the families before their troubles often embody classic American tropes. The parents are often described as high school sweethearts. Favorite pastimes include baseball, fishing, and grilling. These parents often own their own businesses or work in the sorts of jobs that are regularly heroicized: they are firefighters, family farmers, police officers, military personnel, teachers, and ministers. In discussing the families, designers often refer to them as “all American.”

When *EMHE* arrives in a neighborhood and begins a big project, the whole neighborhood seems to get involved. On the show, the crowds that line the streets around the project are often shown. This portrays the family as part of their neighborhood; they are an essential piece, neither guests nor interlopers. This not only embeds the family in a bucolic neighborhood that harkens back to a mythical past America, it suggests that this family has always had a safety net just outside their door, waiting to be evoked.

### *Connecting Audience Members to the Families: Predictability and Sentimentality*

When *EMHE* began to run in syndication on cable's TV Land network, the 15-second promotional ads were all about the crying induced by the show. The promos used Rosey Grier's song "It's Alright to Cry" from the 1972 album *Free to Be You and Me*. The lyrics "It's alright to cry, it might make you feel better" are played over scenes of adults weeping; most of the people are at work—from a meatpacking warehouse to a conference room. The implication is clear: *EMHE* is known for and sought out for its ability to make almost any audience member cry. This sentimentality renders the audience as infantile, weeping subjects as it draws the audiences' bodies into *EMHE*'s narrative (which is celebrating incapacitated, infantile citizens.)

When *EMHE* is written about in the popular press, it is commonplace for journalists and columnists to mention the dark clouds of doom that seem to have been following the families. As Reg Henry (2009) wrote in his column, "You have probably seen the show. A family of battlers is down on its luck. The black dog of misfortune has Mom, Dad, and the kids firmly in its drooling jaws and won't let go. They live in intolerable conditions that would make Christmas in the poorhouse seem festive." In other words, the scale and quantity of challenges facing each family is epic.

The Harper family of Atlanta, for example, after tragically losing a young son, scrimped and saved to move themselves out of the projects and into a home; that home, however, had been something of a nightmare, further endangering the family. LaMell Harper died at age two after choking during dinner. The Harpers called the paramedics, but the paramedics had to wait for a police escort before they could enter the Brooklyn projects where the Harpers lived. The Harpers then resolved to get out of the projects

with their surviving sons, Darius, LaVaughn, and Mister (aged 17, 15, and 8 when the episode was filmed). After saving all the money they could, the Harpers bought a home in Atlanta. The home, it was later discovered, had a problematic septic system that caused raw sewage to flood the basement whenever it rained. The Harpers could not afford to fix the problem and as much as they tried to promptly clean up each flood, the unsanitary sewage and its fumes caused them to remove carpet, drywall, and even furniture from the home. By the time *EMHE* arrived at the house, they found even the main floors looking gutted—the flooring was plywood, the walls stripped to studs. On rainy nights, the children slept in the family’s car while their father tried to clean up the sewage filling their basement.

However, what *EMHE* chooses as the premise for their intervention in the Harper’s lives is not the toxic conditions within their home, but the separation of the family between the basement and car when it rains. This is a regular theme on *EMHE*: the separation of family members is often presented as the intolerable condition *EMHE* has stepped in to fix. This mirrors, in microcosm, popular narratives of nationalism, where nations and states are portrayed as “destined for each other” and the separation of nation-members from each other, and the homeland, constitute as a tragedy (Hobsbawm, 1990). The ideology of nationalism, which feeds into privatized forms of citizenship, is strengthened when the preservation of family units is elevated.

In early 2006, Erik and Vicki Swenson were living a quiet life in a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota. They were teachers and coaches, raising their 9-year-old daughter, Samantha, and expecting twins. By the end of the year, they had welcomed not only their twins to the home, but four nieces and nephews. Vicki’s sister, Terri Lee, had

been murdered by an ex-boyfriend in front of her eldest child; her four children were orphaned, having lost their father to a tragic car accident a few years prior (an accident which was also witnessed by the eldest child). Now Vicki is fighting to change domestic violence laws while trying to find space for a family of nine in her three-bedroom home. This episode includes many mentions of domestic violence as a widespread problem—builders, the design team, and makeover recipients wear pins and talk about the need for awareness. However, no information on how to help fight domestic violence is presented and Vicki's activism is not portrayed as the motivation for *EMHE*'s interest in the Swensons: rather, they seek to reward the Swensons for packing the four orphaned children into their lovely but small home, thus preventing further separation of the family.

In both the Harper's and Swenson's stories there are myriad opportunities to comment on larger societal issues—from the conditions in New York City projects, to the scruples of realtors selling homes with faulty septic systems, to the prevention of domestic violence. However, *EMHE* sidesteps these issues by representing this issues simply as ways in which family members can be separated from each other—they can be separated by death and by toxic conditions. This switching-out works to both depoliticize the issues faced by American families and makes the stories shared on *EMHE* far more sentimental, as viewers may not be able to imagine what its like to mop up a toxic basement, but they can imagine the strain of being separated from their children. The accessibility of this emotion allows *EMHE* to operate on a sentimental, rather than intellectual level.

*EMHE* doesn't just cast families with terrible stories, they tell those stories in very particular ways. Each story is repeated often. Each telling is incomplete and fragmented, interrupted by tears and broken voices. Much of what the *EMHE* audience is exposed to is the continual attempts at putting such difficult situations into words. They are asked to witness the untellable-ness of these stories.

*EMHE* seems to favor not only families that have suffered double- and triple-whammies, but also families that are still reeling from these troubles. In some cases, homes are renovated only a few months after a parent has died (e.g. the Novak family; the Elcano family) or as a soldier returns home from war (e.g. the Woslum family). Thus, *EMHE* borrows from the already-heightened nature of these moments in order to make the very real, not entirely uncommon troubles faced by these families seem surreal and exceptional. Arriving on the scene sooner rather than later helps ensure a plethora of tear-stained faces for the camera and stress-torn voices for the microphones.

In the television world of *Law & Order* plot twists, the predictability of *EMHE* and the opportunity it provides for emotional release is one of its stand-out features. Every week the design team can be counted on to deliver a beautiful home and the family can be counted on to dissolve in grateful, joyful tears, and the audience can be assured of multiple opportunities to cry along. While there was, in the first season of the show, a tendency to create drama by suggesting that the home might not be done on time, the subsequent seasons of *EMHE* do not contain any suggestions that the process of home-building might get out of control. In fact, any problems that will arise in building the home are revealed to the audience beforehand. Before each commercial break, a montage of clips previews the next portion of the episode. If, in the next five minutes of the



program, a gas line is going to start leaking and firefighters will have to report to the scene, the audience receives fair warning of this glitch, along with a picture of what happens after the glitch—assuring them that the problem will be neatly resolved.

For its audience, the predictability of *EMHE* may very well be the most attractive element of the show. Predictability, for audience members, provides assurance of a needed release. When Radway (1991) conducted an ethnography of women who read romances, she discovered that the similarity of the novels' storylines was part of the draw for the readers. According to Radway, romance readers have an intense need for the regular and predictable resolution of the stories they read. To ensure the consistency of their experiences, the readers reported reading the end of novels first, rereading novels, and seeking advice from a trusted shopkeeper. While this look at *EMHE* does not study what audiences do with the program, the restructuring of the program to emphasize the sentimental aspects—including not only eliminating suspense, but also changing the theme song and score—and the way the show has been promoted suggest that producer's believe that reliable emotional release is an important part of the program's success.

*EMHE* is intensely sentimental. Sentimentality has had a long, contentious history in American entertainment. Often stigmatized as artificial, shallow, and excessive, sentimental texts can be regarded as suspect (Howard, 1999). Some episodes of *EMHE* have audiences crying foul and suggesting that each family is "required to cry their eyes out" (imdb.com, 2008). Critics have dubbed *EMHE* and its copycats the "just-try-not-to-cry" genre (Lowry, 2005). Indeed, as production value has increased on *EMHE*, the show has begun to look more and more manipulative. For example, in the show featuring the Gilliam family, the video shown to the designers on the bus includes audio from the

911 call Maryann Gilliam made as her husband lay dying in her arms (he had an allergic reaction to the mold in their home). Hearing Maryann cry “I need you back, David!” to her dying husband is heartbreaking; it is a far cry from earlier episodes when Ty would pass around a Polaroid of the family and explain their situation.

The sentimental components of *EMHE* have the potential to create powerful connections between the audience members and the distant events and people on their television screens. Sentimentality contracts the perceived distance between the audience and the performers such that the interior, bodily “I” of audience members becomes entangled with the persons depicted on the program.<sup>2</sup> As Howard (1999) writes, “sentimentality at the same time locates us in our embodied and particular selves and takes us out of them” (p.77). By creating emotional reactions and connecting those emotions to those seen on *EMHE*, the audience members are encouraged to imagine the families on *EMHE* as members of their own families—people whose experiences and emotions are tied with theirs.

Because the show is rife with American symbolism, it is clear that the bonds are national. Because the makeover recipients earn their makeover through they private acts and family lives, the citizenship form being reinforced is private citizenship. Because the people on screen are continually crying and are never critical, it is clear that the idealized citizenship form on *EMHE* is the infantile citizen.

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<sup>2</sup> This formulation owes a lot to Susan Douglas’s characterization of the radio in which she argues that radio connected people’s “inner, thinking selves and other voices, from faraway places” such that the “interior ‘I’ begins oscillating with the voices of those never met, never even seen.” (2004, p. 31). She goes on to argue that the practice of listening was thus uniquely equipped to circumvent racism and allow white American teens to imagine a shared collective identity with blacks and Americans in distant parts of the country.

When *EMHE* seems less manipulative and the emotions expressed on the show seem genuine, they give the viewer permission to surrender to the sentimental experience and be drawn into the logic of the show. The show's less polished moments, full of simple words, hidden tears, and broken grammar allow *EMHE* to signal genuineness in spite of more manipulative moments. Most of the speech acts contained in *EMHE* use simple language—filled with false starts and grammatical flaws. Breaks in the meter of speech can be taken as a signal that the speaker is processing his or her thoughts as he or she speaks. Ty, the host and face of the show, rarely speaks in complete or grammatical sentences—an important, equalizing fact given that he is a rich and white, while many of the families he helps are poor and non-white. Ty never explains anything with complex words or sophisticated grammar and he is given to using the words “basically” and “actually” unnecessarily and often.<sup>3</sup>

Makeover recipient and recurring character Sweet Alice Harris's speech can be taken as an exemplar of the families *EMHE* helps. While clearly intelligent, Sweet Alice's speech is marked by informal grammar: the first time the audience sees her she's laughing and saying, “Do ya'll know you in Watts?!” That her grammar is a bit spontaneous doesn't obscure Sweet Alice's meanings. When she says “treat me so nice,” her meaning is perfectly clear. The proliferation of informal grammar not only signals genuineness, but also signifies some dimension of democratic culture, where all participants are able to speak in their own way, be listened to, and be understood.

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<sup>3</sup> See Meyerhoff (2006) and Chaika (1989) for more on socio linguistics.

The design team and the families also share a winning sort of whole-heartedness. Ty, in particular, throws himself into each project and ritual with great abandon. Ty is a skinny, spiky-haired wild man, running around each house with a bullhorn and handheld camera, transmitting a frenetic do-gooder energy that seems impossible to fake. When families show him dances and other family traditions, Ty joins in without worry of looking silly or offending them.

The sharing and copying of traditions, histories, and emotions between the families and the design team is a theme throughout *EMHE*. This mixing occurs from the earliest moments in each episode. When Ty explains where the design team is going that week and plays audition videos for the design team, the family and the design team are merged. In watching the video, the design team can be counted on to react emotionally to the families' stories, often weeping as they watch the television and taking each others' hands as the story unfolds. Through a series of cuts, the tear-stained faces of the family and the design team are presented as if they are in the same room. The family and the design team are made to feel things together: they cry together, are both shown laughing at a child's cuteness, and, eventually, the design team starts to tell the family's story as if it were their own. This melding of the design team and the family usually moves beyond a trick of editing and becomes a sentiment which is expressed from both sides. The design team welcomes the makeover recipients to their family and the makeover recipients tell the designers that they now recognize each other as family. The family model is used to fold the audience into the program as it promotes infantile citizenship and familial structures as models for the nation. It also elides class differences between the designers and the makeover recipients, which conceals structural factors of inequality

and sidesteps their politicizing potential.

### ***An Expanding Family, An Expanding Family-Feeling***

The narrative of family-making and family-extension is prevalent in *EMHE*. The makeover recipients typically have a preponderance of children. On many episodes, old homes are no longer suitable because of sudden expansions of family: grandparents are looking after their grandchildren, brothers have adopted their younger siblings, triplets need to be accommodated, or a group of suddenly-orphaned teens have been taken in by their neighbors. By the end of each episode, the makeover recipients and the design team merge into a family. And, on some episodes, makeover recipients from different families meet each other and treat each other as family in part because they have been an audience for each other's episodes. This formulation has important implications for *EMHE*. It resonates with conservative views on nationalism which see the nation as a family writ large and which, therefore, expect childlike obedience (i.e., infantile citizenship) from most members. Additionally, because one can join the family by being an audience member, it implicates the *EMHE* viewer.

Beyond individual stories of family formation and expansion, there is a larger account wherein the families seen on the show are seen merging into a single family. This type of discourse recurs whenever *EMHE* families are revisited or come back to the show, as occurred on the 100<sup>th</sup> episode and in some specials. In February of 2005, *EMHE* designers visited families from past episodes to check in on them and their houses. At the end of the episode, five families were brought together for a barbeque. Standing in front of a big red barn with the design team, Ty told them:

You guys might be wondering why I actually called you here to the Elcano family's house. Well, I thought, well, we ought to do one last thing...throw a good old-fashioned barbeque. And, what's a barbeque without family, right?

With that, five families walked onto the Elcano's farm. Together, the Cox, Garay, Mendoza, Harris, Grinnan, and Elcano families are served coleslaw and other assorted goodies by the design team and then sit around getting to know each other. From their conversations, it becomes clear that the families don't just appear on the show, but are also audience members—they know features of each others' homes, as exemplified by this conversation:

Veronica Garay: You should come over to my house one of these days.

Wendy Cox: Okay! And then you can go to my house.

Veronica Garay: In the summer!

Wendy Cox: Yes.

Veronica Garay: To go swim in your pool!

Wendy Cox: Okay!

Watching and participating in this union, and providing commentary on it, members of the design team comment on this family-making process. Ty says:

It was probably the coolest thing I have ever seen. It was just such a beautiful thing to see all these people getting to know each other, telling their stories, sharing their losses, sharing their...their goals, their....their...their achievements, the way they actually find to come together as a family.

As the party winds down, Sweet Alice stands up; she has something to say:

If ya'll don't mind, I'd like to say a word or two. I just need to say this. Because I've been here with you all day long and you all have treated me so nice. And it goes to show us...when we all come together—and we've got about four or five cultures here—we all come together and love one another it works out. And I'm...And I love you all. I met each and every one of you and we just one big family. I would like to do this every year!

The families express their agreement with this sentiment and add their own testimonials to the conversation, including this expression of familiarity:

John Cox: Alice, you know, I think from the show I feel like I know you and I feel like I can just come over to your house and just kick it on the couch.

Sweet Alice: And you can!  
John Cox: Okay!

Through participating in the show, the families involved have become one larger family. And, because participation in the show is in part defined by being an audience member, it starts to seem possible that the viewers at home are being invited.

In her speech, Sweet Alice speaks of multiple cultures uniting. In doing so, she addresses an important discourse contained in *EMHE*: it is possible to keep the old and have the new, to be explicitly ethnic and also genuinely American. And, if you keep your chin up, if you “all come together and love one another it works out”—even if that sometimes requires help from a television program.

On *EMHE*, identity politics have to be laid aside before the families can merge and experience an American in which ‘it all works out.’ Given the continual emphasis on the tragedy of separated families, sublimating some aspects of one’s identity in order to be together is rendered as a small matter. This need to acquiesce in and assimilate to dominant values is crucial to *EMHE*’s model of a workable nation.

### ***Assimilation, Multiculturalism, and EMHE***

In a March 2005 episode, *EMHE* built a house for the Leomiti-Higgins family, who were incredibly crowded in their two-bedroom home because the six Leomitis had taken in the five Higgins children after their parents died unexpectedly. The Leomiti-Higgins family, according to *EMHE*, is notable for their successful combination of their Samoan ethnicity and an American identity. When Ty visits with the family at the beginning of the episode, their pride in their culture becomes a point of conversation as the family removes their shoes at the front door and continues as Phil Leomiti leads Ty and all of the kids in a traditional Samoan cheer. “This was a very cool family,” Ty later

says, “that really respect and are proud of their Samoan heritage....And it’s that pride and confidence that they’ve given the other Higgins kids.” That the Higgins children are not Samoan is not addressed; the particulars of our everyday way of life are flexible, it would seem, so the Higgins’ can seamlessly assimilate their way of being to the Leomiti way of being. Similarly, the entire Leomiti-Higgins family can neatly balance their Samoan ethnicity and their American nationality.

Every family is seen balancing some more particular identification with their national identity. In all cases, this particularity--be it religious, ethnic, regional, or hobby-related--is celebrated and treated as a source of strength by the design team. This formulation models the way in which immigrant ethnicity has been discussed as sustaining American culture “linguistically, artistically, economically, politically, and spiritually” (Engle, 2003, p. 740). It also gives the makeover recipients the opportunity to demonstrate that they are willing to prioritize their Americanness, in the way that has been deemed appropriate for citizens. The specifics of the acquisition of particularity are not examined on *EMHE*; the audience has no idea how recently the Leomiti family arrived in California and whether Loki Leomiti considered herself Samoan before marrying Phil.

These cultural considerations are the main aspect of the makeover to which the audience is privy. By treating all particularities equally and with care, *EMHE* emphasizes to its audience the universality of particularity. Ethnicity, race, and religion are not seen as threats to unity or sources of problems on *EMHE*—the family’s are always assimilated to the national culture. The design team celebrates the families’ particularity through the aesthetics of the home. For example, the Harvey family, all of



them fishing and crabbing enthusiasts, get a new house with a color palette drawn from a blue crab and a plush outdoor kitchen for grilling. The designers combine particularities with a few universals: lots of bedrooms, bathrooms, and plasma televisions.

In the world of *EMHE*, ethnicity is transubstantiated into design preferences as it is equated with hobbies as a source of delight and amusement. It can be held dear, but it can also be boxed up or switched out when one's passions change or a new overall order is established in the home. *EMHE* portrays ethnicity not as a foundation for deeply held values or political action, but as a scheme for tasteful consumption.

One of the few things a private citizen does publicly is shop. As Charles McGovern (2006) has argued, decades of symbolic work have elevated consumption to the citizen's highest duty. As such, one's choices in consumption become a powerful means of expression and delivering consumer goods is one of the few ways that people can look out for each other. The *EMHE* designers regularly fill the homes with not only state-of-the-art appliances from their sponsor, Sears, but also clothing, computers, and supplies for the family member's favorite pastimes.

In an episode featuring a veteran who lost a leg in Iraq, *EMHE* buys the veteran a new prosthetic leg and fills his home and that of another serviceman with a wide variety of commodities. By way of explanation, one designer tells the camera, "These people put their lives on the line for us. You know, we need to give them things." The fact that the veteran had been given an inadequate prosthetic by the Army is hardly addressed. It is clear that the solution to the problem is to buy this particular veteran a new leg and not worry about health care for veterans in general.

Designers also combine elements of the old home with the new home. Robin

Leslie, a widow with three children, lived in an 1872 plantation home on the banks of the Mississippi. Bought before her husband died, the plan was for the extremely-handly Doug to peel away the 1970s paneling and restore the home to its original grandeur. Without Doug, the home has fallen into disrepair. While Robin likes the oldness of her home, the out-datedness and general state of disrepair has become nightmare. Given her desire to preserve parts of her home, the design team leaves the basic shell and footprint of the home, but renovates the interior. When Robin and her young sons return to the home, Ty tells her, “This is your house. This is your 1872 plantation house that has been updated with all the modern comforts of this century. Which is kinda nice.” He goes on to show her how some of the materials that were removed from the old home have been reused. Scraps of wallpaper that were peeled away from the living room walls have been arranged in a frame made from the old porch’s tongue-and-groove flooring; the piece hangs as art. Centuries-old pine that had been in the walls of the old home has been sanded, stained, and made into a dining room table: “It’s thick, it’s solid,” Ty tells Robin. Indeed, the solidness of family unity is often symbolized by elements of continuity between the old home and the new, be they family portraits, children’s artwork, or simply the cultural practices that will be continued. The best things are produced by combining the old with the new and the particular with the universal. The Americaness modeled on *EMHE* is not an Americaness in which people must transition wholly out of one identity in order to take on another. Just as immigrants must combine the ways of their homeland with the ways of their new home, makeover recipients learn to overcome their difficult pasts and, in the words of one makeover recipient, “continue without starting over.” For *EMHE* to equate the ‘homeland’ of a post-Civil-war plantation with the ‘homeland’ of

crabbing with the ‘homeland’ of Samoa appears unproblematic in the context of the show. However, the equation of ethnicity with a hobby suggests that being forced to assimilate is on par with having to give up a hobby. Similar to *EMHE*’s stance on cultural and economic repression, this sucks the politicizing potential out of ethnicity.

Even as *EMHE* demonstrates the workability of inhabiting multiple identities and combining ethnicities, it enforces a hierarchy of those identities. In the design of the homes, this is embodied by the pervasive use of “theme” bedrooms. While the common spaces in homes have a unified look, most bedrooms are designed to represent a hobby, aspiration, or love of each bedroom’s inhabitant. Thus, in a home with an overarching “country” theme, you might find a child’s bedroom decorated entirely with skateboards. However, the skateboard motif is contained to the child’s room and his interests are not reflected in the shared family space. This subjugation of the part to the whole is echoed throughout *EMHE*.

Just as ethnicity is transubstantiated into a hobby, public service is transmogrified into private service. Even as *EMHE* emphasizes service, it furthers a private, infantile citizenship. Private citizenship is, as discussed in the introductory chapter, a citizenship form in which the location of one’s citizenship is moved out of the public sphere and into homes and houses of worship. While *EMHE* rewards public service, it consistently portrays public activity as if it were private activity. Thus, Sweet Alice Harris is called a “mother” of her community, to be rewarded for inviting strangers in need to her dining room table. The Cox family, who bought a home after travelling for years with a youth ministry, has their work described as “going into homes,” rather than going out into public spaces. And the Woslum family, whose patriarch was serving in Iraq and who

returned for the makeover, offers no information about his military service; in fact, *EMHE* doesn't so much reward Mr. Woslum for fighting for his country as it does Ms. Woslum for making do while he is away.

In one rare exception, Vicki Swenson is commended for helping to change laws regarding domestic violence; however, little detail is given on the laws or Vicki's activism. In talking about the issue of domestic violence, *EMHE* proscribes "awareness" and the consumption of marks of awareness (a purple ribbon).

### ***Conclusion***

The families on *EMHE* have faced a series of crises and continue to choose the idealized vision of America over the real America that they experience each day. They are rewarded for their firm grip on surreality with a new home, returning them to an unproblematic innocence.

*EMHE* buttresses the American Dream and reinforces an aspirational citizenship. The show celebrates infantile citizens who have kept their proverbial chins up and eyes closed. *EMHE* not only rewards this selective blindness, they regularly rehearse it for the wider audience. This was exemplified at the close of the "family reunion" barbeque in 2005. At the close of that episode, Ty introduced a very special guest, John Mellencamp. In a big open barn, the families sat on bales of hay to watch Mellencamp perform. Behind him, strung up on bales of hay, is the American flag. Mellencamp sang his song "Pink Houses":

There's a black man with a black cat  
Livin' in a black neighborhood  
He's got an interstate  
Runnin' through his front yard

You know he thinks that he's got it so good  
And there's a woman in the kitchen  
Cleanin' up the evenin' slop  
And he looks at her and says, hey darlin'  
I can remember when you could stop a clock

Oh, but ain't that America  
For you and me  
Ain't that America  
Something to see, baby  
Ain't that America  
Home of the free, yeah  
Little pink houses  
For you and me  
Ooh, yeah  
For you and me

As Mellencamp completed the first chorus, the video switched from footage of the families grooving to the song and started to show footage of them from the episodes where their homes were transformed. The powerful videos played as the song continued:

Well, there's people and more people  
What do they know, know, know  
Go to work in some high rise  
And vacation down at the Gulf of Mexico  
Ooh, yeah  
And there's winners and there's losers  
But they ain't no big deal  
'Cause the simple man, baby  
Pays for thrills,  
The bills, the pills that kill

The critical turn in the lyrics is not echoed in the images. Soon, footage of Ty speaking is laid on top of the song and the renovation footage:

John's song 'Ain't that America' makes a lot of sense when you sit around and you see all these families that we've helped and we've all become one family; and ain't that America, really? Isn't that everybody from everywhere coming together and pretty much hanging out and being one?

Thus, as Mellencamp performs a song about America's winners and losers; some of whom get vacations, while others get "pills that kill," Ty describes the song as being

about helping one another and “being one.”

In the wake of 9/11, the discourse of private citizenship was assailed from multiple directions. While most assaults on private citizenship seemed to backfire, stress and tension were growing as Americans interest in international politics and public action grew. Against this cultural backdrop, we can expect to see audiences choosing programs that help them to relieve tensions that they are feeling over their proper roles as citizens. *EMHE* is a show that premiered during this time; it contains a surfeit of discourse on citizenship.

The first section of this chapter explains how a program that showcases devastating poverty can also uphold the value of individualism and the ethos of the American Dream. I argue that the show casts families whose poverty can be portrayed as non-systematic and exceptional. In addition, families are portrayed as being optimistic strivers who refuse to own their victimhood. Together, these attributes allow *EMHE* to sidestep issues of economic justice while denigrating politicized victims groups.

In the second section, I explicate the three dimensions of the citizen treatment. They are composed of adjudicators related to the state, adjudicators related to the nation, and adjudicators inherent to the medium. On *EMHE*, everyone is given the citizen treatment. Designers, volunteers, and makeover recipients are all portrayed as being full members of the state, properly embedded in the nation, and being subjects (not objects) for the show.

The predictability and sentimentality of *EMHE* are explored as notable features of the show that work to include the audience in the pleasures of the program. The predictability of the program gives audiences permission to surrender to the sentimental

experience. I discuss the way that sentimental texts are recognized for their ability to evoke bodily reactions in audiences, which in this case includes an invitation into the shared family-feeling of the show. On *EMHE*, families are always expanding. First, there are many children, then the design team is adopted as family, and then makeover families incorporate each other through acts of viewership. The end product of this family expansion is explicitly and continually referred to as America.

Citizenship is modeled through the family structures of *EMHE*. In these families, children are polite and obedient. In mixed families, a dominant culture is chosen and everyone subjects themselves to it. Submission to an over-arching norm is presented as a pleasurable experience. As part of this process, ethnicity is transubstantiated into something like a hobby: loved but easily set aside.

In a final move, *EMHE* is seen transforming the public service that earned makeovers for the families into either private service or consumptive acts. This de-politicization of the overtly political removes public citizenship entirely from view. Thus, *EMHE* not only buttresses private citizenship, it bulldozes public citizenship.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Citizenship in Katrina News: Discursive Deluge, Sudden Storm**

In the last week of August 2005, journalists chased a tropical storm from the Bahamas, across southern Florida and into the Gulf coast regions of Louisiana and Mississippi. That storm, Katrina, would take over 1,500 lives, leave 90,000 square miles of devastation in its wake and cause an estimated \$85 billion in damages (Abbott, 2006, pp. 123-125; Hyndman & Hyndman, 2009, p. 386). Hurricane Katrina has been referred to as the single worst catastrophe in U.S. history.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter traces citizenship discourse as it was stirred up and transformed in the wake of Katrina. My analysis focuses on the events in New Orleans, chronicling the first week of TV news coverage of Hurricane Katrina. In the beginning, the coverage kept the poor black people of New Orleans far from the camera. They were hardly represented and rarely afforded the citizen treatment. By mid-week, as the situation in New Orleans became increasingly dire, news coverage pivoted. Suddenly, the new media recognized the citizenship of the poor black people stranded in New Orleans. The media began to allow these victims access to the cameras and microphones. At the same

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<sup>1</sup> Chertoff, September 5, 2005. As of 2010, Katrina is by far the costliest U.S. natural disaster on record. However, far more lives were lost in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 (approximately 3000) and in hurricanes past. Over the last century, as weather science has improved, the number of deaths attributed to hurricanes has decreased (Abbott, 2006; Hyndman & Hyndman, 2009).



time, the media began to advocate for more a public citizenship. The shift from private to public citizenship can be found in the narrative practices of journalists (i.e., the choice of stories told and the way different groups are spoken of) and in the film grammar used (i.e., the way people are filmed, both in terms of the camera's framing and the lighting used) as well as questions of access, both to the narrative and the camera (i.e., who is seen by the camera and allowed to speak in their own words).

On *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, almost every person seen is given the citizen treatment; they are allowed to speak directly into the camera while in close-up, allowed to direct the camera's attention, and they help to determine the narrative of the show. In contrast, early Katrina news gives only some people the citizen treatment, keeping most of the people who remained in New Orleans out of the camera's lens and away from the microphones. As the treatment of these people changes, so too do the citizenship practices and forms being furthered on the news.

The first few days of Katrina news were in keeping with the post-9/11 celebration of private citizenship and deference to government officials. Within days of Katrina's landfall, however, the news would be full of critical examinations of the government. Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2007) argue that this happened in large part because the "normally masterful image-control operation" from Bush's White House was largely absent; many White House officials were on vacation (p. 10). In the absence of officials and their spin, reporters covered events as they saw them, speaking clearly and directly about what was happening and what seemed problematic; these discussions often included the failure of government officials to understand and respond to the disaster (Ibid., p.11, 165). They also, importantly, included an awakening to and bewilderment

about the differential treatment of different groups of people: news reporters suddenly saw faces, bodies, class, and race—and they put them on camera. That American citizenship was not a universal experience became clear. The suffering of the people being left behind in New Orleans was extreme and extremely public.

Katrina news coverage precipitated and documented the unraveling of existing citizenship forms and the emergence of public citizenship forms. In New Orleans, news reporters witnessed human suffering on a scale and, importantly, in a place that they never expected. That this was happening “in America” was continually remarked upon by reporters, and Americans—both victims and, as time went on, people across the country—continually affirmed that the people in need of help were the audience’s proverbial “fellow Americans.” These reminders of shared nationality were paired with pleas for help and justifications for charitable action. “This is your family, no matter who they are,” a woman told NBC as she donated her time and money to the Red Cross, asking others to do the same (NBC, 2005h). Thus, helping the victims of Katrina was presented as a two-part exercise: first, explicitly include the poor people of New Orleans in one’s vision of Americans, recognizing them as citizens; and second, take public action on their behalf.

Almost everyone saw Hurricane Katrina coverage and quite a bit of it, too. Across America, citizens watched the news in record numbers. In a Pew Center survey of 1,000 Americans conducted on September 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of 2005 (about a week after Katrina hit), 70% of respondents reported watching the news “very closely” and an additional 21% said that they followed news about Katrina “fairly closely” (Pew, 2005a,

p. 19). These statistics place Katrina among the top six most-closely-followed news stories of the last fifteen years (see Figure 1).

Immediately following Katrina, polls showed marked differences in approval ratings for President Bush—in fact, Bush’s approval ratings never recovered to pre-Katrina levels (Pew, 2005a, 2007). Satisfaction with “the way things are going in this country” and the federal government followed a similar trend (Pew, 2007). Assessments of whether the President should focus his attention on domestic or foreign affairs also changed following Katrina. For the first time since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, a majority of Americans thought that Bush should focus on domestic affairs (Pew, 2005a). Fifty-eight percent of respondents to a Pew survey reported feeling depressed over what had happened, a number significantly greater than that for other news events, except for the attacks of 9/11, after which 71% of respondents claimed that they had experienced depression (Ibid.). Fifty percent of survey respondents reported anger over how the rescue efforts were handled (Pew, 2005b). Most tellingly for this examination of citizenship in America, Pew found that respondents were 10% more likely after Katrina to believe that America is divided into “haves” and “have-nots”—48% in October 2005 versus 38% in March of 2005 (Ibid.). This number remained elevated for years after Katrina: 44% in October of 2008 (Pew, 2009). Pew also found a full 85% of Americans either claimed they had made a donation (56%) or planned to donate (28%) to hurricane relief efforts (Pew, 2005a).

While this chapter focuses on the stories of human survivors and rescuers, it is worth noting that Katrina news also looks at the economic impact of the storm since ports in the damaged region handle about a quarter of all importing and exporting for the

nation (Lewis, 2003). There was a special concern about a spike in the price of gasoline that accompanied the hurricane. Oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Mexico had been shut down prior to the storm and were potentially damaged; almost half of America's refineries were in the region hit by the storm; and the ports through which oil and gas passes in order to reach refineries in the Midwestern states were right in the middle of the impact zone (Ibid.). Thus, Katrina news is a mix of stories about people and about the economy: the Pew Center's survey shows that people were attending to the drama at the gas pump as closely as they were the news of the storm's more general effect.

Pew Center reports highlight the centrality of television in Katrina news. Respondents were asked how they had been getting most of their news about the impact of Hurricane Katrina; they were allowed to list two media. Eighty-nine percent of respondents mentioned television, 35% newspapers, 17% radio, and 21% the Internet (Pew, 2005, p. 20). If respondents mentioned television as a main source, they were asked from which networks they had "been getting most of your news about the disaster" (Ibid., p. 20). The results were as follows: CNN, 31%; FOX, 22%; Local news, 19%; ABC, 14%; NBC, 12%; CBS, 8%; MSNBC, 9%; CNBC, 3% (Ibid., p. 7). As Douglas Brinkley (2006) wrote in his history of the event:

Katrina [was] one of the half-dozen moments in American television that not only revealed events but actually defined the community of millions responding to it on television. It joined the Army-McCarthy hearings (1954), the Kennedy assassination (1963), the Apollo 11 moon landing (1969), the Watergate hearings (1973-1974), and the attacks on September 11, 2001. In each case, Americans had been drawn together by the shared response of living together through a searing event, moment by moment, in the intimacy of their living rooms. We were Americans because we lived together through the sense of emptiness after the Kennedy assassination, or the betrayal during the Watergate hearings. (p. 454)

News coverage of Katrina constituted a media event and a defining moment in American history.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter focuses on television coverage of the disaster, specifically that of CNN, NBC, FOX and ABC. CNN and NBC were two of the more popular networks among viewers and both won Peabody awards for their coverage of Hurricane Katrina; where descriptions of news coverage on just one or two networks suffices, I concentrate on CNN and/or NBC. My analysis is informed by repeated viewing of the evening news broadcasts of CNN, NBC, FOX and ABC.

Stories were coded in Atlas. On the initial pass through the archive, I recorded the network, reporters, and location of each story. I also noted the subjects covered by reporters, who was interviewed, subjects brought up by interviewees, characterizations of the people in New Orleans and those who evacuated (i.e., victims, refugees, survivors, evacuees), and any language about “us,” “we,” “them,” as well as “America,” or “in this country.” As analysis continued, I reviewed all stories set in New Orleans, noting the physical distance between the reporters’ cameras and the people of New Orleans, the extent to which what anchors and reporters said mirrored official discourse, and the extent to which the people in New Orleans were allowed to frame the overall narratives of the news stories, to exercise agency, and to otherwise be afforded the citizen treatment.

Katrina news can be usefully divided into three main segments: the days where private citizenship forms remained in a place of privilege (through Tuesday the 30th), the

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<sup>2</sup> Dayan & Katz (1992) define media events as televised ceremonies that are understood by audiences to be history in motion. Originally, the definition was confined to scheduled events, but it has recently been expanded to include live news that resonate in memory as historical (Scannell, 1995).

days where tensions grew over the treatment of New Orleans's storm victims (Wednesday the 31st and Thursday the 1st), and the days that embodied a shift to public citizenship forms (Friday the 2<sup>nd</sup> onward). For easy reference, a timeline of major Hurricane Katrina events, drawn from the news and Brinkley's *The Great Deluge*, is as follows:

**Friday (8/26/2005):** Katrina passes through Florida

**Saturday (8/27/2005):** Katrina is in the Gulf of Mexico, becomes a category three hurricane. Some New Orleans residents enter the Superdome.

**Sunday (8/28/2005):** Katrina is in the Gulf of Mexico, becomes a category five hurricane; residents of New Orleans enter the Superdome, bringing with them three days of food and water.

**Monday (8/29/2005):** Katrina becomes a category four hurricane, makes landfall in the early morning hours, and takes much of the day to pass over New Orleans. Storm surge tops levees and some levees are breached. Water pours into some New Orleans's neighborhoods.

**Tuesday (8/30/2005):** Water continues to fill New Orleans. Those who took shelter in the Superdome have been there for two or three days, depending on when they arrived. There is dim light in the Superdome, but no air conditioning or plumbing.

**Wednesday (8/31/2005):** The water level in New Orleans reaches parity with Lake Ponchartrain. Approximately 700 people are evacuated from the Superdome. The Superdome closes to new arrivals; people start filling the adjacent Convention Center.

**Thursday (9/1/2005):** Early, on *Good Morning America*, President Bush claims that no one anticipated the breach of the levees, counter to existing evidence. On National Public Radio, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff denies knowledge of anyone being in the Convention Center, calling such accounts “rumors” in spite of news footage. Approximately 4,000 people are stranded on Interstate 10; around 20,000 people are in the Convention Center; 26,000 remain in the Superdome. Evacuation of the Superdome proceeds at a slow pace. About 12,000 people arrive safely at Houston’s Astrodome.

**Friday (9/2/2005):** National Guard troops arrive at the Convention Center and Superdome with meals and water. President Bush praises FEMA director Brown, telling him he’s doing a “heck of a job.” Evacuation of the Superdome continues, but no buses arrive at the Convention Center. On Red Cross’s television fundraiser, rapper Kanye West goes off script, claiming that relief efforts are so slow because most of the victims are poor and black and, “George Bush doesn’t care about black people.”

**Saturday (9/3/2005):** Evacuations of the Superdome are completed. The Convention Center is evacuated. Helicopters evacuate the last of the people stranded on Interstate 10.

### ***The Weekend Before the Storm: Private Citizenship, Unbreached***

Alternating between a tropical storm and a category one hurricane (the weakest classification on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale), the storm passed through Florida in under six hours and entered the Gulf of Mexico on Friday, August 26, 2005 (Knabb,

Rhome, & Brown, 2005, p.2). That night, NBC Evening News led with news of this storm, Katrina, and the damage it had done in Florida: there were seven confirmed fatalities, the power was out in much of southern Florida, and rains from the storm had caused homes and streets to flood (NBC, August 26, 2005). NBC said, “the big worry tonight” was “complacency” on the part of Floridians, explaining, “a wrong step onto a submerged line can prove deadly” (Ibid.). While the meteorologist mentioned that Katrina, now in the Gulf of Mexico, was likely to intensify to at least a category three hurricane and then make landfall near New Orleans, this information was a footnote to the story of Katrina in Florida and no worry was expressed for the people living across the Gulf (Ibid.).

Over the weekend, Katrina intensified, becoming a category three hurricane on Saturday, August 27, and a category five (the strongest classification on the Saffir-Simpson scale) by noon on Sunday, August 28 (Knabb, Rhome, & Brown, 2005, p. 3). The hurricane was not only strong, it was incredibly large. Apparently fascinated by its size, television networks kept satellite images of Katrina on screen throughout their reports (see Figure 2); they showed a strong preference for images that coded the white swirl of Katrina’s winds into intense reds and oranges, always showing the storm from space’s distant position.

Early reports reflected the news media’s typical preference for officials. On Sunday, as reporters turned their attention to the people in Katrina’s path, they took a distanced stance from the people. In New Orleans, when people were seen, they were typically shot from a distance as they boarded up their homes or portrayed via images of jammed highways or from a (see Figures 3 and 4). In contrast, government officials—



President Bush, New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, and officials at NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)—were shown from the waist up and even in close-ups (see Figure 5).

In addition to the visual distance the news media kept from the people of New Orleans, they also spoke of them in condescending terms. On CNN, those who weren't evacuating were typically cast as ignoramuses and gamblers. After reviewing New Orleans's history of near misses from major hurricanes, Saturday night CNN anchor Erica Hill said that “residents are hoping for more luck, but most aren't taking any chances.” Hill and field reporter Jonathan Freed expressed concern about newcomers to the area who “don't realize that they need to get out of town” and one of CNN's storm chasers expressed his concern that residents too young to have lived through major storms of the past didn't understand the situation they were facing and wouldn't know enough to leave town. In an interview on that same program, Gov. Blanco expressed concern about those “who aren't watching the news” and therefore don't know about the storm; she also said that residents couldn't count on “praying it away” and shouldn't take their chances with the storm. When asked about the government's plans to help people without the means to evacuate, Gov. Blanco, in a Marie Antoinette move, said, “We're asking neighbors to be concerned about their neighbors,” a statement that CNN neither lingered upon nor challenged.

While praying and taking one's chances were not recommended for individuals, it seemed to be an acceptable plan for government officials. Freed, reporting for CNN from New Orleans on Saturday night, said that in addition to those who don't know they need to get out “there are others that...th...th...th...there is a certain degree of an impoverished

community here; people who would like to get out of town and who may not have the means to get out of town as well. And officials are looking at accommodating them somehow, realizing that some people are just going to be here, regardless.” To which Erica Hill, the Saturday anchor, replied, “Well, hopefully, they'll be able to figure that out.”

While CNN was willing to question the plans of individuals—even as it acknowledged that poverty might be binding them to the city—they were unwilling to challenge officials for failing to prepare accommodations or pre-storm evacuations for these New Orleans residents. The likely cause is three-fold. First, contemporary norms of journalism proscribed reporter-generated criticism. Without an official presenting themselves to the media and lambasting the lack of preparedness, journalists wouldn't have a way to present criticism—they would not have considered crafting their own critical viewpoint.<sup>3</sup> Second, four-and-a-half years into George W. Bush's presidency, federalism was on the wane and the belief that the government should or could solve large problems was not part of the dominant discourse. Third, New Orleans residents were far more likely to be black, to be elderly, and/or to be living below the poverty line than Americans in other large cities (Brinkley, 2006, p.32-33). The lived experience of so many of these individuals—who continually came up against structural barriers to success and equality—ran counter to the American Dream and reporters likely suffered from the fear Berlant (2007) identified in her discussion of the American Dream: a fear

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<sup>3</sup> This is “the indexing hypothesis,” a notion W. Lance Bennett has been developing for some time and which he writes about in *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007).

of “being saturated and scarred by the complexities of the present” (p. 4). If recognized as citizens, the poor people of New Orleans contained within them the potential to explode a core myth of private citizenship; thus, reporters kept them at a distance and in failing to represent them, denied them the citizen treatment. These people, in order to receive better protection from the storm, needed the media to not only see them as citizens, but advocate on their behalf to the government. The media’s failure to recognize the people of New Orleans as citizens allowed the government’s failure to extend to the people of New Orleans the privileges of citizens—to be protected from harm—to stand.

Given CNN’s focus on the topographical vulnerability of New Orleans to storms like Katrina, it’s clear that the journalists grasped the potential ramifications of the impending storm. They didn’t fail to worry over the people of New Orleans because they were ignorant to the dangers the storm posed. In addition to constant reference to the limits of the levees, CNN aired a five-minute story titled “The Big Uneasy,” which explained in detail how devastating a hurricane hit could be to this mostly-below-sea-level city. It was unambiguous throughout the story that everyone expected a big storm to eventually hit New Orleans: Jefferson Parish’s Emergency Manager, Walter Maestri, told CNN, “It’s going to happen. We can’t continue to beat the odds. We’ve beaten the odds for a long, long time.” According to Maestri, a direct hit could easily kill tens of thousands of people, mostly those who “would not or could not” evacuate. And while CNN said that there “are ideas and some plans to save New Orleans from this doomsday vision,” they only mentioned constructing more or higher floodwalls and levees. No plans to assist the poor or infirm with evacuation were mentioned. These vulnerable people were not only far from the cameras, but also from the minds of the journalists.

This state of affairs, where the news takes a stance close to the government and distant from the people, is the subject of the book *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007). In this book, the authors argue that the press's tendency to relay official discourse without questioning it arises from their preoccupation with political power: because journalists spend so much time around political elites, watching them make their moves and shake each other down, journalists become pre-occupied with the moving and the shaking and begin to define what is news and who can speak on the news in terms of political power.

This preference for officials reinforces private citizenship as it portrays a public sphere devoid of everyday people. In their book, Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston review the build-up to the war in Iraq, and the war itself, showing how the press calibrated “the relative power and status of the available sources when constructing balance, plot, and viewpoint in news stories” (p. 27). The authors demonstrate how official spin trumped the concerns of everyday people to the extent that the Bush administration was able to conceal evidence that ran counter to the official accounts (i.e., links between Iraq and Al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein’s possession of WMDs). Coverage of New Orleans before Katrina’s strike was very much in keeping with the press’s tradition of indexing itself to the powerful. The readiness and appropriateness of government officials and agencies were telegraphed rather than questioned; the news did not take the viewpoint of an everyday person stuck in New Orleans, nor did it advocate on behalf of those who needed help weathering the storm.

On August 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, Saturday and Sunday, the thousands of people taking refuge in New Orleans’s Superdome, whose treatment would be the focus of so much

attention after the storm, were barely seen and not interviewed. On CNN's evening news, the Superdome was mentioned on Saturday, but not seen. On Sunday, with the Superdome opened, CNN included footage of people arriving at the Superdome and queuing outside. All told, people going into the Superdome were seen for about a minute (four short clips) of the two-hour program, always at a distance and from behind (see Figures 6). NBC's footage of the Superdome was similar to CNN's, though their coverage of the people waiting to enter the building made it clear that people were being rained upon as they waited to enter. The NBC reporter, Martin Savidge, said that the process of getting into the Superdome was proving very slow and difficult (see Figure 7). FOX was unique in showing many of the people waiting to enter the Superdome from the front; FOX also discussed the rainy conditions in which they were forced to line up. However, FOX characterized the long wait to enter the building as essential, given the National Guard's need to search every bag for alcohol and weapons. Referring to the situation in New Orleans in general, FOX's Shepard Smith said, "All that can be done, has been done."

***Monday (8/29/05): Unwarranted Gladness***

Katrina made landfall on Monday morning. Because the storm was so massive, it took many hours to pass over New Orleans. As such, when NBC, CBS, ABC, and FOX put out their evening news, not much was known outside of what reporters could see from their hotel windows. FOX's anchor, Smith, had weathered the storm from a hotel in the French Quarter, an area that is approximately three feet above sea level. As Smith

took to the air at 6:00pm, he reported that the rain had stopped, and the sun had just begun to peek out.<sup>4</sup>

For most of their Monday night broadcast, FOX aired reports from different cities in the Gulf Coast region where streets were partially underwater and roofs were torn from buildings; the overall tone of the show was that of relief. Things were bad, but they weren't that bad. Smith anchored the show from a street in New Orleans's French Quarter. He said, "This time yesterday, emergency management officials feared [New Orleans] would take the brunt of a category five hurricane with 175-mile-an-hour winds. Instead, Katrina got weaker and Katrina headed east. ... This area of the country and particularly here in the French Quarter were spared largely. Though there were some crazy winds overnight." Later, Smith would add, "there was some capping of the levees, but the levees were not breached." In fact, walls on the Industrial, London Avenue, and 17th Street Canals had failed; most of New Orleans was flooded and the water was continuing to rise (Horne, 2006, p. 59). While many communication devices were not operational that day and travel within the city was nearly impossible, news of the large breach in the 17th Street Canal had spread throughout the day; FEMA had known about it since at least 11am (Ibid., p. 58) and Mayor Nagin had announced it at 1pm (Brinkley, 2006, p.630).

At the close of FOX's program, relief began giving way to reality. Just five minutes before the evening news was set to wrap up, FOX started to air some raw footage coming in from a helicopter. The helicopter appeared to be over Lake Ponchartrain, to

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<sup>4</sup> All times are local. New Orleans is in the Central Standard Time zone.

the east of New Orleans. Smith apologized for the rawness of the footage, promising to clean it up and sort out it out for use later. As he spoke, the helicopter's camera glimpsed a New Orleans's neighborhood just past the lake--one that is below sea level. "Wow," Smith said. "This is the first look at anything like this," he said as the helicopter showed block after block of submerged streets, lined with single-story homes that were flooded to their eaves. "That gives you a clear perspective of how reporting from one spot..." Smith began, his thought trailing off. Then, the view changed to Smith standing in the French Quarter, people milling around behind him as he signed off for the hour.

On CNN, a similar story unfolded. As with FOX, the anchor talked with a variety of reporters scattered around the region, trying to assess the damage. Aaron Brown, anchoring from New York, asked each reporter about the availability of drinking water; he repeatedly mentioned that there was just no way to get a "wide shot" of the situation. On camera phone with David Mattingly, who was in New Orleans, Brown asked, "Do you think you have a sense of the breadth of the story? Just in New Orleans? How big, how bad, how deadly is it?" Mattingly's technology failed before he could answer. One of the things Brown did know was that the Superdome's roof had leaked during the storm; part of the roof had blown off; "We know it was a terrifying experience," he said.

Brown's show aired from 9:00 to 11:00pm. Because of the later hour of his broadcast, Brown had access to more information about the situation in New Orleans. At 10:20pm Brown began a phone interview with Jeanne Meserve, a CNN reporter who was inside New Orleans. For about ten minutes, Meserve and Brown talked about what she had seen that day. On screen as Meserve spoke, CNN showed a map of Louisiana and a small portrait of Meserve (see Figure 8). Occasionally they rolled footage of a helicopter

pulling a man to safety. This looping footage likely created a false image of the extent to which search and rescue work was underway; the Coast Guard had only seven helicopters working in New Orleans on the 29<sup>th</sup> (Brinkley, 2006, p.630).

Meserve, who sounded like she was on the verge of tears throughout the interview, began by saying, “It’s been horrible. As I left tonight, darkness of course had fallen and you could hear people yelling for help. You could hear the dogs. Yelping. All of them stranded. All of them hoping someone would come.” Meserve went on to explain how boats had spent the day going out into the flooded part of the city, navigating past live wires and spewing gas lines, around submerged cars and other obstacles, pulling hundreds of people from rooftops. She said people were getting off the boats in horrible shape, she had seen a woman with a severed leg. When asked, Meserve said that she thought the boats were saving who they can get to, that there was no organized triage, that people are being rescued from rooftops, but then delivered to nowhere in particular, to be taken into the city.

Trying to get a sense of where in the city Meserve had been, Brown asked her to describe it. Meserve had been in a neighborhood of “poor, humble homes,” most of them one-story high. Because getting there was a roundabout trip to avoid obstacles, she couldn’t be sure of exactly how far it was from downtown. Meserve had been somewhere where she supposed most people would not have had cars, would not have had a way to evacuate. “It is hard for me to comprehend how many people might be out there and how many people’s lives are in jeopardy,” she said.

Brown asked her what the search and rescue teams were telling her. Meserve said that they were reporting that the flooding was much worse on the other end of the area



she was in. “Ward Nine,” she uttered. On her end, the houses were up to the eaves, on the other end, rescuers told her, water was up to the roofs. Survivors told her that the water came up very suddenly. Meserve told Brown that the water still seemed to be rising. In the French Quarter, too, now that she was there. The water was rising.

Thus, on Monday night the scale of the catastrophe was slowly revealing itself, but with the stories of disaster came images and stories of rescues and capable responses. Monday’s news reports were largely populated by anchors and reporters. Audiences saw tapes of reporters trying to stand in gale-force winds; they saw landscapes of destruction; they saw buildings. FEMA head Michael Brown appeared very briefly on NBC to tell the anchor that FEMA was ready, had been ready for anything. FOX had footage of Bush from earlier in the day telling an audience, “Our Gulf Coast is getting hit and hit hard. In the meantime, America will pray, pray for the health and safety of all our citizens.” Gone were the end-on-end interviews and official press conferences of earlier days, but victims were not yet in view.

If everyday people weren’t appearing on camera, they were at least taking up more narrative space than in the weekend’s news coverage. CNN lacked the images, but Meserve’s phone interview. And, later, conversations with Ray Bias, a medic in the Superdome, and Mark Biello, Meserve’s cameraman who had gone out in a boat for several hours, began to fill the news space with the idea of these hurricane survivors. Survivors who were, it became increasingly clear, in peril. Towards the end of his two-hour program, CNN’s Brown realized that maybe the worst wasn’t over and that New Orleans was “perhaps hit harder than we have characterized to this point.”

Trying to get a sense of the scene inside the Superdome, Brown asked Bias if the situation had been getting worse; in his response, Bias expressed grave concern for the people in the Superdome. Bias tells Brown that the roof had leaked, the power was out, it was dark, and getting warm. Bias had been told that hospitals were flooded and planning to bring some of their patients to the Superdome. He said that the sick people already in the Superdome couldn't hold on much longer, that the breaking point would come soon. As Bias spoke, video images from inside the Superdome were shown. They appeared to be from some time after the storm passed but before the sun went down. They showed the field and seats from a distance, people were tiny, indistinct blobs. CNN seemed to be trying to depict the lack of light as the camera continually panned up to the few windows letting daylight into the dome. Thus, Bias's words of concern are never reinforced, but rather controverted by abstracted, and unpopulated images.

Over on NBC, broadcasting from 5:30 to 6:00pm, Brian Williams anchored the news from just outside the Superdome. Over Williams's shoulder, a part of the dome's protective membrane, torn from the dome in the storm, flapped. Because some of their people had weathered the storm in the building, NBC had footage showing the conditions inside of the Superdome during the storm. That footage showed the gaps that had opened up in the roof and let in torrents of rain. It also captured the terrifyingly loud noises Katrina had made inside the building.

Williams interviewed a young black family still inside the Superdome; in the way that he interacts with them, Williams affords the family the citizen treatment. However, this family presents no challenge to private citizenship. This family is composed of

infantile citizens, they are docile, grateful, awaiting instruction. The family's patriarch was shown reclining on a makeshift bed constructed of two coolers.

Before leaving the Superdome on Monday night, NBC showed an interior hallway: people of all races and ages were waiting for news, waiting to get out of the huge building. "As we left," Williams reported, "we saw the first signs of restlessness.... It is hot, it's damp, there is no moving air. It is getting very dirty and shall we say very aromatic. And still no announcements or information on conditions outside, when people can go home."

All in all, the news media's coverage of Katrina on Monday, the day the storm hit, was a hodge-podge of partial information and unwarranted relief. The media didn't yet comprehend or communicate the extent of the flooding in New Orleans. This left the implications of the flooding unexplored: the people in the Superdome wouldn't have homes to return to, the people stranded in the flooded neighborhoods would need to be brought to safety, and together all of these people, who numbered in the tens of thousands, would need to be helped out of the drowned city. The news was dominated by video of the storm itself and some of the devastation it left in its wake. Very few everyday people appeared on the news and when they did appear, they were presented as helpless objects. They were stranded on rooftops, calling out for help or reclining in the Superdome, waiting to be taken home.

### ***Tuesday (8/30/05): Looters in the Floodwaters***

Overnight, the floodwaters in New Orleans continued to rise; eighty percent of New Orleans was underwater (Brinkley, 2006, p. 631; Horne, 2006, p. 59). All but one

of New Orleans's hospitals lost power. At daybreak, search and rescue operations, now equipped with flat-bottomed boats from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, began pulling hundreds of people from rooftops and bringing them to dry land. Over the course of the day, these rescued people and others with nowhere to go arrived at the Convention Center, where they have been told buses would pick them up. The Convention Center had about forty officials and workers in the building; there was no food, power, or water. By the end of the day Tuesday, an estimated 20,000 people were at the Convention Center. Nearby, in the Superdome, conditions had continued to deteriorate. The 8,000 to 9,000 people inside were running out of food and water. They had been told to bring three days worth of supplies and they have been in the Superdome for three days (Ibid., pp. 630-633).

On the news, more and more everyday people were visible, some coming out of the rescue boats, some looting, and many just moving around the city, searching for a way out, something to eat, a safe place to stay (see Figures 9-13). The news media presented looting as the major worry. On NBC, after showing footage of people walking out of a smashed up convenience store, Carl Quintanilla, who had been in New Orleans since the weekend, declared looting "the real concern" in New Orleans. In the next story, Don Teague, who had been in Houma, Louisiana, for the storm but was now in New Orleans, covered rescue operations in flooded neighborhoods. Teague's story showed people being loaded into and coming off of the rescue boats, all of them needing help just to move around: very young, very old, clearly weakened and in shock (see Figures 9 and 10). Teague commented on the frail condition of the people and said that darkness was coming soon and with it, rescue operations would stop. Hundreds, maybe thousands of

people were still stranded. He said he wasn't sure that people could survive another night. Neither Teague nor Williams suggested that concern for these imperiled lives might supersede concerns about property crime—Quintanilla had declared looting “the real concern” and that assertion was allowed to stand.

Thus while everyday people were increasingly visible in the news, the media failed to show concern for them. It was increasingly clear that the people still in New Orleans were an important part of the Hurricane Katrina story, but reporters were finding ways to show them without giving them the citizen treatment. Tuesday's reports rested on existing stereotypes about the criminality of African Americans as well as myths about the types of behaviors people engage in after natural disasters. Sociological studies of public responses to disasters have consistently demonstrated that people respond well: criminal activity decreases, conflicts are set aside, and citizenship roles expand to include a whole host of proactive and pro-social behaviors (Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski, 2006, p.57-81). Stories collected from people in the city at this time suggest that most looting was motivated by a need for clothing, food and water (for example, Glass, 2005). However, the media chose to focus on and play up looting behavior. This is in keeping with the media's longstanding fixation on stories of social disorder (Gans, 1979, p. 53). It also enables them to look at and display the people of New Orleans without treating them as citizens and therein awakening criticism of the government that had failed to help them evacuate and was still absent from the city.

Emphasizing social disorder is, as Gans argued, “as much concerned with the restoration of order by public officials as with the occurrence of disorder” (Ibid., p. 53). Thus, by depicting the main problem of the day as looting, the media positioned the

disciplining forces of the police and military as the solution to the problems of the day. This not only kept the focus off of the main problem—tens of thousands of people stranded without food or water—but also positioned the people of New Orleans as less than full citizens. Rather than portraying them as people who were in peril and needed their government’s protection, the media depicted them as a source of danger against which protection was needed.

A peculiar and telling thing happened as NBC’s Williams put together the many disturbing things he had witnessed in New Orleans that day. He moved quickly from a description of widespread looting, to the alien look of the flooded scenery, to the discovery of a body on a street corner, to the peculiar predicament of tourists stuck in New Orleans. Williams linked them, making New Orleans out to be a foreign place, inhabited by a violent people who left bodies on the street, a people and a land who must not be American because they horrified American visitors:

There are scenes here in New Orleans that look like they are from another land entirely; civil behavior has been suspended; today we found a body of a dead man on a street corner. For visitors, this is a special kind of horror, with no way out of town.

These words were uttered just after looting was shown (Figure 11), began over footage of the strange, flooded landscape (Figure 12), continued as the camera showed a covered body (Figure 13), and ended with scenes of tourists being kicked out of their hotels; the tourists who spoke to the camera had American accents. The black men shown looting as well as the flooded streets they waded across were marked as ‘other.’ The body found in the street was taken as evidence of how bad things had gotten (and that badness seemed to reflect back on the men from the earlier scenes). And then American people from

outside of this area were allowed to speak, suggesting that where they were in some sort of un-American, un-imaginable space.

Thus, NBC's broadcast, even as it showed how battered New Orleans and its people were, claimed that looting was the central concern of the day and rendered New Orleans and its people as dangerous exotics. These stereotypes and disaster myths framed the coverage and worked to reinforce private citizenship forms by suggesting that Katrina's victims were lawless, unknowable types who needed to be controlled, rather than recognizable fellow-citizens who needed help. Everyday people had done much of the rescue work in New Orleans on this day, but the news conflated these Good Samaritans with the National Guard. This conflation rendered the volunteers' acts of public citizenship as official, which not only suppressed the representation of public citizenship in the media, but also enhanced the image of the government's early response and the depiction of the military as excellent rescuers.

On CNN this Tuesday, the coverage was similar to NBC's. The people of New Orleans were presented as disruptive, violent, and out-of-control. News of President Bush's newly-planned visit to Louisiana was celebrated. Brown said that Bush was planning the visit in order to "lend what is mostly, in fact, moral support, and I'm sure it will be welcomed by people there to know that the President and the federal government is taking time to come see their situation." In addition to this strange suggestion that what the people of the Gulf Coast wanted from their government was moral support, CNN also furthered the ideology of militarism throughout their hours on air. As Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski (2006) discuss in their article on disaster myths and Hurricane Katrina, militarism suggests that the military is the best and only solution to most

problems. In the wake of natural disasters, the ideology of militarism suggests that the main problem is disorder and that the military is uniquely equipped to reestablish order. However, disaster studies show that crime and lawlessness are not major issues after natural disasters and that the military's skills are inappropriate for most emergency management roles (Ibid.). NBC furthered militarism when it conflated everyday volunteers with the National Guard and focused on the need to control looting. CNN bolstered militarism in multiple stories, most strikingly by suggesting that there might not be enough troops to help with New Orleans (which they refer to as the "home game") because of the ongoing war in Iraq (the "away game"). This not only suggests that troops are the solution to New Orleans's problems, but equates New Orleans with a war zone (not, for example, a sinking ship or burning building).

Like NBC, CNN committed some semantic shenanigans wherein New Orleans was presented as an alien land. Jamie McIntyre, reporting from the Pentagon, talking about New Orleans, said, "This is an area that is surrounded by America." A CNN reporter located just outside of New Orleans with a group of people waiting for buses referred to the people as refugees—a word typically used to describe people who are fleeing their home country, seeking help from another.

On this day, Tuesday, the media seemed to be casting about for the best word to use to describe the residents of New Orleans. This struggle reflected their uncertainty about the status of these people. Across the networks, the people of New Orleans were usually described as victims or survivors, but the terms refugee, displaced persons, and evacuees also surfaced—these terms would take hold the next day and quickly become a source of controversy.



In the final minutes of NBC's broadcast, a storm victim is given the citizen treatment. Williams introduces the story by saying that he is trying to end the broadcast with some good news. What follows is the brief, sad story of Mike Spencer, who spent a large part of the storm clinging to a tree outside his home. White, blonde, mustachioed, and a grandfather, Spencer attributes his will to survive to his commitment to be helpful after the storm and to his desire to see his grandchildren. Spencer is filmed in good light, shown in close-ups, and allowed to direct the camera's attention to the tree that he had clung to in the storm (see Figure 14). Spencer resembles the makeover recipients on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* in that he has barely survived his recent circumstances (literally hanging on for dear life), but finds the strength to move on by thinking of others, particularly children. While Spencer talks about being of service to others, he isn't seen helping others and concrete plans for doing so are not presented.

As you will recall, NBC's Monday night's coverage had contained the story of a black family in the Superdome who had been extended some of the privileges of the citizen treatment in that they were interviewed and shown. However, the camera was not flattering to them and they had little agency within the story. The family had remained objects of the camera: NBC focused on the weird bed they have made out of coolers and the patriarch is shown lying down throughout the interview, utterly without agency. This Tuesday night story about Mike Spencer, on the other hand, extends all of the privileges of the citizen treatment to Spencer, an established white man who prioritizes family about all. The media have found a way to elevate private citizenship forms.

On Tuesday night, stories about flooding and looting dominated. The people stuck in New Orleans were almost completely excluded from the privileges of the citizen

treatment. Over on ABC, in an interview near the scene of looting, some of the privileges of citizenship were extended to a tall black woman. Apparently asked about the looting, the woman responded, “This ain’t no time for this here foolishness, but people are trapped. A lot of them homes don’t have no water. Need medicine. I need insulin right now.” Thus, she is allowed to give her contrary view about the looting: it’s silly and it’s not the main issue right now. However, while recording her as she said her piece, ABC’s camera never rested on her face, but rather zipped around the scene. In addition, the woman’s name isn’t given, nor her occupation, nor where she lives. She is not a subject of much interest at all and the reporter does not take up what she says. Instead, ABC cuts to another part of the city and another site of looting.

***Wednesday (8/31/05): Citizens, Refugees or Ghosts?***

On Wednesday, the influx of people from the flooded streets caused the population inside the Superdome to swell to 26,000 (Brinkley, 2006, p. 632-6). The first buses arrived to take away the most critically injured and ill—about 700 people (Ibid.). There were as many as 20,000 at the Convention Center (Ibid.). In most of the city, the level of water has stopped rising, having reached parity with Lake Ponchartrain overnight (Ibid.) The situation in New Orleans was dire, but seemed to have stopped getting worse.

Unlike the previous night’s broadcast which had taken a distant and dim view of the survivors, on Wednesday. NBC’s cameras looked at the victims closely, and the reporters reinforced what survivors were saying: they needed help; they had been promised help; they were not getting any help. Each story from the New Orleans area

showed individual people just trying to survive and get out of area. While looting was mentioned, it was depicted as necessary. Savidge said, “Looting continued throughout the downtown area today. It isn’t a game for many of these people, it is a matter of survival.”

Savidge covered activity in and around the Superdome, his stories are full of the poor black people that are stranded in the city. After days in which the storm survivors have been seen only at a distance, NBC showed these survivors up close. After days in which survivors comments were largely unheard and mostly ignored, new interviewees were not only allowed to speak, their ideas were taken up and repeated by the reporters who supply evidence for their claims. Savidge interviewed a man who had been told to go to the Superdome to get help evacuating, the man said he was then told to turn around and walk to Interstate 10 (Figure 15). A woman inside the Superdome yelled angrily through the camera lens, “Get us out of here!” (see Figure 16). While the images of these black people align with some stereotypes (the state of undress, the bug-eyed anger), both are afforded some of the privileges of the citizen treatment, they are seen in three-quarter and waist-up frames. They are allowed to say their piece. In addition, both are seen holding infants. Children are not only humanizing, but can also confer citizenship—having children is a component of the American Dream and part of the citizenship franchise (Kann, 1999, p xii). The man filmed on the streets is also depicted as having agency; the audience knows he has been moving around the city, searching for information and transportation.

NBC’s Carl Quintanilla, who the day before had called looting the main concern, took a new view on Wednesday. In his report, Quintanilla was seen taking a boat ride

with a Good Samaritan. As they went along, encountering more and more people in the floodwaters, Quintanilla said, “Each encounter gets more and more profound.” When they found a woman who needed help getting her father out of his home, Quintanilla and the Good Samaritan pulled the woman and her husband out of the chest-deep water and take them to find her father. Her dad is an elderly man and he is found building a raft as he waits for help. The family was reunited and taken to safety. On the journey, the camera captures images of dozens of other people who are stuck in the flooded neighborhood. “Victoria and her father are lucky,” Quintanilla concluded, “They will try to get to family in Houston, but the hard part is clear, missions like this are going to have to happen time and again and again and again.” This story showed a family who was trying to help itself, but needed help because of the flooded state of the streets. In this story, the Good Samaritan is identified as such, and the victims of the storm are allowed to tell their own stories. So, not only are victims of the storm presented as citizens, but also space is opening up in the narrative for acts of public citizenship.

These acts of public citizenship, however, are being performed by whites. While blacks are seen in public spaces, acting with agency, and being afforded many of the privileges of the citizen treatment, only whites are seen simultaneously performing public citizenship and being unequivocally afforded the citizen treatment. The news media offer more latitude to redefine citizenship to the blacks, but also to the whites. For blacks, this latitude allows them to be included in visions of citizenry. For whites, who had already been counted as citizens but restricted to the private citizenship form, the new latitude afforded them the opportunity to simultaneously practice public citizenship and be recognized as citizens.

The final story in NBC's broadcast celebrated the public citizenship of two young white volunteers: Brittany Foulard and Steve Woodward. Britney is in EMT training in Baton Rouge and with her boyfriend Steve she drove down to New Orleans to volunteer. Their story is told in their own words. They talk about why they are there and each describes how hard the other is working. They are out on one of the highways, under an overpass. There is a triage center of sorts set up and Brittany is working there; Steve is greeting helicopters, unloading survivors, supplies, whatever is coming in. Brittany and Steve are given the full citizen treatment by the cameras and microphones: they are seen, heard, acting and able to direct the camera.

Alongside this strong depiction of public citizenship is one of the first nods to reactions from Americans outside of the region. "Empathy," Williams concluded at the close of NBC's broadcast, "is coming in from everywhere." Williams uses Brittany and Steve as examples of the overwhelming charity that has begun to pour into the Gulf Coast region. At the close of NBC's broadcast, Williams made reference to impending sunset. People fear nightfall, he said, there are men with guns.

Men with guns were the focus of CNN's Wednesday coverage. In the hours between NBC's evening news program and CNN's, Mayor Nagin had suspended the police's search and rescue operations. Brown began his broadcast with this news, speaking in a disgusted tone:

It became clear today that the Gulf Coast is facing the type of crisis that we expect to see in a developing country, not the richest country in the world. It is a natural disaster combined with some very human misbehavior. Police in the city of New Orleans, 15,000 of them, have now been called off their search and rescue work to simply deal with the lawlessness.

Brown cast the people of New Orleans as ‘third world’ when he explained that the crises of lawlessness is caused by “human behavior” that is not expected in America (i.e., of Americans). Thus, while NBC’s Wednesday coverage had opened up to visions of the storm victims as citizens, and to representations of public citizenship, CNN’s anchor argued that the people of New Orleans were not Americans. Brown clung to the disorder frame that NBC had set aside.

CNN obsessed over the lawlessness in the city and the need for National Guard troops. Brown interviewed a series of officials: Jefferson Parish emergency operations chief Deano Bonano, Louisiana Senator David Vitter, FEMA director Michael Brown, and FEMA spokesman Don Jacks. Brown asked them to speculate on the cause of the looting and on the estimated time of arrival for more troops. With more than 50,000 people in the Superdome and Convention Center, some of them having been there for four days, most of them without any supplies, CNN spent its time talking to officials and asking about property crime.

ABC’s coverage was similar to CNN’s as it continued to focus on looting. However, ABC’s anchor in New Orleans, Bob Woodruff, didn’t call the storm survivors refugees; in fact, he avoided calling them much of anything. ABC’s main story about New Orleans that night was called “Ghost Town.” The term ‘ghost town’ is usually used to refer to an abandoned place. In referring to New Orleans as a ghost town while simultaneously describing the calls for help “from every ledge,” ABC denied the very humanity of the stranded people.

In a later story in the ABC broadcast, a black man in a baseball cap was shown taking beverages out of a destroyed store. Then, Woodruff interviewed the man, looming

over him as he asked, in a scolding tone, “Do you think it is okay to take that?” (see Figure 17). The man’s response was indistinct, but the microphone captured what Woodruff said next: “You stole it.” The man then looked up into Woodruff’s eyes and with confusion in his voice, he said, “It’s food.” If the man is surprised that Woodruff doesn’t recognize the need to eat and drink, perhaps the audience isn’t, as Woodruff has already denied the basic humanity of the people of New Orleans.

On FOX, Smith continually referred to the people of New Orleans as refugees. It was the term used in on-screen headlines as well as by almost every reporter. However, unlike CNN, FOX did not focus on looting, but on the “human tragedy” it saw unfolding. Perhaps more than any other network, FOX made it clear how many people were trying to get out of New Orleans and not getting any help:

And now a live look at [what is] coming from the projects of the east of New Orleans: thousands upon thousands of people. They have streamed from their flooded and sewage-filled neighborhoods for two solid days. And as they walk the interstate, they are given no information about where to go, where buses are, where the water is, who is here to help them. And every single solitary face in that crowd of thousands is an African-American man or woman or baby or child looking for some instructions and to this point, they have gotten none.

Thus, on Wednesday, the news media were divided: FOX saw refugees in need of help, NBC had black citizens in need of help as well as white citizens being celebrated for public citizenship, CNN and ABC saw looters needing to be controlled.

In a city full of people in desperate need of help, the media struggled to make sense of what they were seeing. Very few officials were on hand to make sense of the disaster for the reporters and so reporters were left to cast about for any meanings they could find or generate on their own—a task to which they were no longer accustomed. While CNN and ABC focused on looting and forced disorder frames onto the day’s

events, FOX and NBC attended to the human tragedy of the stranded residents—who they increasingly recognized as citizens and afforded the citizen treatment. FOX and NBC began to trouble citizenship discourse as they suggested that race might be playing a role in the government’s inadequate response and that citizens should take action to help the people of New Orleans.

***Thursday (9/1/05): Anger and Shame***

In Brinkley’s history of Hurricane Katrina, the twelfth chapter is titled “The Intense Irrationality of a Thursday” (2006). September 1<sup>st</sup> was a day marked by a substantial reemergence of spin from government officials. President Bush gave an interview at the White House to Diane Sawyer for *Good Morning America*, Governor Blanco held a press conference, Senator Landrieu appeared on CNN, and Secretary Chertoff gave an interview to NPR’s Robert Siegel.

The day’s discourse quickly entered the realm of the irrational and surreal when Bush said that he didn’t “think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees; they didn’t anticipate a serious storm” (Brinkley, 2006, p. 452). Later in the day, Chertoff told Siegel that reports of people being at the Convention Center were “rumors” of which he had no knowledge. Both of these claims would have seemed entirely nonsensical to audiences that had been watching the news; the weekend had been filled with dire predictions from a variety of government agencies, and reporters from almost every network knew that people were in the Convention Center, with news about the conditions there breaking throughout the day.



Against these claims, reporters began to talk back. On NPR, Siegel refused to let Chertoff's dismissal of the situation at the Convention Center stand: "But Mr. Secretary, when you say we shouldn't listen to rumors, these are things coming from reporters who have not only covered many, many other hurricanes; they've covered wars and refugee camps. These aren't rumors. They're seeing thousands of people [at the Convention Center]." This confrontational stance marks a break from journalistic routines of the previous years. And it got results: Chertoff promised to look into the situation.

Live on CNN in the early afternoon, Mayor Nagin would send out "a desperate SOS." Against the claims of the federal and state governments, Nagin said, "I keep hearing that [help] is coming. This is coming. That is coming. My answer to that today is, 'B.S.: Where's the beef?'" Nagin said that politicians were "spinning and people are dying down here." It was a drumbeat taken up by reporters. Later, CNN's Anderson Cooper, interviewing Senator Landrieu of Louisiana, would interrupt her as she talked about Congress's upcoming efforts to help the region. Landrieu asked if Cooper had heard about the plans. Cooper responded:

Excuse me, Senator, I'm sorry for interrupting. I haven't heard that, because, for the last four days, I've been seeing dead bodies in the streets here in Mississippi. And to listen to politicians thanking each other and complimenting each other, you know, I got to tell you, there are a lot of people here who are very upset, and very angry, and very frustrated.

And when they hear politicians slap—you know, thanking one another, it just, you know, it kind of cuts them the wrong way right now, because literally there was a body on the streets of this town yesterday being eaten by rats because this woman had been laying in the street for 48 hours. And there's not enough facilities to take her up. Do you get the anger that is out here?

All day, across the networks, politicians' attempts to spin the recovery efforts were shut down by reporters. Thus, as evening newscasts were being prepared, reporters were

operating under a new norm: they were advocates for the people of New Orleans; they were not the mouthpieces for politicians.

On the ground in New Orleans, things had gone from bad to worse. More than three days after Katrina had flooded the city, cutting off electricity and supplies of potable water, tens of thousands of people remained trapped in the city. While the Superdome had been supplied periodically with bottled water and packaged food, the plumbing had long since failed and human waste was everywhere in the hot, humid building. Survivors in the Superdome, because they had food and water, were far better off than people in other parts of the city, who were subject to same dangerous heat and waste, but had been without food and water for most of a week.

As horrible as the situation was, the rumors were worse. There were widespread rumors of murder and rape (including child rape) occurring inside the Superdome and Convention Center. According to rumors, gun violence ran rampant in the city.<sup>5</sup> Media outlets began to repeat rumors as facts. On this day, for example, Shepard Smith reported

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<sup>5</sup> A doctor sent to process the bodies at the Superdome was told there may be hundreds waiting for him in the basement; he found only six bodies, none of them were dead as the result of murder—there was a drug overdose, a suicide, and four deaths from natural causes (Horne, 2006, p. 108; Brinkley, 2006, p.193). The rates of other crimes are harder to assess, but evidence suggests that accounts of rape and gun violence were exaggerated. New Orleans sex crimes unit chief David Bennelli, speaking a couple of months after Katrina, said that only four victims, all women, had come forward to report sexual assaults—he knew of two attempted rapes inside the Superdome, and two rapes in the city (Horne, 2006, pp. 115-116). By December of 2005, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center had received 42 reports of sexual assault in New Orleans after Katrina (Brinkley, 2006, p. 240); that number includes the whole city and host homes. As for gun violence, rumors of rescuers being shot at were widespread enough to interfere with the rescue of thousands of people (Ibid., p.508). At one point, it was believed that a sniper had fired on a helicopter at the Superdome (Horne, 2006, p. 104). Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, Commander of Joint Task Force Katrina, on the scene at the time of the incident, didn't believe that anyone had fired on the helicopter, attributing the noise to a water bottle popping as a truck drove over it (Ibid.).

rumors about rape in the Superdome and murder at the Convention Center as fact at the top of *The Fox Report*.

The people of New Orleans had their own rumors. From the beginning, there had been a persistent rumor that city officials had intentionally breached the wall of the 17th Street Canal in order to flood the Ninth Ward and thereby save upper-class mostly-white neighborhoods (Marable & Clark, 2008, p. 192; Horne, 2006, p. 109; Lee, 2006). By Thursday, the theory underlying this rumor—that the poor people of New Orleans were not a priority for the government—had gained steam. Adding explosive fuel to the fire was what came to be known as the “Gretna Bridge Incident.”

Gretna is an affluent suburb of New Orleans just across the Mississippi River from downtown New Orleans. On September 1, a group of about 200 people walked from New Orleans along the Route 90 Bridge to Gretna. According to historian Douglas Brinkley (2006) the group was about 95% black and included New Orleans residents as well as tourists who had been turned away from the Superdome and the Convention Center (pp. 468-471). As the group approached Gretna, two police officers came out to meet them, firing warning shots into the air and telling them that they would not be allowed to pass (Ibid.). The exhausted group decided to set up an encampment on the bridge and to try to enter Gretna the next day. According to Brinkley (2006), Gretna police returned to the group in force:

“Get the fuck off the bridge,” the police shouted. When the people didn’t respond immediately, the officers pointed their weapons at individuals. Ultimately the Gretna police called in a helicopter, which hovered low over the encampment, its rotor blades blowing the makeshift shelters away and pelting the people with dust and debris kicked up by the downdraft. The group retreated to New Orleans. (p. 470)

While this incident would not appear on the evening news for over a week, the story spread quickly amongst the crowd at the Convention Center.<sup>6</sup> As more and more people heard about the incident, they lost hope that relief was on its way. Stuck in a city with no relief in sight, people began to think that their government didn't care if they all died.<sup>7</sup>

Ted Jackson, photographer for *The Times-Picayune*, discovered a change in the people's attitudes towards his cameras on Thursday. For days, survivors had yelled at Jackson as he paddled a boat through the city, taking pictures. "You just going to shoot me and not save me?" a stranded man asked (Horne, 2006, p. 112). On Thursday, Jackson approached the Convention Center, afraid he would be attacked as soon as the crowds spotted his camera equipment. Instead, the crowds reacted to his cameras by embracing him and ask him to chronicle what was happening (Ibid., p. 114). In doing so, the people of New Orleans were exercising agency, asserting themselves as subjects to be considered, not just objects to be looked at. This attitude would enhance reporters ability to afford the residents the citizen treatment.

Other news personnel interviewed after the storm gave similar accounts of the people positive reaction to the media's presence (Knauer, 2005, p. 126). In fact, NBC broke the Convention Center story because New Orleans resident Dwayne Jones had

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<sup>6</sup> On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, FOX's Shepard Smith, who had witnessed the incident (Brinkley, 2006) reported, "And they've set up a checkpoint. And anyone who walks up out of that city now is turned around. You are not allowed to go to Gretna, Louisiana, from New Orleans, Louisiana." The Gretna Bridge Incident did not really break until September 10<sup>th</sup> on CBS: "This was the lifeline to dry ground...witnesses say that officers forced them back, firing warning shots in the air."

<sup>7</sup> Denise Moore, a hurricane survivor who would appear on NPR's *This American Life* (Glass, September 9, 2005) and in graphic novelist Josh Neufeld's account of Katrina (2009), provides a powerful account of how news of the Gretna Bridge Incident affected the people waiting for evacuation. See Figure 21 for part of her story.

entered the NBC compound and asked a cameraman to go with him to the Convention Center.<sup>8</sup> Jones believed that media attention could only help the people's situation (Brinkley, 2006, pp 397-402).

Just as people inside New Orleans had lost faith in their government's willingness to protect them, news audiences around the country seemed to suffer a similar crisis. As Brinkley (2006) argued, "Watching the scenes of New Orleans still enduring want and danger four days after the hurricane was tearing the whole nation apart" (p. 453).

Throughout the day, as reporters pulled apart and rejected the Bush administration's excuses of surprise and ignorance, more and more Americans called the media to express their anger and shame.<sup>9</sup> Americans asked how they could help. Thus, going into the Thursday's evening news, reporters not only had a new norm of advocating for the people of New Orleans, they felt that the audience was behind them.

That evening, most news outlets (ABC Evening News, NBC Nightly News, CNN News Hour) were playing clips of Bush's comments alongside evidence proving his claims false. On FOX, known for its conservative slant, they did not mention Bush's appearance on *Good Morning America* even as they ran a story titled "Engineers Warned

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<sup>8</sup> Brinkley (2006, pp 397-402) says that this happened on Wednesday, but evidence suggests that it happened on Thursday. *NBC Nightly News* doesn't talk about the Convention Center until Thursday. Also, cameraman Tony Zumbado is reported to have given an interview to MSNBC about the Convention Center as soon as he returned to NBC's camp, but the earliest that I could find Zumbado in MSNBC transcripts is Thursday. Further, Brinkley says that Zumbado took Harry Connick, Jr. to the Convention Center a few hours after his first trip; again, Connick doesn't appear on *NBC Nightly News* until Thursday and he says he was at the Convention Center "today" and will sing in a fundraising concert "tomorrow." This only makes sense if Connick went to the Convention Center on Thursday, the concert aired live on Friday.

<sup>9</sup> NBC, FOX, and other networks noted people's request for information on air. Pew (2005 Sept 8) captured the anger and depression people felt more systematically—the majority of Americans reported feeling angry and depressed over the Katrina disaster.

of Levee Problems for Years.” This gap in their coverage is likely due to a desire to save Bush from criticism. While not discussing Bush’s appearance on *Good Morning America*, FOX covered his press conference with former Presidents Bush and Clinton—Bush Sr. and Clinton were going to spearhead fundraising efforts—giving it more time than other networks.

ABC news, so fixated with looting on the previous night, started their evening broadcast by saying, “More and more people are dying because help is not coming fast enough.” In their segment on New Orleans, they made the dire situation clear: “Crowds of people, mostly black and poor, waited for hours for buses that never came. The elderly, infants without formula—waiting in the heat.” At the Convention Center, cameras captured the anger of the people not receiving help, reporting their names along with their situation. The crowds lining the streets were shown chanting, “We want help. We want help.” Thus ABC is seen recognizing the citizenship of the poor, black citizens of New Orleans. Recording their names with their predicaments demonstrates respect previously afforded only to officials and white storm survivors. Recording and relaying the chants allowed the stranded people of New Orleans agency within the narrative; they were allowed access to the frame of the news story and ABC focused on their situation and need for help.

The first words on *NBC Nightly News* were chanted by the people of New Orleans—“Help! Help! Help!” Throughout the broadcast, NBC would foreground the situation of the people trapped in New Orleans. Williams’s first words were, “Katrina survivors, desperate and angry, begging for help from anyone who will listen.” Once on screen, Williams reported:

They feel forgotten and the people inside the city of New Orleans are asking repeatedly today to the people in Washington, ‘Are you watching? Are you listening?’ Here in New Orleans today, efforts to evacuate the stranded, those you see at the Superdome and other locations have gotten more complicated and more difficult and people have now, remember, gone days without food or water or a good night’s sleep. They are literally begging for help.

At every turn, Williams reminded the audience that the people in New Orleans were desperate for help and had good reason to believe that their lives were in danger. As with other networks, the bodies of the recently deceased were shown, as were people having diabetic fits and otherwise losing consciousness.

Williams anchored the program from Metairie, just outside New Orleans. On air, Williams said NBC had relocated for safety reasons. The program included reports from Don Teague at the Superdome and at the city's primary triage area (a stretch of highway). Martin Savidge reported from the Convention Center.

At every turn, Williams and his team reminded the audience that the situation was desperate and that the people of New Orleans were behaving “the way you would when the lives of your family members are threatened.” This language collapses the gap between the audience and the people in New Orleans—“they” and “you” are one in the same. When mentioning ongoing looting, Teague said “even [police] officers have to loot their own food and water.” NBC’s coverage appeared designed to flatten out the differences between the people of New Orleans, officials like the police officers, and the people in the audience. NBC explicitly folded the audience and the people stranded in New Orleans into each other. Not only did Williams say that the people were responding “the way you would,” he said the anger in the city had “spread across the country today.” NBC portrayed a nation that included the people of New Orleans and that

was, collectively, infuriated. Not only did this establish storm survivors as citizens, it furthers public citizenship as it celebrated the anger and the desire to take action.

NBC's coverage that evening included many instances wherein the poor black people of New Orleans were given the citizen treatment. It also, importantly, was filled with depictions of public citizenship as it is performed by both whites and blacks. At the city's triage area, NBC features Wardell Edwards, a young black man dressed in a baggy white t-shirt, his hair up in a bright yellow do-rag (see Figure 18). When Edwards first appeared on camera, it was in passing as the reporter talked about poverty in the city. Edwards was seen saying, "We ain't got nothing. I know that." The reporter then began to talk about the hard choices that had been made in the city over the last few days: "Wardell Edwards rode a boat to safety with 18 children from his housing project. Their mothers couldn't fit in the boat and stayed behind to wait for rescuers. That was two days ago." Edwards is then shown sitting with the group of children as they eat. "I love them. That's why I do all I can do for them," he says. The story then moved on to show a National Guardsman looking after other children in the same way. This not only established Edwards as equivalent to the guardsman, it makes the public-ness of Edwards's service even more explicit: these are not Edwards's children, but he cares for them as his own, performing the same service as people whose job's demand service of them.

Every network continued to refer to the people trapped in New Orleans as refugees. NBC said, "It's a profound humanitarian crisis that grows deeper by the day, tens of thousands of hurricane refugees trapped in a city that's dissolving into chaos," but made scant use of the term otherwise. Reporting from Biloxi, ABC's Elizabeth Vargas



seemed to be wrestling with the term. She said, “The governor of Texas said today that his state would take 25,000 people displaced from the hurricane zone. He called them refugees. And that is what they are. In the richest country in the world, Mississippi is the poorest state. And in many places here, it looks very much like the third world.” This statement suggests that she is aware that the term “refugee” is usually reserved for people crossing national borders, but thinks that it might be apt given the destitution faced by the storm’s survivors.

On FOX, the term refugee was used throughout the program. Smith used it interchangeably with “survivor.” FOX was alone in airing a press conference from Detroit mayor Kwame Kirkpatrick in which the mayor said, “I have been hearing them called refugees on the television, and it sickens me. These are our citizens. These are our brothers and sisters. And Detroit will always be ready to stand up and help.” Smith did not comment on the video clip except to add that Michigan was sending 450 National Guard troops. FOX’s coverage on Thursday was not as discursively coherent as NBC’s, including elements similar to both NBC’s advocacy and CNN’s conservative spin.

While the day’s events and the irrationality of the Bush administration’s claims seemed to have puzzled FOX and set NBC and ABC more firmly on an advocate’s path, over at CNN, Brown tried to repeat the spin. CNN’s coverage on Thursday night was a triumph of disassociation: Brown began a story on New Orleans by stating, “In New Orleans, the thing most visibly absent, the thing that we have all struggled with...is law and order.” However, the visuals in his story contradict this suggestion. Voice-overs and reporters spoke of the residents of New Orleans as “hoodlums” and claimed there were “roving gangs of gunmen,” but the images were of people waving white flags and

waiting behind barricades (see Figure 19). What was “visibly absent” from the picture were buses to evacuate the many people still at the Convention Center and Superdome (see Figures 20 and 21).

In the second story of the broadcast, Brown begins by saying that he’s going to ask a question even if he might be accused of being “political” for doing so; he then asks, “Why didn’t the military get to New Orleans sooner?” Again, the voice over and the images tell different stories. While the reporter talks about the need for troops to restore law and order to the city, the visuals show looting and footage of the troops already in the city, but not the chaos of violent crime referred to by CNN. National Guard troops were not shown patrolling with guns and rounding up bad guys, but rather carrying a man to a shaded area outside the Superdome (apparently passed out, it isn’t clear) and generally milling around outside the Superdome (see Figures 20 and 22). While looting is made out to be rampant and opportunistic, video only shows people taking things from grocery and clothing stores. In a clip that was repeated several times, a woman is seen with packs of diapers; another segment shows a stream of people coming out of a grocery store (see Figures 23 and 24). The assertion that New Orleans has descended into chaos is not supported by the videos provided. Instead, people seem to be taking necessities and doing so in an orderly fashion. In the video of people streaming out of the grocery store, an old man is standing just outside the doors; he is in the way, but people move around him politely (see Figure 24).

This Thursday night broadcast was starkly unsympathetic to the people of New Orleans; they are viewed from a distance and referred to as, amongst other things, “seething masses.” In the story on looting, CNN’s cameras privileged three people:

Blanco, State Senator Robert Murrioneaux (Figure 25), and an unnamed white woman (Figure 26). Blanco was shown at her press conference, where she authorized the National Guard to “shoot and kill” rioters and looters. Murrioneaux is shown saying that “right now, the plan is to establish order.” The woman, who is never identified, says that “we” are going to get “them,” meaning the looters. “Those people...” she says, “probably caused trouble before this storm.” These harsh words are shown over footage of the speakers in close-up and footage of those stranded in New Orleans: people who are barely surviving.

In CNN’s story about the military’s timing, the Pentagon reporter, McIntyre, reports that people at the Pentagon think that criticism of the military is unfair, and is just an attempt by partisans to make the President look bad. He also says that at the Pentagon they “seemed to question the motives of some of our reporters that are out there and hearing these stories from the victims about why they have so much sympathy for the victims and not as much sympathy for the challenges that the government faced.” As Brown and McIntyre banter and discuss this, they both reject this framing of reporters’ concerns. McIntyre says he thinks it is natural, not political, to identify with the victims. Brown says, “We’ve got people who’ve been living as refugees, it’s not hard to understand why our first heartbeat goes in their direction, we’ll worry about the bureaucrats later.” Thus, as Brown attempts to fit the Bush administration’s warped frames onto his news program, he finds that they don’t fit, and in rejecting them, he comes to describe the hurricane victims as people that “we’ve got.”

***Friday (9/2/05): Help Arrives, Public Citizenship is Celebrated***

On Friday morning, National Guard troops arrived at the Convention Center and by the end of the day both the Superdome and Convention Center were equipped with meals and water. While it did finally seem that real progress was being made, President Bush's mid-morning public statement to FEMA director Brown that he was doing a "heck of a job" made Bush seem utterly out of touch with reality. After five days, stranded New Orleanians had been given one meal and one bottle of water. It was not a "heck of a job."

Aided by increasing unease and chatter (in the blogosphere, in email forwards, in interpersonal communication) about the way that the media regarded the mostly-black victims, as well as ever-increasing awareness of how long the people stranded in New Orleans had been without food, water, and medicine, the TV news filled with critiques of the government's response. Television networks began to ask tougher questions about the relief efforts.

Stories asking why tens of thousands of people couldn't be evacuated replaced stories asking why poor people commit crimes of opportunity. Reporters started collecting their own evidence, contradicting official spin. NBC's Carl Quintanilla, hearing that buses couldn't reach the Convention Center and that the people stranded there were behaving dangerously, went to the Convention Center and showed hundreds and hundreds of people sitting calmly, waiting for the buses. He also got in his car and drove straight out of New Orleans, quickly reaching a dormant, empty convoy of buses. For Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2007), this type of coverage represents an important break from the uncritical, lapdog journalism of the preceding years.

NBC's Martin Savidge covered the distribution of relief at the Convention Center. He said that the National Guard troops were fearful of the people: "It's clear the rescuers feared the ones they came to help—at least initially." This story aired immediately following Quintanilla's, where he had demonstrated the calm of the people at the Convention Center. The implication was clear: the rescuers' fear was the problem, not the behavior of the people.

Savidge was next seen walking along a city street with Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, Commander of Joint Task Force Katrina. An unidentified reporter asked, "What took so long, sir?" Honoré looked at Savidge and answered, "Because it's hard. How long did it take you to get here?" Savidge, who had been in New Orleans since the weekend before the storm said, "I've been here, sir." Honoré had no sensible response; it was clear that obfuscating bluster wouldn't work.

Again in Friday night's news, NBC framed public citizenship on the part of the audience as the only sensible response to the disaster. Before each commercial break, NBC put up a different graphic explaining different ways that members of the audience could get in touch with charities or otherwise help out. In addition, they celebrated the public citizenship of a wide variety of people featured on their program in a story called "Hands Across America."

NBC began "Hands Across America" by showing repair work on the levees. Then reporter Bob Faw said, "In New Orleans today, they're sealing floodgates, but throughout America the floodgates were opened, wide." In the story that followed, Faw assembled a wide variety of clips documenting charitable donations from Chicago church group donating their time to help load up trucks, to \$900 that a 10-year-old girl in

Virginia Beach, Virginia collected by going door-to-door. NBC celebrated donations of cash and supplies of all sizes, treating the people providing help with the full citizen treatment.

On CNN, while Aaron Brown pointed out that help was arriving four days late, he continued to promote private citizenship. At the top of the program, Brown noted the criticism that Bush had received for showing “too little leadership.” Brown added, “Today he was on the ground, in Alabama and Mississippi, he was on to New Orleans, doing the things that Presidents do in times like this.” As Brown spoke, President Bush was shown talking to people in Biloxi. As the camera watched, Bush stood with his back to the camera, his arm around a woman, squeezing her tight.<sup>10</sup> Then, as Brown says “the things that Presidents do,” Bush pulled the woman’s head toward him and kissed her on the forehead (see Figure 27). Brown endorses this infantilizing gesture as presidential. It clearly suggests that the President’s job is not to oversee relief efforts, but rather to appear periodically and be fatherly towards the public.

Later in the program, Brown said that the Convention Center had been like a combat zone between the police and the survivors. Brown then kicked the feed to reporter Chris Lawrence who had spent the night on the police station’s roof with several officers. The story portrayed the hardships endured by police officers in the city at night; the exhausted officers heard gunfire throughout the night, which they said was directed at them. At the end of the story, Lawrence interviewed an officer. She told the camera, “We need to go back to living with faith and with hope and even with compassion for

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<sup>10</sup> The woman is identified later as Kim Bassier, 21.

some of the people who didn't have any for us." Given the context in which this clip is shown, it seems like "we" refers to police officers and "the people" refers to the armed civilians. This may not have been the officer's intention, but by setting up the clip as they did, CNN makes it seem that the people of New Orleans need to show compassion and humanity rather than be shown it.

All told, CNN's broadcast was as complimentary as possible to the Bush administration and continued to portray the people in New Orleans as combative and threatening. NBC's broadcast had been as compassionate as possible to the people of New Orleans. FOX and ABC's broadcasts that evening resembled NBC's more than CNN's, but were not as coherent as NBC's.

***Saturday (9/3/2005) and After: Changes Settle In***

On Friday night, after the network newscasts had concluded, the Red Cross held a televised fundraiser. Comments from one of the stars brought out to try to raise interest Kanye West, a popular African American rapper, would become a hook for reporters to critique the disaster relief efforts in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast. On the live telecast, West went off script, instead of the prosaic words on the teleprompter, West said:

I hate the way they portray us in the media. We see a black family, it says they are looting, you see a white family it says they are looking for food. And you know it has been five days because most of the people are black. ... America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well off as slow as possible. And

they've given them permission to go down and shoot us. ... George Bush doesn't care about black people. (NBC, September 2, 2005)

West's statement was widely repeated and talked about over the weekend and help to fuel further discussion of the ways that the people of New Orleans had been treated by their government and by the media.

Over the weekend, Americans from areas outside the Gulf Coast, through their acts of charity, activism, and volunteerism continued to make their way into news coverage. The need for and preponderance of citizen action from within and without the affected region became a central part of the story of Katrina. The need for citizens to keep an eye on their government, question officials, and be prepared to take action was made obvious by the storm and the government's bungling. This undermined the private citizenship forms, which had dominated for decades.

### ***Conclusion***

In the early days, Katrina news offered distancing, dismissive views, treating the people of New Orleans as dangerous non-citizens and outsiders. As the week progressed, TV news outlets began to recognize the citizenship of the hurricane survivors; in doing so, they also celebrated some acts of public citizenship. On Thursday, as reporters learned more about the situation in the Convention Center, it was clear that the relief efforts had been disastrous at every level. When the Bush administration tried to spin the news—portraying the relief efforts as fairly successful and the federal government as innocent of any neglect—they failed miserably. This seems to have galvanized news personnel, making it obvious that if they didn't advocate for the people of New Orleans,



it was quite possible that no one would. Thus, in a manner unprecedented since at least 9/11, news organizations began to challenge the President and officials of all stripes, holding their comments up for scrutiny and fact-checking their assertions.

Harry Boyte (1992) describes the public sphere as a space that exists in between “the large institutions that tower over us” and the “terrain of the immediate, familiar, everyday, and close to home” (p. 340). When the news media operate as they did post-9/11—as lapdogs and unquestioning transmitters of government spin—they are no longer fully in the ‘between’ space of the public sphere, but become an extension of the state or what Boyte referred to as the “granite mountains of the social landscape, with a seemingly immutable logic and force of their own.” In 9/11 news, journalists joined up with the state, mostly removing themselves from the public sphere. As they did so, they promoted private citizenship, a discourse that removes people from the public sphere, pushing them fully into their private spheres.

In the course of covering Hurricane Katrina, most journalists freed themselves from the tentacles of the state and the news media reemerged as an independent institution that exists in the public sphere. As it did so, it pulled the American people back into the public sphere by rejecting the discourse of private citizenship and promoting public citizenship.

Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston (2007) attribute the reemergence of challenging news in Katrina coverage to the absence of government officials and spin in the first days of the flooding. The story, however, is more complicated than that. It is crucial to attend to the confluence of events on Thursday, September 1, 2005. Not only had reporters, in the absence of government officials, begun to explore the situation on the ground for

themselves (which Bennett et. al. attend to closely); they had stepped closer to the poor black people that were stranded in New Orleans, beginning to see them as (and portray them as) citizens, setting aside the early characterizations of the people as dangerous, exotic, and unknowable. After becoming increasingly upset about the treatment of people confined to the Superdome, on Thursday the news media discovered the dramatically more perilous situation of the people who had been dropped off or directed to the Convention Center. It is essential to understand that the Bush administration re-emerged with its spin on the same day and at the same time that the news media and the public were learning about the horrors at the Convention Center. Against this appalling backdrop, almost any spin from the Bush administration would have been hard to keep alive. The fact that the Bush administration's story about Katrina was so obviously untrue and incomplete made furthering their spin almost impossible. The clumsy craziness of the Bush administration's spin that day galvanized the media, making them intent on advocating for the people of New Orleans.

## FIGURES

Most Closely Followed News Stories 1986 - 2006			
	Very	Fairly	Combined
Challenger disaster (7/86)	80*	16	96
9/11 terrorist attacks (9/01)	74	22	96
San Francisco earthquake (11/89)	73	22	95
High price of gasoline (9/05)	71	19	90
Rodney King verdict and riots (5/92)	70	22	92
Hurricane Katrina (9/05)	70	21	91

\* The margin of error for the 9/05 study is 3.5% (95% confidence); margins of error for earlier surveys were not provided.

Figure 1. This table shows the most closely watched news stories from 1986-2006. All data from Pew Center report of September 8, 2005.



Figure 2. Hurricane Katrina was presented through satellite images as it barreled towards New Orleans. This image is from CNN's August 28, 2005 report. The smaller image in the lower-right corner was on screen throughout the broadcast.



Figure 3. The people of New Orleans were often portrayed with images of traffic. This image is from CNN's August 28, 2005 report.



Figure 4. The people of the Gulf were often shown at a distance as they boarded up homes and businesses. This image is from CNN's August 28, 2005 report.



Figure 5. President Bush told people in Katrina's path to evacuate. "I urge all citizens to put their own safety and the safety of their families first by moving to safe ground," he said. This image is from NBC's August 28, 2005 report.



Figure 6. People were shown from a distance as they arrived at the Superdome. They were typically shot from behind and at a distance. This image is from CNN's August 28, 2005 report



Figure 7. Another distant image of people waiting to enter the Superdome. This image is from NBC's August 28, 2005 report.



Figure 8. This image appeared throughout most of Meserve's interview on CNN. This image is from CNN's August 29, 2005 report



Figure 9. Rescuers helped a family with small children evacuate from Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. This image is from NBC's August 30, 2005 report



Figure 10. People coming out of the rescuers' boats appeared frail and in shock. This image is from NBC's August 30, 2005 report



Figure 11. A young man laughed at a police officer as she tried to grab him and stop him from looting. This image is from NBC's August 30, 2005 report.



Figure 12. Scenes such as these prompted reporters to comment that America "looked like another land." This image is from NBC's August 30, 2005 report.





Figure 13. The corpse of a man was discovered by NBC on a street corner. This image is from NBC's August 30, 2005 report



Figure 14. Mike Spencer of Gulfport, Mississippi tells the camera how he survived the storm. This image is from NBC's August 30, 2005 report



Figure 15. Derrick Washington explained that he is trying to evacuate, but keeps getting different information on where to go. This image is from NBC's August 31, 2005 report.

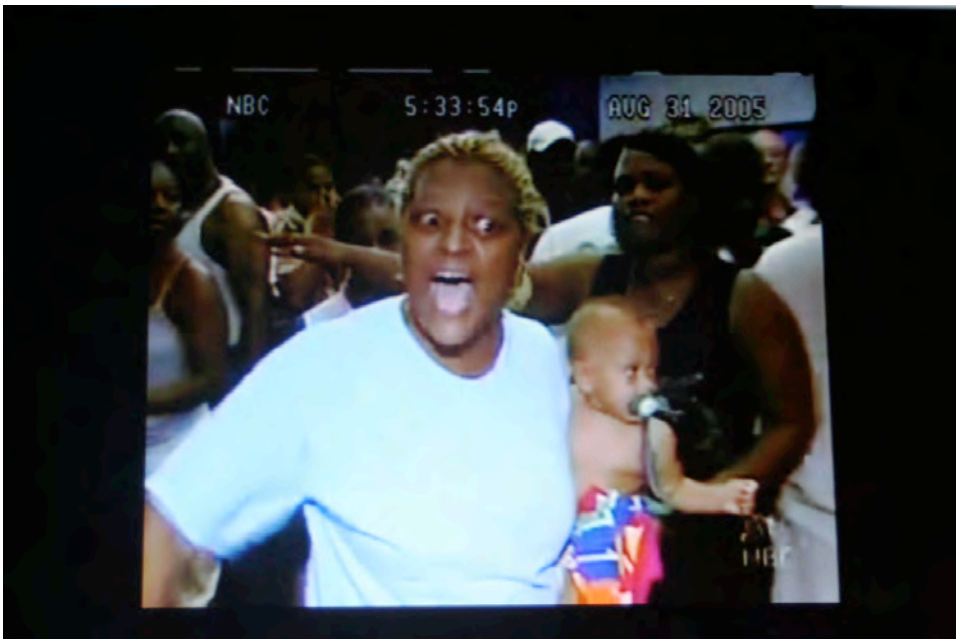


Figure 16. Inside the Superdome, an unidentified woman yells to the camera “get us out of here!” This image is from NBC's August 31, 2005 report.



Figure 17. Bob Woodruff asked a man looting food, “Do you think it is okay to take that?” This image is from ABC’s August 31, 2005 report



Figure 18. Wardell Edwards is shown with a large group of children he helped to rescue. It is one of the first times that the full citizen treatment is extended to a black resident of New Orleans. This image is from NBC’s September 1, 2005 report.



Figure 19. A scene from the Convention Center. This image is based on an interview with Denise Moore. This drawing is a page from Josh Neufeld's non-fiction book, *A.D.: New Orleans After The Deluge*.



Figure 20. In New Orleans, people were repeatedly lined up along the streets for buses that didn't arrive. This image is from CNN's September 1, 2005 report.

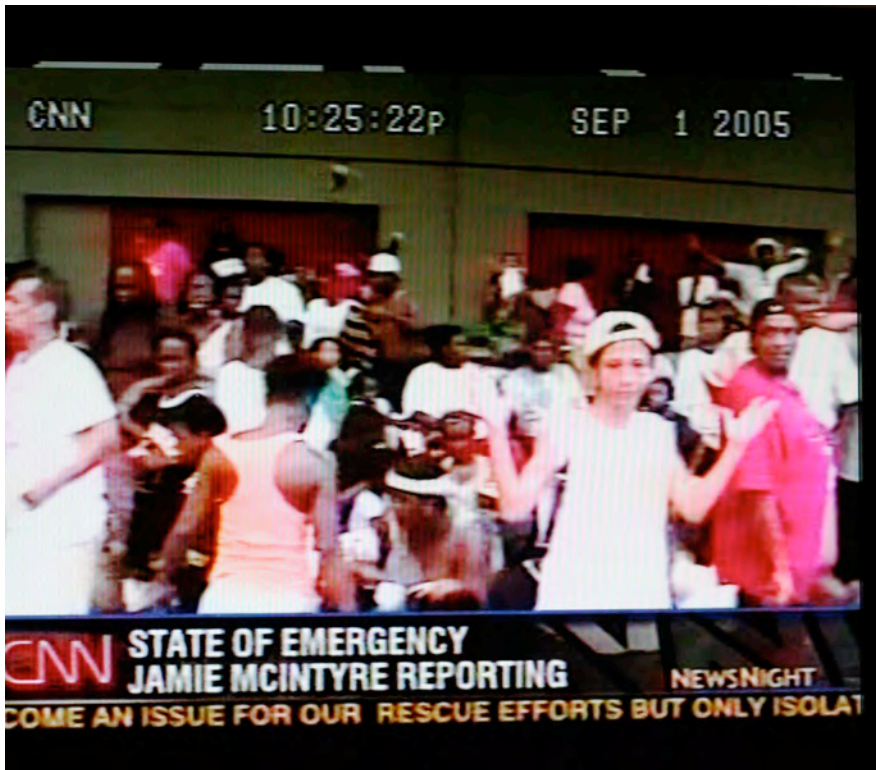


Figure 21. A scene from outside the Convention Center. This image is from CNN's September 1, 2005 report.



Figure 22. Near the Superdome, troops carried what appeared to be an unconscious man. This image is from CNN's September 1, 2005 report.



Figure 23. A woman walked out of a store with packs of diapers. This image is from CNN's September 1, 2005 report.



Figure 24: People were shown leaving a grocery store with bread and other supplies, stepping politely around an elderly man. This image is from CNN's September 1, 2005 report.



Figure 25. State Senator Robert Marrioneaux tells CNN, “Right now the plan is to establish order.” This image is from CNN’s September 1, 2005 report.



Figure 26. This unidentified woman tells the camera, “Those people...probably caused trouble before this storm.” This image is from CNN’s September 1, 2005 report.

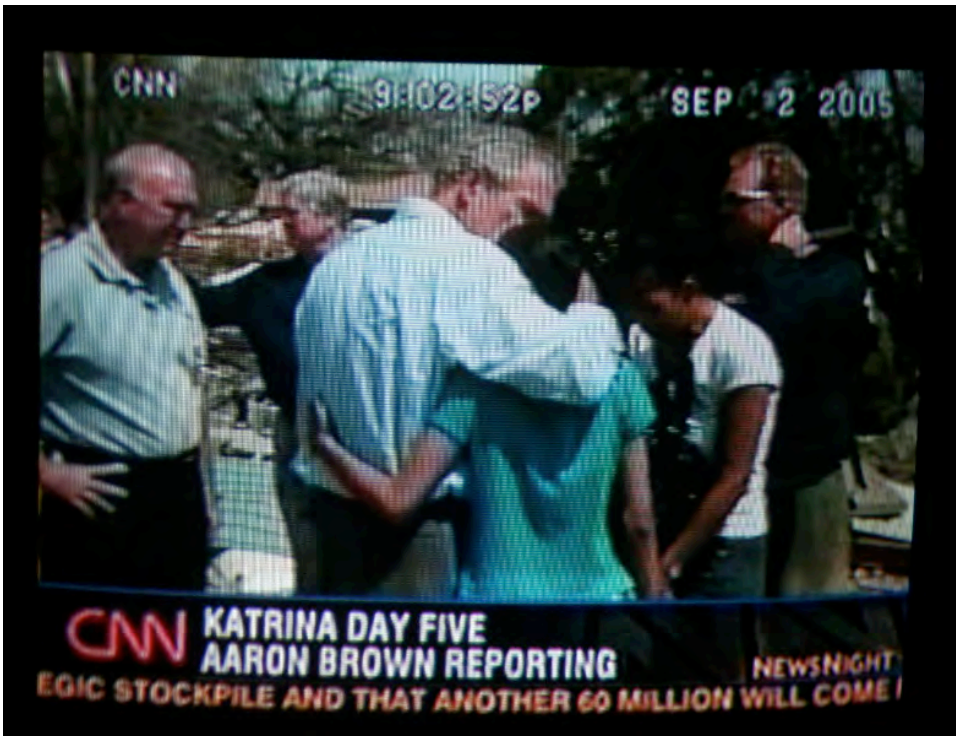


Figure 27. President Bush embraces and infantilizes a hurricane survivor in Mississippi. This image is from CNN's September 2, 2005 report.



## CHAPTER 4

### **The Perils of the Public Citizen: Citizenship and Super-powers on *Heroes***

Hurricane Katrina exposed the downsides and blindspots of private citizenship forms. The storm disrupted dominant discourses of citizenship; where private citizenship forms had once dominated, suggesting that one should perform citizenship through family life, public citizenship forms now emerged, suggesting that citizens should act in and think in the public sphere (a space which is explicitly neither the state nor the family.) The infantile citizen—passive, unknowing, obedient—had faded from glory and visions of a more adult citizen—active, informed, and inquisitive—emerged. While Katrina did not bring about a wholesale shift in citizenship discourse, it did disturb dominant forms and break down barriers which had been keeping representations of public citizens from the American audience. Thus, we can expect cultural products from the post-Katrina era to include representations of public citizens as well as narratives which allow a working out of tensions over citizenship forms.

This chapter examines the television show *Heroes*, a program in which everyday people develop super-powers and then endeavor to “save the world.” Set primarily in present day America, *Heroes* features characters that, due to evolution, have various powers such as flight, invisibility, and the ability to travel through time. Over the course of the first season, the individual characters struggle to accept and understand their newly-developed super-powers. As the characters develop their powers and become

aware of big public problems, they grapple with the question of whether they should remain in their little lives or strike out and do something.

All told, what *Heroes* reveals is new tension within citizenship discourse. While the text worries over public citizens, it does represent them. The central tension of *Heroes* is over action in the public sphere and what people, both ordinary and extraordinary, ought to take on. While often suggesting that being an active agent and trying to change the world is dangerous, *Heroes* also celebrates some acts of public citizenship. And inasmuch as *Heroes* fails to flatter public citizens, it also regards private citizens with marked distaste.

### ***Show Information***

Hurricane Katrina hit the American coastline just before the 2005-2006 season; the shows premiering a year later were, therefore, the first shows that could have been developed in the post-Katrina zeitgeist. *Heroes* was the surprise hit of the season, earning eight Emmy nominations, regularly landing in Neilson's top twenty, averaging 14.4 million viewers each week, and becoming NBC's best performing series in five years (Kushner, 2007; McCollum, 2007; Porter, Lavery & Robson, 2007, p. 1). Despite a fall from phenom status in the subsequent seasons, *Heroes* remains successful, averaging over 9 million viewers a week, and remaining a top ten show with the coveted 18-to-49-year-old demographic through 2008 (Jensen, 2008).

According to creator and executive producer Tim Kring, the original concept for the show came in 2005 after NBC executives asked him to create a serial drama like *Lost* (2004-present) or *24* (2001-present); Kring claims that he then "looked to the zeitgeist"

for a concept, noticed the anxiety most people have about “the world in general” and “big issues that are really hard to fix” and began to develop a show in which regular people with superpowers would step-up and take care of the world’s big issues (Kushner, 2007).

My analysis of the show is based on close and repeated viewings of the first season of *Heroes*. While the second and third seasons have been viewed and inform this analysis, the number of alternate universes created, the multiplication of characters across those universes, as well as the introduction of some truly bizarre retro-connectivities (likely caused by repeated overhauls in the writing staff), make even skeletal accounts of those seasons so dense as to be incomprehensible.<sup>1</sup>

Episodes of *Heroes* are grouped into volumes, each of which has a theme and story arcs that conclude at the end of the volume. The first season was twenty-three episodes long and comprised the volume “Genesis.” This volume introduces the characters as they discover their powers; it focuses on two mysteries: how to stop a serial killer who is targeting the heroes and how to stop a foretold apocalyptic event in New York City. Most of these episodes feature independent storylines; the audience understands the stories to be linked to each other via the two main arcs, but most characters are unaware of the larger picture. As the season progresses, more and more storylines converge as characters meet each other and begin to work together.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. I begin with an analysis of *Heroes* as part of the super-hero genre. Focusing on a comparison with *The 4400* and *X-Men*, I explore the ways in which *Heroes* has transformed a classic tension in the genre—what it means to be a person—to tension over what it means to be a citizen. This genre-

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the trouble with writers on *Heroes*, see Ryan (2008), Poniewozik (2008), or Ausiello (2009).

based analysis illustrates the centrality of citizenship discourse to *Heroes* as it introduces the basic storylines of the first season.

In the second section of the chapter, I explore the narrative ambivalence over active citizenship roles by comparing characters in *Heroes* who seek super-powers to those who would rather be “normal.” By comparing characters who want to be special and have power to characters who want to be normal, this analysis demonstrates that while *Heroes* allows representations of public citizens, it does not celebrate them unequivocally, often regarding them suspiciously. Unlike the closed discursive system found on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, where private citizens are universally promoted, *Heroes* allows for some representations of public citizenship even as it meditates on the dangers that imperil public citizens.

Third, I examine the denouement of *Heroes* first season. As the season wrapped up, the plot brought into focus two parents who endanger their families by infantilizing them. Through them, it becomes clear that *Heroes* is as unsure of private citizenship forms as it is of public citizenship forms.

### ***Genre Analysis: From Who Can be a Citizen to What Citizens Should Do***

A lot can be learned about a text by comparing it to other offerings in its genre; Branston (2006) has argued that in the telling and retelling of similar stories, genres of texts reveal enduring preoccupations and cultural tensions (p. 45). In addition, because offerings within a genre are not entirely formulaic, new emphasis and permutations can suggest shifts (p.46). In this section *Heroes* is compared to film *X-Men* (2000) and television program *The 4400* (2004-2007). While *Heroes* borrows heavily from the super-

hero genre, questions over the human-ness or person-ness which is typical in the genre, are on *Heroes* rendered as a question over the citizenliness of the characters.

This analysis compares *Heroes* to two texts in which a category of people develop superpowers. The superhero genre has a long history and has had a recent resurgence, with more than ten major motion pictures in the genre being released since 2000, most of which featured long-standing comic book characters: Superman, the Incredible Hulk, Spider-Man, Hellboy, Iron Man and Batman.<sup>2</sup> In the film *X-Men* a random set of individuals develop superpowers through processes of evolution. On the Emmy-nominated mini-series and USA Network program *The 4400*, a random collection of people develop powers after they are abducted by agents from the future. In these stories, the focus is on understanding (and battling over) the role of the evolved/enhanced humans as they relate to society in general: are they monsters or people? Subjects or objects? The narratives offer allegorical ways for the audience to think about the expansion of civil rights. *The X-Men* was a one of the top grossing films of 2000 (boxofficemojo.com). *The 4400* broke the record for a basic-cable show when its opening episodes had 7.4 million viewers (Andreeva, 2007).

The X-Men are a group of humans who have developed a variety of superpowers through natural processes of evolution. They have been featured in numerous comic books and a popular TV cartoon series in the 1970s, but today are known to most through the incredibly popular trilogy of movies *X-Men* (2000), *X2* (2003), and *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006). There are several core tensions in the X-Men movies, all of which play out

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<sup>2</sup> *Superman Returns* (2006), *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), *Spider-Man* (2002), *Spider-Man 2* (2004), *Spider-Man 3* (2007), *Hellboy* (2004), *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008), *Iron Man* (2008), *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008).

in battles between the two camps of evolved humans—those who follow Professor Xavier on the one side and those who follow Magneto on the other.

Professor Xavier's followers are referred to as the X-Men and they run a school for young people who are struggling to control their powers and find a place in the world. The X-Men keep their eye on the general population and use their powers to avert disasters whenever possible. Xavier preaches an ethical code and love for all of humanity; he tries to convince his students—most of whom were rejected by their families and communities when they developed their powers—that ordinary humans are deserving of their help and that the X-Men and the humans are, in fact, one in the same.

Magneto, on the other hand, has been disillusioned by the behavior of ordinary humans and believes that the evolved humans should not work with the rest of society, but should seize control, by killing the un-evolved humans or finding a way to make “them” like “us.” Magneto's followers tend to be evolved humans who cannot “pass” for ordinary humans and were subject to horrible treatment in school and at home after their powers emerged. While Xavier’s followers are fairly ordinary in their appearance, most of Magneto’s followers look decidedly “other”—Toad has greenish-yellow skin, Mystique is covered in blue scales, and Sabertooth resembles a human/cat hybrid.

As the film makes clear, Magneto was interned by the Nazis in WWII. Magneto believes that genocide might await the mutants, and to avoid it, Magneto strives to objectify and eliminate the un-evolved humans. Xavier strives to convince Magneto that ordinary people can learn to live peacefully with the evolved humans. Simultaneously, Xavier works to keep governments and individuals from persecuting the evolved humans; Xavier sees everyone as subjects and tries to spread that view.

In the first *X-Men* movie, this conflict manifests itself over a bill on the floor of the U.S. Congress: a mutant registration act. A key advocate of this legislation, Senator Kelly, is seen saying the following into his phone (the audience only hears his side):

Senator, listen, you favor gun registration, yes? ... Well, some of these so-called children possess more than ten times the destructive force of a hand-gun. ... No, I don't see a difference; all I see are weapons in our schools.

This illustrates quite clearly the position that the mutants are not people ("so-called children") but objects ("weapons in our schools"). The entire plot of the movie is a battle over this world-view. The audience is clearly meant to identify with Xavier and the X-Men in their compassionate view towards all of humanity, including Magneto and his followers.

While the plot of *X-Men* only threatens the super-powered humans with internment, on *The 4400* internment is quickly a reality. The 4400 are a group of people who appear, all together, from a ball of light, in a lakebed, in the Seattle of 2004. Each of the 4400 people had disappeared at some point over the previous six decades and returns at the same age they were when they left, with no memory of where they have been. Immediately upon their return, the 4400 are taken by the U.S. Government to a containment facility that is run by NTAC (National Threat Assessment Command), a fictional division of Homeland Security. The internment of the 4400 ends within the first hour of the series after the ACLU sues on their behalf, asserting their basic human rights.

*The 4400* started as a miniseries and was then a television program airing on the USA Network from 2004 to 2007. The main characters in the 4400 are a pair of investigators from NTAC who try to figure out why the 4400 people were taken and then returned. One investigator, Tom Baldwin, whose nephew is among the 4400, never questions that the 4400 are humans/subjects. In early episodes, Baldwin must continually

remind his partner, Diana Skouris, who used to work for the CDC (Center for Disease Control), that the 4400 “are not viral samples, they are human beings.”

By the time it is apparent that some of the 4400 have been returned with supernatural powers, they have already been released. Higher-ups in Homeland Security push for tighter and tighter surveillance and control over the 4400. Skouris and Baldwin work to keep the 4400 free. The investigators work runs along two lines: helping the 4400 when their new powers emerge (until they learn to control them, they are usually quite dangerous) and to demonstrate that the 4400 are making contributions to society. In solving the 4400’s problems, the NTAC agents often discover scientific or medical advances; for example, in the episode “Blink” the investigators discover that a strange oil produced by the body of one of the 4400 has applications for psychiatry (3-7). Skouris and Baldwin also uncover a government conspiracy to suppress the powers of the 4400 via a “promicin inhibitor”—a medication that the government administers to the 4400 without their consent.

Thus, *The 4400* is like *X-Men* in that the civil rights of the evolved/enhanced humans are continually at risk. At times, civil rights talk is made explicit. In *X-Men* this is done through references to the Nazis. On *The 4400* this is accomplished through a focus on Richard Tyler. Tyler is an African-American man who disappeared while fighting in the Korean War. Tyler experiences the United States of 2004 as a place full of new rights and freedoms, While interned, he sits with Baldwin’s nephew (who has only been missing for three years) and reads the newspaper:

Tyler: “The Secretary of State is colored?”

Baldwin: “Black. And I’ll take your word for it.”

Tyler: “The National Security Advisor, too. The world sure has changed!”



Once the 4400 are released, Tyler is surprised that he can be seen with a white woman in public and even rent an apartment with her; “I know, I know,” he tells his girlfriend, “it’s not 1951 anymore, times have changed...but I’m just surprised at how much.” While most of the 4400 experience their return as a traumatic re-casting into the role of an object (to be interned, scrutinized, treated as suspect, and then released into a world that has moved on); Tyler is seen experiencing increased subject-hood.

*X-Men* and *The 4400* both use the idea of super-powers as a way to contemplate the limits of civil rights. Super-powers are drawn as an extreme form of diversity, a type that endows people with the power to easily commit mass murder or otherwise wholly disrupt the social order. Given this potential, the state worries that it has any chance at stopping those with super-powers and contemplates excluding them from citizenship so that they can be disarmed, contained, or eliminated. Both *X-Men* and *The 4400* conclude that everyone must be treated as a citizen, judged on an individual basis for their behavior, not their potential. Both texts go to great lengths to demonstrate how the diversity represented by those with superpowers solves more problems than it creates—their bodies not only produce cures for diseases, but the good people with powers are essential in helping the state respond to the bad people with powers.

These questions over civil rights and the role of diversity focus on whether characteristics of one’s body can qualify or disqualify one from citizenship. In contrast, *Heroes* doesn’t ask which bodies can qualify as a citizen, but rather what behaviors and attitudes are appropriate for citizens. This is a distinct dimension of citizenship, the one I’ve been tracing from 9/11 news, through *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and to Katrina news. Before moving on to discuss what *Heroes* suggests about what it means to

be a good citizen, this section explores more illuminating similarities and differences between *X-Men* and *The 4400* and *Heroes*. In *X-Men* and *The 4400*, the main threat to the characters' subject-hood is the government.

Throughout the first season of *Heroes*, the main threat to the characters subject-hood is over-bearing and infantilizing family members. Two central characters, Claire Bennet (a high-schooler) and Peter Petrelli (in his twenties) are continually constrained by families that see them as fragile and inept. This is ironic given that Claire and Peter share the ability to heal from any injury. Claire's dad, HRG, continually stresses the need for Claire to seem normal; when Claire uses her powers, HRG grounds her, lies to her, and has his super-powered myrmidon ruin her relationship with her best friend and boyfriend by modifying their memories.<sup>3</sup> Peter's mother and brother both undermine him; Nathan, Peter's brother continually puts down Peter's desire to help others by suggesting that they come from inflated self-importance: "Peter has got all these... ideas in his head; delusions of grandeur. He thinks he's supposed to make a difference." Angela, Peter's mother, continually pits her sons against each other, expressing a clear preference for Nathan, a self-interested bully.

A distant, secondary threat to the characters on *Heroes* is "The Company," a shadow organization that bags and tags evolved humans. The Company has a looming presence throughout the first season, and what is slowly revealed is that they kidnap evolved humans in to order assess the potential danger of their powers. HRG, who has no super-powers, works for the Company and his story is the primary way that the

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<sup>3</sup> Claire's adoptive father will be called HRG (horn-rimmed glasses), a convention that arose in the fan discussions and in the mainstream press when the characters' given name was unknown. Additionally, Sylar is the name adopted by Gabriel Gray when he discovers his super-powers: this character is referred to as Sylar throughout this chapter.

audience learns about this organization. Exactly what the Company is—whether an arm of the government—remains unclear, as HRG himself doesn't know much about the higher functions of the organization. Most of the people that are kidnapped by the Company are released after two days, but bear a mark (a kind of tattoo) and also have a gap in their memories (HRG's partner is able to remove memories).

In the world of *X-Men* or *The 4400*, the government or an entity like the Company would be cast as the principal “bad guy.” However, in the first season of *Heroes* the only people we see being held by the Company for more than two days are the serial killer, Sylar, and a heroin addict, Isaac. In both of these cases, the Company seems to be serving a useful purpose, keeping both men from killing others or themselves. This stands in stark contrast to the genocide and internment that is alluded to in both *X-Men* and *The 4400*. The Company is treated with some ambiguity and is far from the main problem faced by the evolved humans on *Heroes*. This illustrates a shift away from concern for disciplining exclusionary state-like organizations.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, the central tension in *Heroes* is over action in the public sphere. The main problem faced by most characters is the inability to control their powers or the threats posed by other evolved humans who cannot control their powers. Sylar, the serial killer, begins with the power of “intuitive aptitude,” which allows him to see how mechanical and biological things work just by looking at them. Sylar is able to take others' powers after opening the tops of their heads and seeing how their brains work. Part of his power, however, is the hunger to learn more and more, and acquire more and more powers. The *Heroes* audience first meets Sylar via a phone message in which he says “The hunger,

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<sup>4</sup> After the first season, more organizations like the Company are discovered and discussed, including one that interned and killed numerous innocent people. However, this is not a focus of the first season.

it's... I can't control it." (1-2). In the third season, when Peter is taken into a possible future in which Sylar is good, he seeks Sylar out in order to acquire his power of intuition (Peter can absorb powers without violence). Sylar warns Peter, telling him, "You don't realize, my ability is not just understanding how things work. There is a hunger that comes with it; to know more, to have more. I couldn't control it and it turned me into a killer. A monster." (3-4). This implies that using one's powers can have unknowable consequences. Sylar's original power is intuition—which seems harmless enough—however, using it causes him to break so bad that he becomes a mass murderer.

Besides Sylar, the other great threat in the first season of *Heroes* is Ted Sprague. Ted emits radioactive energy and has the power to explode like a nuclear bomb. Ted's wife dies of radiation poisoning. Out of a misconception that they made him radioactive, Ted blames the Company for his wife's death. Wracked with grief and unable to control his power, Ted pursues the Company, almost exploding several times and ultimately ending up in New York City, where his uncontrolled power threatens to destroy half the city. While Ted's power is dangerous before he goes public, tapping into his anger and trying to change the world almost kills thousands of people. The fact that Ted's motivations are wrong-headed makes the message even clearer: everyday people don't know enough to make the changes they seek in the larger world.

The havoc and death wrought by the evolved characters on *Heroes* stand in stark contrast to the pervasive helpfulness of the 4400 and the X-Men. The X-Men and the 4400 save ordinary people from ordinary problems. The supernatural characters on *Heroes*, on the other hand, are always trying to prevent a disaster which is posed by one of their own. In the first season of *Heroes* there are only three people who are saved

when someone uses their supernatural powers to prevent an ordinary person from an ordinary death (two car accidents and a fire). In contrast, there are more than fifteen ordinary people who die at the hands super-powered characters.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike previous offerings in its genre, *Heroes* is unconcerned with objectifying official forces. Instead, the primary objectifying force is infantilizing parents who encourage their progeny to stay private. Further, central conflicts between characters are often centered on whether they should be public agents trying to save the world or private people maintaining their families. By way of Sylar and Sprague, the narrative suggests that public action is the wrong choice. However, other storylines—such as when Peter saves Claire from Sylar or when Nathan saves New York City from the exploding man—suggest that public action is sometimes required. This reflects a shift away from tensions over who can be a citizen and toward tensions over what citizens ought to do. The next three sections discuss the citizenship discourse on *Heroes* in more depth.

### ***Public Citizenship: A Silly Position or an Adult One?***

One of the main characters on *Heroes* is Claire Bennet. Claire is a fresh-faced girl of fifteen who has just earned a place on the cheerleading team and is struggling to be popular, earn good grades, and stay out of trouble at home. Having discovered that she heals immediately when she is injured, Claire has begun to test the limits of this ability. As she attempts a series of dangerous stunts, she expresses growing discomfort with her supernatural power, often linking it with aspects of adulthood that she is nervous about.

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<sup>5</sup> Niki refers to having killed DL's team, and is known to have killed two of Linderman's goons, the gamblers, the FBI agents, and Aaron (at least 10). Ted accidentally kills his wife (1). Sylar kills his mother, Chandra Suresh, Molly's parents, Molly's guard, and the Company's doctor (6). Isaac kills Simone (1).

Like a teenager just discovering their sexuality, Claire vacillates between finding her power exciting and freakish. Her father seeks to suppress Claire's public use of her power in much the same way that he tries to stifle her desire to date and otherwise be more adult. Through Claire, *Heroes* suggests that powers should be embraced and used publicly; it argues for public citizenship.

When the audience first sees Claire, it is through the viewfinder of her friend's camcorder. Yellow hair blowing in the wind, neatly dressed in her red-and-white cheerleader uniform, Claire is climbing up an abandoned gravel plant. After making sure that her friend on the ground is still filming the scene, Claire jumps from a walkway, falling about 75 feet and landing face down on the hard and dusty earth. With his camera still in hand, her friend runs toward her yelling "Oh my, oh my god! Claire? Oh...my...God. Claire!" As her friend nears her, Claire lifts her head to reveal a cut on her cheek then sits up and, accompanied by crackling noises, pulls a broken arm back into its natural position within her still-clean sweater. Looking directly into the camcorder as the cut on her face slowly heals, she says "This is Claire Bennet and that was attempt number six" (1-1).

This scene happens ten minutes into the series premiere, after the audience has been given sufficient time to acclimate to the visual style on *Heroes*. The show has a very glossy style—camera angles are clear and striking, the color palette is limited and thick with primary colors, faces and action sequences are always in focus and easy to decipher. It is a very precise and beautiful look, patterned in part after comic books. In this polished world, the jumpy, dusty, handheld footage of Claire's 75-foot jump stands

out. It marks her simultaneously as average and important. The visual distinction reflects Claire's internal struggle over her power.

Claire is devastated by her discovery that she has super-powers. To Claire, it seems that the rest of the world has it easy, they live in the glossy richly-colored world, while she lives in the scratched-up dustbowl seen through her friend's viewfinder. In her next scene, which follows closely on the footage of her jumping from the gravel plan, Claire and her friend, Zach, talk about her predicament:

Claire: "I'm so depressed."

Zach: "What? Why? I mean, besides the fact that it was so gross that I almost fudged myself this is like the single coolest thing to happen in this town in like 100 years."

Claire: "Not if nobody finds out, it's not."

Zach: "Why did you want me to tape it?"

Claire: "I have my reasons."

Zach: "It's not like you're not going to be popular anymore"

Claire: "Popular? Who said anything about being popular? My life as I know it is over, okay. I've got the Bishop game next week, SATs in October, homecoming is three weeks from today and I'm a FREAK SHOW!"

Zach: "You are being a little dramatic, don't you think?"

Claire: "No, I don't think! I have busted like every bone in my body, stabbed myself in the chest, I've shoved a 2-foot steel rod through my neck and I don't have a scratch on me!"

About to turn sixteen, starting to think about college, and under the scrutiny of everyone in her school, Claire feels isolated by her indestructibility. Claire, like so many teenagers, is struggling to feel normal. The discovery of her ability to heal and further neuroticized her.

Throughout the season, Claire struggles to see herself as anything other than a "freak show" despite the assurance of multiple other characters that she should embrace and accept power; The Haitian, another person with powers, tells her "What you can do, what I can do, that is God." (1-12) and her adopted mother, upon discovering Claire can heal, hugs her and tells her "I always thought you were a miracle. Didn't know how

much of one until now” (1-17). Still, in the final episodes, after saving many lives—by approaching Ted as he goes nuclear and injecting him with a sedative even as her own flesh melts away—Claire sobs “I’m not normal” and “I ruined everything because of what I am” (1-22, 1-23).

While at times Claire toys with the idea of putting her power to use—saying fanciful things like, “you know, I’ve been thinking that after we save the world, I may go on patrol. You know, jumping in front of bullets and dragging people out of burning buildings” (1-22), by and large, Claire is uncertain of what she wants for herself. She spends much of her time wishing she were normal. Because Claire is a high-schooler, just coming into her own, this desire for normalcy comes off as any teenager’s nostalgia for the simpler days of his or her childhood. Her begrudging attitude towards her power is just another manifestation of her distress over her impending adulthood. Becoming a public citizen is akin to other aspects of adulthood, like understanding one’s sexuality and conquering college entrance exams.

That public citizenship is an acceptable adult position, but one that Claire is just not ready for yet is suggested in the way Claire interacts with her adoptive father, HRG. Dead set against Claire using her power or telling anyone about them, HRG continually tries to keep Claire at home, under his thumb. Claire and HRG have a close relationship and are shown, at times, talking about HRG’s need to accept that Claire is growing up. The following conversation takes place in Claire’s bedroom as she sits on her bed. The bed is covered in teddy bears and stuffed dogs that HRG has given her over the years.

HRG: Is everything alright? We haven’t talking in a while.  
Claire: Actually, there is something.  
HRG: Yeah?



Claire: The bears, my stuffed bears, I think it is time for them to migrate. I'm almost sixteen, Dad. Bears and dogs can't last forever.

HRG: Whether you are sixteen or thirty-two or sixty-four...

Claire: When I'm sixty-four you...

HRG: I will be there for you, always.

Claire: Don't you think it is time I learned to deal with my own problems? (1-13)

This suggests that the problem HRG has with Claire's use of her power is the same as his reluctance to let her date or do other adult things, he insists that he will always take care of her and is saddened when Claire wants to take care of herself.

Later in the season, When HRG reluctantly allows Claire to use her power to take out Ted Sprague, part of his concern is that her heroic act displaces him, HRG, as the protector of the family and head of the household. Again, this suggests that HRG sees public citizenship as adult behavior, not so much a wrong position, as one that Claire is not yet ready tackle.

HRG is depicted in season one as a "company man"—in point of fact, there is an episode focused on him entitled "Company Man." As a company man, HRG is used to unquestioningly carrying out the orders of his bosses (much like an infantile citizen or blind patriot). As an infant, Claire had been found by the Company and then placed in the Bennet family with the understanding that the Company would reclaim her if she developed powers. When HRG begins to fear that the Company knows about Claire's power and will take her away from him, he starts to act against the Company (1-16). This represents a break from his usual submission to orders. Thus, even as HRG begs Claire to be passive and submit to his judgment, he is casting off his own passivity within the Company, where previously he had taken a child-like position. Because this is done in preservation of the nuclear family, it is positioned as almost unquestionably "right"

and therefore offers a hefty counter-weight to parts of the *Heroes* narrative that argue for infantile citizenship.

Becoming more adult in order to protect one's family is markedly different from wishing, abstractly, for powers in order to be "special." There are three characters that are seen wishing for powers before they get them: Sylar, Peter Petrelli, and Hiro Nakamura. While both Peter and Hiro are inherently good, and Sylar is evil, all three men are portrayed as being somewhat childish, girly and silly. Together, they suggest that the practice of public citizenship is innately suspicious, often motivated by a person's need to garner attention and feel special.

In the episode "Six Months Ago," the narrative jumps back to a time before Sylar had killed anyone and was living in Queens, repairing watches for a living. Sylar, still going by his given name of Gabriel Gray, is approached by Chandra Suresh, a geneticist from India who, following DNA migratory patterns and using the human genome project, believes that he has a list of people with superpowers. Sylar's name is on that list and the two men begin a friendship as they try to uncover what Sylar's ability might be.

Throughout this episode, Sylar wears drab, nerdy clothes, walks without confidence, and keeps talking about how excited he is to be on Chandra's list:

When I was a kid, I used to wish some stranger would come and tell me my family wasn't really my family. They weren't bad people, they were just...insignificant ...and I wanted to be different, special. I wanted to change. A new name, a new life. The watchmaker's son became a watchmaker. It is so futile...that I wanted to be important. (1-10)

Sylar, a grown man, expresses this child's view of what it means to be important or special as though he was still that child; he speaks with great yearning. What Sylar says positions the desire to have powers as childish and silly. Sylar's awkward, un-cool appearance reiterates this positioning.

When Sylar actualizes his power, it corrupts him and he takes on a new name and a new life. He leaves watch repair behind and starts travelling the country finding more people with powers in order to kill them and take their powers.<sup>6</sup> As he acquires more powers, Sylar becomes more deranged. The message is clear: power corrupts. In addition to this powerful message is another, one that holds true for Peter and Hiro as well as Sylar: the original desire to be more public was silly.

At the close of the season, when Sylar worries that he is the exploding man and will kill many innocent people, he plays with the idea of returning to Queens, taking his old name, and going back to work in the repair shop. In discussing this with his mother, he frames it in terms of not trying to be special: “Maybe I don't have to be special. That's okay: to be a normal watchmaker. Can't you just tell me that's enough?” he asks his mother. By way of explanation he tells her the following: “If I stayed, maybe I could stop. Maybe I wouldn't have to...” (1-21). This illustrates Sylar's belief that powers confer special-ness; he sees the return to his old life as a return to ordinariness. While Sylar is mostly portrayed as sick and psychopathic, during these quieter scenes, the inherent silliness of his original desire to be special is brought out. During the brief time that HRG holds him captive at the Company, HRG calls Sylar an “insignificant watchmaker,” to which Sylar retorts “I restored time pieces” (1-11). By this time, Sylar has amassed quite an arsenal of supernatural powers and yet he quibbles with HRG over the best way to define his old job. For all of his frightening powers, Sylar remains childish.

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<sup>6</sup> The name Sylar comes from the watch he is working on just before he kills his first victim. This naming seems to be a nod to the Zodiac killer, who was also said to take his name from his watch.

The first time the audience sees Hiro Nakamura, he is sitting in a cubicle, staring at a clock, trying to stop time. Hiro's cubicle is littered with toys and junk food and Hiro is dressed like a school boy, in short shirt sleeves and a plain black tie. When Hiro succeeds in pausing time, causing the clock and everyone in the office to freeze for an instant, he raises his puffy arms over his head and squeals with delight, "I did it!" He then skips along the row of cubicles, chattering excitedly (1-1). This positioning of Hiro as a child pervades his story, his body language is very bouncy and he often has to hide in small places to avoid trouble.

Hiro is also portrayed as having a child-like view of the world. He is full of wonder and exuberance. After an episode in which Hiro sees Nathan fly (1-4), Hiro always greets Nathan by putting his hands in a superman pose and yelling, "flying man!" This portrayal of Hiro's silliness is enhanced by the fact that through most of the first season Hiro speaks only in baby English. Usually speaking in Japanese, but slowly learning English as he travels around the United States, Hiro is seen saying things like, "You are bad person!" (1-15) And, "You are like me: special. Why do you want to hurt other special people?" (1-20). In addition, Hiro requires a lot of guidance as he goes, relying heavily on the comic book artist who can paint the future in order to know what steps to take next. Hiro carries a comic book with him through the first few episodes, even using it to decide what car he should rent (1-4). Hiro is motivated by a personal desire to be like his favorite storybook character, he is silly and constantly needing direction and help. Inasmuch as Hiro is a likeable character, he is not one that the audience would be expected to emulate.

In the beginning of season one, Peter is 27 and works as a hospice nurse. He has a slight build and floppy haircut. At night, Peter has dreams in which he can fly. Believing in these dreams, he tries to exercise this power (1-1). Peter seeks out his broad-shouldered brother, Nathan, to talk about the dreams he has had; Nathan, who is running for Congress, tries to put Peter off of his quest, instructing him not to "pull a Roger Clinton on me" (1-1). Peter doggedly pursues power, even ending up in the hospital after jumping from a building, trying to get his power to kick in. After Peter's hospitalization is made public, Nathan tells the press that Peter attempted suicide, equating Peter's quest with a sickness (1-3). Peter eventually discovers that he doesn't have one power, but many, he absorbs them empathically just by being around people with powers. Nathan, the more masculine brother, who has been belittling Peter's idea of having superpowers, is the person who has given him the ability to fly. This suggests that the appropriate, masculine attitude towards power is simply having and concealing them; it is childish, feminine, and dangerous to try to acquire power and use it publicly.

Peter's access to his powers is through emotions. In the episode "Distractions," Peter attaches himself to an angry, invisible man who seems to know how Peter's powers work. The invisible man tells Peter that he has got to cut his ties with his family: "You worry a lot about your people, don't you? Your friends, your mother, your brother, no wonder your head's all clogged, you are still sunk under" (1-14). However, as it turns out, Peter's powers are accessed through feelings, as he discovers when remembering Claire causes his wounds to heal: "You were wrong!" he tells the invisible man, "I don't have to cut her out, I have to remember her, how she made me feel!" (1-14). Even after figuring how to access his powers, Peter cannot control them and is often overwhelmed

by them; he faints repeatedly (1-11, 1-23), and has a tremendous amount of trouble controlling the power to go nuclear (1-21, 1-22, 1-23). “I love Peter,” his mother says in the season finale, “but that poor kid can barely get out of his own way. He is ruled by insecurities, he's weak” (1-23). Peter’s powers, as they are accessed through emotion, are feminized. Peter himself is feminized and infantilized by the powers as they cause him to faint and even render him comatose for several weeks. Again this casts the public use of powers in a negative light.

However, Peter is continually proven “right” by the narrative on *Heroes* and, along with Claire, is one of the main characters. Peter is one of the first characters to understand that Isaac is painting pictures of the future and to use the information in the paintings to save a life (he saves Claire). His brother, Nathan, while having a hegemonic masculinity, is seen being corrupt, unkind, and unfaithful to his wife; as such, it is not always clear that the Peter/Nathan dichotomy breaks in Nathan’s favor. Outside of the narrative of *Heroes*, in the promotional materials for the show, Peter is portrayed as essential to saving the world. The marketing campaign for *Heroes* used the catchphrase, “Save the cheerleader; save the world,” it is Peter who is destined to save the cheerleader, Claire, (a character from the future tells him to) and so the audience understands that Peter is right to continually push himself and try to master his powers. Thus, *Heroes* is far from unequivocal in its dismissal of Peter’s practice of citizenship.

### ***Private Citizenship: Beautiful Homes and Overbearing Parents***

The *Heroes* narrative continually suggests that life in the public sphere is dangerous, that knowledge of the world is risky, that attempts at helping strangers

actually hurts them, and that people who want to ‘make a difference’ are silly. However, while the show fails to endorse public citizenship, it doesn’t embrace private citizenship either.

Dimensions of the citizenship treatment associated with lighting are obscured on *Heroes* by the show’s preference for treating spaces, not people, to differential lighting. The home is marked as a special space is by lighting. As previously mentioned, the palette of *Heroes* relies on primary colors. In public spaces, this palette is accompanied by an abundance of ominous blue-black shadows. In some homes, the light is a sickly olive green. But in the homes of happy nuclear families like Claire and HRG’s, the light is golden and radiant.

The family home is also a realm in which powers can be safely exercised. Outside of the home, the use of powers leads to negative consequences; after Claire saves a man from a fire, a newspaper story of the event puts her in Sylar’s path (1-1, 1-9). When a police officer uses his ability to read minds to try to prevent a series of crimes, he ends up being kicked off of the force (1-13). In contrast, Claire takes a bullet for her mother with no negative consequences (1-17), and the mind-reading police officer uses his ability to read minds to make his sorrowful wife happy again (1-10).

More significantly, however, as we learn from seeing Sylar in a possible future where he has a son, the making of a nuclear family can redeem you (3-4). When we first see Sylar in this possible future, he is calm, composed and self-assured. Sylar bathes in the golden light, making waffles for his son and petting him affectionately. As soon as the son dies (collateral damage in a battle), Sylar returns to his old ways, immediately exploding like a nuclear bomb—killing more than 40,000 people (3-4).

Through Claire, *Heroes* makes it clear that the world is a dangerous place and that “going public” only multiplies that danger. Despite being able to heal from almost injury, Claire is continually depicted as fragile and imperiled. In the second episode, Claire’s neck is accidentally broken as she walks near a football practice. In the third episode, Claire is almost raped and in trying to get away from her attacker falls backwards onto a branch, which impales her through the head. Claire only recovers when the doctor performing her autopsy removes the branch. The implication is clear: the world is a dangerous place and it is only by some genetic accident that Claire survives these assaults—audience members facing the same situation wouldn’t be so lucky.

Through Claire’s relationship with her adoptive father, HRG, we learn that knowledge of the outside world is as dangerous as action. Thus not only is it suggested to the audience that they shouldn’t act in the public sphere, but also that learning about their world is a dangerous act. Through his position at the Company, HRG knows a fair amount about people with superpowers. HRG knows Sylar, the serial killer, and he also knows that the Company kills some people with powers, if it deems them to dangerous. However, instead of sharing this knowledge in his efforts to protect Claire and the rest of his family, he continually deceives, inveigles, and obfuscates.

HRG is aided in this effort by the Haitian, his partner at the company, who has the ability to erase memories and block other’s ability to use their powers. Since HRG’s job at the Company is a secret (his cover is that he is a regional manager at a paper company); HRG must have the Haitian erase his wife’s and children’s memories whenever they discover evidence of his double life or start to question the number of “paper emergencies” that have him running out of town.



Halfway through the season, we learn that Mrs. Bennet's memory has been altered so many times that she has begun to exhibit symptoms of dementia. Yet, after Sylar attacks Mrs. Bennet in his efforts to find Claire, HRG asks the Haitian to remove the memory; this lands Mrs. Bennet in the hospital (1-14; 1-16). Claire, infuriated at her father for his part in her mom's illness, gets into an argument with him at the hospital, during which HRG says "Your mother is a gentle soul and people like her shouldn't have to know about people like [Sylar]" (1-16). HRG believes that not only should people be kept from knowing about villains with superpowers, but anyone with superpowers: "They can't know...people are fragile—like teacups" (1-17). To protect his wife, HRG ends up almost killing her. Clearly, maintaining Mrs. Bennet's infantile position and protecting the nuclear family is dangerous.

When Claire needs to go into hiding, HRG asks the Haitian to remove all of his memories of discovering Claire's powers and sending her away (1-17). As part of the cover up, HRG has the Haitian shoot him in the gut and then go deep into HRG's memory to take out anything that may lead the Company to Claire. Again, this shows that familial relationships can be a liability. Even a father's knowledge of his daughter can be dangerous.

As it turns out, Claire's biological father is Nathan Petrelli. When HRG sends Claire into hiding, she defies his plan for her and heads instead to New York City, seeking her biological family. Still feeling like a 'freak show,' Claire is hoping that her biological family will soothe her, make her feel normal and give her somewhere to belong. In looking for Peter and Nathan, Claire finds their mother, Angela.

Like HRG, Angela continually infantilizes her family members. Even though her sons are grown and no longer live at home, she is constantly summoning them to her and telling them what to do, often working behind the scenes to force their hands. When Claire arrives, she tells her that neither Nathan nor Peter is in a position to help her and Angela is prepared to take Claire away without telling Nathan that his daughter wants to see him.

Angela is continually portrayed as a bad person. Having the ability to see the future via dreams, Angela knows that a nuclear man will explode in New York City. She has enough advance warning and political capital to help avert the disaster, but Angela does not try to stop the explosion. Rather, she plans on evacuating the area and taking her family with her. Angela believes that the explosion, if allowed to happen, will have political benefit for Nathan, who has just been elected to Congress.

Angela is also portrayed as a bad mother. At one point, Peter appears to have been killed by Sylar. Angela's reaction to her son's death is much cooler than Claire's, even though Claire had only met her uncle once. Angela tells Nathan that they will have to hide Peter's death until after the election; she is cold and calculating even minutes after even as Peter's apparently dead body is delivered to her home.

In the final episodes, Claire and a revived Peter join forces with HRG and a handful of other characters to try to stop the exploding man. They discover that Angela knows who the exploding man might be, but wants the bomb to go off. Claire and Peter head to Nathan's office to warn him. It turns out, however, that Nathan knows about the explosion and is planning on doing what his mother has demanded—evacuating without a word to anyone else. As Claire and Peter argue with Nathan, Angela appears, and then

Peter gets separated from the rest of the family; Peter ends up fainting on the streets of New York City.

Meanwhile, Claire has been cornered by Angela and Nathan. They try to persuade Claire to evacuate with them. Angela tells her that she'll have everything she ever wanted—a family, a place to belong. To escape them, Claire must throw herself out of the window of Nathan's office building. She falls several stories to the pavement, where her body shatters on the pavement. Claire then heals, gets up, and runs off to see if she can stop the nuclear man. Obviously, the audience is expected to side with Claire and Peter in this showdown, since they want to prevent the deaths of tens of thousands of New Yorkers. Claire is willing to hurtle herself out of a window to escape the clutches of her ill-intentioned, infantilizing family members and the audience knows that she is right to do so. The necessity of Claire's painful fall as well as putting Angela and Nathan, allegorically on the wrong side of both 9/11 (an explosion in New York) and Hurricane Katrina (taking oneself to safety without offering help to others) offers a stunning condemnation of private citizenship.

### ***Conclusion***

In its emphasis on citizenship roles rather than the classic genre fixation on civil rights, *Heroes* embodies a post-Katrina shift. However, the text does not universally endorse public citizenship roles. Instead, the text meditates on the dangers taken on or created when ordinary people (even those with extraordinary powers) become public citizens. While *Heroes* portrays objectifying, infantilizing characters negatively, therein denouncing private citizenship, the show also belittles those characters with explicit

desires to make a difference and be of service. The first season of *Heroes* seems to capture, more than anything else, a moment of cultural ambivalence wherein the old private citizenship forms have been rejected, but more public versions of citizenship seem dangerous and silly.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion: Audaciously Public Citizenship

On Christmas Day of 2009, a passenger on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 lit an explosive device that he had smuggled aboard in his underwear. The explosives proved faulty and the bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, was quickly restrained by passengers and the flight crew. A few days later, President Barack Obama held a press conference in which he commended the service of those who helped save flight 253 and criticized the failures of intelligence and security personnel that had failed to stop Abdulmutallab from boarding the plane with explosives. In a column about the attempted bombing and President Obama's response, Maureen Dowd (January 10, 2010) wrote "[Obama is] so sure of himself and his actions that he fails to see that he misses the moment to be President--to be the strong father who protects the home from invaders, who reassures and instructs the public at traumatic moments." Dowd, in pining for Obama to act like a "strong father," pines to be treated as an infantile citizen, or at least insists that others do. But instead of being appeased and instructed, Dowd finds herself consulted, informed, and treated like an adult. For this, she slams Obama, "it's not okay to be cool about national security when Americans are scared." In Dowd's column, we find a clash between two visions of American citizenship. Dowd claims to seek refuge in the infantile, private citizenship form that had dominated from the Reagan years. Obama hails the American audience as active, public citizens.

American media regularly contain meditations on citizenship and clashes between competing citizenship forms. While scholars have examined moments in which citizenship surfaces, sustained analysis of the discursive flows are lacking. Thus, the tools scholars can use for identifying moments in which citizenship is being worked on and the methods the media employ in speaking to citizenship have remained largely unexplored. Mapping this territory allows the scholar to more readily dissect citizenship discourse by providing for its detection and then demonstrating how to analyze it. As this analysis allows the scholar to capture the variable discourse of citizenship, it opens the door to testing the effects of particular news stories, political speeches, and other mediated texts which speak to citizenship. It also allows the individual to more readily understand themselves as potential subjects of the discourse, thus enabling them to reject formulations that do not hold with their values.

In this dissertation, I have traced the discourse on American citizenship from 2001 to 2010, through news and fictional programming, and using analytical tools culled from a variety of disciplines. In doing so, I have identified three ways in which the discourse of citizenship can announce itself within a text:

1. The first complex includes interactions of characters (whether fictional or actual) with agents of the state (broadly defined), including such varied institutions as the fire department, public schools, poll workers, and border patrols. This complex includes engagements with the more formal aspects of citizenship, including basic issues related to passports and voting rights, but also the right to be protected by police and access to resources such as education. This complex is related, theoretically, to the concept of “governmentality” developed by Foucault (1991).

The notion of governmentality draws attention to the many institutions that govern and subject individuals in relation to the state. Ong (1999) built upon Foucault's concept when she referred to teachers, police officers, and other agents of the state as "vectors of adjudication" who can recognize or reject the citizenship rights of individuals in everyday interactions.

In *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, city officials recognize the citizenship of the makeover recipients as they fast-track building permits. When, in Katrina news, police officers and members of the National Guard point their weapons at the people waiting outside the Convention Center, they are rejecting their citizenship.

2. The second complex contains a variety of elements associated with the nation's myths about itself, including popular ideas about the nation's history, shared traditions, and typical way of life. Nationalism studies have pointed out the fictional foundations of many national histories. They have demonstrated that many traditions which are considered inherently "American" (or "Scottish" et cetera) are recent formulations which are selected from a wide array of options and then invested with emotional power and treated as if they are eternal and natural (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). In sociology these might be called "charter myths." Ideas about what is inherently or ideally American create criteria for belonging beyond those that the state establishes (Ong, 1999, p.264). This complex is related to the concept of "cultural citizenship" as it is defined by Ong (1999): "cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that

establish the criteria for belonging within a national population and territory” (p. 264).<sup>1</sup> This second complex comes into play through evocation of symbols which have been connected to the nation through cultural work: landscapes and scenes which have become iconic for America (farms and picket fences), activities which are held out as especially American (barbeques and surfing), lifestyles which are known tropes of Americana (marrying one’s opposite-sex high-school sweetheart, owning one’s own business), and attitudes that are treated as inherently American (belief in a better future, desire to work hard).

*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* embeds makeover recipients in many elements of this complex. For example, the Elcanos were high-school sweethearts and business owners, living on and working a farm that had been in their family for generations. In news coverage of Katrina, the media portrayed the people of New Orleans as non-citizens by emphasizing the strangeness of the flooded city and describing New Orleans as looking “otherworldly” or like they are from “third world.” On *Heroes*, Claire Bennet’s status as a cheerleader and homecoming queen marks her as all-American.

3. The third complex includes phrases such as “my fellow Americans” as well as symbols like the flag, which might cue either the nation or the state (or another whole) depending on context and use. As Billig (1995) asserted, what matters here is that people can be reminded of “their national place” by such mundane

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on cultural citizenship is vast. Ong’s definition points to process of exclusion and inclusion in citizenship based on cultural criteria, as well as the product of these negotiations: ever-changing criteria. Other scholars, most notably Renato Rosaldo, define cultural citizenship as a set of activist practices which push an ever-widening set cultural acts and artifacts into the public sphere.



words and images (p. 8). As such, scholars should be mindful of banal images like maps and words like “us” or “we” which can signal the presence of citizenship discourse.

These complexes alone do not necessarily speak to citizenship, but when paired with ideas about desirable conduct and lifestyles, they can contribute to the ever-transforming citizenship discourse. The complexes provide an effective guide for the analyst seeking to uncover citizenship discourse.

My analysis of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, and *Heroes* revealed a set of privileges that were extended to only some individuals at some times. Where these privileges are accompanied by indicators of citizenship discourse, I have called this mode of discursive address “the citizen treatment.” The citizen treatment reveals not only who is considered a citizen, but also what citizenship form is being idealized. An individual getting the citizen treatment is heard by the microphones and seen clearly by the camera (being both well-lit and shot in close-ups or mid-shots); their ideas and version of events are given voice, their perspective frames information and they are allowed to direct the camera’s attention. In addition, their status as a citizen is reinforced by any engagements with the three complexes of citizenship identified earlier: they are respected by agents of the state; portrayed as existing within cultural ideas about what is normal, ideal, or iconic for the nation; and they are included within any national “we”s offered within the narrative.

This dissertation has presented an evolution in a particular dimension of citizenship discourse: that which describes the citizen’s proper stance towards the state and within the public sphere. I documented a shift away from private citizenship forms

(which value docile, unengaged people) towards a public citizenship form (which values active, knowledgeable people). In the early chapters, I document the celebration of individuals who embody private citizenship forms. In the era immediately following 9/11, few representations of public citizenship surfaced and those who exemplified this active, questioning form were not afforded the citizen treatment in the news or entertainment programs examined. In my analysis of Hurricane Katrina news, I documented a dramatic shift in citizenship discourse. In early reports, the media excluded the poor black residents of New Orleans from citizenship and celebrated the citizenship of the affluent New Orleans residents who had evacuated; later reports not only extended citizenship to the poor black people of New Orleans, but shifted away from the idealization of private citizenship, toward the idealization of public citizenship. Early reports treated the poor, black residents of New Orleans as non-citizen objects, while later reports forcefully asserted their citizenship. In the chapter analyzing *Heroes*, a changed discourse is found, one that allows for representations of public citizenship even as it celebrates private citizenship.

Future work on citizenship discourse should seek to uncover the general conditions that precipitate a shift in idealized forms. In the chapter on Hurricane Katrina, I trace the shift in representation to a particular set of circumstances: journalistic norms had fallen apart in the absence of officials, the human tragedy took place in the streets where it was easy to see, and the complete bungling of the government's rescue efforts went on for so long that it was impossible to deny the severity of the situation. As a case study, coverage of Katrina suggests that only extreme circumstances can cause a shift in discourse. However, it is possible that citizenship practices are usually more flexible.

Katrina struck just a few years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11—a time in which conformity to a passive nationalist norm was all but required. While I suspect that American culture will always be more likely to foster private citizenship forms than public ones, the post-9/11 ethos likely created extra barriers to change. In the future, should citizenship discourse slide towards private citizenship, the circumstances that jar it back into the public sphere may not need to be so dramatic.

A media that is independent of the state, both in terms of ownership and ideas is almost certainly required if American citizenship discourse hopes to foster publicness. The journalistic routine of indexing, wherein the media operate as unquestioning transmitters of government spin removes the media from the ‘between’ space of the public sphere. If the news media cannot keep themselves in the public sphere, how can they expect to foster public citizenship (which keeps acts of citizenship in the public sphere)?

In 2008, Americans elected Barack Obama to the Presidency. The election was notable for many reasons, among them the grassroots nature of Obama’s campaign and Obama’s strong stance on public service and critical patriotism. From early in the campaign, Obama openly rejected the sort of blind patriotism and docile, infantile citizenship that had been fostered in previous decades. This rejection was embodied by his abstaining from wearing the American flag as a lapel-pin and his oft-given explanation of his doing so: “The truth is that right after 9/11 I had a pin,” Obama said in a 2007 interview. “Shortly after 9/11, particularly because as we’re talking about the Iraq war, that became a substitute for I think true patriotism, which is speaking out on issues

that are of importance to our national security” (Glover, 2007). Thus, Obama rejected passivity as a viable form of citizenship and advocated instead for action and thought.

As President, Obama has continued to foster public citizenship, imploring the American people to work for change and stay involved with their government. In the 2010 State of the Union address, he said, “I campaigned on the promise of change -- change we can believe in, the slogan went. And right now, I know there are many Americans who aren't sure if they still believe we can change -- or that I can deliver it. But remember this -- I never suggested that change would be easy, or that I could do it alone.” In the speech he went on to celebrate the American spirit and the fundamental decency of the American people, which he said, in reference to a devastating earthquake in Haiti: “...it lives on in all the Americans who've dropped everything to go someplace they've never been and pull people they've never known from the rubble, prompting chants of ‘U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A!’ when another life was saved.” Even the first major initiative sponsored by First Lady Michelle Obama is about getting active: “Let’s Move” is a campaign to end childhood obesity.

As work in political science and political psychology has moved beyond documenting the occurrence of “rally ‘round the flag” phenomena and moved toward researching the processes through which rallies occur, they should attend to the discourse of citizenship. In one post-9/11 quasi-experiment, exposure to Bush’s speech on the evening of the attacks contributed significantly to American’s response (Schubert, Stewart & Curran, 2002).<sup>2</sup> This line of research would be enriched by analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> Researchers did not find a significant effect for media exposure. However, since they weren’t able to compare people who had experienced 9/11 via the news media to people who had experienced it directly, this just indicates that the effect of 9/11 news doesn’t vary significantly

citizenship discourse, as would work in social identity theory that emphasizes group members' shared understandings of themselves (see Hopkins, 2001 and Turner, 1999).

Across the political spectrum, Americans have taken up the public citizenship form. As Obama enacted his more progressive policies, conservative and libertarian Americans took to the streets to protest tax cuts and then health care reform in what they called "Tea Parties." The American news media, who for decades had ignored or downplayed political protests (Nichols & McChesney, 2005), broadcast the "tea parties" and afforded the protesters the citizen treatment.

Citizenship discourse in the America of 2010 is much-altered from that of 2001. After 9/11, docile, obedient, infantile citizens dominated media portrayals of ideal citizenship; now, active, questioning, adult citizens garner attention and esteem. As Dowd's column illustrates, citizenship discourse continues to be a contested realm; some Americans long for the comfort of infantile citizenship forms while others revel in the opportunities afforded them by public citizenship. Shifting and competing ideas about citizenship will continue to be reflected in and affected by the stories told by entertainment media. This dissertation has chronicled almost a decade of change and provided the tools and vocabulary for continued analysis of citizenship discourse.

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with the amount of exposure. Given the dramatic nature of the events and the cohesiveness of news coverage, this is expected.

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