THIS I BELIEVE: A SORT OF NATIONAL ANTHEM

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For Alfred and Sophia

**

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Abstract

This study explores how a weekly audience-participation program called This I Believe, which broadcast from 2005 to 2009 on National Public Radio’s most popular news programs, provides its listeners with an ‘American’ national identity by which to see themselves, others, and the world during the historical moment surrounding the Bush administration. This I Believe is used as a case study because its essays on personal belief offer insight into the articulation and formation of the subjectivity of its liberal audience, whilst the programs’ stated goal to promote a national dialogue about the common good provides an understanding of the construction and reproduction of nationalist discourses. Conceptualizing national identity as a socially constructed category and performance, and the ‘nation’ as constituted through narration and acts of imagination, this study analyzes texts for understanding how the national subject is (re)produced within discourse.

Analyzing nearly sixty essays, I reveal how the essayists employ a “liberal-style” of national power, drawing on liberal ideals of citizenship and state organization to articulate the ‘nation,’ shape national imaginaries, and sustain the fantasy of the “White nation.” I show how by claiming that the public sphere is in crisis, corrupted by commercial, political, and religious interests, This I Believe offers to assist its listeners in reclaiming their voice and privileged national position within the ‘nation.’ I describe how the essayists’ ideas of neighbors, home, security, freedom, terrorism, and tolerance do the work of reproducing nationalist structures of thought and help to reconstitute the national identities of the This I Believe audience. I contend that This I Believe is part of a larger liberal response to the conservative hegemony over morality. I argue that liberalism is the morally resonant discourse for the listeners of This I Believe and show how the election of President Obama legitimated liberal ideals of the inclusivity of the nation and the success of citizenship. I conclude that the redemption President Barack Obama offered was symbolic only, because the liberal ideas he embraces fail to acknowledge the structural inequalities which shape national belonging and place the responsibility for social change onto the already marginalized.
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1. Introduction: “We Don’t Have Earlids”

Benedict Anderson argued that the most pivotal development for the emergence of the “imagined community” of nationalism was the communicative technology of the newspaper. This daily shared ritual of reading, and the communication this fostered, helped to form people into ‘citizens’ through its ability to forge a sense of “deep, horizontal comradeship” with unseen others, as well as to provide a concrete representation of the nascent ‘nation,’ including its spatial and social limits, as well as its history (Anderson, 1983: 7). Such a sense of national communion was only expanded with the development of radio, which through its use of sound, its expanded geographic scope, and its simultaneity, “outstripped anything the newspaper had been able to do in terms of nation building on a psychic, imaginative level” (Douglas, 2004: 24). Benedict Anderson agreed that “radio made it possible to …summon into being an aural representation of the imagined community where the printed page scarcely penetrated” (1983:54). Marshall McLuhan called radio “the tribal drum” which engendered a sense of community, which he claimed, was not unlike “the ancient experience of kinship webs” (1964: 263). This I Believe host Jay Allison recognizes this special quality of the radio, explaining:

“I think that there is something so disarming about hearing someone and hearing them on the radio and they sneak past your defenses and you can’t help but sense them as human beings. You know, we don’t have earlids, I always say, and it leaves us a little bit vulnerable to ambush by the emotion that’s contained in another person’s voice” (Fresh Air, 2006).

Listened to in the home or in the car, national radio broadcasting tries to “link the national public into the private lives of its citizens, through the creation of both sacred and quotidian moments of national communion” (Morley, 2000: 107). Tacchi argues that “radio stimulates the imagination, and imagination gives substance to sound, and sound can be seen to give substance, in its materiality, to relations between self and others”

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1 The term ‘nation’ is placed in inverted commas to signify that it is a problematic analytic term which reifies the idea that there are natural and objective communities of people based in cultural and linguistic variations. This term ignores the historical processes of nationalization through which the ‘nation’ is socially, politically, economically, and ideologically constructed and contested. For ease of reading, the inverted commas will be only be used for the first usage of the term.
Nationality and nationhood depends upon such acts of imagining a particular style of community formation, because although most of a nation’s members will never actually meet one another, “yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983:6).

Through these qualities of the medium, “radio lend[s] itself to association with ideas of nation, of national identity, and, significantly, constructs the affective dimension of ‘the heart and mind of America,’ its ‘soul’” (Hilmes, 1997:1). Radio, particularly network radio, has been historically influential in national identity-building by constructing both national unity and difference, through the experience of multiple identities, “some of them completely allied with the countries’ prevailing cultural and political ideologies, others of them suspicious of or at odds with official culture” (Douglas, 2004: 24). This study seeks to answer the question: how does what is considered the only media network friendly to liberal voices in the U.S., *National Public Radio* (*NPR*), provide its listeners with an ‘American’ national identity by which to see themselves, others, and the world? A weekly audience-participation program called *This I Believe*, which broadcast from 2005 to 2009 on NPRs most popular news programs, is used as a case study because its essays on personal belief offer insight into the articulation and formation of the subjectivity of its liberal audience, whilst the programs stated goal to promote a national dialogue about the common good provides an understanding of the construction and reproduction of nationalist discourses.

This study seeks to explore how *This I Believe* facilitates the (re)production of national identity, the management of national belonging, and the articulation of discourses of nationalism during the historical moment surrounding the Bush administration when its unique audience sought a media format which would give

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2 By liberal, I refer to people who embrace liberalism, a system of thought associated with modernity which challenged the philosophical, economic, cultural, and political structures of the feudal order. Liberalism is characterized by such distinctive features as individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, and meliorism (Gray, 1986).

3 The terms ‘America’ and ‘American’ are placed in inverted commas to signify that they are problematic analytic terms which reify the idea that there is a supposedly homogenous nation for whom state practices are carried out. These terms ignore the complex separations, exclusions, and inequalities through which national inclusion is structured and fail to recognize the power of the state as a system of rule. The United States’ exclusive claim as “Americans” is additionally problematic for many outside of the United States, particularly in “Latin America,” who also identify as “Americans.”
‘public’ voice to their private values, and provide an opportunity for civic engagement. Conceptualizing national identity as a socially constructed category and performance, and the nation as constituted through narration and acts of imagination, this study analyzes texts for understanding how the national subject is (re)produced within discourse. This study employs a Foucaultian discursive analysis, with its emphasis on denaturalizing social categories, to reveal how power/knowledge is embedded in and enacted through radio broadcasts. The answer this dissertation offers is that This I Believe produces national subjects and shapes the ideological boundaries of the nation by arguing that the public sphere is in crisis, corrupted by commercial, political, and religious interests, and offers to assist its listeners in reclaiming their voice and privileged national position by drawing on resonant ideas based in liberal philosophy to bring its listeners back into the American nation-building project.

1.1 History and Background of This I Believe

In April 2005, a short radio segment called This I Believe (TIB) began airing weekly on the two most listened to shows on National Public Radio’s (NPR) news programs: Morning Edition and All Things Considered. On This I Believe, one ‘American’ each week read aloud a three-minute essay that he or she had written about his or her personal beliefs. This I Believe was a throwback to an earlier radio program of the same name which broadcast from 1951-1955 on Philadelphia’s WCAU during the height of McCarthyism and the Red Scare, and was hosted by Edward R. Murrow. Soon after its initial broadcast, the 1950’s program was airing “at least once daily during the week and sometimes two or more times on the weekends,” on some 196 of CBS’s radio station affiliates throughout the nation (Allison and Gediman, 2006: 266).

The This I Believe series then expanded beyond the borders of its radio format and spilled onto the pages of more than ninety newspapers across the country. In 1952, the first compilation of essays was published along with a companion record set, both of

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4 The term ‘public’ is placed in inverted commas to signify that it is a problematic analytic term which reifies the idea that there is a single ‘public’ that is egalitarian and equally accessible, rather than structured by inequalities and exclusions. The term also legitimates democratic forms of government, through the idea that the state rules on behalf of the national ‘public’ and in the ‘public interest’ or ‘common good.’
which were bestsellers (Morgan, 1952). Not long after, *This I Believe* was being translated into six languages for broadcast on *Voice of America*\(^5\) The series was picked up by the *British Broadcasting Corporation*, resulting in another published compilation of essays in 1953 written by both ‘American’ and ‘British’ authors (Morgan, 1953). In 1954, “there was even an Arabic book, featuring a similar mix of American and Middle Eastern authors, which sold thirty thousand copies in Cairo in just three days” (Allison and Gediman, 2006: 266). The same year in 1954, a sequel to the first *This I Believe* book was released in the U.S. (Swing, 1954). Despite the popularity of the *This I Believe* series, it was abruptly cancelled in 1955 due to the death of its creator and sole funder, Ward Wheelock.

While the show might have ended, its cultural legacy lived on, as local radio stations continued to air old essays, classrooms continued to use the books as teaching tools, and as late as 1980, Steve Martin was able to open *Saturday Night Live* with a parody of *This I Believe* (*SNLTranscripts*, 2013). With one exception, a published book collection of *This I Believe* essays by “prominent” ‘Australians’ (Marsden, 1996), by the turn of the century, *This I Believe* had seemingly disappeared into obscurity. That is until its recent reappearance in April 2005 on *NPR*, following current *This I Believe* producer Dan Gediman’s discovery on March 2003 of a 1952 edition of *This I Believe* while at home sick with the flu. Launched during another national crisis of restrictions to free speech and violence against the enemy within, *This I Believe* was conceptualized as a project perceived to have modern resonance.

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\(^5\) The *Voice of America* (VOA) is the official external broadcast institution of the government of the United States. Voice of America was established in 1939 during the propaganda battles of World War II and operated by the Office of War Information. In 1945 Voice of America was transferred to the Department of State During the Cold War and used to fight the propaganda of the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. In 1953 Voice of America was transferred to the newly formed United States Information Agency (USIA) whose mission was to keep the world favorably informed about the lifestyle and citizens of the United States (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2005; Uttero, 1982). Currently Voice of America operates under the International Broadcasting Bureau and is overseen by the Broadcasting Board of Governors whose mission is to “inform, engage and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy” (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2013a). The Voice of America now reaches an estimated audience of 141 million weekly by radio (shortwave, FM, AM and satellite), television (satellite and cable), and Internet in 43 languages (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2013b).
The contemporary *This I Believe* series is independently produced by Dan Gediman and John Gregory. Dan Gediman has worked in public broadcasting for more than 20 years and won many prestigious awards ("The People Behind *This I Believe,*” 2013). Jay Allison was the series host and curator until the show left *NPR* in 2009. He is well-known in public radio, having “created hundreds of documentaries, essays, and specials for national and international broadcast” over the last 25 years and having won “virtually every major industry award for his productions and collaborations” ("The People Behind the New *This I Believe,*” 2013). Other significant people include project manager John Gregory, Outreach Coordinator Mary Jo Gediman, and from 2005-2009 Senior Editors Ellen Silva and Viki Merrick, Submission Editors from Atlantic Public Media Sydney Lewis, Helen Woodward, and Melissa Robbins, as well as Associate Editor Emily Botein, Associate Producer Amy Fisher, Photographer Nubar Alexanian, and Composer Georg Brandl Egloff ("The People Behind *This I Believe,*” 2013; “The People Behind the New *This I Believe,*” 2013).

*This I Believe* solicits about half of the essays by commission and selected the other half from email and online submissions. The selection committee is divided evenly between people from *NPR* and people from *This I Believe.* For the solicitations, the committee claims to attempt to “represent the country and offer diversity,” so they try to have a variety of “work, age, geography, gender, ethnicity, and religion” (Gediman, 2006). For the public essays, a group of people in West Falmouth, Massachusetts sorted through the email submissions every day. If three of the people in this group agree that an essay is good, then it is sent to the senior staff, and if they like it, it goes through an editorial process in which notes are given to the writer, and subsequent drafts are requested until it is deemed acceptable. The essay writing guidelines are listed on the website, and instruct the writer to “tell a story,” “be brief,” “name your belief,” “be positive,” and “be personal” ("Guidelines,” 2013). In addition to following these directions, Gediman emphasizes that the essays must be about beliefs.6

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6 He distinguishes essays on belief from essays which are “opinions,” or “vignettes/stories about their lives,” or “things hoped for.” The essay must of course be well-enough written, but more importantly he expressed that it must be “moving,” “inspirational” or “thought-provoking.” Gediman explains that *TIB* wants to feature different beliefs or different presentations of beliefs, and not have “five essays in a row be
This I Believe has been successful at expanding its reach beyond NPR. Since its first broadcast in 2005, This I Believe has gone on to publish a collection of essays in book and audiobook forms in October 2006 and went on a seven-city tour promoting this book. It ranked among Amazon.com’s “Top 50 Books of 2006.” The program has won two prestigious awards: in June 2006 a Webby Award\(^7\) and in October 2006 a Gabriel Award.\(^8\) This I Believe is also being used in a variety of institutional formats: “teachers in middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities; in hospices all across the nation; and by a psychologist in a maximum security prison” (This I Believe, Inc. March 2006). This I Believe has produced discussion manuals tailored to the needs of different audience segments (This I Believe, Inc. March 2006). This I Believe also sold a companion, a This I Believe journal for drafting personal essays. In September 2008 This I Believe published a second book collection of essays and again went on a thirteen-city tour to promote the book. There have been additional collections: This I Believe: Life Lessons (Gediman, Gediman, & Gregory, 2011); This I Believe: On Love (Gediman, Gediman, & Gregory, 2012); This I Believe: On Motherhood (Gediman, Gediman, & Gregory, 2010) with a companion CD collection A Mother’s Gift; This I Believe: On Fatherhood (Gediman, Gediman, & Gregory, 2011); Edward R. Murrow’s This I Believe: Selections from the 1950s Radio Series (Gediman, Gediman, & Gregory, 2009) with two companion CD collections.

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about love of country or stick-to-it-iveness or self-discipline” (Gediman, 2006). Gediman also states that the essay must be engaging enough to sustain audience attention for three minutes on the radio.

\(^7\) Established in 1996, the Webby Awards is the leading international award honoring excellence on the Internet presided over by The International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, whose members include musician David Bowie, Internet Co-inventor Vint Cerf, President and Editor-in-Chief of Huffington Post Media Group Arianna Huffington, Twitter Co-founder Biz Stone, Chairman and Founder of R/GA Bob Greenberg, Co-Founder of Instagram Kevin Systrom, Executive Creative Director at Google Lab, Iain Tait, Mozilla CEO and Chair Mitchell Baker, Tumblr Founder David Karp. The 2013 Webby Awards received 11,000 entries from over 60 countries honoring excellence in Websites, Interactive Advertising & Media, Online Film & Video, Mobile & Applications, and the Social Web. Websites are judged for Content, Structure and Navigation, Visual Design, Functionality, Interactivity and Overall Experience (The Webby Awards, 2013).

\(^8\) Established in 1965, the Gabriel Awards is open to radio and television stations and producers in the United States and Canada to honor works of excellence in film, network and cable television, and radio programs. The Gabriel Awards are presided over by the Catholic Academy for Communication Arts Professionals and entries are judged for their ability to uplift and nourish the human spirit. The Gabriel Award is a nine-inch silver figure of Gabriel, the angel who first announced to Mary of Nazareth the coming of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). The statue symbolizes the communication of God’s Word to humankind (The Gabriel Awards, 2013).
The series was also picked up in popular culture, with an excerpt of Martha Graham’s essay featured in the November 2006 issue of *Oprah Magazine*, and *This I Believe* as an answer on *Jeopardy* in June 2006 under the Radio category (*This I Believe, Inc.*, 2006). Additionally, *This I Believe* was the subject of a 2005 comic strip by Chicago Public Radio listener MK Czerwiec (*National Public Radio*, 2005). *This I Believe* partnered with *USA Weekend* magazine, which published the essays. *This I Believe* is also available for download by podcast. In the future, *This I Believe* hopes to extend its reach to popular television programs and Dan Gediman’s “ultimate dream” is to go international with a *This I Believe* series (Janssen, 2005). The current program is well on its way towards this goal, as evidenced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s launch of its own version of *This Believe* featuring ‘Canadian’ essayists, and the release of a Spanish translation of the *This I Believe* book of U.S. essayists, published in Spain by Plataforma Editorial and sold on *This I Believe*.org to listeners (Allison and Gediman, 2007).

*This I Believe* stopped broadcasting on *NPR* in 2009 without any explanation and moved to *The Bob Edwards Show* on Sirius XM Satellite Radio. Bob Edwards, a Peabody Award-winning member of the National Radio Hall of Fame, joined *NPR* in 1974 and was a former cohost of *NPR’s All Things Considered* and host of *NPR’s Morning Edition* (*National Public Radio*, 2004). For the first year, from May 1, 2009 until September 10, 2010, the Bob Edwards show only broadcast essays from the 1950s version of *This I Believe*, and then transitioned to broadcasting new *This I Believe* essays that had never been published on *NPR*. The new *This I Believe* essayists featured on *The Bob Edwards Show* did not include the celebrities often broadcast on *NPR*, including more unsolicited self-submitted essays like the first contemporary essay broadcast on the program, “Opening the Door of Mercy” (9/10/10), written by Karin Round, an office manager for her family’s hardware store in Massachusetts.

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9 Karin Round’s essay “Opening the Door of Mercy” was broadcast on *The Bob Edwards Show* on 09/10/10 and included in the special features *Life Lessons Learned From Strangers*, *Life Lessons on Kindness*, and *Kindness*. 7
1.2 Radio Research

In the United States, radio for the most part has failed to attract aesthetic, academic, or political attention, resulting until the 1990s, in an overall absence of industrial, theoretical, aesthetic, or historical studies (Hilmes, 2002). So profound is this gap that radio scholar Michelle Hilmes contends, “[no] other medium has been more thoroughly forgotten, by the public, historians, and media scholars alike” (2002: xiv). In “Rethinking Radio” Hilmes explains how many factors contributed to “disappear radio” and its “public forgetting.” These included “industrial pressures, shifting cultural patterns, new historiographical concerns, and changing theoretical paradigms” (2002:2). The medium of radio also presents unique challenges such as its invisibility, evanescence, and its utilization of non-narrative forms like music and aural statements or discussion (“talk”) to convey meaning (Hilmes, 2002; Scannell 1996). Within the social sciences there has been a preoccupation with the visual, and a general lack of analytical terms and ideas about sound, in part because its meaning is not always experienced linguistically. The privileging of the visual realm is typical of Western thought and has been central to the development of capitalist modernity (Urry, 2000).

Kathleen Newman (2004) author of “Radio-Active: Advertising and Activism 1935-1947,” laments that “[t]hough we have volumes of theory on reading, perception, looking, the gaze, and subliminal images, we have hardly thought at all about the psychological effects of a mass culture that is apprehended through the ears” (cited in Monaghan, 1999). Sociocultural studies of radio have been isolated, but include Marshall McLuhan's “Understanding Media” (1964) and Fred MacDonald's “Don’t Touch That Dial” (1979).

Through the development of social history, cultural studies, critical theory, feminist theory, and queer theory, the study of “low” or “popular” cultural forms became legitimate sites of inquiry (Ang, 1985; Frith, 1981; Hall & Jefferson, 1983; Hebdige, 1991; McRobbie, 1991; Radway, 1981), propelling scholars beyond an interest in the ideological encodings of producers, and into audience reception studies and the decoding done by the consumers of media (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947; Allen, 1985; D’Acci, 1994; Doty, 1993; Fiske, 1987; Gray, 1995; Hall, 2002; Jhally & Lewis, 1992; Lenthall, 2002; Torres, 1998; Zook, 1999). These trends, combined with a social history focus on everyday life and repressed histories, resulted in the development of the interdisciplinary
field of radio studies, which emerged in the 1990s (Monaghan, 1999; Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002; Squier, 2003). This new scholarship was recognized in a 1999 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, which described the growing field’s interest in the tension between “radio's complicity in advancing some now-well-documented features of American culture--its intense consumerism and its questionable notions about such factors as race, gender, and ethnicity” and “the ability of the invisible medium to transgress accepted cultural norms and to feed new ideas into American homes” (Monaghan, 1999: 17).

This recent radio scholarship has produced work on minority stations (Fiske, 2002), local innovations (Hillard & Keith, 2005; Keith, 1997; Riismandel, 2002; Starr, 2001; Vaillant, 2002) women’s programs (McCraken, 2002), religious broadcasting (Apostolidis, 2002; Hangen, 2002), negotiations of gender (Desjardins & Williams, 2003; Douglas, 2002; Goodlad, 2003; Lowe, 2003; McCracken, 2002; Murray, 2002; Wang, 2002) processes of racialization (Russo, 2002; Savage, 2002; Smith, 2002), politically activist radio (Newman, 2003), and popular formats like serials and talk and quiz shows (Douglas, 2004; Mittell, 2002; Loviglio, 2005). There has also been interest in exploring ideas of the public sphere and public service, populism, democracy, nationalism, national identity, and propaganda (Loviglio, 2005; O’Connor, 2002; Russo, 2002; Smith, 2002; Smulyan, 2002). This is a needed development, as Benedict Anderson contended that the role of radio “generally in mid-twentieth-century nationalisms, has been much underestimated and understudied” (1983: 54).

The majority of this new research on radio broadcasting has focused predominantly on the medium prior to the advent of television from the 1920s through the 1940s, with both traditional histories (Bergreen, 1980; Douglas, 1987; McChesney, 1993; Smulyan, 1994; Craig, 2005) as well as cultural histories of this period (Cohen, 1990; Ely, 1991; Hilmes, 1997; Savage, 1999; Horton, 2002; Hilmes and Loviglio, 2002; Loviglio, 2005; MacDonald, 1979; Rubin, 1992; Squier, 2003). However, academic interest wanes “at the point at which network radio gives way to the localized, music-centered, and format-driven business that it became in the 1950s…attract[ing] little but disdain from academics” (Hilmes, 2002: 10-11). There have been some post-television histories of radio (Fornatale & Mills, 1984; Lewis and Booth, 1990; Keith, 2000; Hillard
and Keith, 2005; Pease & Dennis, 1994), but fewer cultural histories or analysis of program content (Douglas, 2004; Mitchell, 2002; Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002; Squier, 2003). Radio received some critical attention beginning in the 1980s with the development of call-in and political talk radio, particularly in the 1990s with the popularity and political influence of controversial radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern, and Larry King (Douglas, 2004; Kurtz, 1996; Levin, 1987; Munson, 1993).

However, even with the surge in interest in researching radio broadcasts, research on public broadcasting in the United States has been “conspicuous largely by its absence,” although recently histories have begun to emerge (Engelman, 1996; Ledbetter, 1997; McCourt, 1996: 29; McCourt, 1999; Starr, 2001; Walker, 2004). Even then, while public television receives a modest amount of attention, research on public radio has been “almost nonexistent, consigned to addenda and footnotes” (McCourt, 1996: 29). This study intends to fill this research lacuna.

Founded in 1970, the stated purpose of National Public Radio (NPR) is to serve the “national public interest” and provide an alternative to the undemocratic tendencies of private media (NPR’s Growth, 2007). NPR has an audience of 26 million weekly listeners and according to its own promotional material is “a dominant intellectual force in American life and a primary source of news for millions” (NPR’s Growth, 2007). National Public Radio has been described as “serious, informative, and creative” helping to “redeem the cultural status long denied the medium as whole” through its “innovative programs” (Hilmes, 2002). Former journalists of NPR write most of the literature on NPR, either institutional histories (Collins, 1993; McCauley, 2005; Mitchell, 2005) or popular books that recount and celebrate beloved programming or hosts (Stamberg, 1993; Looker, 1995; Gross, 2004; Phillips, 2006; Wertheimer, 1996). The academic work done on NPR is predominantly focused on the production side: looking at the histories of changes in funding and leadership, the internal negotiations of how to carry out their

mission or on the external struggles to survive in a politically and economically challenging climate (McCauley, 2002; McCourt, 1999). There has been scant critical research on the content of programming on NPR or on the reception of content by NPR listeners, with the majority of such research written by scholars working in communication studies and most of it focused on the monologue “The News From Lake Wobegon” featured on the radio program *A Prairie Home Companion*11 (Douglas, 2004; Dzikowski, 2009; Fry, 1998; Larson, 1992; Larsen & Orvec, 1987; Spinelli, 2003; Stelling, 1985).

Most basically, this project seeks to address the empirical gap in the literature, adding to the growing body of literature on radio studies by taking as a site of inquiry a contemporary audience-participation program on public radio. The only research12 produced on *This I Believe* have been three unpublished “technical reports,” in which University of Texas at Austin psychologists Cindy Chung, Jason Rentfrow, and James Pennebaker used a computer-based textual analysis program to scan and correlate the seventeen million words in the database essays with basic demographic variables.13 This study takes a very different approach from Chung, Rentfrow, and Pennebaker. Implementing a cultural studies perspective firmly based in sociological investigative methods, concepts, and theory, this dissertation employs discourse analysis to a wide range of texts produced by those affiliated with *This I Believe.*

More substantially, this study makes a contribution to radio studies, as well as to studies of nationalism, by considering the complex connections between public radio broadcasting, the formation and maintenance of national identity, and the construction of

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11 The academic interest in *A Prairie Home Companion* likely stems in part from the show’s longevity and continuing popularity, running since 1974 and currently heard on more than 600 public radio stations by more than four million listeners (*A Prairie Home Companion*, 2013). Another reason is likely the program’s use of parody and satire to interpret rural small-town American life and ideas of home (themes I discuss in chapter three) through the fictitious Minnesota town of Lake Wobegon.

12 *TIB* Producer Dan Gediman informed me in 2006 that he was aware of current academic research being conducted on *This I Believe* by students and faculty in fields as diverse as Classics, Journalism, Psychology, and Sociology, but he was unable to provide me with more specific information. To date, I have been unable to find any published theses, dissertations, or journal articles on *This I Believe,* and was only able to discover Chung and Pennebaker (2008a&b) and Chung, Rentfrow, and Pennebaker (2009) because their research is cited in the introduction to the book *This I Believe II* (2008).

13 For example, they found “that older people wrote more of religion, America, and the nature of existence, while younger people often wrote of financial issues, sports, and music. Males were more likely to reference science and sports; females, illness and marriage” (Allison and Gediman, 2008:3).
a public sphere. This study details the meaning-making processes by which the essayists on *This I Believe* imagine themselves as national subjects, using their essays to participate in what is described as a national dialogue and to do the cultural work of simultaneously (re)producing and negotiating national boundaries, as well to (re)produce the discourses which define the role of the United States in the world. Through these compelling performances, the essayists are hailed by *This I Believe* as embodiments of the nation and its people. They are employed to legitimate the liberal idea of the United States being a participatory democracy and justify public radio’s vital role in constituting its own national public sphere.

1.3 ‘Public’ Radio

This study makes an empirical contribution not only to the understudied sociological study of radio, but specifically ‘public’ radio, showing how the idea of the ‘public’ is discursively accomplished on NPR as essayists are characterized as embodiments of the nation and employed to justify NPR’s mission. Expanding on Benedict Anderson’s idea of national “styles” of power, this study seeks to make a theoretical contribution to the study of nationalism by showing how liberal ideals of citizenship and state organization form the style used on *This I Believe* to articulate the nation, shape national imaginaries, and incorporate its specific audience into the American national state. Anderson posited that “all communities are to be distinguished…by the style in which they are imagined” (1983: 6). He identified three characteristics of the nationalist style of imagining, which include the idea that the nation is limited, ruled by a sovereign state, and imagined as a community (1983: 7). In this study I will attempt to describe a more specific “liberal” style of nationalist imagining, which is articulated through the content of the public radio program *This I Believe*.

While research on public broadcasting in the United States and especially research on public radio has been limited, public radio has a long history of cultivating popular interest. Evidence of such support can be found in surveys which find that as many as eighty percent of people in the U.S. claim a favorable impression of PBS and NPR as a whole; in reports that cite that NPR member stations derive nearly forty percent of their revenue from listener contributions; in findings that over two-thirds of American
voters oppose proposals to eliminate government funding of public broadcasting; and in protests against attempts to “zero out” public broadcasting from the federal budget (NPR Annual Reports 2005; NPR.org, 2013; PBS Statement, 2012; Mitchell, 2005: 170). Moreover, the defense of “public service media,”14 is no longer the purview of imperiled noncommercial networks and their listeners alone. Joining the historically marginalized voices of public service broadcasters like America’s Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR) are a growing number of grassroots organizations who recognize the economic, political, and symbolic power of media and its operation at global, national, and local levels. Composed of nearly 500 local, regional, and other national groups, the media reform movement is “dedicated to making America’s media systems more democratic, diverse, and accountable” (Howard, 2008).

The debate over the viability of noncommercial broadcasting in the United States centers on the contested concept of “the public.” Within liberal thought, the media are theorized as essential to the formation of the public sphere, providing a space to promote a supposedly free marketplace of ideas and provide a check against state control (Habermas, 1991). Liberalism is the political ideology that undergirds liberal styles of governance, including liberal democracies like the United States. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this configuration of ruling is the concept of civil society or the public/public sphere, which negotiates the relationship between the state and the nation. Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke theorized society as being separate from the state. Civil society was the space in which citizens met to form public opinion and to become a public, a people, a nation, a process described by Locke as “whenever any number of men so unite into one society… to make one people, one body politic, under one supreme government” (1824: 187). According to this logic, civil society precedes the state, creating the state in order to govern on its behalf, to rule autonomously and objectively in the public interest, or what later came to be referred to as “the common

14 Robert McChesney (2003) uses the term “public service media” normatively, rather than historically, to imagine media that would be “full-service broadcasting, with education, entertainment, and public affairs aimed at the entire population of a country. Its attributes are being nonprofit and noncommercial; dealing directly with the public instead of using ratings; having a relationship with the entire population to develop programming, not just the boring education stuff, not just journalism and public affairs, but entertainment, the whole works” (11).
good.” The legitimacy of liberal democracies is therefore grounded in this idea that the state represents the people, serves the nation, and rules with popular consent, for as Locke explained it, the citizen “authorizes the society, or which is all one, the legislative thereof, to make laws for him as the public good of the society shall require (1824: 181).

Civil society creates a group of national subjects who do not consider themselves ruled over, but ruled for, and in this way liberalism operates as a “way to naturalize the power of the state to rule” (Sharma, 2006: 17). As people are brought into the exercise of power, the focus of concern shifts away from the relations of ruling, to discussions of who constitutes the people and what defines the common good (Sharma, 2006).

Researchers in a variety of disciplines have identified a need for scholarship on the public sphere (Habermas, 1984; Thompson, 1984; Fraser, 1987, 1990; Calhoun 1992). Scholarship on the public sphere includes theoretical discussions on its importance (Dewey, 2000; Ehrenberg, 1999; Barber, 1985), critical evaluations of its parameters and utility (Benhabib, 1992; Fraser, 1990; Schudson, 1992), historical case studies (Eagleton, 1985; Cmiel, 1990; Ryan, 1992; Eley 1992), ethnographies on political conversations and civic practices within public life (Mansbridge, 1980; Lichterman, 1996; Eliasoph, 1998), and intersections with media (Curran, 1991; Berlant, 1997; Castells, 1997; Jacobs, 2005; Loviglio, 2005). However, it is important to note that although all citizens are theorized to have access to the public sphere, “…the official public sphere rested on [and] was constituted by a number of significant exclusions” (Fraser, 1990: 59, emphasis added).

The idea of the nation as “a homely place for all who live there” concealed the “existence of separate spaces of belonging for various types of people classified according to deeply entrenched ideologies of separate races and gender roles and by the belief that there are different territorial spaces for differently nationalized people” (Sharma, 2006: 17).

My study will demonstrate how This I Believe fails to recognize such inequalities within the “public” and, as a result, reproduces the notion that there is, in fact, a public sphere that is egalitarian and equally accessible. I will discuss how the category of ‘citizen’ is used as if it applied to everyone and as if it applied equally even to those who are in the category. When used in this way, the inequalities between de jure ‘citizens’ is concealed, and the significant structural inequalities between those classified as ‘citizens’ and ‘non-citizens’ is depoliticized. My study will further show that such goals – and the
social relations upon which they rest - are legitimated by the production of a perception that the public sphere, in general, is in crisis, a crisis generated because of supposedly corrupted private, commercial, political, and religious interests. The generation of this crisis ideologically obfuscates the “interests” of public broadcasters as well as both the producers and listeners of shows such as This I Believe. This study describes how ideas of the ‘public’ and the ‘common good’ work to construct an idealized community of similarity, whilst normative discourses of difference, diversity, and multiculturalism conceal and reinforce inequalities and exclusions.

Stuart Hall argues that a “key opposition” in the cultural struggle to constitute classes is between “the people/not the people” (Hall, 1996: 234). This ability to shape the boundaries of the public, determining who is included and excluded, as well as where the public ends and the private begins, underscores the enormous social and political power media institutions like NPR wield in their ability to uphold the legitimacy of the state through the ideological construction of the ‘nation’ (Moores, 1997; 1993). In public broadcasting, the traditional approach imagines the public as a “superordinate entity,” usually the nation, “composed of many social and cultural subgroups,” not all of whom are represented by the commercial broadcasting system and who often lack the ability to communicate with other subgroups (McCauley, et. al, 2003: xx). The paternalistic and contradictory role of the public broadcasting system, then, is to act as a “guardian” of the public, by providing “quality” content to groups excluded by the corporate sector. This, it is presumed, assists in the development of these subgroups into normative citizens and creates a unified national identity (McCauley, et. al, 2003; McCourt, 1996, 1999).

While media scholar Michael Schudson argues for the critical evaluation of representative institutions like NPR in order to ascertain the extent to which they are in fact public or could be reorganized to be made more public (1994; 1992), from a Foucauldian perspective, the social categories of public and private are actually called into being through the “discursive incantations” of radio programs like This I Believe (Loviglio, 2005: xvi). Throughout the history of radio, the most popular programs have been those like This I Believe, which

constitute a series of negotiations of the contradictions inherent in the public/private dichotomy in American social life. The preoccupation with both transgressing and policing this boundary can be found in...audience participation
programs…along with other programs that take as their subject the adventures of ‘average Americans’ (Loviglio, 2005: xviii).

Rather than conceptualizing the public sphere as an taken-for-granted “fact” then, it is more useful to understand it as a discursive accomplishment and to ask “who needs it, who manufactures the ‘need’ for it, and whose interests it serves” (Burton, 1997: 234).15

Early network radio’s “central problem and greatest appeal” was negotiating this public/private dichotomy, as it blurred the boundaries between the interpersonal and mass communication, making “intimate questions of identity and difference…part of a national conversation” (Loviglio, 2005: xvi). Radio opened up a new kind of social space “the intimate public” in which listeners were “invited to participate vicariously in authorized transgression of the public/private boundary, even if only to help police it” (Loviglio, 2005: xvii). In an analysis of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats, Loviglio details how radio could be used to insert public speech into private spaces, conveying a sense of “immediacy, intimacy, and direct democracy” to listeners (2005: 4). Through this radio program, F.D.R. attempted to generate national unity by encouraging listeners to support his New Deal programs and collaborate in the process of national identity formation and national recovery, whilst warning against “the dangers of foreigners, radicals, organized labor, isolationists, and other ‘selfish’ interests” (Loviglio, 2005: xxvii). Much like the essayists on This I Believe, by writing letters in response to the Fireside Chats, F.D.R.’s listeners were able to “participate in a new sense of public life by working to define who and what that public encompassed” (Loviglio, 2005: 27).

In his analysis of talkshows, Wayne Munson contends that “the media’s interactive cyberspace is qualitatively different from the separate public or private spheres conceived in modernity…it is, instead, a liminal space somewhere between or beyond the two” (1993: 152). The flexibility of the public/private dichotomy within the media have produced arguments as to the political possibilities of “talk” programming, which purportedly bring new, previously “unspeakable” identities and issues into the public sphere (Gamson, 1995; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Carpignano et al. 1993). This study will consider whether such self-confessional programming, of which This I Believe

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15 Burton refers to the ‘nation’ as a discursive accomplishment and I am extending his questions to apply to the ‘public’ sphere.
is an example, actually might have the opposite effect, contributing to a “cycle of political evaporation” (Eliasoph, 1998: 260). Referencing Robert Putnam’s work on associational involvement, Robert Bellah describes how talk radio is not conducive to civic engagement because it “mobilizes private opinion, not public opinion” (Bellah et al. 1996:xvii). By restricting what its listeners can say in public on the air, This I Believe “firmly establishes a sense of what the public sphere itself is—of what can be questioned and discussed, where and how” (Eliasoph, 1998:230). In setting these boundaries, This I Believe limits the possibilities for political engagement, which Nina Eliasoph argues are strongly influenced by beliefs about talk—“beliefs about who talks, about what talk accomplishes, about where talk belongs, about when talk is ‘just rhetoric’ or dangerous or depressing, and beliefs about how [so-called] regular people talk” (2002: 137). This I Believe thus attempts to “make public spectacle of private passions” and also “private spectacle of public passions,” as citizenship on This I Believe is enacted through essayist performances of their private selves in public (Munson, 1993: 152). This strategy is not unique to This I Believe, as media often allege that the “nation’s survival” depends on “personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidiant” (Berlant, 1997:4).

1.4 “Making the Nation”

Nations are not natural communities; there are no “objective criteria,” such as language, religion, or geography, which all national members possess or are seen to possess (Billig, 1995: 24). Instead, as scholars such as Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernest Gellner (1983), Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1991), and Miroslav Hroch (1985) emphasize, nations are socially constructed. In particular, as Michael Billig notes, “nationalism involves the construction of the sense of national identity for those who are said to inhabit, or deserve to inhabit, their own nation-state” (Billig, 1995: 24).

Nationalism is then a project to “make the nation” and to “make the nation is to make people national” (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008: 536). But the production of a people who constitute “the nation” is a “fundamental problem” with the idea of the nation. As Etienne Balibar notes, “to make the people…is to produce the effect of unity by virtue of which the people will appear, in everyone’s eyes, ‘as a people,’ that is, as the basis and origin of
political power” (Balibar, 1991: 93). Nationalism, thus, shapes the operation of power. As Hobsbawn & Ranger argue, “[n]ationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1991:10). Nationalism is a project to “make the nation” and to “make the nation is to make people national” (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008: 536).

These insights direct us to importance of understanding – and investigating - the ways in which shared meanings, symbols, discourses, and practices constitute national communities and produce national identities. One of the ways that ‘the people’ are produced is through the media. Referencing the British Broadcast Corporation, Stuart Hall argued that public broadcasting did not reflect the nation, but was “an instrument, an apparatus, a ‘machine’ through which the nation was constituted. It produced the nation which it addressed: it constituted its audience by the ways in which it represented them” (1993:32). In an analysis of audience-participation program Vox Pop, which broadcast from 1932-1948 on a variety of networks, including NBC, CBS, and ABC, Jason Loviglio documents early network radio’s changing strategies in their “restless search for ‘the voice of the people’” (2005: 40). Vox Pop was a site for negotiating who was to be included and excluded from the American people, as the voices of average people represented the differential “kinds of publicity and privacy available to men and women, natives and the foreign-born, white folks and people of color, voters and consumers” (Loviglio, 2005: xxvii). He discusses how through audience participation programs like Vox Pop, “the mass audience of the radio came to stand in for the nation in general and ‘the people’ in particular” (Loviglio, 2005:38). Loviglio explains that through programs like Vox Pop, network radio broadcasters propagated the perception that radio programs were “national rituals that helped to constitute a revitalized sense of national identity;” an idea which continues to circulate as This I Believe describes itself as a “national project” (Loviglio, 2005: 40). Audience-participation programs like This I Believe, commonly

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16 According to the Recorded Sound Reference Center, the genre “Audience-Participation Program” is defined as “programs which involve spontaneous participation by members of the studio audience” (Library of Congress, 2009). Related genres include “call-in shows” and “talk shows.” While listener participation on This I Believe is not spontaneous in the live, participating in the moment sense, participation on This I Believe is spontaneous in the sense that listeners self-select to participate in the program by submitting an essay. I interpret “participation” to be the key descriptor and consider “audience participation” the genre into which TIB most closely fits.
conflate their mass listening audience with the nation and the people, frequently drawing analogies between participatory radio and participatory democracy.

Nationalism is deeply entrenched in everyday life, with the media acting as a crucial conduit for the imagination of citizenship. In nations, people are both “pedagogical objects” and “performative subjects” (Bhabha, 1990: 302). Not only do media shape what can be said in public, but it is predominantly through media that citizens learn the contents of their national identity, as “Americans experience themselves as national through public sphere accounts of what is important about them: this is why the manufacture of public opinion is crucial both for producing ‘citizens’ and seeing how ‘citizens’ are produced” (Berlant 1997:10). This I Believe attempts to engage these relationships and claims to act as a kind of electronic town commons, explicitly stating: “We are interested in creating a commons, where the same contribution is expected from all, not a critique of others, but a statement of one’s own” (Allison, 2008:4).

It is through such collective ritual performances that national sensibilities and solidarities are constituted and reproduced, as This I Believe essayists participate in a national genuflection not unlike reciting the pledge of allegiance, reciting their essay on the air, “I believe…” (Rippberger and Staudt, 2003). It is important to identify such contexts in which people invoke the nation, because “nationhood does not define people’s experiences of all interactions all the time…it comes to matter in certain ways at particular times for different people,” and so it is necessary to consider why the nation matters for those participating in This I Believe (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008:543-544).

Symbolically, This I Believe permits those imagined as the nation’s citizens, and, more infrequently, those who are not, the opportunity to have their national identity recognized via their essay performances, in which the display of particular private beliefs confirms their participation in a shared stock of common knowledge and legitimates their

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17 This usage of “the commons” is problematic as it fails to recognize the historical significance of the term, specifically the various struggles by commoners to resist land privatization and the appropriation of common lands and common rights in the transition to capitalism and the rise of modernity (Federici, 2004; Marcus and Rediker, 2000). Silvia Federici argues that the “commons” were so essential to “the political economy and struggles of the medieval rural population that their memory still excites our imagination, projecting the vision of a world where goods can be shared and solidarity, rather than the desire for self-aggrandizement, can be the substance for social relations, 2004: 24).
status as ‘real’ Americans. Conceptually, this can be understood using Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss’ four modalities in which everyday nationalism is practiced—talking, choosing, performing, and consuming the nation (2008). *This I Believe* attempts to “market” the nation to its listeners, who are essentially “consuming” the nation and national belonging by choosing to listen and “perform” their national identity through essay submission, constituting and negotiating the nation through their listening and essay performances (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002; Foster, 2002; Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008; Palmer, 1998).

The interest in the construction of national identities is a part of the growing field of scholarship on everyday life (de Certeau, 1984). From this perspective, nationalism is understood as a routine part of life, which includes habits of practice, belief, and talk, such that “[n]ationalism is more than a feeling of identity; it is more than an interpretation, or theory, of the world; it is also a way of being within the world of nations” (Billig, 1995: 65). This way of being might be conceptualized, after Bourdieu, as a kind of national *habitus*, which encompasses the unconscious, practical, embodied knowledge through which national identity is performed and a sense of national belonging is constituted (Hage, 2000:54; Edensor, 2002: 93). Michael Billig refers to the routinization of nationalism in established nations of the West as “banal nationalism,” describing it as the taken-for-granted context of “political discourses, cultural products, and even the structuring of newspapers,” and, as I argue, radio programs such as *This I Believe* as well (1995:8). People in the U.S. spend on average one hour per day listening to the radio in their cars during their weekly commute (Bouvard, et al, 2003). *National Public Radio*’s core audience listens for about 11 hours per week, with 62 percent listening on the weekends as well (Giovannoni, Peters, Youngclaus, 1999). Such statistics reflect how radio content is a persistent everyday presence for most people in the United States (Giovannoni, Peters, Youngclaus, 1999). This study will attempt to reveal the contents of the “national habitus” of the *This I Believe* essayists as expressed through their performances of “banal nationalism” on the radio (Billig, 1995). *This I Believe* therefore offers an opportunity to study the way nationalism becomes hegemonic (or “common-sense”) and the ways in which NPR listeners through their everyday activities
construct, negotiate, and reproduce nationalist discourses and identities (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008; Edensor, 2002; Billig, 1995).

Scholars who have explored the relationships between culture and nation have focused predominantly on the role of elites, the production of ‘high’ or ‘official’ culture, and the spectacular, to the exclusion of non-elites, ‘popular’ culture, and the mundane (Edensor, 2002; Castells, 1997). For example, Gellner focuses on how national identity is shaped through the mass education system, whereby ‘official’ knowledges are transmitted by cultural elites to all citizens to produce homogenous national cultures (1983). Also, Hobsbawm and Ranger argue that nations are constructed through the “invention of traditions,” traditions like pageants and ceremonies, which cultural elites create in order to serve the nation-building purposes of the state (1991). This study will also be focusing on the role of elites, but unlike most studies on the social construction of nationalism, this study will also focus on the mundane, exploring how contemporary U.S. nationalism is produced and maintained through the routine discursive practices of elites, with a detailed textual analysis of first person accounts. Studies which consider dominant nationalist discourses normally study discourses as they appear in institutional settings such as governmental documents (Hage, 2000; Sharma, 2006) or educational curricula (Gellner, 1983), or in the case of media, through newspaper coverage (Billig, 1995; Musial, 2010) or the plots of popular television programs (Berlant, 1997; Bociurkaw, 2011), each instances in which the individual authors disappear from view and in which audiences have limited opportunities to participate in the construction of discourse. Through its first person accounts, This I Believe provides access to the processes by which elites articulate and disseminate concepts of the nation, revealing how those in its audience discursively represent the nation in their own terms.

This study explores how intellectuals come to secure their cultural authority to shape national understandings. Gramsci argued that intellectuals are key figures in constructing ideological ties between the capitalist ruling class and its allied coalitions of interests (1971). This historical bloc can govern through state practices of coercion, overt inculcation, or censorship, but prefers to gain compliance of the masses through hegemony within the sphere of civil society, which includes institutions like churches, schools, and mass media. The intellectuals on This I Believe operate within this sphere of
civil society, broadcasting essays on national radio, as well as guiding students and the
faithful on how to interpret and write essays through downloadable curricula and worship
guides as described in the methods section. In this way, intellectuals articulate the values
and beliefs which form the dominant ideology and portray the interests of the dominant
classes as universal interests.

Although This I Believe claims to feature the essays of ‘ordinary’ people, the
program predominantly broadcasts the essays of intellectuals from various social fields,
including public officials, professors, journalists, writers, lawyers, doctors, social
activists, artists, and non-profit directors, making This I Believe primarily a site for the
expression of dominant, mainstream discourses, rather than marginalized or resistant
discourses. This does not mean that This I Believe is not a site of cultural tension, as
evidenced by the careful selection of essays for broadcast or publication from the nearly
200,000 submitted to the program. In her analysis of radio's impact on American culture
in the first half of the twentieth century, Hilmes refers to Foucault in arguing that
“dominant discourse when subjected to reversal reveals not the smooth face of consensus
but the ruptured and seamed lines of tension and resistance the consensus seeks to
conceal” (1997: xvii). This study considers the lines of tension among the dominant
within the national field, between Democrats and Republicans, between liberals and
conservatives, between what Edward Said refers to as “insider” and “outsider”
intellectuals, between those with what Ghassan Hage calls “governmental belonging” and
“passive belonging,” as well as between those whom Hage refers to as “evil white
nationalists” and “good white nationalists” (2000).

Edward Said emphasized the public role of intellectuals, defining an intellectual
as “an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a
message, a view, an attitude, philosophy, or opinion to, as well as for, a public” (1994: 9).
In this, Said departs from a belief put forth by conservative sociologists like Talcott
Parsons and Edward Shils that intellectual responsibility required abstention from
political involvement (Kennedy & Suny, 1999). Said divides such public intellectuals
into insiders (“yea-sayers”) and outsiders (“nay-sayers”). Insider intellectuals are those
who “belong fully to the society as it is, who flourish in it without an overwhelming
sense of dissonance or dissent” and who reproduce the existing sets of ruling relations by
promoting “patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial, or gender privilege” (Said, 1994: 52, xii). Outsider intellectuals are “at odds with their society…so far as privileges, power, and honours are concerned,” and in their “exile” critically unmask relations of oppression and exploitation through “restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others” and by “speak[ing] truth to power” (Said, 1994: 53, xii). For Said, speaking the truth to the power of the idea of the nation means that “with regard to national identity it is the intellectual’s task to show how the group is not a natural or God-given entity but is a constructed, manufactured, even some cases invented object, with a history of struggle and conquest behind it” (1994:33).

In this study I explore how This I Believe’s highly educated liberal audience felt a sense of exclusion from national life during the years of the Bush administration, the ways in which the essayists attempted to speak truth to power, and their desire to return to an insider intellectual status.

1.5 Theoretical Frameworks

In order to understand how This I Believe facilitates the production of a particular subjectivity that contributes to the realization of national state power, one in which national subjects play an active role in their own self-government, this study draws on Michel Foucault’s discussion of governmentality or governmental rationality (1991). In his history of governmentality, Foucault emphasizes the interaction between forms of power and processes of subjectification, describing the connection between the constitution of the subject and the formation of the state as he details “how the modern sovereign state and the modern autonomous individual co-determine each other’s emergence” (Lemke, 2002: 51). Foucault defined government as “the conduct of conduct,” a definition which includes both the “governing of the self” as well as the “governing of others” (Lemke, 2002: 51). He emphasized that a “genealogy of the subject in Western civilization” must “take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self” (Foucault, 1993b: 3). Such an account must consider both “the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself” and “the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination”
Foucault argues that government occurs at “the contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves” (1993b: 4). These ideas are useful for analyzing how the essayists on This I Believe actively participate in the reproduction of state power and play a role in their own self-government, as they choose to participate in This I Believe, to write a nationalist essay, to articulate discourses which draw on national forms of social organization, and to imagine themselves as regulating the conduct of others.

Language is an essential element for understanding the social relations of power which connect what Foucault called “technologies of the self” to “technologies of domination” (1993b). For example, in his studies of asylums, prisons, governments, and schools, Foucault emphasizes how the historical configurations of discourses construct new kinds of identities and practices. These discursive constructions operate as “technologies of the self” as individuals are “gradually, progressively, really, and materially constituted” and constitute themselves within and through the knowledge/power nexus (Foucault, 1980: 97). Foucault argues that discourses also have “disciplining” effects, enabling and limiting what can be said, thought, and done within a given field (1995). The individual then, is both “an effect of power” and at the same time “the element of its articulation…its vehicle” (Foucault, 1980: 97). These ideas are useful for understanding how the nationalist discourses expressed on This I Believe shape the national identities of NPR listeners, whilst simultaneously, it is the NPR listeners-turned-essayists who are articulating these nationalist discourses, and thereby (re)producing the national identities of themselves and others, as well as the practices and material relationships between people that their identifications support. Through discourse, the This I Believe broadcasts “systematically form the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972:49). In describing this dialectical relationship between knowledge and power Foucault explains, “People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what they do does” (1983:187).

Foucault’s ideas on the diffuse nature of discursive power are helpful for understanding how power circulates between media producers, audiences, and state interests, explaining how nationalism and the (re)construction of national subjects pervade the discourses of the This I Believe producer content as well as the essays.
Foucault argues that power is diffused throughout the social world. It is not solely located in institutions like the state, but, rather, is present in “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their organization” (Foucault, 1993:518). Foucault explains that power should not be conceptualized as a dichotomy between powerful and powerless, but instead as present in all relationships, continually being redistributed, homogenized, and converged (Foucault, 1993). He argues that “the world of discourse is not divided between dominant discourse and dominated discourse,” explaining that there are “a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (1993: 523). Power then is not something that can be possessed, because it is a practice, often a discursive practice, which is being continually produced from multiple points where unstable, unequal, local relations exist within a “complex strategical situation” (Foucault, 1993:518).

This emphasis on power as a social practice intrinsic to daily life leads to the second theorist which strongly influenced this dissertation, Ghassan Hage. Hage is interested in examining “the practical deployment and significance of nationality in the social—how people experience and deploy their claims to national belonging in the everyday life” (2000:50). Hage argues that national identity is not based solely upon formal citizenship, that institutional-political level of acceptance granted by the state (Hage, 2000). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Hage argues that equally important is the practical-cultural level of acceptance that occurs through the acquisition of “national cultural capital.” This national cultural capital is composed of the “sum of accumulated nationally sanctioned and valued social and physical cultural styles and dispositions (national culture) adopted by individuals and groups, as well as valued characteristics (national types and national character) within a national field: looks, accent, demeanor, taste, nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behavior” (Hage, 2000: 53). The accumulation of national cultural capital translates into national belonging.

People struggle within the national field of power to “naturalize the value of their capital” and to “naturalize their hold on it,” as well as to “naturalize their own national order and their domination within this order (Hage, 2000:62, 67). In other words, nationalists struggle to impose their own “symbolic violence” on the national field. Symbolic violence is a concept offered by Pierre Boudieu which refers to the processes
by which the systems of meaning and categories of thought of the dominant are imposed upon and come to unconsciously structure the perceptions of the dominated. Through symbolic violence the social structure which privileges the interests of the dominant is legitimated and the dominated’s placement in the social hierarchy is naturalized.

Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (1992:167). Hage explains that the differential capacity to impose symbolic violence on the national field results in “differential modalities of national belonging,” which terms “passive belonging” and governmental belonging” (Hage, 2000:51).

These ideas are helpful for understanding the different ways in which the *This I Believe* essayists feel disempowered and desire to feel “at home” within the nation. Drawing on Lacan, Hage explains that nationalist practices have an often overlooked affective dimension which stem from a “fantasy of dominance,” wherein nationalists find meaning and purpose through the pursuit of and yearning for the ideal nation (Hage, 2000:69-75). This idea of fantasy is helpful for understanding the essayists’ concern about the proper the management of the nation. Drawing on Zizek, he argues that “national otherness” is “necessary for the construction and maintenance of this fantasy,” because it allows the nationalist to believe that the ideal nation could be achieved if not for the “disturbing” presence of the other (Hage, 2000: 74). Thus, Hage points to the ways in which national subjectivity relies on the perception of a “threat” to the nation, which is useful for understanding how the *This I Believe* essayists employ ideas like neighbors, home, security, freedom, terrorism, and tolerance to reproduce nationalist structures of thought and reconstitute the national identities of the *This I Believe* audience as they struggle for domination within the national field.

Part of this struggle for domination occurs between what Hage terms “evil white nationalists” and “good white nationalists,” national subjects who occupy a shared imaginary position of power within what Hage terms the “White nation” fantasy, but who disagree over national others ought to managed, whether through practices of exclusion or practices of tolerance (2000: 18). Hage’s analysis is based on multiculturalism debates within Australia during the period in which John Howard and the Liberal Party held office and stood in opposition to the anti-migrant and anti-Aboriginal populism of
Pauline Hanson, a moment when “evil white nationalists” felt disempowered. Hage argued that Australian nationals who supported multiculturalism were able to gain dominance over racist nationals by (re)constituting themselves as tolerant. By defining themselves as “urbane, anti-racist, cosmopolitan, and non-Anglocentric” the multiculturalists argued that they were more adapted to changing global conditions, and were able to marginalize the old nationalist minority, who were cast as “hopelessly racist, Anglophile, out of touch and old-fashioned” (Hage, 2000: 183). Significantly, both the multiculturalist and racist nationals imagined the national space as essentially white and shared the understanding that racial communities were the bearers of ‘difference.’ Both positions perceive themselves as “masters of national space” and share the conviction that “it was up to them to decide who stayed in and who ought to be kept out of that space” (Hage, 2000:17).

It is this argument that both evil and good nationalists share a similar fantasy structure that allows for my application of Hage’s ideas to a very different context, debates on the proper management of the nation in the United States during a period in which the “evil white nationalists” formed the national majority with George W. Bush and the Republican Party in office, and the “good white nationalists” formed the national minority with Democrats and the liberal audiences of National Public Radio and This I Believe being marginalized. Within Hage’s context, multiculturalism made sense to Australian nationalists for how to most legitimately manage the ‘problem’ of the presence of what Hage calls “Third-World-looking migrants” within national space and to define Australia’s relationship to its international neighbors. However, in the United States after September 11th, racial tolerance no longer made sense to American nationalists for how to manage the ‘problem’ of the presence of citizens and non-citizens within national space who were racialized as ‘terrorists’ or for how to relate to other nation-states defined as fundamentalist, uncivilized or differently civilized. Practices of exclusion, including blatant racism and the denial of civil rights under the Patriot Act, as well torture and imperialism under the War on Terror were legitimated by pointing to how much worse people from nation-states within the Middle East were because of their primitive cultural practices, authoritarianism, misogyny, and violence. The suspension of tolerance was ultimately unsustainable, marked by the 2008 election of Barack Obama, which was
interpreted as a historical transcendence of ‘race’¹⁸ and a confirmation of American liberal ideals. Hage however argues that practices of tolerance and intolerance are similar in that their both problematize national others as “object[s] to be governed by the eternally worried white national subject” (2000:233). I use this argument to show how liberal concepts like tolerance, as well as freedom and the common good, even when used by “good white nationalists,” reproduce the structure of white privilege. I argue that while Obama’s win is defeat of the racism of “evil white nationalists,” the win is a triumph of the racism of “good white nationalists” wherein negatively racialized persons must embrace the dominant national narrative, as well as conform to white definitions of acceptable and unacceptable blackness or brownness. I will argue that the redemption or vindication of the United States through the perceived success of liberal ideals as symbolized by Obama’s election reduces the space for criticizing nationalism from the left and the social, economic, political, and ideological structures which reinforce white privilege.

1.6 Discourse Analysis

Homi Bhabha argues that the “nation” is constructed through narration, continually reified in discourses such as those found on This I Believe (1990). Through these discourses, nationalism and national citizenship appear to be natural and necessary social facts, when in fact it is only through the endless enactment of their conventions that they are produced. As Judith Butler argues, it is the “reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (1993:13). Through everyday speech acts the ‘realness’ of national identity and citizenship are constructed and exercised (van Dijk, 1984; Wodak et al, 1999; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). ‘Citizenship’ then is a performance, an “act” which has no relation to any essential ‘truths’ about the subject, but rather is an ideology, constructed through a history that exists beyond the

¹⁸ The term ‘race’ is placed in inverted commas to signify that it is a problematic analytic term which reifies the idea that there are discrete, essential categories of human beings based in somatic and cultural variations. This term ignores the historical processes of racialization through which ideas about ‘race’ are constructed, come to be regarded as meaningful, and are acted upon. For ease of reading, the inverted commas will be only be used for the first usage of the term.
subject who enacts it (Butler, 1990: 272). If the nation is constituted through narration and acts of imagination, and national identity is a socially constructed category as well as a performance, then an analysis of the construction and deconstruction of texts is a useful methodological approach. This study therefore employs a discursive analysis of *This I Believe* to explore how the national subject is produced within discourse and the ways in which discourses (re)produce state power.

Foucault defines discourse “sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements (1972: 80). Hall explains that discursive analysis helps to understand how power and knowledge work together, revealing “how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, make up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced, and studied” (1997: 6). Foucault argued that the constitution and circulation of discourse is a *primary* site of the struggle for power, “the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized’ (Foucault 1981: 53). According to Foucault, “We cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (1980a: 93). Discourse and its absence, silence, function in various relations to power, ranging from transmitting it, to producing, reinforcing, or undermining, exposing, hindering, resisting, or rendering it fragile (Foucault, 1993:523).

As to my specific employment of the method of discourse analysis in this study, it is important first to point out that Foucault was reluctant to prescribe a research method, stating “I take care not to dictate how things should be” (1994:288). As someone who interrogated all claims to truth, a Foucauldian-influenced discursive analysis is best thought about as a way to look at texts, loosely characterized as the deconstruction of binaries and critique of metanarratives like race or nation to reveal how such categories are socially constructed, in part, through language and representation. Because a Foucaultain discursive analysis assumes that meaning is arbitrary to time and place, and social identities are continually being redefined and reinscribed, it is less concerned with linguistic structure, or counting the instances in which an idea is used, and refuses to leave categories of social identity untroubled. Importantly, Foucault also emphasized the
importance of historicizing existing discourses by tracing their genealogy, trying to explain their historical specificity and the conditions in which discourses function, in order to understand their “strategical integration” or necessity in a given context (Foucault, 1993:523). Finally, Foucault rejects the Marxist concept of ideology because it implies the existence of a universal rationality and a universal truth, as well as that knowledge/power always radiates in a single direction from a specific source. Foucault argues that the point of analyzing discourse is not to determine whether it is true or false, but instead to understand historically how effects of truth are produced within discourse, whether or not they increase subjection, and to understand how power circulates from multiple sites. Combined, a Foucaultian discursive approach provide a useful framework for analyzing how liberal discourses constitute national subjectivities, organize social differences, and reproduce state power, exposing the asymmetries in power which are sustained through discourse, as well as the regulatory power of discursive structures like nationalism.

I justify my selection of This I Believe as a case study on several grounds. First, This I Believe’s format of audience participation and essays on personal belief provided me with data on which to study the articulation and formation of subjectivity, identity, and discourse among its listeners. Second, This I Believe producer emphasis on the programming being a national project with the goal of creating national dialogue about the common good made This I Believe a good case study for studying the ideological construction of the nation and the discourses of nationalism. Third, This I Believe’s broadcasting placement on NPR news programming Morning Edition and All Things Considered meant that the show was being heard by NPR’s largest audience and provided me with access to data on the characteristics of this audience, which suggested that this audience was nationalist and therefore interested in contributing to the imagination and management of the ideal nation. Moreover, NPR’s news audiences provide access to how intellectuals are recruited into making the nation, people who occupy a privileged position within the national field of belonging. Fourth, This I Believe began broadcasting during a time of national upheaval, suggesting that it was in part a response to current events, and the success of the program suggested that it resonated with audience interests at this time. Relatedly, This I Believe’s utilization of the history of the 1950’s series as
relevant to contemporary events again suggested that it was a valuable study for understanding nation-making. Finally, *This I Believe* is most similar to an *NPR* program called *StoryCorps*, an oral history project whose mission is to “provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives” (2013). It is similar to *This I Believe* in that it is a three-minute audience participation program, and that all participants are archived (although not online) in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, but it differs in that through two-person interviews the focus is on preserving personal memories as a way to archive national history (*StoryCorps*, 2013). In contrast, through its individual essays *This I Believe* is more present-focused, interpreting the expression of personal beliefs as acts of citizenship, necessary for maintaining a “healthy democracy” now, and therefore more relevant as a case study for understanding the production and reproduction of national subjects.

I began my analysis by collecting and reading or listening to all of the available material produced by and published about *This I Believe* when the show first began broadcasting in 2005. Initially, there were few essays available and so the primary materials were the published collections of books from the 1950s series, the website content from the contemporary series, and interviews given by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman to promote the program. This included *This I Believe* website pages like “About Us,” “Essay-Writing Tips,” “For Educators,” “For Youth,” or “For Communities”; the electronic newsletter which is published monthly; the introductory and afterword chapters from the book collections *This I Believe* and *This I Believe II* (Allison and Gediman, 2006; Allison and Gediman, 2008); interviews on *NPR* programming such as *Morning Edition* and *Fresh Air* and interviews on other radio-affiliated media such as *The Current*, *WKAR*, and *USAToday.com*; as well as a personal phone interview with Dan Gediman (Harris, 2006). There were also two downloadable discussion guides19 which were

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19 First, there is a general discussion guide, which they suggest is “appropriate for use in civic clubs, libraries, senior centers, coffee shops, and other public venues suitable for respectful discussion” (“*This I Believe Discussion Guides*; *This I Believe Discussion Manual*). Second, there is a discussion guide for “houses of worship.” This discussion guide for both “intra-and interfaith settings” was created by a group of leaders from houses of worship in Louisville, Kentucky through the initiative of the Cathedral Heritage Foundation (*HOW Discussion Manual*: 3).
designed to encourage listeners to take *This I Believe* into different kinds of ‘publics,’ and four downloadable curricula for middle school, high school, college, and lifelong learners.\(^{20}\) I also collected, read, and scanned three of the 1950s series *This I Believe* books, which I then gifted to the contemporary series in 2006 for their archives (Morgan, 1952, 1953; Swing, 1954). While I initially intended to include the original series in my analysis, I chose to limit my scope to the contemporary series, both for convenience, as well as because I interpreted that the original essays only “made sense” in their historical, political, and social context, despite the claims of national continuity being made by the producers.

Thus my initial exposure to the program, like the listeners of the *This I Believe*, was through the discourses being put forth by the producers to solicit audience participation. These discourses described *This I Believe* as a “national project,” that “rises from the grass roots,” in which participation is “an act of bravery” and one goal of which is to “facilitate a higher standard of public discourse” and to help listeners to change their “life, community, and society” through examination of their beliefs (Allison, 2008: 2, 6; Allison and Gediman, 2006: 274). The producers contend that the nation’s liberal values were in crisis, threatened by political, commercial, and religious interests. They criticized a divisive “media climate” for contributing to a problem of “not listening well, not understanding each other—we are simply disagreeing, or worse” which has resulted in the inability to communicate directly with fellow citizens and discover the common good, arguing that “A healthy democracy needs ways to bypass gatekeepers so we can communicate with one another directly, and perhaps even find common ground” (WKAR, 2005; Allison, 2006: 6). The producers therefore implied that they were not gatekeepers, lending credence to my argument that *This I Believe* audiences felt disempowered and marginalized from national public discourse. The producers also argued that Americans

\(^{20}\) There curricula include instructions for how to write an essay, and group exercises for improving the form of others’ essays, but devote little attention to discussing the content of others’ essays. The website claims that “thousands of teachers around the world—in every U.S. state and more than 50 countries—have embraced *This I Believe* as a powerful educational tool” (“This I Believe in the Classroom”). Although the discussion guides and curricula used to be free, a small donation is now required to access these resources. *TIB* also offers a brochure and poster to be used in these various institutional settings. Initially, there was also a *Handbook for Community Event Coordinators*, now discontinued, which included: both discussion guides, the high school curriculum, a variety of promotional materials such as the brochure, a sample press release, sample feature stories, and planning ideas.
are living in an “age of fear,” and explained “we’re afraid of each other again. We’re afraid of the other, those far away. Neighbors are asked to keep an eye on each other” (WKAR, 2005). The producers likened the contemporary moment to McCarthyism, claiming that Americans are afraid to express their beliefs because of recent restrictions on free speech and a political climate which vilifies dissent. They surmised that “We find ourselves in conflict over moral standards, patriotism, family, and issues of race and faith” (Allison, 2006: 2).

The producer discourses served as my starting point for selecting from the increasing number of broadcast essays. As more essays were broadcast on the program, I observed that many of the broadcast essays expressed the liberal concerns about the common good, democracy, and civil rights raised by the producers, well as exhibited concern over the ideals of the nation, the rightful place of national subjects and objects within the nation, and the role of the nation in the world including the proper relationship of the nation to national and foreign ‘others.’ I read all 208 essays broadcast from April 2005-April 2009 which aired during one of NPR’s programs, primarily Morning Edition, All Things Considered, or Weekend Edition Sunday. I used the written, web-available form of the essays because the web versions offer additional information not

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21 The broadcast essays were available in a variety of media formats, and could be listened to live on NPR—either from a live audio file or downloadable podcast on the website or from the audiobook—as well as read either on the website or from the published collections. The written, web-available version, however, lacks the “lead” from the broadcast, a sentence or two in which the host introduces the essayist, but through my listening of these audio readings of the essays, I found that the leads usually draw from the material in the biographical blurb on the website. Consequently, there is no apparent, or at least significant, loss of explicit information in choosing the text pages over the audio files. One general disadvantage to the text format is that it lacks the implicit information that is conveyed through listening to the essays, which is central to the experience of radio as a medium. The term prosody is used in linguistics to refer to such informationally dense subtleties as changes in tone, intonation, rhythm, and lexical stress which are conveyed through speech. In short, radio conveys auditory information that is not experienced linguistically (Tachhi, 2002: 242). On This I Believe essayists are able to supplement the meanings inherent in their texts with another layer of information through their voice, creating a nuanced “texture” of sound. In this way, the essays carry more affect. In order to account for the unique qualities of auditory experience, to better engage the performative aspects of the essays, and to experience what it is like to be a member of TIB’s listening audience, I both read and listened to the essays I selected for analysis. Because all of the essays were edited and the readings coached by TIB staff, I found a close correspondence between the meanings expressed via sound and text, but believe that it was a useful exercise to engage both formats. For all citations, I referred to the textual format available on the website.

22 Many of the essays that were selected for analysis from the broadcast essays or the special feature essays were also published in one of the book collections: This I Believe (2006); This I Believe II (2008); This I Believe: On Motherhood (2010); This I Believe: On Fatherhood (2011); This I Believe: On Love (2012); or This I Believe: Life Lessons (2013).
available on the radio, including: a photo of the essayist, a biographical blurb, database theme, and links to related essays. See Table 1 for a detailed description of all 79 essays cited in the dissertation, including author, date, title, type, location, chapter, and level of analysis. From the essays broadcast on National Public Radio, I selected 23 for in-depth analysis, 14 for partial analysis, and referenced another 22. I also included 9 essays for in-depth analysis from the contemporary essays broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show from 2010-2013. I also included 10 essays which were not broadcast, but were included in the special features described below (8 in-depth and 2 partial analysis), 2 of which were later published. Additionally, I analyzed in-depth 2 non-broadcast essays from the database. Altogether there are 80 essays cited in the dissertation, 58 of which were analyzed. I selected essays based on their discussion of liberal and nationalist ideas. For the in-depth and partial analysis, I focused on essays which addressed the topic of national identity, citizenship, or patriotism, essays about politics or government or by governmental officials, essays about war or written by soldiers, essays about home and neighbors, essays by or about immigrant, essays about other nation-states, essays on freedom, and essays on diversity and tolerance, and omitted essays which did not fit these topics. For the referenced essays, I drew from any of the broadcast essays, usually to highlight an author or sometimes to quote one line.

In 2007, This I Believe started labeling the essays thematically and creating links to related essays, revealing which themes This I Believe identified as key ideas for organizing the essays, how they interpreted an essay, and how they interpreted other supposedly similar essayists as relevant to an analogous theme. The more than 70 themes listed in Table 2 were included in a searchable database, which also included first name, city, state, country, age range, essay type, theme, and keyword, and later versions removed the option to search by country or essay type. I identified eight overtly nationalist themes, which included: “America/patriotism,” “citizenship,” “democracy,” “government/constitution,” “immigrant,” “patriotism,” “peace” and “war” and four themes associated with classically liberal ideas of “equality,” “freedom,” “self-

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23 By partial analysis, I mean that although I read the entire essay, I only selected a portion of the essay to analyze for the dissertation. In contrast, for the in-depth analysis, I analyzed all portions of the essay in the dissertation.
Most essays had multiple thematic labels, and I compared This I Believe’s thematic label with my own interpretations of the essay content finding that I did not always agree or at least that the labeling was not exhaustive, so I used this tool loosely. For example, I found that for some essays that I would label as patriotic, the This I Believe thematic designation might be “brotherhood & friendship,” “community,” “courage,” “discrimination,” “injustice,” “place,” “prejudice,” “race,” or “social justice.”

Significantly, this database also included all of the 170,966 essays submitted by listeners to This I Believe, most of which were not selected for broadcast or publication. Initially I intended to include an analysis of the database essays as well as the broadcast essays, but ultimately did not, for reason explained below. To arrive at this decision, I used the eight nationalist and four liberal themes to do a rough cut of the database, and read several hundred of the thousands of essays this cut produced. I would find an essay that I thought particularly illuminated a nationalist idea that I was focusing on and then later discover this essay being featured in the Special Features section or being chosen for inclusion in the book collections, suggesting a resonance between the This I Believe selection committee and myself as to what constitutes an interesting essay. In 2008 This I Believe introduced Special Features, which are collections of five essays drawn from the broadcast and database essayists, all organized around a central topic, with more than 130 topics containing over 650 essays. Special Features are available only on the website. These topics are different from the themes in the database, often temporally connected with contemporary holidays or events or with life experiences. I found that many of the special features corresponded with the nationalist and liberal ideas that I was finding reflected throughout This I Believe and after reading through all of the special features, I selected the following 15 special features for concentrated analysis: “The Immigrant Experience;” “Lessons Learned From Strangers;” “Life Lessons on Diversity;” “There’s No Place Like Home;” “Family Members in Military Service;” “The Middle Ground;” “Home for the Holidays;” “Neighbors;” “The Goodness of Neighbors;” “The Power of the Vote;” “Patriotism;” “Beliefs Born on the Battlefield;” “Reflections on 9/11;” “Independence Day;” and “Veteran’s Day.”

I theorized that the database essays, since they were rejected by the producers, would contain alternative, negotiated, or resistant discourses to the dominant nationalist
discourses being broadcast on *This I Believe*, reflecting the uneven and unequal discursive struggle between the elite and the popular essayists. However, I discovered that this was not the case, finding that the database essays predominantly expressed the dominant nationalist discourses in less refined and more extreme terms than the published essays, and usually the writing and argument development was less sophisticated. The two essays that I selected from the database for inclusion in the dissertation reflect themes that were implied within the broadcast essays, but could not be expressed directly or as boldly as in the database. First, in contrast to the broadcast essays lamenting the loss of the “middle ground,” Peter’s essay recounts how he was so disappointed with the reelection of George W. Bush he considered immigrating to Canada (2005). Second, in contrast to the broadcast essays who celebrate the triumph over racism in the election of Barack Obama, Katie’s essay describes what makes Obama’s blackness different such that she could imagine having tea with him (2008).

As to how each essay was analyzed, I worked to historicize and thereby denaturalize social categories like nation, home, citizen, neighbor, terrorist, common good, public, security, freedom, diversity, and tolerance, exploring the ways in which these concepts are constituted and reconstituted through discourse, and used by the essayists to legitimate or reproduce nationalist forms of social organization. I attempted to understand how nationalist discourses are refracted through events such as the elections of President George W. Bush, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the global “war on terror,” and the election of Barack Obama, showing how the discourses employed by the essayists were redefined by these events, but also embedded in a history of nationalism and whiteness that preceded these events, a history which allows for the mundane expression of these discourses on *This I Believe*. I worked to expose within the essays the asymmetries in power which are sustained through discourse, as well as the regulatory power of discursive structures like nationalism, examining the essays for the ways in which essayists struggled to manage their own and others’ national belonging (and not belonging). I discovered connections between the producer content and the essay content, working to reveal how power circulates from multiple sites, the idea of the ‘public’ is discursively accomplished, and the ways in which intellectuals constitute themselves as national subjects and participate in the (re)production of national discourses.
1.7 Reflexive Statement

My scholarly goal in this dissertation is to describe the style in which the listeners of National Public Radio imagine and identify with the nation, and to uncover the ways in which liberal ideas and the fantasy structure upon which they are based, are central to the maintenance of nationalism and white privilege. My motivation is not to judge nationalists as “good” or “bad,” but rather to show how the discourses which they articulate bring them into the exercise of power, naturalize the power of the state to rule, and reinforce the existing social relations that organize their privileged membership in the nation. My purpose is to show how nationalism is an endemic and aggressive condition, one in which even intellectuals are articulated into, which prepares all national subjects for the moment when national sacrifice will be required, when tolerance must be withheld. My intention is to challenge the common sense of liberals that social inequalities are not intrinsic to liberal values or liberal democracies and thus can be resolved through reform. I want to suggest that the expression of private belief, without addressing the structures within which such belief is embedded, is not sufficient for civic engagement. I hope to compel the liberal and progressive intelligentsia to recognize that the purported triumph of liberal values as symbolized by the election of President Barack Obama does not represent “change we can believe in,” and to inspire them to “speak truth to power” by critiquing liberal nationalist ideas for the ways in which they reproduce relations of oppression and exploitation.

1.8 Summary of Introduction

To summarize, this study seeks to answer how National Public Radio provides its listeners with a resonant style of ‘American’ national identity by which to imagine themselves, others, and the world through the audience-participation program called This I Believe. This study explores the ways in which discourses constitute national communities and produce national identities. The literature review describes the ways in which radio has been significant for nation-building, acting as a conduit for the imagination of citizenship and the production of the people, able to shape the boundaries of the public, as well as uphold the legitimacy of the state through the ideological construction of the ‘nation.’ Studies are cited which explore radio’s ability to negotiate
the private/public dichotomy and debate the significance for political engagement of citizenship as a performance of the private self in public. Such national performances are then explored through a review of literature which reveals how nationalism is a banal part of everyday life, and describes the ways in which intellectuals are articulated into the nation and secure their cultural authority to shape national understandings.

Theoretically, this study draws on Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” and his ideas about the individual as both an effect and articulation of power, in order to understand how This I Believe facilitates the production of a particular subjectivity that contributes to the realization of national state power. This study also draws on Hage in order to understand national belonging as a lived experience, using his concepts of “passive belonging” and “governmental belonging” to interpret the different ways in which the essayists identify with the nation based on their location within the national field of power. This study explores how intellectuals come to secure their cultural authority to shape national understandings, and considers the lines of tension among the dominant within the national field, particularly between those whom Hage refers to as “evil white nationalists” and “good white nationalists.” Drawing on Hage’s argument that both evil and good nationalists share a similar “White nation” fantasy structure, I apply his ideas to a context in which the Good White nationalists, represented by the Democrats and the liberal audiences of National Public Radio and This I Believe, felt disempowered and sought a media format which would give public voice to their private values. I extend Hage’s critique of multiculturalism to reveal how liberal concepts like freedom and the common good, as well as tolerance and diversity, reproduce the structure of white privilege.

This I Believe was selected as a case study because its essays on personal belief offer insight into the articulation and formation of the subjectivity of NPR’s liberal news audiences, whilst the programs’ stated goal to promote a national dialogue about the common good provides an understanding of the construction and reproduction of nationalist discourses. Drawing on the work of Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Nina Eliasoph, and Lauren Berlant, wherein national identity is conceptualized as a socially constructed category and performance, and the nation as constituted through narration and acts of imagination, this study analyzes texts for understanding how the
national subject is (re)produced within discourse and the ways in which discourses (re)produce state power. This study employs a Foucaultian discursive analysis, with its emphasis the constitution and circulation of discourse a primary site of the struggle for power, its focus on denaturalizing social categories, and its concentration on historicizing existing discourses to explain their specificity and the conditions in which discourses function.

This study makes a contribution to growing body of literature on radio studies, filling an empirical gap by implementing a discursive analysis on a unique site of inquiry, a contemporary audience-participation program on public radio in the United States, and showing how the idea of the public is discursively accomplished. More substantially, this study makes a contribution to radio studies, as well as to studies of nationalism, by considering the complex connections between public radio broadcasting, the formation and maintenance of national identity, and the construction of a public sphere, through an analysis of the meaning-making processes by which the essayists on This I Believe imagine themselves as national subjects and articulate nationalist discourses. Unlike most studies on the social construction of nationalism, this study will focus on how nationalism is produced and maintained through the routine discursive practices of elites, with a detailed textual analysis of first person accounts, in order to reveal the contents of the national habitus of the essayists and ways in which intellectuals (re)produce nationalist discourses and identities through their everyday activities. This study expands on Anderson’s idea of national “styles” of power, seeking to make a theoretical contribution by showing how liberal ideals of citizenship and state organization form the style used on This I Believe to articulate the nation, shape national imaginaries, and incorporate its specific audience into the American national state. Relatedly, this study extends Hage’s ideas about the white nation fantasy structure to explore how they apply to a context in which the liberal ideas of good nationalists have become marginalized.

1.9 Outline of Chapters

Throughout this dissertation I will be investigating the ways in which shared meanings and discourses constitute national communities and produce national identities. Specifically, I will show how This I Believe functions as a tool in the construction and
maintenance of ‘American’ identity for the listeners of This I Believe on National Public Radio, employing a liberal “style” of nationalism to bring the highly-educated, socially-conscious public radio audience into the nation-building project, as the essayists participate in (re)producing an American national identity by which to see themselves, others, and the world. I will be exploring the processes by which the idea of ‘the people’ is produced through this radio program, showing how this audience participation program negotiates the contradictions inherent in the public/private dichotomy as essayists’ employ these confessions of the self to give public voice to their private values, to claim their membership to the nation, and to manage the boundaries of the national public.

In Chapter Two, “This ‘Liberals’ Believe” I argue that prior to This I Believe’s first broadcast in 2005, the increasing dominance and faith-based politics of the Republican Party, combined with cuts to public media funding and rhetorical attacks by conservatives, as well as threats to free speech and civil liberties, all contributed to feelings of disempowerment for many members of This I Believe’s audience. I describe how historically NPR has been considered an outlet for populist impulses on the left, and I discuss the debates between conservatives and liberals about the perceived ideological biases of public broadcasting. I argue that the people who most listen to NPR news, a highly educated, socially conscious, and politically liberal group, are nationalists in the sense that they gain purpose and meaning through their participation, real or imagined, in the management of the ideal American nation. I argue that This I Believe provides these “worried” listeners with a sympathetic community of fellow liberals with whom to share their beliefs and values, as well as the opportunity to join in the imagined American nation by using This I Believe as a vehicle to reclaim their voice and viewpoint.

I detail how This I Believe draws on classical and modern liberal ideals, including an aversion to absolute authority that is not representative of the nation, an emphasis on protecting the rule of law and freedom of speech, as well as the significance of individual moral autonomy and self-reflection, to argue for the importance of discovering the common good and achieving a national consensus. The producers and essayists argue that protecting these basic rights is what it means to defend freedom, to provide security, and to be an ‘American.’ I contend that such assertions, and the social relations upon which they rest, are legitimated by the production of a perception that the public sphere is in
crisis, a crisis generated because of supposedly corrupted commercial, political, and religious interests. The generation of this crisis ideologically obfuscates the interests of producers and listeners of shows such as *This I Believe*. I argue that *This I Believe*’s emphasis on belief, rather than material conditions, is grounded in the liberal ideal that the authority of the state is legitimated through an educated citizenry and because the state is understood as the instrument of the people, rather than an apparatus of ruling, liberals look to the individual, the people, and the common good as the source of power. Furthermore, I argue that *This I Believe*’s focus on private belief and discussion, rather than public issues and debate, produces an idealization of consensus and, ironically, a suppression of diversity, which combined with their lack of acknowledgement of structural inequalities, denies any possibility of participatory parity.

In Chapter 3, “The America I Believe In,” I show the ways in which the *This I Believe* essayists struggle over the value of their national capital, using it to make assertions about the value of their belonging within the nation and of the nation belonging to them. I argue that understanding what it means to feel at home within the nation requires a consideration of the organization of social differences that regulate national space. Drawing on essays about home and neighbors, I explicate Ghassan Hage’s concept of governmental belonging, describing how some essayists express their perception of being “at home” in that nation by taking for granted their right to legitimately speak on behalf of the nation and contribute to its management. I argue that such essays show how the idea of home as a place of belonging connects nation to family, such that the nation is imagined as a homely totality, a national neighborhood of neighbors. However, I argue that nationalist claims can also be directed at neighbors. Drawing on essays about patriotism and “the immigrant experience,” I explicate Ghassan Hage’s concept of passive belonging, describing how some essayists express their perception of not being “at home” in the nation. I detail how these essayists challenge the value of those contents that illegitimately classify them as less national, striving to have a legitimate say in how national belonging is defined, and to be recognized as at least as national, as American, as those in a position of national dominance.

Drawing on essays about how the War on Terror has become a part of daily life, I describe how those essayists with governmental belonging fear that the security of the
national home and their racial, national, and imperial privileges are threatened and in need of protection. These essayists, many of whom are mothers, demonstrate their civic commitment by defending U.S. imperialist practices as a necessary moral obligation of the state through ideas of freedom. I argue that for those essayists who are included in the discourse of national belonging, such fear can be unifying, providing a sense of moral purpose and a willingness to defend the nation. In contrast, for those essayists not fully included in the discourse of national belonging, the homeland can be a place of insecurity, especially for those identified as “Muslims,” who must prove that they are not terrorists by defending the actions of the American government.

In Chapter 4, “Our Greatest Strength in Dealing With the World,” I explore how the This I Believe essayists’ imagination of “difference” is a critical component to the maintenance of their sense of national belonging. I argue that ideas like freedom, terrorism, diversity, and tolerance, impede essayists’ efforts to comprehend the causations of acts of terror or to develop a critical awareness of how imperialism operates. I describe how after September 11th, the Bush administration emphasized freedom and liberty as central values of ‘American’ national identity, as well as values with global appeal and benefits, whose defense and promotion justified U.S. foreign policy. Drawing on This I Believe essays by foreign-policy governmental officials and well travelled ‘citizens,’ I argue that consistent with these claims, the This I Believe essayists celebrate the United States as a model of liberal democracy in a world that that they characterize as lacking in freedom, violent and antimodern, occupied by people who yearn for basic human rights. The essayists, many of whom are military personnel, are supportive of what they interpret as the humanitarian motivation of the United States to bring ‘freedom’ to the oppressed, even if that means using military or occupying force, in order to defeat those who “hate freedom.” I argue that such a universalizing discourse evades the complicity of the United States in provoking and perpetuating such violence, an evasion which can also be found in the lack of discussion by This I Believe essayists of the American torture of ‘enemy combatants,’ in favor of essays by Americans who were tortured.

Uncomfortable with what Ghassan Hage terms morally ‘evil’ nationalist practices of exclusion, such as torture, I detail how the This I Believe essayists emphasize instead
what Ghassan Hage terms the morally ‘good’ nationalist practices of tolerance and acceptance, with their valuation of cultural pluralism and diversity. I contend that discourses of multiculturalism help to deny social relations of domination in order to maintain the veneer of unification that nationalism requires for its legitimation. I consider the distinction within multiculturalism between those who embody diversity, and those who tolerate or appreciate diversity, showing how non-White essayists write about their ‘own’ cultural practices, whilst White essayists write about how their experience of ‘other’ cultures enriches their lives. I then analyze essays by essayists who have felt excluded because of their social ‘difference, revealing how toleration and acceptance act as exclusionary forces on the tolerated and accepted. I argue that by imagining ‘others’ as objects to be positioned or removed, and setting limits on what will and will not be tolerated, both practices of tolerance and exclusion reproduce the centrality of the White nationalist within national space, and guard against those who would threaten dominant understandings of ‘Americanness,’ grounded in the fantasy of the White nation. Drawing on essays about diversity, I show how despite the essayists’ desire to challenge practices of exclusion, their shared conviction that they possess, as national subjects, the power to make decisions about how to manage those defined as national objects, reveals the limitations of the discourse of tolerance to overcome nationalist modes of social organization and acknowledge the multiplicity of contested divisions produced organized through relations of class, gender, and racism that create ‘difference.

In Chapter 5, “Finding New Pride in America” I argue that This I Believe was in part a liberal reaction to the faith-based politics driven by Christian conservatives, which dominated public discourse and policy during the Bush administration, and which liberals felt threatened their unique vision of the nation. I describe the efforts of conservatives and liberals to integrate faith and morality into their political campaigns, struggling to legitimately define which values are ‘American’ and which are ‘un-American.’ I argue that This I Believe is consonant with the Democratic effort to regain control over the public discourse on morality, offering its listeners the opportunity to say what they believe in, to discover shared beliefs, and to provide each other with the social support necessary to maintain these beliefs. I argue that despite a professed desire for a public conversation about the common good, citizenship on This I Believe is enacted through
pubic performances of individual private beliefs, and that by restricting permitted talk to “patriotism without political cant,” This I Believe limits the possibilities for political engagement, for connecting personal lives to political issues. I argue that This I Believe demonstrates how Democrats do not require a religious foundation in order to connect with the deepest concerns of its constituency, because as shown throughout the dissertation, liberalism is already a morally resonant discourse for the nationalist essayists being broadcast on NPR.

I contend that the essayists strongly identified with Democratic President Barack Obama, who in his public speeches drew from liberal discourses to articulate many of the concerns expressed by the This I Believe essayists. I analyze This I Believe essays which suggest that for some essayists, the election of President Obama legitimated liberal ideals of the inclusivity of the nation and the success of citizenship, and that with a liberal nationalist at the head of the United States, these essayists felt a little less worried about their position in the national field. I argue that such reclamation of national identity is the kind of change being sought by This I Believe. I suggest that during their moment out of the political center, liberals had the opportunity to realize through their own feelings of not belonging how ideas of home and nation work to separate and position people based on differentiated identities, but instead cultivated a “new pride” based on a belief that the state would once again rule in the interests of liberals, that changing the representative of the state would secure, rather than challenge or transform, the social relations that organize the This I Believe essayists privileged membership in the nation. I conclude that This I Believe shows how the constitution and circulation of discourse is a primary site of the struggle for power, revealing the influence of media institutions like NPR to facilitate national identification, shape the boundaries of the public, and to uphold the legitimacy of the state through a liberal style of imagining the ‘nation.’
2. This *Liberals* Believe

Beginning with the 2000 primaries and continuing through the first term of the Bush administration, the audience of *National Public Radio* news grew by 55 percent, as listeners turned to public radio news stations in “droves” to hear its “intelligent, in-depth” coverage on “Bush versus Gore, 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Bush versus Kerry, and more” (Station Resource Group and Walrus Research, 2008: 2). The people who most listen to *NPR* news have been dubbed “NPR Activists” because of their “very liberal” political beliefs, their use of the radio as a “forum to learn,” and their interest in “seeking solutions to social, environmental, and economic problems” (Bailey, 2004: 187, 190). NPR Activists are nationalists in the sense that they gain purpose and meaning through their participation, real or imagined, in the management of the ideal American nation and state (Hage, 2000). Such purpose can be inferred from research which shows that the news listeners on *National Public Radio* are civically engaged, spending more time on community projects, attending more club meetings, and following politics much more closely than other Americans (Putnam, 2000: 220). More specifically, *NPR* listeners were 94 percent more likely to have signed a petition, and “twice as likely to take an active role in a local civic issue, work for a political party or candidate, write a letter to the editor, write or visit an elected official, address a public meeting, or take part in an environmental group or class” as the average American (*NPR Research*, 2011; McCauley, 2005: 116). *NPR* listeners were also more likely than the average American to belong to voluntary associations like “unions, fraternal orders, church boards, charitable groups, and local government bodies” (McCauley, 2005: 116).

*This I Believe* does not often publish essays which are explicitly focused on an essayists’ political philosophy or partisan affiliations, because as will be discussed, they want to avoid argument, but when such essays are published, they tend to share similar characteristics. These characteristics include: a uncomfortable feeling that their moderate or liberal political beliefs are not widely shared or represented, a liberal aversion to absolutism, a liberal desire for tolerance, and a general wish to feel more at home within the nation. Such sentiments can be found in the essay “The Value of the Middle,”
Iveson says that her political beliefs fall in “the middle” and she identifies as an “Independent,” although in a recent bid for MO state representative in 2008, she ran on the Democratic ticket. She describes her feeling of isolation from public discourse as “I’ve doubted whether there was a real middle, or just an empty space between extremes.” She is hostile to a political environment that seeks to control her beliefs, complaining, “There seemed some pervasive expectation that sufficient force would persuade people in the middle to choose, picking one extreme over the other.” She is also upset that because she refuses to compromise her conscience, “the implication [is that] those in the middle [are] somehow flawed, weak or indecisive.” Iveson describes the current political climate as “bleak” and calls out to the This I Believe audience “I believe that there are a huge number of other people in the middle. Just like me they have felt jaded, excluded, isolated, helpless. They don’t see themselves, their values, reflected in either extreme.”

Iveson describes her own middleness, which reflects the “integratively complex” political reasoning of centrists and liberals, who are able to see the similar importance of conflicting values (Domke, 2004:173). Iveson has “Democratic and Republican friends,” holds “some traditional religious values within my more freethinking faith tradition,” is “soundly liberal (soft-hearted) and fiscally conservative (hard-headed) in matters of public policy” and says that none of these so-called oppositions “strike me as contradictory.” Iveson takes a jab at self-righteous flag-waving when she claims “I am a patriot without a flag decal.” She also takes a jab at conservative religion, when she claims “I am a true believer in things that I can’t see and I think faith is all about doubt.”

But behind Iveson’s bravado is a disempowered nationalist, frustrated that her voice is not being heard nor understood, as she explains “It felt like an English speaker trying to communicate with a non-English speaker: If they don’t understand you the first time, speak louder—as if clarity comes from volume alone.” Iveson places herself in this metaphor in the subordinate position as a non-English speaker, revealing her perceived shift out of the symbolic center of the nation.

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24 Cande Iveson’s essay “The Value of the Middle” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 01/27/12 and included in the special features The Middle Ground, and The Power of the Vote.
Iveson goes to some length in her essay describing what it used to feel like to experience what Ghassan Hage calls “homely belonging” in the nation, describing how she was born “in the heart of the country: Missouri.” She felt inclusion in and ownership over “our house in the middle of town; my town in the middle of the state; my state in the middle of the United States; the United States in the middle of North America; the pattern extending out to the farthest reaches of the starry universe.” For Iveson, being in the center of the nation was “extraordinary, magical and fabulous—the best place to be.” This childhood fantasy is no longer present for Iveson, and she laments, “in the last few years this middle ground hasn’t been so comfortable.” Hage argues that sentiments, such as these, are the lament of nationalists who imagine themselves to have lost the homely feelings of “familiarity, security, and community” and desire nothing more than “be at home” again (2000:40). Based on the liberal ideal that no one ought to be governed without being heard, Iveson concludes her essay with a call to arms to This I Believe listeners to resist the majority and stand up for freedom of conscience, proclaiming, “I believe it is possible for a strong middle to break this stalemate with strong values, clear insights, resistance to extreme choices and sheer numbers. I believe in a radical, activist middle that will restore our sense of balance, and I am ready to participate.”

Oftentimes, the essays in the database express more intensely the themes represented in the broadcast essays. Peter,25 a middle-aged restaurant manager from Milwaukee, WI (6/22/05) writes in his essay “I cannot describe how dejected I felt the night after Bush’s re-election this past November. I felt betrayed by our government, my political party, the people of this country, all of whom (it seemed to me) made decisions based more on fear than reason, or even any true sense of faith.” Peter’s emphasis on reason and fidelity to conscience, as well as his opposition to Bush, suggest that that he is a liberal and a Democrat. Like many NPR listeners, he was active in the campaign, “putt[ing] more time and energy into getting out the vote than I ever had before.” Peter identified his own will with the national will so strongly, that when his candidate failed to be elected, he contemplated changing citizenship, filling out paperwork to begin the process of emigration to Canada. Peter’s assumption that Canada would

25 Peter’s essay “This I Believe” was submitted to the database on 07/22/05.
unproblematically allow him to immigrate speaks to his sense of his own power, and also to his sense of being an American, in that he feels that his U.S. citizenship privileges him as a migrant, as well as his choice of Canada as a destination. But, Peter couldn’t go through with it because of his liberal nationalist beliefs in pluralism, toleration, and against all forms of absolute authority. He realized that “the fundamental thing about my country was that people came here to be free, and being an American isn’t about…whether you agree with anyone else. It’s about a declaration of descent [sic] from all other sovereign authority, and a desire to make our destinies for ourselves, together.” Peter is a loyal liberal nationalist, professing “This I believe: this is my country. I could not move to Canada, because I will not be run out of my country in fear. This I believe: that if we love our country, we stay and fight against those things which we feel threaten the beliefs on which it was founded. This I believe: that the highest form of patriotism is descent [sic].”

Essays like Iveson’s and Peter’s suggest a concern among This I Believe audiences that they no longer belong to what Hage terms the “national aristocracy,” that their liberal aspirations and ideas are no longer national aspirations and ideals (2000: 192). By 2005 when This I Believe began broadcasting on NPR’s news programs, the Republican Party had become the dominant force in U.S. politics, holding the presidency, both houses of Congress, a majority of state legislators, and a growing voter base. Such a dramatic turn of political events led Democrats, liberals and other centrist, leftist, progressive, and independent-leaning individuals to worry that they had lost the control they once imagined they enjoyed over the management of their nation and the state.

A recent NPR poll reported that nearly 30 percent of its listeners feel like their life is slipping out of control (NPR Research, 2011). Between 2000 and 2003, the Democratic lead party identification over Republicans substantially declined to only 3 points, the smallest lead since 1969 when the Democrats enjoyed a 17 point lead over Republicans (Taylor, 2003). Also, 2003 marked the first year since 1995 that conservatives (35 percent), outnumbered liberals (18 percent) by more than two to one, but still trailed moderates (40 percent) (Taylor, 2003). Likely in response to such trends, in 2004, 67 percent of Democrats and 55 percent of Independents self-reported as feeling “alienated” (Harris Poll, #96).
Moreover, the label of “liberal” has become “a Bad Word,” so pejorative that during the 2004 presidential campaign, President George W. Bush used the term as an invective against John Kerry, who avoided embracing the label himself (Lukacs, 2004). Political commentator and comedian Bill Maher protested against the demonization of the term “liberal” during the campaign and encouraged liberals to “take back” the word (2007). During the year preceding the first broadcast of This I Believe, the term “liberal” was a slander being used by conservatives, the Right, and much of mainstream media. A brief review of books released that year showcases the rhetorical dominance of anti-liberal sentiments, including books by conservative radio talk show hosts like Sean Hannity’s “Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty over Liberalism” (2004) and Michael Savage’s “The Savage Nation: Saving America from the Liberal Assault on Our Borders, Languages and Culture” (2004). Increasingly, “liberalism has become an object of ridicule, condemned for its misplaced idealism, vilified for its tendency to equivocate and compromise, and mocked for its embrace of political correctness” (Boyle, 2008:706).

2.1 “A Patriot Without a Flag Decal”

Sensing a loss of control, liberal nationalists worried that the state no longer represents their interests. Ghassan Hage describes the practice of “worrying” as an essential component of the governmental mode of inhabiting the nation, employed by people who have “have given themselves the national governmental right to ‘worry’ about the nation” (Hage, 2000:17). Claiming the legitimate right to worry about the nation reveals how worrying is a privileged practice grounded in the fantasy of the White nation, a fantasy Hage describes as “centered around a ‘White-very-worried-about-the-nation-subject’” (2000: 10). He recounts how in Australia, “worried ‘White Australians’…think that they have a monopoly over ‘worrying’ about the shape and the future of Australia (Hage, 2000:10). Significantly, worrying is essential to the

subjectivity of the nationalist, because as Hage explains “if the White governmental subject wasn’t worried there would be no need for him to exist” (Hage, 2000: 124). He explains how worrying provides governmental nationalists with purpose, facilitating the construction of “themselves as the most worthy” citizens, as ‘real’ Australians, or in this case, ‘real’ Americans (Hage, 2000: 10).

Hage bases his argument on a Lacanian understanding of “fantasy” whereby national subjectivity includes both a “fantasy of the nation” as well as “fantasy of the self as a fulfilled nationalist” (2000: 70). What this means is that national subjects find meaning both in the hope that their ideal nation will be realized, as well as through the actual tasks of worrying about and building this nation. Hage explains that “People don’t have fantasies. They inhabit fantasy spaces of which they are a part” (2000: 70). Through what Hage refers to as “series of ideals and yearnings” nationalists become purposeful and “establish their very raison d’être” (2000:68, 71). Relevant to the This I Believe essayists, Hage reflects that worrying can sometimes be “the last resort of the weak…what people who are losing control…do to compensate for their loss” (2000:10). He explains that worrying can be used as strategy by for nationalists who are experiencing a “crisis of legitimacy as a governmental subject” (Hage, 2000: 189).

For the essayists on This I Believe who are feeling a loss of control over the management of the nation, yet who also believe that “they have a legitimate claim to represent the national will embodied in the state” and “ought to be more empowered” worrying can be a way for them to compensate and remain meaningful as national subjects (Hage, 2000: 69). Hage explains that nationalists experiencing a governmental crisis “face the threat of their own disintegration,” and use worrying to retain the sense that the imaginary national order is still “their national order” (Hage, 2000:190). Former assistant producer of the original 1950s series, Gladys Chang believes that This I Believe functions as less of a moral exercise, than a coping mechanism for a diverse population distraught over recent social changes and in need of comfort and companionship (Allison, Gediman, and Merrick, 2005). In an interview with Dan Gediman on Morning Edition, she reflected how the This I Believe essays were and still are “deeply sincere statements of people of all ages trying to make sense out of a time when things were quite scary for
many people and for other people, soothing to know that somebody else thinks the way they do” (Allison, Gediman, and Merrick, 2005).

Importantly, as discussed in the Introduction, Hage constructed his arguments about national worrying based on his analysis of disempowered, “Evil White Nationalists” in Australia as they worried over how the “Good White Nationalists” in Australia were managing what he refers to as “Ethnic Others” (2000). In this study I attempt to apply Hage’s ideas to the reverse situation in the United States, when Good White Nationalists were feeling disempowered and worried over how the Evil White Nationalists were managing “Ethnic Others.” I base this application on Hage’s description of the “White Nation Fantasy,” as “fantasy of a nation governed by White people, a fantasy of White supremacy” which he argues is shared by both Good and Evil Nationalists who equally imagine themselves to be masters of national space (2000: 18). He clearly states that “White multiculturalism and the White discourses of nationalist exclusion… share a similar fantasy structure…a fantasy of White supremacy” (Hage, 2000: 232). Hage emphasizes how “nationalist practices appear to emanate from both empowered and disempowered people at the same time” and details how racist practices and multiculturalist practices represent merely “a difference of capacity of tolerance between people who equally claim the capacity to manage national space” (Hage, 2000: 93). Hage explains that “there is no tolerant nationalism and intolerant nationalism,” there is only nationalism (2000:93). Since Evil and Good Nationalists share a similar fantasy as they imagine themselves as the “masters of national space,” it seems reasonable that Hage’s ideas would be helpful for interpreting the experiences of national subjectivity of the tolerant This I Believe essayists (2000: 68).

One important difference though in the experience of disempowerment by Good White Nationalists is that they do not express a “discourse of Anglo decline” like the worried Evil White Nationalists in Australia. Instead, the This I Believe essayists express what I will call a “discourse of liberal decline” as they worry that free speech, the rule of law, the protection of civil liberties, tolerance for diversity, and the public sphere itself are threatened by the worrisome practices of conservative Republicans in the Bush administration, and therefore threaten their liberal ideal of the American nation. Hage explains how disempowered nationalists can either respond with “despair” or they can
take on the “more heroic task of reestablishing the national order against what is perceived as a chaotic situation” (2000: 190). As I will show, the This I Believe essayists choose the latter option, employing the radio program to voice and find support for their beliefs, facilitating the discernment of a liberal national identity and moral discourse, which would find resonance in the rhetoric of President Barack Obama, culminating in a restoration of the dominance of the Good White Nationalists and their liberal fantasy of the White Nation.

This I Believe rhetorically asks “What advantage comes to people, particularly prominent ones, in making themselves vulnerable by speaking from the heart, speaking without defense in front of an audience of millions?” The answer is that through these confessions of the self, the essayists assert, legitimate, or congeal their membership to the nation. In search of “ontological security,” This I Believe audiences engage in a “reflexive project of the self” and attempt to sequester their national anxiety through essays which demonstrate their national belonging and right to manage national space (Giddens, 1991). Experiencing feelings of dissatisfaction, longing, and protest, the NPR listeners who seek out formats like This I Believe derive meaning and purpose from the task of being what Hage calls “a national domesticator” and building the ideal homely nation (2000:71). This I Believe provides NPR Activists with the opportunity to assert their sense of rightful belonging to the nation and their beliefs about how the nation ought to be managed. For listeners experiencing a profound sense of exclusion from public life, This I Believe provides a sympathetic community of fellow liberals with which to share their beliefs and values. Audience research showed that the key to listeners choosing to make a donation to NPR was the degree of “personal importance” public radio held for them. They discovered that one dimension of this personal importance was a “sense of community.” For its most loyal listeners, NPR provides “a community bound by shared interests and values rather by city limits or country lines…so real and meaningful that its citizens are willing to support it voluntarily” (Giovannoni, Peters and Youngclaus, 1999: 117).

Tapping into this sense of community, This I Believe asserts that the seemingly ordinary act of writing an essay by supposedly ordinary people has extraordinary consequences. The producers claim it’s a form of activism to share your beliefs with the
community on *This I Believe*, providing the “worried” nationalists with a new sense of purpose. In the foreword to the first collection of published essays, oral historian Studs Terkel clarifies that “Being an activist is self-explanatory: you act; you take part in something outside yourself. You join with others, who may astonish you in thinking precisely as you do on the subjects, say, of war, civil liberties, human rights” (Allison and Gediman, 2006: xx). While *This I Believe* promotes tolerance for different beliefs, statements like these highlight that the ultimate goal for listening to other people’s beliefs is the discovery of shared beliefs. Whatever your level of engagement with *This I Believe*, whether it be to simply listen alone in the car or to go so far as to form a regular discussion group in the church basement, *This I Believe* maintains that are you are entering into a community. This community is the “imagined community” of the American nation.

Participating in *This I Believe* then, is about more than writing your personal credo, but about joining a national discourse, where your private thoughts become public acts. Terkel elaborates how, “Once you join others, you become a different person, a much stronger one. You feel that you really count, you discover your strength as an individual because you have along the way discovered others share in what you believe, you are not alone; and thus a community is formed” (Allison and Gediman, 2006: xxi). Such an understanding is reflected in essayist interpretations of the series, such as *This I Believe* essayist Ted Gup’s comment that “If you take all the essays in the aggregate, what you have is a sort of national anthem” (Allison, 2008:2).

In this chapter I will describe how through discussions about the public and the common good, *This I Believe* engages in a liberal project to reestablish the hegemony of liberal nationalism, which they contend has been thrown into crisis. I will show how for its nationalist listeners who perceive the state as an essential component of their own power, *This I Believe* affirms their liberal beliefs that everyone has an equal right to be heard and to participate in the management of the nation, and offers to assist them in reclaiming their voice and purpose through discussion of personal belief. In describing *This I Believe* as a “liberal project” what I mean is that in addressing the nationalist

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27 Ted Gup’s essay “In Praise of the Wobblies” was broadcast on *Morning Edition* on 09/12/05 and published in *This I Believe* (2006), as well as included in the special feature *The Middle Ground*. 
concerns of its listeners, *This I Believe* draws from ideas based in liberal philosophy, and uses these ideas to bring its listeners back into the American nation-building project. These ideas include the problematic tenets of liberal governance described in the introduction, namely that civil society confers authority to the state to govern in the national public interest. These tenets are grounded in an assemblage of auxiliary ideas, such as equality, pluralism, and toleration, which explicate liberalism’s central commitment to “liberty” and its belief in “the freedom of the individual as the highest political value” (Ryan, 2012: 23).

Classical liberalism, espoused by thinkers like John Locke and Adam Smith, defines freedom negatively, as the freedom from oppression, and thus is hostile to all forms of “tyranny”\(^{28}\) which threaten the freedom of the individual, and advocates for the establishment of rule of law, as well as the protection of civil liberties, including the right to freedom of religion, speech, and private property (Ryan, 2012: 28-34). Modern or social liberalism, espoused by thinkers like John Stuart Mill and John Rawls, extends classical liberal philosophy to define liberty positively, as the freedom to act, tasking public institutions, especially the modern welfare state, with the responsibility to protect and enhance individual freedom by providing equality of opportunity and minimal provisions for a good life, such as universal education or healthcare (Ryan, 2012: 25-26).

Both conservatives and liberals share ideas drawn from classical liberal philosophy. Classical liberalism’s aversion to government interference resembles the views of modern political conservatives. Social liberalism’s emphasis on social justice resembles the views of modern political liberals. Liberals can be distinguished from conservatives in their concern for social problems such as poverty, racism, sexism, and exploitative social relations, and from progressives and socialists by their conviction that these problems are neither intrinsic to liberal values, nor endemic or integral to liberal democracies, but rather can be resolved through reform (Parenti, 1995: 41-42). In other words, liberals do not see the inequalities they are concerned about as inherent to the very social structure that liberal democracies are a part. Conservatives and liberals share an acceptance of the underlying principles of liberal styles of governance, but they where

\(^{28}\) Liberalism is antidespotic, anticlerical, and hostile to totalitarianism (Ryan, 2012: 34).
they differ is in its proper application, in different visions of how national space ought to
be managed. In this chapter, I will detail how This I Believe draws on classical and
modern liberal ideals, including an aversion to absolute authority, an emphasis on
protecting the rule of law and freedom of speech, as well as the significance of individual
moral autonomy and self-reflection, to argue for the importance of discovering the
common good and achieving a national consensus.

In the section “As Left as Talk Radio Gets” I will describe how historically NPR
has been considered an outlet for populist impulses on the left, discuss the debates
between conservatives and liberals about the perceived ideological biases of public
broadcasting, and argue that the cuts to public media funding and rhetorical attacks by
conservatives raised concern among liberals that their interests and values were not being
represented in the public sphere, causing them to turn to what is considered the only
national news network friendly to liberals values, National Public Radio. I will describe
the demographic and social characteristics of NPR listeners, discussing the significance
of higher education for valuing the style of NPR news presentation, as well as for
cultivating the intellectual and moral autonomy necessary to produce the liberal ideal of
the educated citizenry essential to democratic forms of government.

In the section, “The Tinkerbell Effect” I will describe how in response to the USA
PATRIOT Act, the producers and essayists on This I Believe defend traditional liberal
values like freedom of speech and the press, as well as the rule of law and the right to due
process, arguing that protecting these basic rights is what it means to defend freedom, to
provide security, and to be an American. In the section, “My Opinions Matter” I will
describe how This I Believe producers draw on the historical analogy of McCarthyism to
critique how the USA PATRIOT Act has produced a fear of being accused of disloyalty
to the nation because of subversive or dissenting beliefs and led to the creation of
imagined enemies, both within and outside the borders of the United States. I will show
how the producers of This I Believe emphasize the importance of individual moral
autonomy and self-reflection by cautioning essayists about the dangers of not knowing

29 The USA PATRIOT Act is an acronym that stands for Uniting (and) Strengthening America (by)
Providing Appropriate Tools Required (to) Intercept (and) Obstruct Terrorism Act.
one’s beliefs. In the section, “A Safe Way” I will describe the criticisms the This I Believe producers make of perceived erosions to the ideal public sphere and detail their desire to create a fantasy space of inclusion by restricting the range of acceptable speech on air to private belief, and advocating for national discussion about the common good to take place off air, in the voluntary associations of the public sphere where public opinion can be formed.

2.2 “As Left As Talk Radio Gets”

Historically, NPR has been the outlet for populist impulses on the left, providing a channel for those who felt “a profound sense of exclusion from and increasing disgust with the mainstream media” (Douglas, 2004: 285). NPR is one of the few national media outlets felt to represent the voices of liberals, and includes an audience that self-identifies as 32 percent liberal and 29 percent middle-of-the-road (Sherman 2005:6). For those who desire to have a “more immediate sense of [them]selves as part of a nation,” NPR programs like This I Believe “speak to the desires of its more liberal listeners who see themselves as outside of and often at odds with the hypercommercialized, hypercynical mainstream media and who want public articulation of a different kind of truth.” (Douglas, 2004: 19). They were able to achieve this through programs that “sought to reactivate attentive listening …which established new daily rituals and new forms of dialogue through which people could build imagined communities on the air…opening up the airwaves to a range of voices” (Douglas, 2004: 285).

NPR and political talk radio became economically, politically, and culturally significant in the 1980s because of an ability to “tap into the sense of loss of public life…and the huge gap people felt between themselves and those who run the country” (ibid: 285). In the 2008 election, seventy-seven percent of the listeners to news talk radio voted, compared to fifty-seven percent of the general population (Lucas, 2012: 23). These numbers reflect the political significance of news talk radio, and are taken seriously by leaders of the Democratic Party such as President Obama’s former chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, (now mayor of Chicago), who called Rush Limbaugh the “de facto leader of the Republican Party,” and stated “He is the voice and the intellectual force and energy behind the Republican Party” (Lengell, 2009). From Rush Limbaugh to Glen Beck,
Conservative talk radio has become “such a large universe that different definitions of conservatism and different styles of programming co-exist on the airwaves” (Lucas, 2012:17). Progressives on the other hand, are “desperate” for programming that “acknowledges their points of view” (Rendall and Hart, 2005).

In contrast to political conservatives, “Liberals do not have a clearly left-leaning television outlet, an explicitly liberal mainstream newspaper, or a network of talk radio hosts” (Domke, 2004: 169). NPR is about “as left as talk radio gets,” but NPR insider Jack Mitchell argues that if there were a “left-wing equivalent to Rush Limbaugh” NPR would fall in “the fair-minded middle between the two extremes” (2005: 170). Following Republican success in the 2002 elections, which was in part attributed to the influence of political conservatives on talk radio, political liberals expressed a desire to challenge these conservative voices and form a progressive network of talk radio hosts. Debuting March 31, 2004, Air America Radio was launched by Progressive Media, whose owners have ties to the Democratic Party, with its chief executive Mark Walsh stating that the network would “offer something unique on talk radio -- a megaphone for liberals” (Steinberg, 2004). Then, comedian and now, junior U.S. Senator from Minnesota, Air America host Al Franken pronounced “This territory has been ceded to the right way too long…We’re going to take it to them,” but ultimately the network was unsuccessful, filing for bankruptcy in 2010 (Carney, 2010; Steinberg, 2004).

National Public Radio has variously been charged by conservative pundits and politicians as “palpably slanted,” “a welfare program for liberals,” “a patronage mill for Democrats,” and “a little Havana on the Potomac” (McCauley, 2005: 4, 111; Mitchell, 2005: 166). Such accusations of a “left wing agenda” even go so far as to claim that Morning Edition and All Things Considered, programs ranked as the most trusted news sources in the U.S., do little more than “amplify the voice of the militant feminists, the homosexual activists, the most radical elements of the civil rights and environmental movements, and the trendy-lefts’ intellectual and cultural elites” (Eggerton 2005; McCauley, 2005: 111; Mitchell, 2005: 167).

In the foreword to the first published This I Believe collection, Terkel takes on the assertion that the media has a liberal bias, quoting British journalist James Cameron who was “condemned for being non-objective and having a point of view” in his reporting on
North Vietnam. Cameron confessed that “I may not always have been satisfactorily balanced; I always tended to argue that objectivity was of less importance that the truth” (Terkel, 2006: xvii). Conservatives have long alleged a liberal bias in the media as a whole, but in fact former Republican party chair Rich Bond admitted that conservatives’ frequent denunciations of “liberal bias” in the media were part of “a strategy” (Ackerman, 2001). With the concentration of media ownership into only eight billion-dollar multinational conglomerates, ultra-conservative owners like Rupert Murdoch, founder of Fox News, have the power to exert tremendous political and economic influence. A 2001 study of network television news found that 92 percent of all U.S. sources interviewed were White, 85 percent were male, and 75 percent were Republican (FAIR, 2001). Political analysis E.J. Dionne refutes the existence of “big liberal media,” arguing that “It took conservatives a lot of hard and steady work to push the media rightward” (2002) He contends that talk radio and cable television “tilt well to the right,” while news formats are “under constant pressure to avoid even the pale hint of liberalism” (Dionne, 2002).

Its not just the content of NPR that concerns Republicans, but the very idea of government subsidized broadcasting that is offensive to conservative’s faith in free markets. Thus, part of the attack against liberals has come in the form of continued threats to cut funding to public broadcasting. For example, in 1995 one of Newt Gingrich’s first acts as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives was to call for the elimination of federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), and for the privatization of public broadcasting, efforts that were unsuccessful (Khan, 2011). In 2005 the Republican Congress attempted deep cuts to the CPB’s operating budget,

30 Disney (market value: $72.8 billion); AOL-Time Warner (market value: $90.7 billion); Viacom (market value: $53.9 billion); General Electric (owner of NBC, market value: $390.6 billion); News Corporation (market value: $56.7 billion); Yahoo! (market value: $40.1 billion); Microsoft (market value: $306.8 billion); Google (market value: $154.6 billion) (Dmitry Krasny, March/April 2007 Mother Jones: 49)

31 Historically, Murdoch has been able to use a variety of his News Corporation’s media holdings to influence everything from elections, such as the 1975 dismissal election of Australian Labor Party Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and the 1979 election of British conservative Margaret Thatcher, to the formation of conservative magazines like The Weekly Standard and conservative 24-hour news television Fox News Channel, to the promotion of his business interests, such as the 1998 refusal by HarperCollins to publish former British governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten’s book which criticized the Chinese government, with whom Murdoch was building economic relationships (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003:49).

32 ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News and NBC Nightly News
which were unsuccessful after significant protest by liberal and progressive groups.

What was different about this attempt was that while historically such threats were initiated by politicians, in this instance Kenneth Tomlinson, chair of the CPB, was the person charging “liberal bias.” An unnamed senior Federal Communications Commission (FCC) official revealed to *The Washington Post* that the Bush administration was exerting significant control over the CPB, asserting that under Ken Tomlinson the CPB “is engaged in a systematic effort not just to sanitize the truth, but to impose a right-wing agenda on PBS. It’s almost like a right-wing coup. It appears to be orchestrated” (Rendall and Hart, 2005). Indeed, at a post-election party Tomlinson admitted as much, “joking” with PBS officials, including PBS president and CEO Pat Mitchell, that they “ought to make sure their programming better reflected the Republican ‘mandate’” (O’Connor, 2005).

While perhaps in this instance the political cronyism was more overt, James Ledbetter describes the *CPB* as a “political favor bank . . . used over the years as a dumping ground for the worst sort of political hacks” (1997:9). But, after commissioning a secret study of alleged bias on select *PBS* and *NPR* programs in which “guests were graded not just on ideology, but on whether they explicitly supported policies of the Bush White House,” Tomlinson was forced to resign from the *CPB* on November 3, 2005. The report of his tenure requested by House Democrats found evidence of ethical violations including that “‘political tests’ were a major criteria used in recruiting a President/Chief Executive Officer for *CPB*” (Folkenflick, 2005). Here, reference is being made to the current president of the *CPB*, Patricia Harrison, former co-chair of the Republican National Committee. *NPR* too, has had concerns raised about political hiring in the instance of *NPR* President Kevin Klose (1998-2008) who was previously the director of the International Broadcasting Bureau, the entity responsible for all government and government sponsored, nonmilitary, international broadcasting; essentially the propaganda agency for the U.S. government (Sherman 2005; Jowett and O’Donnell, 2012). In 2005 the Bush administration launched “its most serious assault ever on *NPR*’s

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33 The CPB provides around 15 percent of NPR and PBS’ combined budget.
independence, proposing two new ombudsmen, even though NPR already has one, and a formal analysis of its Middle East coverage” (Freedman, 2005).

Clearly, the struggle for the survival of NPR has both ideological and material dimensions. Competing in a market environment and in the face of continuing threats to its federal subsidy, NPR developed strategies for “self-sufficiency” which focused building their audience and private support (Mitchell, 2005: 174). Because NPR is a non-commercial station, it is prohibited by federal regulations from selling airtime to for-profit advertisers. Listener contributions are NPR’s single largest revenue source, and in addition to its federal appropriation, financial support for NPR comes from station licensees, underwriting grants, fees paid by the member stations and other distribution networks, foundation support, endowment, merchandising income, and donations from private corporations, like Proctor & Gamble, Sodexho, Microsoft, Saab, CitiBank, Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, and Walmart (Sherman 2005:6; Giovanni, Peters and Youngclaus, 1999). In November 2003, NPR received a $236 million bequest from the estate of Joan Kroc, the widow of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc (Sherman, 2005:1).

*This I Believe* is independently produced by Dan Gediman and John Gregory. Independent producers are responsible for the majority of NPR’s cultural programming, as the bulk of NPR funding goes towards news and public affairs programming. Additionally, independent productions are less expensive for NPR than station-produced programs and enable NPR to maintain its product image as “a progressive institution outside the bounds of market forces” (McCourt, 1999: 137). Independent producers, most of whom are “freelancers operating on a shoestring,” must compete to win NPR’s interest, typically receiving “miserly compensation” from NPR and often having to “give their programs away to ensure carriage” (McCourt, 1999: 138). Independent producers must market their product to fit within NPR’s parameters.

On NPR, programs will only be produced if they can be sold to underwriters first. The desire for nationwide audiences results in a tendency to support certain kinds of programs, those which for example “support their ideologies, appeal to particular audiences, or help public relations,” resulting in a tendency for independent producers to self-censor the kinds of programming that they create (McCourt, 1999: 127). *This I Believe* had a historical track record of popularity across the United States, was fairly
inexpensive to produce, and appeared to be viable over the long term. Such viability stems from content which is independently created by a never-ending supply of “freelance” essayists, is short in duration at under three minutes and therefore can be flexibly integrated into a variety of programming formats, and is generally noncontroversial in subject-matter and thus attractive to sponsors. This I Believe has successfully solicited sponsorship from Farmers Insurance Group, The Righteous Persons Foundation, Capella University and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

In 2010, the main page of the This I Believe website even featured an advertisement for Corn Flakes, which read “Everyone goes through a corn flakes phase. We believe it lasts a lifetime. Click here to tell us what you believe.”

Because of its reliance on CPB funding, some critics on the Left argue that with each successive attack from the Right, public broadcasting becomes “weakened,” as programmers become “more skittish” and “survival through capitulation becomes more ingrained” (Rendall and Hart, 2005). These critics contend that this economic structure encourages a play-it-safe approach, that “its taxpayer subsidy has repeatedly been used as a club…[training] public broadcasters to avoid topics and methods of criticism that might bring down the hand of rebuke” (Ledbetter, 1997:11). A perceived shift to the center has provoked the charge by progressives that NPR has become “too mainstream, too spineless and timid, too deferential to power” (Sherman, 2005: 4). Exemplified by scholars like Edward Herman and Robert McChesney (1997) and by publications such as “Public Television for Sale” (Hoynes, 1994) or “Made Possible By…The Death of Public Broadcasting” (Ledbetter, 1997) progressives fear that public radio’s increasing dependence on corporate funds will inhibit its willingness to critique capitalism and consumption. For many NPR listeners, even the “perception of commercialism” on public radio is offensive, and audience researcher Dave Giovannoni worries that the pressure public radio faces to find new sources of funding cultivates an “incipient willingness…to adopt practices that erode [the industry’s] core values” (McCauley, 2005:110).

Much to the consternation of the political Right, the political Left justifies the need for public broadcasting based on the argument that within media “free markets do not necessarily serve the public interest” (Mitchell, 2005: 164). However, just what it means to serve the public interest and what an alternative to commercial media should
look like is the basis of contention among critics on the Left, including not just “progressives,” but also “curators,” “mass educators,” and “populists” as described by Jack Mitchell\(^{34}\) (Mitchell, 2005). “Curators,” for example, are concerned about the interference of marketplace values on content, worrying that in “the quest for larger audiences…those who make decisions in public radio will exchange quality for popularity (2005: 182). Mitchell clarifies that commercial broadcasting “gives the individual what he or she wants” whereas public broadcasting “gives the collective society what it wants, or more precisely, what the educated upper-middle class thinks society needs” (2005:13). “Curators” are part of this educated upper-middle class who believe that “the greatest threat to quality programming is public tastes” and are happy to serve only the 15 percent of the population who choose public radio for its “high standards, taste, intelligence, and understatement” (Mitchell, 2005: 182). In contrast, “mass educators” also belong to the educated upper-middle class, but these socially conscious listeners “feel guilty” ignoring the other 85 percent of the population, and desire to provide programming to serve “the poor, minorities, and the less educated” (Mitchell, 2005: 183). Less authoritarian than the curators or the mass educators are the “populists,” who reject elitism of all kinds, and want “radio of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Mitchell, 2005: 184).

While the founding board members of National Public Radio described public radio as a “democratic instrument,” their vision of including the voices of ordinary people has been difficult to implement, as Mitchell admits that public radio leadership doesn’t really “trust” the public, and “could not bring themselves to actually let listeners onto the air in a regular forum” (Mitchell, 2005). Mitchell also explains that “by, for, and about programming” is antithetical to NPR’s philosophy, which is not to build “intra-community consciousness” for various groups, but rather to encourage “intercommunity communication” between diverse people, “to listen to one another and to better understand one another (2005: 186-187). Such sentiments are reflected on This I Believe as well, as Gediman touts the benefits of the program, “It is the sharing and the listening

\(^{34}\) Jack Mitchell was the first employee of National Public Radio, and subsequently did the first NPR broadcast, wrote its first strategic plan, wrote its first standards and practices document, served as the first permanent producer of NPR’s seminal program All Things Considered, as well as served on board of directors of NPR, three of those as chairperson (2005: x).
that provide us opportunities to understand one another and respect beliefs that are
different from our own” (2008: 244). While this may be the ideal, the reality is that
National Public Radio serves its stable audience of the “highly educated and societally
conscious,” people who are the products of a “liberal education,” “academically
sophisticated,” “inner-directed,” and concerned about “the common good” (Mitchell,
2005: 169, 147). Such characteristics incline NPR’s audience to know and identify with
NPR’s history, to debate about its purposes and performance, and to be critical of and
engaged in media reform and the defense of public broadcasting.

Consistently, left-leaning media watchdog Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting
(FAIR) have documented that there is a “pro-establishment and pro-corporate tilt in
PBS’s and NPR’s national news and public affairs programming” (Rendall and Hart,
2005). The 2004 FAIR study found that NPR “relies on the same elite and influential
sources that dominate the mainstream commercial news,” with elites representing 64
percent of its sources, including government officials, professional experts, and corporate
representatives, and of these, Republicans outnumbering Democrats by more than 3 to 2
(Rendall and Butterworth, 2004:1-3).

Insiders within NPR argue that its content is “mainstream” and draws upon “ideas
from both the Right and the Left—a sort of carefully balanced polemic” (Mitchell, 2005:
179; McCauley, 2005 111). But early co-host of All Things Considered Susan Stamberg
finds that “Over the years, we've become much more sober” (Sherman, 2005: 1). Recent
research, practices, and NPR insider commentaries point to an increasing conservatism at
NPR over the past decade (Sherman, 2005). These studies show how NPR has moved
more towards the political center and now airs “less objectionable material” than it did in
the 1980s, winning the praise of even staunch critics like Newt Gingrich. Gingrich
reportedly admits to now being both a fan and a contributor to NPR, reflecting “Either it
is a lot less on the Left, or I have mellowed” (McCauley, 2005: 111). Incidentally,
Gingrich35 has written an essay for This I Believe titled fittingly, “The Willingness to
Work for Solutions” (5/27/05).

35 Newt Gingrich’s essay “The Willingness to Work for Solutions” was broadcast on All Things
Considered on 05/27/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
So why is it that both conservatives and liberals share the view that *NPR* is liberal in orientation? Jack Mitchell argues that it is because *NPR* “layers journalistic values on top of academic values” which are both liberal in the sense that they value “an openness to and eagerness for new ideas and evidence” and “put aside ideology in favor of facts” (2005: 169). These values can be considered liberal in the sense that they embrace progress or reform based on reason. Alan Ryan discusses the relationship between liberalism and liberal education, which values treating ideas objectively, rather than subjectively (2012: 68). Former President of *NPR* Doug Bennett believed that the “liberals” *NPR* appealed to were “not necessarily political liberals” but the products of a “liberal education” for whom “*NPR* news’ depth and intelligence, not any political bias, attracted them (Mitchell, 2005: 169). In contrast to specialized education, liberal education is a way of learning designed to cultivate the intellectual and moral autonomy necessary to produce the educated citizenry necessary for democracy (Nussbaum, 2009; Schneider, 2009). The kind of news that *NPR* offers is “lots of rational, relatively objective, fair and balanced inquiry and argument…all somewhat abstract and distant from reality, all engaged in by a very comfortable and moderately privileged group of people who personal interests make them generally support the political and economic status quo, while they may see the need for change intellectually” (Mitchell in McCauley, 2005: 114). Mitchell observes that the values imparted through a liberal education often “translate” into liberal positions on social issues, such as abortion, gay rights, and feminism, but less predictably so on economic issues or foreign policy (2005: 169).

While the overall political orientation of *NPR*’s audience is fairly evenly divided with 28 percent conservatives, 29 percent moderates, and 32 percent liberals, these numbers are misleading (Sherman, 2005: 6). Because there are more conservatives in the general population, this means that the proportion of conservatives who listen to *NPR* is less than the proportion of liberals who listen. Furthermore, conservatives who listen to *NPR* tend to fall into the VALS\textsuperscript{36} Fulfilled type, who predominantly listen to the classical

\textsuperscript{36} VALS is a framework developed by the marketing research firm Strategic Business Insights which segments US adults into eight distinct types—or mindsets—using a specific set of psychological traits and key demographics which are thought to motivate consumer attitudes and behavior (2012). An Audience Research Analysis Report for NPR determined that 35 percent of NPR listeners are Actualizers (also termed Innovators), 30 percent are Fulfilleds (also termed Thinkers), and the remaining 36 percent are
music on NPR. Those who listen predominantly to the news tend to fall into the VALS Actualizer type (NPR Activists) and hold beliefs that are liberal (Bailey, 2004: 187). Both Actualizers and Fulfilleds have been found to be motivated strongly by their beliefs and ideals (Giovannoni, Peters, and Youngclaus, 1999: 75). The most “loyal” listeners defined in terms of giving and listening most regularly to NPR news are “disproportionately liberal” (Mitchell, 2005: 169). Mitchell contends that these numbers “do not prove that NPR programming tilts left” but they do “suggest that liberals find the news NPR presents more to their liking than conservatives” (2005: 169).

The liberal education hypothesis is a compelling one, as audience research has shown that the best predictor of whether someone will listen to public radio is the possession of a college degree. Other demographic variables like age, sex, race, and income were all found to be statistically insignificant in predicting listenership (Giovannoni, Peters, & Youngclaus, 1999:175). Among NPR’s core audience, “seven in ten have advanced degrees and virtually all have graduated from college” (Giovannoni, Peters, & Youngclaus, 1999: 9). Among all NPR listeners, sixty percent have at least a bachelor’s degree and they are almost four times as likely to have a graduate degree than the average American (McCauley, 2005: 115). With nearly half possessing a college degree, liberals are the most educated political identification (Pew Research Center, 2005: 7). Liberal is also the dominant political identification in academia, with between forty-four and sixty-two percent of professors identifying as liberal (Klein and Stern, 2009: 26).

Research also shows that listening to public radio among educated minorities is as high as it is among educated Whites. About 15 percent of public radio listeners claim membership in a racial or ethnic minority group and (Giovannoni, Peters, & Youngclaus, 1999: 9; Mitchell, 2005: 187). Among these minority listeners, Asian/Pacific Islanders are twice as likely to have college degrees as their non-listening peers, while

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37 Such high educational achievement also correlates with higher percentages of listeners who hold professional jobs (27 percent), have an annual income over $75,000 (30 percent), read elite publications like Atlantic Monthly, the New Yorker, the New York Times, and Smithsonian, or attend live theater or musical performances than the average American (McCauley, 2005: 115).
Black/African American listeners are three times as likely, and Hispanic/Latino listeners are five times as likely. 

*NPR* has often been criticized for failing to create programming that “targets” the needs of racial minorities and in response, has occasionally created special programming to attempt to attract listeners who share certain racial characteristics. For example, in 2002 *NPR* premiered *The Tavis Smiley Show* to try and capture an African-American audience. The show was cancelled in 2004, leaving Smiley to allege “It is ironic that a Republican President has an Administration that is more inclusive and more diverse than a so-called liberal-media-elite network” (Farley and Smiley, 2004:1).

But what Smiley failed to acknowledge was that his program attracted only 4 percent of the *NPR* audience, failing to appeal to the interests, values, and beliefs shared by its educated audience, which includes African Americans (Mitchell, 2005: 125). Creating programming based on differences, fails to recognize how “public radio’s minority listeners have more in common with other public radio listeners than with nonlisteners who share their ethnic or racial backgrounds” (Giovannoni, Peters, & Youngclaus, 1999: 29). It is the shared liberal values and beliefs, instilled through higher education, combined with similar personality profiles, such as a strong sense of civic responsibility, which attract people to its programming.

### 2.3 “The Tinkerbell Effect”

On September 17, 2001, liberal-leaning host of ABC’s late-night television program *Politically Incorrect*, Bill Maher, was denounced by White House secretary Ari Fleisher for remarks Maher made in response to President Bush’s claim that the September 11 suicide bombers were cowards. Maher asserted “We have been the cowards, lobbing cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away. That’s cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building, say what you want about it, it’s not cowardly” (Tapper, 2002). Fleisher called Maher’s remarks “a terrible thing to say” and a reminder “to all Americans that they need to watch what they say, watch what they do. This is not a time
for remarks like that; there never is” (Tapper, 2002). From college professors like Ward Churchill being threatened with disciplinary action for his comments on the World Trade Center and Noam Chomsky being labeled by David Horowitz as “The most devious, the most dishonest and -- in this hour of his nation’s grave crisis – the most treacherous intellect in America,” to small-town journalists like Tom Guttting of the *Texas City Sun* and Dan Guthrie of *The Daily Courier* losing their jobs after criticizing the president, these were “hard times for the First Amendment” (Horowitz, 2001; Carter & Barringer, 2001). Domke argues that post 9/11, the Bush administration “consistently demonstrated intolerance for dissent by adroitly pairing a consistent emphasis upon civility and unity as central virtues of representative government with hard rebukes when this norm was not met” (2004: 119).

Domke explains that the cost for those who publicly disagreed with the administration was that “such dissenters were presented as a threat to American and global security” (2004:121). Such costs were exacted through legislation like Section 802 of the USA PATRIOT Act, which defined domestic terrorism broadly, creating the potential that “individuals exercising his or her freedom of speech, expression, and assembly through acts of civil disobedience” could be investigated as terrorists or Section 215, which permitted government officials access to the records of books, libraries, and websites without an individual’s knowledge or consent (Bill of Rights Defense Committee, 2006). The controversial USA PATRIOT Act was strongly opposed by eight states and 409 cities and counties who passed resolutions against the act and asserted their commitment to the protection of civil liberties (Bill of Rights Defense Committee, 2006). The USA PATRIOT Act was a polarizing issue between conservatives and liberals, as 73 percent of staunch conservatives viewed it as a necessary tool in the war on terror as opposed to 71 percent of liberals who argued that the USA PATRIOT Act threatens civil liberties (Pew Research Center, 2005). While the “brunt of repression and detentions” was born largely by noncitizens, public outcry was strongest against programs that targeted American citizens, like the proposed national identity card,
Operation Terrorist Information and Prevention System (TIPS) to “enlist private citizens to spy on potential terrorists,” and the Total Information Awareness (TIA) project for “mass technological surveillance of private transactions” (Maira, 2009: 74). As the proposed in 2003 USA PATRIOT Act II (the Domestic Security Enhancement Act) threatened to strip American citizens of their citizenship rights for associating with terrorists, “citizenship remain[ed] a linchpin of the war on terror” (Maira, 2009: 75).

Responding to these attacks on civil liberties, especially against citizens, Allison argues that “The patriotism of dissidence is called into question” (WKAR, 2005). Gediman points out that right after 9/11 people were scared to voice opinions. Fairly innocent writing and conversation can be considered seditious” (WKAR, 2005). While perhaps many felt afraid, the risk of speaking out was much higher for males of South Asian or Middle Eastern descent who appear to be Muslim.39 These men faced the potential restriction of their civil liberties, or worse, indefinite detention, and for those without secure citizenship and immigration status, possible deportation. On This I Believe there is an overall elision of exactly who is not free to speak, what kinds of and whose conversations are viewed as seditious, and a clear avoidance to explicitly identify Muslims as the unfair target of such restrictions imposed by the USA PATRIOT Act. Instead, such ideas are insinuated through statements like when Allison explains, “we’re afraid of each other again. We’re afraid of the other, those far away. Neighbors are asked to keep an eye on each other” (WKAR, 2005). By defending traditional liberal values like freedom of speech and the press, as well as the rule of law and the right to due process, the This I Believe essayists argue that protecting these basic rights, especially for citizens, is what it means to defend freedom, to provide security, and to be an American.

Former Vietnam Navy Aviator and current Law Professor at the University of Arkansas Michael Mullane,40 in his essay “The Rule of Law,” (5/5/06) discusses the importance of believing in the law, within the context of interning people without due process. Rule of Law is a classic liberal principle, which defines all people as equally

39 In the U.S. “Muslim” has become a “shorthand” to refer to “a range of movements and actors, not all of them actually Muslim or Islamist, targeted by the U.S. imperial project as the ‘enemy’” (Maira, 2009: 240).
40 Michael Mullane’s essay “The Rule of Law” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 05/05/06 and published in published in This I Believe (2006), as well as included in the special feature Reflections on 9/11.
subject to the law, and considers governmental authority legitimate only when exercised in accordance with publicly disclosed laws enforced in accordance with due process. Mullane describes the rule of law as “probably the single greatest achievement of our society. It is our bulwark against both mob rule and the overweening power of the modern state. It governs us…protects us…and is the strongbox that keeps all our other values safe.” The “our society” to which Mullane attributes the achievement of the rule of law appears to be the United States rather than Western civilization more generally, because he later discusses Japanese-American internment and September 11th as occasions in which this achievement was threatened. Mullane describes the law as both “wonderfully strong and terribly fragile.” He says that in order for the rule of law to exist, people must believe in it, what he calls “the Tinkerbell effect.” Mullane asserts that is only by reinforcing the rules, by “insisting that the law protects us all and that every single one of us is accountable to the law” that our nation and its citizens will be safe from arbitrary governance, whether dictatorship or anarchy.

Normally, to defend the rules is a conservative position, but in this instance Mullane is critiquing the actions of the state and fighting against the denial of democratic rights of “people” (again, those unspoken Muslims) who were being incarcerated without due process following the 9/11 attacks. He acknowledges that some feel the “sacrifice of personal liberties” is necessary “in times of crisis and threat” in order to “be safe,” but he points to the historical case of Japanese-American internment as evidence against this line of thought. He notes that “in retrospect, those actions were not only unjust and morally wrong, they were unnecessary and did nothing to protect us.” He thinks that something for which “generations of Americans have bled and died to create and protect” should not be doubted nor ignored. In order to preserve the rule of law, Mullane encourages listeners “not to be weak, important or frightened,” but instead to “stand up” for democratic rights, for this is “the very thing that makes it worth being an American.” Mullane’s essay perpetuates the myth that U.S wars are fought for moral reasons like freedom and justice, while concealing motivations for aggression based on the defense

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41 Rule of Law was described by Locke, as the “Freedom of men under government is, to have a standing Rule to live by, common to everyone of that Society, and made by the Legislative Power erected in it; a Liberty to follow my own Will in all things, where the Rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another man” (1824:143).
and expansion of U.S. political and economic interests, in the name of freedom (see Chomsky, 1973; 1986; 1999; 2003).

In his essay, “Everybody Deserves Defense,” (10/20/08) Professor of Law at Golden Gate University Law School and former Chief Assistant Public Defender of San Francisco Peter Keane⁴² argues for the importance of defense law in protecting freedom. Keane suggests that freedom is always imperiled due to the “natural human tendency of those who wield power to abuse those without it.” Keane admits that most of his clients are “convicted of something, “as all of the power and resources of the state, the police, and the prosecution are hurled against that one person.” Like Mullane, Keane is acutely aware of the capacity of the state to exercise violence. What “protects and maintains all of our freedoms” from the vagaries of the powerful is what Keane calls “one key mechanism.” He describes this mechanism as “the rule that whenever someone does something that we condemn, no matter what it is, he still gets one person to speak up for him.” Keane describes this rule as the lynchpin for “all our other democratic rights,” and without which, renders the rest “meaningless.” Keane teaches his students to “be proud to defend anyone” and to “stand up for the world’s Saddam Husseins⁴³ and Osama bin Ladens,⁴⁴ for America’s accused rapists and murderers, and thieves.” Problematically implying that all of these clients are guilty as charged, which of course is difficult to ascertain in the absence of a fair trial, Keane nonetheless emphasizes the classical liberal principle that everyone is entitled to equal treatment under the law, “One person on your side, no matter what you’ve done: That’s what keeps us a free people.”

Both Mullane and Keane’s essays suggest that freedom is imperiled, but not from the external threat of the terrorists, but rather from the internal threat of the fearful, who are willing to withhold the civil rights of some (those feared to be terrorists or other

⁴² Peter Keane’s essay “Everybody Deserves Defense” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 10/20/08 and included in the special feature Justice.
⁴³ At the time that Keane was writing, Saddam Hussein had received a “deeply flawed and unfair trial” by the Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal (SICT), which included political interference, the denial of legal counsel for the first year, and the assassination of members of the defense all resulting in Hussein’s execution in 2006 (Amnesty International, 2006).
⁴⁴ Osama bin Laden received no trial, as he was killed in 2011, to much national and international approval, rather than captured, charged, and tried. This marked a major shift from the assassination ban in the 1970s under President Ford to the Bush administration’s determination that the ban does not apply to terrorists (Toobin, 2011).
threats) in the name of security. Fear of the other leads to internment and to the denial of a fair trial, the withholding of civil rights, those protections that according to Mullane and Keane define what it means to be an American. *This I Believe* as a series, both the 1950s and the contemporary version, situate the need for their program because Americans are living “in an age of fear.” In an interview on *Fresh Air*, Terry Gross asked Allison, “Murrow talks in his commentary about us living in an age of fear and confusion. Do you feel like we are still in that kind of age?” Allison responded without hesitation, “Well, don’t you?” as if the answer were self-evident (2006).

Palestinian immigrant Terry Ahwal, in her essay “Finding the Strength to Fight Our Fears” (10/14/07) corroborates Allison’s observations that many Americans are afraid, by drawing parallels between living in Detroit post-9/11 and her childhood experiences living under Israeli occupation. Ahwal knows from experience that fear can be deadly and points to fear as the enemy. She explains that “it is fear we should be fighting not the ‘other.’” She explains that Detroit has been devastated by fear as “so many white people fled the city out of fear. After 9/11, the Arab and Muslim community segregated themselves because of the level of suspicion directed at them from others. Fear of association because of ethnicity led many to retreat within themselves and their community. They stopped socializing with non-Arab/Muslim colleagues and neighbors. Once again, we allow differences to separate us because of fear.” Ahwal describes the isolation of “Arabs” and “Muslims” in Detroit as self-segregation, failing to acknowledge the fears motivating their retreat, such as the state surveillance of their communities through the National Security Entry-Exit Registration system (NSEERS), warrantless wiretapping, searches and acquisition of personal information, as well as repetitive detentions (Maira, 2009:251-254). Without a discussion of the profiling of Arab and Muslim Americans, and the ways in which the War on Terror invaded the everyday lives

45 Terry Ahwal’s essay “Finding the Strength to Fight Our Fears” was broadcast on *Weekend Edition Sunday* on 10/14/07 and published in *This I Believe II* (2008).
46 The National Security Entry-Exit Registration system (NSEERS) was administered through the Homeland Security Department which required thousands of Arab and Muslim men to register with immigration authorities after 9/11. Between November 2002 to May 2003 more than 85,000 men were fingerprinted, photographed, and interviewed at immigration offices, which in combination with tens of thousands more men screened at airports and border crossings, resulted in only eleven links to terrorism, but initiated more than 13,000 deportation proceedings (Swarms, 2003; Arab American Institute, 2011). NSEERS concluded the registration process on April 27, 2011 (Arab American Institute, 2011),
of those racialized as such, Ahwal implies that the fears of the Arab and Muslim American communities are as unwarranted as those who fear “Muslims.”

2.4 “My Opinions Matter”

To help This I Believe listeners make sense of their fear, This I Believe keys into the historical analogy of McCarthyism and the Cold War during the 1950s when the first series was aired, using it as a model, acting as both ideal and critique (Schwartz, 1996). In this particular instance, the critique comes first, by comparing our current political and media climate to the terrifying and repressive period of McCarthyism. This is achieved in part by airing excerpts of Edward R. Murrow’s This I Believe broadcasts, including its first broadcast on April 4, 2005, when Jay Allison opened with the following statement: “The United States is at war, patriotism is questioned, the economy is shaky, and discrimination compromises our ideals” (Allison, Gediman, & Merrick, 2005). For a moment the listener might think that Allison is referring to America in 2005, but he explains that in fact, “It is 1951 and broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow worries that America is being driven by fear” (Allison, Gediman, & Merrick, 2005). Murrow’s voice crackles onto the air, “Around us all is an enveloping cloud of fear. There is a physical fear, the kind that drives some of us to try to escape, if only for a little while, the sound and the fury of …whatever may be coming” (Murrow, 2005). When the 1951 version of This I Believe first introduced itself to its audience, it contextualized the cultural climate in America as one of fear, both physical and mental, and when the 2005 version of This I Believe first introduced itself, it made the same claims.

During an interview in Current newspaper Allison pointed out how fear was and is so immanent both in the fifties and today. In both periods ordinary people engaged in procedures for monitoring and responding to threat levels on a regular basis. During this interview, Gediman surmises “It’s hard to remember how truly fearful people were during that era” and Allison disagrees by saying, “I’m not so sure that’s different today. Back then we could hide under our school desks. Now we can note the danger level

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47 Keying is a process within framing that when applied to collective memory, connects separate historical moments by “match[ing] publicly accessible models of the past to the experiences of the present” (Schwartz 1996: 911).
according to color. They’re both equally futile and helpless feelings” (Janssen, 2005). The producers suggest that in both periods, threats are imagined to be everywhere, whether from Communists and nuclear attacks, or Muslims and terrorist attacks, producing similar feelings of vulnerability. Allison’s quote reinforces liberal nationalist fears that things are out of their control.

This I Believe cultivates a particular frame on fear: the fear of being accused of disloyalty to the nation because of their real or supposed subversive or dissenting beliefs. Edward R. Murrow talked about fear in the 1950s This I Believe in several different ways, but the current producers selected excerpts from his broadcasts and writings that fit with their particular diagnoses. For example in his introductions to the first published This I Believe collection published in 1952, Murrow begins in Britain 1940 before the United States entered the war and England “stood alone.” He tries to understand how the British found the courage and confidence to defend a moral cause against incredible odds, again assuming problematically the notion that Britain went to war for moral reasons, rather than to defend its imperial interests (Louis, 2006). He concludes that what sustained them was “They believed not only in themselves but that they were fighting against evil things and the fight was worthwhile. One reason for [their] survival was that the nation did not betray the things in which it believed” (Morgan, 1952: vii-viii). But current Americans are not united in their beliefs about that the War in Iraq is righteous and many are concerned that the nation is betraying fundamental liberal democratic values. As an another alternative, Murrow also talks about how divisive beliefs can be, to such an extent that in the concentration camps of Buchenwald, Czechs and Poles hated their fellow Czech and Poles more than their German captors because of “hatred of Communist for non-Communist, and there was no room for compromise. They believed in different political projects, and even the imminence of death and the ties of common citizenship could not break the difference in belief” (Morgan, 1952: viii-ix). Had the more recent This I Believe used this as an excerpt, it would have drawn attention to the political differences among Americans, between conservatives and liberals, between Republicans and Democrats.

Instead, This I Believe selected passages from Murrow which depict an Orwellian universe characterized by rampant unfounded paranoia, heightened nationalism, and
unjustified persecution, in order to make the bold claim that contemporary American society is like this or becoming like this. Gediman thinks that the controversy over the USA PATRIOT Act is “eerily reminiscent” to McCarthyism. He says that: “Murrow’s introduction to the book reads as though he were reporting events of today. He spoke of a time when ‘dissent is often confused with subversion,’ and when a man’s beliefs and actions were ‘subject to investigation.’ Those words could just as well come from the editorial pages of 2003, when America was gearing up for a war in Iraq to fight the terrorists ‘over there’ so they wouldn’t attack us ‘over here’” (2006: 261). In the 2006 foreword of published essays, Studs Terkel opens with the concluding passage of Murrow’s 1952 foreword of published essays, commenting “It has the ring of a 2006 mayday call of distress, yet it was written in 1952” (2006:xv). Such statements by Gediman and Terkel are purposefully shocking, bringing audience’s attention to a moment in U.S. history when the government violated civil liberties in specific ways, such as through loyalty reviews, blacklists, and investigations, as well as through legislation like the Alien Registration Act, McCarren Internal Security Act, and the Taft-Hartley Act, in an effort to control and repress the political dissent of particular groups, specifically communists and “the political organizations, labor unions, and cultural groups that constituted the main institutional and ideological infrastructure of the American left” (Schrecker, 1998: 369). While these acts of political repression were frightening, Ellen Schrecker describes the measures taken as “tame” in that “only two people—Julius and Ethel Rosenberg—were killed; only a few hundred went to prison; and only about ten or twelve thousand lost their jobs” (1998: xiii). Incarceration and unemployment can be compared to the systematic violence and terror, including torture and execution, taken by the U.S. government against those who dissented against slavery, especially former slaves, or against those who dissented against colonialism (Marcus & Rediker, 2000; Rediker, 2007).

However, the period of McCarthyism was a particularly significant historical moment for liberals because the charge of “communist” was often used against them by conservatives as a political strategy. In the 1952 presidential campaign, Richard Nixon accused Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson of earning a “PhD from Dean Acheson's College of Cowardly Communist Containment” (Dionne, 2005). Like conservatives in
the 1950s who were frustrated with 20 years of New Deal Liberal dominance, Bush’s Chief of Staff Karl Rove complains, “For decades, liberals were setting the agenda, the pace of change, and the visionary goals. Conservatives were simply reacting to them…But times change, often for the better” (2005). Rove engages in a rhetorical strategy not unlike the McCarthyites, describing liberals as being soft on terrorism and disloyal to the nation, contending “Conservatives saw what happened to us on 9/11 and said: we will defeat our enemies. Liberals saw what happened to us and said: we must understand our enemies. Conservatives see the United States as a great nation engaged in a noble cause; liberals see the United States and they see…[Referring to statements made by Democratic Senator Richard Durbin] Nazi concentration camps, Soviet gulags, and the killing fields of Cambodia” (2005). Rove argues that Durbin’s Senate floor criticisms of Guantanamo, which were broadcast on Al-Jazeera, endanger the lives of Americans soldiers, concluding “No more needs to be said about the motives of liberals” (2005).

By choosing to emphasize these aspects of Murrow and this remembering of the 1950s, This I Believe offers a critique of the current state of affairs in relation to the beliefs Americans hold about others and the rights that all Americans have to hold differing beliefs. This interpretation of the past emphasizes how fear of different beliefs can lead to the creation of imagined enemies, both within and outside the borders of the United States. Allison explains that “As in the 1950s, this is a time when belief is dividing the nation and the world” (WKAR, 2005). In a different interview he reiterates this same sentiment, “The world is tearing itself up because of one thing, and that is belief” (Janssen, 2005). Allison also says that “Certainly we are in a time of questioning. We are divided by belief. In the 50s, there was the Cold War, McCarthyism, nuclear threat. There was fear. There is fear now” (USA Today.com, 2005). This I Believe argues that the fear being experienced now is the result of differences in belief, which are causing conflict at both the national and the global level. They lament that, “Matters of belief divide our country and the world. We find ourselves in conflict over moral standards, patriotism, family, and issues of race and faith” (Allison, 2006:2).

This I Believe’s emphasis on belief, rather than material conditions, is grounded in the liberal ideal that institutions of state power are perceived as legitimate only when autonomous citizens “in light of their common human reason” freely endorse their
political authority (Rawls, 2001). The state requires an educated citizenry with the
capacity to “rationally reflect upon and critically appraise their own values, moral
commitments, and political convictions” in order to choose the political power that best
represents their interests (Christman 2005: 330). Such a citizen must therefore be
autonomous and “must regard itself as the author of its own principles, independently of
foreign influences” (Kant, 1965: 67). While inaccurate representations of liberals in the
media and restrictions on free speech and civil liberties are frightening, This I Believe
asserts that the greatest threat to democracy is Americans who either don’t know their
own beliefs or are afraid to express them.

Keeping with the McCarthyism analogy, This I Believe warns against the dangers
of demagogues who leverage the emotions and ignorance of the people during national
crisis in order to intensify popular support for their calls to immediate action and
increased authority to override the rule of law. Demagoguery is especially problematic
because it “creates and fosters a situation in which it is actively dangerous to criticize
dominant views, cultures, and political groups” (Roberts-Miller, 2008). Demagoguery
works through “polarizing propaganda that motivates members of an ingroup to hate and
scapegoat some outgroup(s), largely by promising certainty, stability, and what Erich
Fromm famously called ‘an escape from freedom’” (Roberts-Miller, 2008). Fromm’s
escape mechanisms involve the loss of self and the giving of one’s freedom to someone
else through conformity, authoritarianism, and destructiveness (1994). Because autonomy
is so fundamental to liberal democracy, any threat to it is a threat to both individual and
collective freedom. This I Believe emphasizes that the most significant threat to
autonomy is the internal laxity of the individual, who permits him or herself to be
controlled by others out of fear or ignorance (Robin, 1999). It is the realm of belief where
This I Believe says action must be taken.

In the introduction to the book, Allison says to readers, “beliefs are choices. No
one has authority over your personal beliefs. Your beliefs are in jeopardy only when you
don’t know what they are” (Allison, 2006: 6). Therefore, the first step that readers and
listeners must take to resolve their sense of “jeopardy” is to become more self-reflective.
One of the major problems that Murrow identified in the original series was the problem
of conformity, the concern during the fifties that individuals were members of the “lonely
crowd,” which Murrow vehemently denied, stating “The individual is unpredictable, and in the area of what he believes, he is still sovereign” (Morgan, 1952: xi; Reisman, 1950). Nora Lupi, in her essay, “My Opinions Matter” expresses similar sentiment, declaring “I have just as much right as anyone to say how I feel about whatever topic I choose. Many people throughout my life told me to shut up or mind my own business when I attempted to express my opinions on politics, gay marriage, abortion or the death penalty. I no longer believe that I should just blend in with the crowd. I am ready to make a stand and shout out to the whole world what my opinions are” (8/31/12). This I Believe talks about the problem of conformity in the following terms: that if you do not know your own beliefs then you must base your actions on the beliefs of others. This is expressed through statements like “Most essayists make earnest attempts to determine what they believe for themselves. Writers express gratitude for the opportunity, the nudge, to take on the challenge. They generally don’t find it easy” (Allison, 2006: 5).

Once you have determined your beliefs, the next step is to speak out about them. In her essay, “The Mystery and Power of Naming Things” (3/20/06) playwright Eve Ensler stresses how important it is to “nam[e] what’s right in front of us because that is often what is most invisible.” By breaking the silence, a person breaks their isolation, and sets on the path to freedom. By telling his or her story, others are inspired to do the same, as “one person’s declaration sparks another and then another” and by each person individually expressing his or her beliefs, a kind of synergy naturally unfolds. While Ensler is primarily referring to experiences of abuse against women, the benefits of speaking out, “breaking through taboos and denial” applies to a variety of injustices. Ensler describes how “Helen Caldicott naming the consequences of an escalating nuclear arms race gave rise to an anti-nuclear movement. The brave soldier who came forward and named the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison was responsible for a sweeping investigation.” While making such atrocities public is “dangerous” and “terrifying,”

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48 Nora Lupi’s essay “My Opinions Matter” as broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 08/31/12 and included in the special feature The Power of the Vote.
49 Eve Ensler’s essay “The Mystery and Power of Naming Things” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 03/20/06 and published in This I Believe (2006), as well as included in the special feature Women in Activism.
Ensler emphasizes that it is “crucial work” that must be done “in spite of political climates or coercions, in spite of careers being won or lost, in spite of the fear of being criticized, outcast, or disliked.” Thus Ensler affirms This I Believe’s assertion that it is a dangerous time to speak out, and therefore more important than ever to do so. So important in fact, that Eve Ensler avows, “freedom begins with naming things. Humanity is preserved by it.” Like Mullane and Keane, so too Ensler believes that the basis of freedom is the preservation of civil rights, especially the freedom of speech.

In the foreword to the 2006 book, Studs Terkel similarly argues that the right to speak out is the foundational tenant of liberalism: “‘Liberal’ according to any dictionary is defined as the freedom to speak out, no matter what the official word may be, and the right to defend all others who speak out whether or not they agree with you” (Allison and Gediman, 2006: xviii). What Terkel and Ensler do not acknowledge is that the right to express dissent, and the consequences for expressing dissent, are differentially distributed, as they take for granted the privileged subject position of liberal nationalists who can safely protest the restriction of civil liberties without fear that their own civil liberties will be infringed upon, confident that their concerns will taken seriously, risking only criticism and reputation. Instead, This I Believe emphasizes the democracy of beliefs, emphasizing that all people have beliefs and the ability to express them, as Gediman champions, “This is something everyone can do and the more people who participate—across the lines that we tend to separate ourselves by—the more powerful and valuable This I Believe can be” (WKAR, 2005).

2.5 “A Safe Way”

In the current climate of fear, Allison confesses that it is “rare” to find people willing to “risk” even their reputations, and when it happens, as it has on This I Believe, “it touches us, and it is not too much to say that we approach our work with a sense of honor” (2006: 2). Allison laments that “amid the most pervasive information delivery systems in history, there is little place for the encouragement of quiet listening to the beliefs of others without rebuttal or criticism” (2006: 2). Unlike talk radio, which is known for its sensationalism and pursuit of controversy, according to one general manager of a talk radio station “Liberals are genetically engineered not to offend

Dan Gediman complains “so much of what we see and hear in the media today is based in conflict, argument, and debate. We want to take a step back from reality TV and talk radio and encourage people to listen to one another” (WKAR, 2005). A person either speaking in or listening to the media must be prepared to enter into a deafening war of words, marked by “yelling” and “bragging” (WKAR, 2005). He argues that the methods of representation used in the media are manipulative. Rather than allow a speaker the time necessary for a comprehensive and accurate representation of their views, the media puts forth shallow and often-manipulated “sound bites.” Instead of offering audiences well-researched and incisive critiques of public intellectual’s positions on important issues, the media takes “potshots.” And instead of advancing an objective and faithful account of the facts, the media “spins” the truth into a biased fabrication (Allison, 2006: 2). These criticisms are consistent with certain academic values, such as a preference for in-depth coverage of a topic which includes allowing a speaker to fully state his or her position, as well the need for objective analysis of the ideas presented without a slant or an attack on the presenter’s character. More significantly, these criticisms are leveled at the erosions they are thought to bring to the idealized public sphere, including introducing privatized market interests into the public sphere, the fragmentation of the public sphere into competing interest groups, and the manufacture and manipulation of public opinion (Fraser, 1990: 59). They suggest that This I Believe desires a return to liberal ideals regarding “political debate, public dialogue, and who deserves access to the soapbox” (Douglas, 2004:302).

One of the central problems today, according to host Jay Allison, is that “we are not listening well, not understanding each other—we are simply disagreeing, or worse” (WKAR, 2005). He laments that “It’s harder to find a few quiet, even protected, moments for thoughtful statements.” (USAToday.com, 2005). A listener from Detroit suggested to Allison that This I Believe connect related essays together into a point-counter point format so that listeners could think about ideas more systematically. Allison rejected this suggestion, stating “We are actually keen to avoid argument. If you want argument, you can find it pretty easily on the media these days. This is the reason we didn’t set up online
discussion boards. We didn’t want to engender yet more argument and entrenchment of positions” (USAToday.com, 2005).

Marriage and family therapist Robin Mize in her essay “Finding Our Common Ground” (10/29/10) expresses a similar discomfort with disagreement and the polarizing nature of politics. In her essay she describes the challenges she faces with holding and espousing liberal beliefs. She confesses how, despite supporting the cause, she refused to attend a recent peace rally in Washington with her husband and son because it made her feel uneasy “… the mob mentality of a large group of people who feel they are right, even if I agree with them. It was the absolutism lurking in the liberal ideals. To me it felt just as scary as any other kind of intolerance.” Mize is afraid to attend a peace rally because she feels that it is too extreme to have such strong (liberal) convictions, even for peace. She describes these peace-promoting, supposedly intolerant, liberals as akin to “the self-congratulatory, undiscriminating nature of the mob. I think of the French Revolution, I picture those Nazi rallies, and I fear the self-complacency of knowing that you are right.” Here Mize expresses a liberal fear of absolutism and stresses the liberal value of tolerance.

Mize dislikes how Republicans are homogenized as the “evil enemy” of the peace marchers. She prefers to individualize and thereby diminish the structural arguments of liberal protestors, with such dismissals as “The other side isn’t any more ignorant or selfish than we are; they are not big business or big brother or the international monetary fund.” Instead, she grants everyone the right of moral autonomy, based on a liberal foundation of the individual’s equal right to choose his or her own beliefs, and expresses her liberal commitment to a toleration of those beliefs. Liberalism rests on the argument that the opinions of everyone are important, as Mize explains, “We do not agree, but I have to accept that they are thoughtful and compassionate people who have come to the opposite conclusion about how things should be… I choose to respect their opinions, even as I disagree with them.”

Mize feels isolated in her liberal leanings due to her position as a “rare bird” in her family with four republican siblings. Mize often wishes that she could just “agree with my siblings and not be troubled by these uncomfortable differences of opinion.” She struggles to both hold her beliefs and respect her siblings, with the sense that in her case, her beliefs are quite vulnerable to the mighty force of the moral certitude of the conservative stronghold. She recommends similar survival strategies for her national family as to her own family, “It seems to me that here in my family is an essential element of our democracy: we agree to disagree. Our ability not only to accept, but to respect, our differences is our common ground.” Mize thus suggests a strategy of noninterference with those who hold different beliefs, concluding that she cannot change, the beliefs of others, nor does she desire to do so, arguing, “I believe we are all doing the best we can.”

Allison states that “in a media climate of hyper-reality television and conflict radio, of aggressive pundits, of innuendo, harangue, and attack—we’re trying to create not more noise, but a quiet place” (WKAR, 2005). A quiet place suggests a retreat, a safe haven for those who feel attacked and disempowered, a fantasy space where one can feel like an insider again. Allison asserts that the This I Believe essays are a “testament to a belief in listening” (Allison, 2006:6). On This I Believe the ideas of listening and speaking out are used fairly interchangeably even though they are opposites, which continues to suggest that what is meant is “listen to us.” This notion of a quiet place is a basic tenet of NPR. Bill Siemering, author of NPR’s first statement of purpose, “wanted quietness…Something that was not, and is not, available in many places on the radio dial. He wanted calm conversation, analysis, and explication” (Wertheimer, 1996: xix).

Doctor and professor Alicia Conill takes up the theme of listening in her This I Believe essay “Listening is Powerful Medicine” (2/1/09) wherein she describes the “immeasurable” healing power of listening. She says that while “each story is different…what matters to the storyteller is that the story is heard—without interruption, assumption, or judgment.” Activist and organizer Wade Rathke in his This I Believe

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51 Alice Conill’s essay “Listening is Powerful Medicine” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 02/01/09 and published in This I Believe: Life Lessons (2011).
52 Wade Rathke’s essay “Listening Shows Me the Way” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 01/29/07.
essay “Listening Shows Me the Way” (1/29/07) also lauds the importance of listening, which he explains is “the heart of organizing.” Rathke found that in his work “The more people talked and the more I listened, it became almost inevitable, maybe even irresistible, for us to organize and do something effective.” One of the beneficial qualities of listening is “when people have to explain something to me, it helps them understand their own needs better.” Providing forums for listening, like This I Believe does, thus also provides opportunities for self-reflection, which are necessary according to liberal philosophy, for the protection of free and open discourse. Rathke assets that “Listening strengthens all of our beliefs.”

The This I Believe producers juxtapose “listening” with “disagreeing,” “rebuttal,” “criticism,” “conflict,” “argument,” “debate,” and “entrenchment of positions.” This I Believe seemingly does not see a contradiction between the promotion of democracy and free speech, and the avoidance of conflict. This disavowal produces an idealization of consensus and, ironically, a suppression of diversity. This I Believe’s search for what Americans have in common becomes implicated in the exclusionary strategies that have been shown to be integral to the public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Moreover, its focus on discussion and beliefs, to the exclusion of structural inequalities, denies any possibility of participatory parity (Fraser, 1990). It is also a retreat from the deliberative democratic ideal of defending one’s interests through public debate.

The reason these contradictions are not acknowledged is related to the importance that This I Believe places on the development of the common good for the maintenance of the nation. This I Believe contends that debate is not conducive to discovering what the American people value in common, that it is only through “focused thought and discussion” that people are able to understand their own beliefs and the beliefs of others (Allison, 2006: 6). This I Believe bases its ideas on the liberal ideal that is only through a “specific kind of discursive interaction,” that of “rational discussion” about “public matters,” that a “strong consensus about the common good” can be developed (Fraser, 1990:59). This I Believe states that one of its goals is “to facilitate a higher standard of active public discourse by inspiring people to reflect, encouraging them to share, and engaging them in a conversation about personal values and beliefs that can shape a life, a community, and a society” (Talking About Beliefs, 2006).
This I Believe’s emphasis on discussion rather than debate is grounded in its individualistic interpretation that beliefs are relative as matters of personal choice. Since there is no way to evaluate one another’s beliefs within this individualistic vision, a concern arises that within politics “where the interests involved as incommensurable and therefore almost impossible to adjudicate, interest politics must inevitably break down into coercion and fraud” (Bellah et al. 1996: 203). This I Believe rejects what it perceives to be the manipulation that occurs within interest politics in favor of the politics of the consensual, neighborly community. Within this supposedly egalitarian community, shared beliefs can be discovered or created through what Robert Bellah describes as “individualism without rancor…the carefully cultivated empathy of face-to-face conversation” that is idealized in the town-meeting as described by Alexis de Tocqueville (Bellah et al. 1996: 200). The liberal individualist vision of politics explains differences as the product of individual choices, and thus struggles to comprehend the structural inequalities of power organized through large impersonal institutions, creating a nostalgia for the supposedly simpler politics of the small town.

Significantly, there is no actual discussion taking place either on the program, or on the websites. The national “dialogue” that This I Believe producers claim to be providing on air and online is, instead, a sequential line of essayists speaking one at a time without interruption or engagement. If desired, like-minded essayists can then gather privately after the meeting in public spaces to discuss their beliefs. This I Believe provides a variety of discussion guides (at a cost) on their website, customized for general discussion, for discussion in places of worship, and for discussion/curriculum in classrooms. They encourage listeners to take these discussion guides into their communities and suggest possible spaces, such as classrooms, places of worship, civic clubs, book clubs, libraries, senior centers, and coffee shops. This I Believe thus advocates for dialogue among citizens to take place off air, in the voluntary associations of the public sphere where public opinion can be formed. Many communities have heeded the call. This I Believe projects have been taken up at academic universities,53 K-
This I Believe stresses that “[a] healthy democracy needs ways to bypass gatekeepers so we can communicate with one another directly, and perhaps even find common ground” (Allison, 2006: 6). This I Believe asserts a joint aim, to facilitate the development of the common good, but “not to persuade Americans to agree on the same beliefs.” Rather, they hope to “encourage people to begin the much more difficult task of developing respect for beliefs different from their own” (History of This I Believe, 2005). These ideas are symbolized in the This I Believe book covers. The cover of the 2006 book is an image of a solitary wooden chair raised on a platform in the middle of an open grassy field with brilliant blue sky. It is here that the reader is invited to sit down and testify his or her beliefs to a world without witnesses. The common good is imagined as the sum of individual beliefs antecedent to public discussion (Fraser, 1990: 72).

The cover of the 2008 book is an image of a clothesline upon which brightly colored laundry hangs by clothespins in another open grassy field against a setting sun. It is here, at the end of the day, that the reader is invited to hang their beliefs of different colors, sizes, and kinds next to one another, never touching, a sequence of separate beliefs, tolerating one another, all related to one another through their mutual belonging

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54 The fifth grade class of Isaac Dickson Elementary School; secondary students at Glenwood Springs High School, CO; Vermont Academy; Shawnee and Cherokee High Schools, NJ; Menlo School, CA; Holderness School, NH; Simonsen Ninth Grade Center, MO; Skyline High School, CO; and The Academy of Learning for Outstanding, Notable Students, Vancouver (“Community Activities,” 2012).
55 73 libraries around Pittsburgh, PA in the Allegheny Library Association; Friends of the Library–Waikoloa Region, HI; Gilford Public Library, Gilford, NH; Putnam County Public Library in Greencastle, IN (“Community Activities,” 2012).
56 GirlForward in Chicago for adolescent refugee girls; InterCorps Council of Minnesota (“Community Activities,” 2012).
57 A capella group Persephone’s Daughters from Plymouth, MA (“Community Activities,” 2012).
58 A young adult ministry group called Junction NYC; Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Winston-Salem, NC (“Community Activities,” 2012).
59 Habla, an international education center in the Yucatan; U.S. Embassy cultural affairs section in Cairo (“Community Activities,” 2012).
60 People of Statesville, North Carolina; The Village Square and the people of Tallahassee, Florida; People of the Outer Banks in North Carolina; Rhode Islanders; Central Pennsylvanians (“Community Activities,” 2012).
within the nation. *This I Believe* thus combines a liberal commitment to “toleration focused on the sanctity of the individual personality and the inviolability of the individual conscience” with a liberal democratic concern for the maintenance of the public sphere and the formation of public opinion (Ryan, 2012:8). They do not see these two aims as mutually exclusive, and stress the importance of dialogue for achieving both. *This I Believe*’s intends to create a “different kind” of national dialogue, which allows essayists a “safe way to explore our differences and to discover the hopes and dreams that many of us have in common” (*WKAR*, 2005).

This emphasis on finding a safe way to manage differences reveals *This I Believe*’s determination to find what Americans have in common, no matter how seemingly unrelated. In an online chat session hosted by *This I Believe* partner *USA Weekend* magazine, a listener from Washington D.C. asked Allison, “While there are similarities to be found in the social contexts of the 1950s and today, how do you think they are different?” Allison chose to answer this question by focusing on the similarities, claiming, “by listening to these voices we’ll learn about ourselves. We’ll see our position in the new millennium through the hopes of people fifty years ago. We’ll hear our differences, yes, but we’ll hear what we continue to hold in common—as Americans and as people” (*USAToday.com*, 2005). By minimizing the differences between the two series, emphasizing the timelessness of the ideas expressed by the essayists from the 1950s, Allison emphasizes the historical continuity of the nation, that it is one community stretching through time (Anderson, 1983).

The next listener from Rockville, Maryland, probably unsatisfied with the previous answer, asks nearly the same question, “Are the issues/themes the same today as they were years ago? What has changed?” Allison replies, “Often, the themes are not terribly different. People are people, and haven’t undergone radical change in 50 years” (*USAToday.com*, 2005). The outcome of the assertion that people haven’t undergone radical change in the past fifties years is to take the idea of the “people” out of time, because historically speaking the generations living before Civil Rights, Feminism, Vietnam, Gay Pride, Silicon Valley, and September 11th is almost incommensurable both structurally and ideologically to the generation living now.
This is a strategy of nationalist hegemony: to convince the NPR audience that the beliefs and values of the This I Believe essayists are the values and beliefs of all Americans of all time. When asked by a Chicago listener as to whether the essays are chosen “based on the news of the day,” Allison responded that “It’s okay to have some timely relevance, but we’re not looking for it. We want the opposite actually, something for all time, if you’ll forgive the presumption” (USAToday.com, 2005). The This I Believe producers lament the constant barrage of information and images in commercial media and ask, “When does the value of immediacy wear out? (Allison and Gediman, 2006: 3). During the brief interruption of the NPR news, This I Believe claims to offer a welcome resting place, where time slows down and space opens up for listening. Allison explains that when This I Believe begins, “time changes a little. The din of the daily is left behind, and the moment is noted not for its clamor but its calm” (Allison, 2006:3). This happens because “It is interested not in what can be learned in a moment, but over a lifetime” (Allison, 2006: 3).

Blurring the lines between the past and present, This I Believe uses nostalgia to construct the idea of “the people.” As a remake, This I Believe taps into memories, real or imagined, of Cold War families gathered around the radio set to hear the trusted voices of their cultural leaders and heroes. Nostalgia is “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed…a romance with one’s own fantasy” (Boym, 2001:xiii). Nostalgia speaks to the desires of essayists like Iveson who desire a return to their childhood feelings of homey belonging. This I Believe invites listeners into the fold of the American people, through participation in a history of national heroes, both by listening to their ancestors’ words of wisdom and by submitting an essay like they did fifty years ago. The series has featured essays by immortal liberals like Eleanor Roosevelt,61 Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas,62 and Harry Truman,63,64 as well as cultural figures like

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61 Eleanor Roosevelt’s essay “Growth That Starts From Thinking” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show and NPR.org on 07/31/09 and published in This I Believe (2006) and This I Believe: Selections from the 1950s Radio Series (2009).
62 William O’Douglas’s essay “‘My Father’s Evening Star” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 10/02/09 and published in This I Believe (2006) and This I Believe: Selections from the 1950s Radio Series (2009).
Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, and Martha Graham. The 1950s essays are also revisited on the website’s weekly special features, which have included themes such as: “Writers of the 1950s,” “Actresses of Hollywood’s Golden Age,” “Murrow’s Boys,” “Hollywood Legends of the 1950s,” “Classical Music Stars of the 1950s,” and “WWII Vets.” This collapsing of past and present is also evident in the way that the website and the book are organized, blending old essays with modern ones.

Both series made the populist claim that they intended to feature the views of “ordinary fellow Americans,” and Allison admits that although the essays of public figures are valuable, “the most interesting essays are from regular folks” (WKAR, 2005). Consonant with NPR’s liberal mission to serve the diverse needs of the public, expressed as a commitment to “represent a wide range of different generations, cultural histories, racial and sexual identities, educational backgrounds, spiritual beliefs, physical abilities, and professional aspirations,” This I Believe makes the claim that they are trying to “create a picture of the American spirit in all its rich complexity” (Diversity at NPR, 2007; History of This I Believe, 2005). Gediman explains that the essay selection

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63 Harry Truman’s essay “A Public Man” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show and NPR.org on 02/12/10 and published in This I Believe: Selections from the 1950s Radio Series (2009), as well as included in the special feature Beliefs from the Campaign Trail.
64 Harry Truman was the only president featured in the 1950s TIB series. His legacy as a celebrated liberal president has been based on his defense of Roosevelt’s New Deal, his support for civil rights including his desegregation of the armed forces, his passing of the GI Bill, his support of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, his decision to recognize Israel, his founding of the United Nations, the creation of NATO, and the Truman Doctrine to contain communism (Dallek, 2008).
65 Helen Keller’s essay “The Light of A Brighter Day” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show and NPR.org on 06/05/09 and published in This I Believe (2006) and This I Believe: Selections from the 1950s Radio Series (2009).
66 Jackie Robinson’s essay “Free Minds and Hearts At Work” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show and NPR.org on 07/10/09 and published in This I Believe (2006) and This I Believe: Selections from the 1950s Radio Series (2009).
67 Albert Einstein’s essay “An Ideal of Service to Our Fellow Man” was broadcast on NPR.org on 05/31/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
68 Martha Graham’s essay “An Athlete of God” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 10/09/09 and published in This I Believe (2006) and This I Believe: Selections from the 1950s Radio Series (2009).
69 In early iterations of the website old and new essays were placed next to one another in sequence, differentiated by black and white or color portraits. The current version website features 797 of the 1950s essays in a separate database. In the 2006 book, the table of contents makes no differentiation, but within individual essays is the phrase “as featured in the 1950s series” (Allison and Gediman). On the radio, aside from the introductory biography, the only way to differentiate between the old and the new essays, is that the audio quality is poorer, and the diction of the essayist sounds antiquated.
committee strives to “represent the country” and Allison hopes that This I Believe will “attract just plain old anybody” (Janssen, 2005).

The current This I Believe quotes Murrow’s original introduction, where he states that “each week we’ll hear from a banker or butcher, a painter or social worker” (Allison, Gediman, and Merrick, 2005). For both series, these categories of people were and are symbolic, meant to refer to the “common man.” However, so far there have been no bankers, butchers, or painters, whose essays have been broadcast, although there has been one professor of social work. While more than 100,000 people have submitted essays, which are accessible in the This I Believe database, few of these essays are published on the air. Despite Allison’s comments that, “In many cases, the essays from people without credentials are much more insightful,” the current This I Believe continues much of the “didactic attitude” of its predecessor (WKAR, 2005; Janssen, 2005). For the most part, This I Believe employs the idea of “the people” for its symbolic power. To use the idea of “regular” or “ordinary” folks is to attempt to obfuscate the elitism of the program, and to “produce the effect of unity” which Balibar identifies as the “basis and origin of political power” within liberal forms of governance (1991:94).

In contrast to their critique of the 1950s as marked by challenges to civil liberties and free speech, Allison and Gediman also offer the myth of the 1950s as an encouraging model for contemporary Americans to emulate. They quote the hopeful convictions of luminaries like Jackie Robinson, who despite struggling with racism, was able to confess “I believe in the human race. I believe in the warm heart. I believe in man’s integrity. I believe in the goodness of a free society” (Janssen, 2005). Through these kinds of examples This I Believe suggests that it is an abiding sense of “hope” or “faith” which provides the basis for a common American identity. Gediman explains that while the essays people wrote during the 1950s expressed, “fear about the challenges the country and the world faced” they also exhibited “tremendous optimism about the future” and told “stories of a faith that support[ed] them in good times and bad” (WKAR, 2005).

Nostalgia has been called a “disease of an afflicted imagination,” because there is a sense of loss, but what is lost cannot be properly remembered, nor does the sufferer know where to look for what is lost. It has a charm for making the sufferer teary-eyed, tongue-tied, and incapable of critical reflection (Boym, 2001:4) To suggest that a good attitude
was a fundamental component to challenging racism or sexism in the 1950s is to ignore the important political work done by social movements. This feel-good sentimental strategy for addressing the social problems faced by current citizens denies them their feelings of outrage or disappointment, and shifts attention away from taking a critical look at repressive and unequal relations of power and back onto the individual to self-reflect and manage their private emotions.

Because the state is understood as the instrument of the people, rather than an apparatus of ruling, liberals look to the individual, the people, and the common good as the source of power. Citizenship on This I Believe is enacted through the essayist’s nationalist performances of their private beliefs in public. Employing the liberal understanding that the ideal public sphere excludes private interests, This I Believe restricts the essayists to revelations of private, intimate experiences and thereby delimits the circle of concern to the individual, as attempts to make more political connections to larger structures of power are perceived as inauthentic and thus illegitimate (Eliasoph, 1998). It is difficult to challenge the beliefs held by others when they are considered private, individual matters, not public concerns. There is no need to justify your own beliefs to others when what you believe only involves you. It is only when belief is mobilized into action, as apart from discussion, that structural change can occur, and once this happens, beliefs become something else—interests, rights, platforms, slogans and so on. This I Believe specifically instructs essayists to refrain from imposing their beliefs onto others through their writing style, to write essays which “aim for truth without accusation, patriotism without political cant, and faith beyond religious dogma,” and essays which do not fit within these parameters are actively censored from broadcast and relegated to the database (Allison, 2006: 3).

This I Believe acknowledges the contradiction that even though beliefs are private, once they go on the air, the essayists are held accountable for their public statements. In discussing the This I Believe challenge, Allison explains that “this task of writing your core beliefs in a short statement [is] so intensely personal and yet so public that people [are] clearly challenged by it. Some said it was the hardest thing they ever did” (WKAR, 2005). The essays on This I Believe are then a strange kind of speech—personal and, therefore supposedly impervious to critique, yet public and therefore influential. This I
Believe tries to have it both ways, to say that the essays are about private beliefs and therefore not political, and yet they also say the essays are a discussion about the common good, the public interest. There is some confusion over the fact that through discursive contestation private beliefs become common concerns and that there “are no naturally given, a priori boundaries” (Fraser, 1990: 71).

Keeping the discussion in the realm of beliefs is described by Volosinov as an attempt to “drive inward the struggle,” to put the focus on personal or moral difference rather than structural and political inequality (cited in Hall, 1981: 236). Rather than acknowledge inequalities in gender, race, or power, the producers will only allow that there are differences in beliefs. Even then, the only purpose for expressing these different beliefs is to discover, not through argument or debate, universal truths which express a shared national identity. This move towards shared ideals is described by Volosinov as an attempt by the ruling class to “impart a superclass, eternal character to the ideological sign: in order to “withdraw it from the pressure of the social struggle” (Hall 1981: 236). This I Believe offers audiences an imaginative compromise between their anxieties generated by collapsing political possibilities and unequal access to media formats for voicing their discontent, and their simultaneous desire to avoid political conflict and retreat into the safety of individual belief and private values. The essays operate as a subtle process of disempowerment, giving “effective presence to social and political anxieties and fantasies” in order to conceal the “transformative work” that is being done to “manage or repress” these unacceptable feelings, with the intention of bringing disaffected liberals back into the national fold using ideas drawn from liberal philosophy (Jameson, 1979: 141).
3. “The America I Believe In”

This I Believe describes itself as: “…an exciting national project…inviting Americans from all walks of life to participate…to create a picture of the American spirit in all its rich complexity” (History of This I Believe, emphases added). Despite containing over seventy themes in its database, it is This I Believe’s nationalist address which stands out most clearly and contextualizes all other topics of conversation. The nationalist impulse can be found in the basic architecture of the program, as evidenced by assorted features of the show. One such feature is the need to locate essayists, both broadcast and database, within the nation by identifying their city and state residence, and as interest expanded internationally, country of residence. In scrolling through the database essays, you can travel imaginatively on a cyber road-trip through the contours of ‘America,’ town to suburb to city and back again. If the desire should strike, you can stay awhile and using the search function, read only the essays from a particular city or state—perhaps “your” city or state. All of the essays on This I Believe are also categorized by themes, so if its not so much where you want to go, but what you want to hear, then you can search amongst the eight overtly nationalist themes, which include: “America/patriotism,” “citizenship,” “democracy,” “government/constitution,” “immigrant,” “patriotism,” “peace” and “war.” You can also search amongst themes strongly associated with ‘American’ national identity, such as the following four classically liberal ideas of “equality,” “freedom,” “self-determination,” or “tolerance.”

Since searching in the database is an act only really committed listeners would probably do, This I Believe makes its nationalist discourse more transparent for

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70 See Table 2 for a list of all 70 themes, with total number of essays classified under each. In all there are 170, 966 essays. In addition to the themes listed, there are also additional themes which under certain contexts may be considered national, such as: “brotherhood & friendship,” “community,” “courage,” “discrimination,” “injustice,” “place,” “prejudice,” “race,” and “social justice.” Essays can be classified under multiple themes. In this chapter, Patricia Tsubokawa’s essay is classified under “America & patriotism,” “equality,” “patriotism.” Aileen Mory’s essay is classified under “children,” “citizenship” “war.” Other essays which I believe are clearly nationalist, like Robert Heinlein’s are classified only under “community,” suggesting the limitations of relying on the themes only and points to the complexity of meanings that each them contains. For this reason, the themes serve only as a rough guide, as each essay needs to be analyzed individually to determine nationalistic content.

71 The idea of self-determination is discussed in the Chapter 3 chapter “The ‘America’ Believe In,” whilst the ideas of “equality,” “freedom,” and “tolerance” are discussed in Chapter 4 the chapter “The Greatest Strength in Dealing With the World.”
occasional listeners. One way they accomplish this is through a regular flow of broadcast essays on “America” such as “The Bright Lights of Freedom” by former Assistant Secretary of State under the Clinton administration and Legal Advisor to the State Department under the Obama administration, Democrat Harold Koh,72 “The Virtues of the Quiet Hero” by Republican Senator and Presidential Nominee John McCain,73 “The America I Believe In,” by former Secretary of State under the Bush administration Colin Powell,74 or “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” by political conservative and gay rights advocate Andrew Sullivan.75,76 This I Believe has featured additional essays by U.S. governmental officials, including former Secretary of State77 under the Clinton administration, Democrat Warren Christopher,78 former Speaker of the House under the Clinton administration Republican Newt Gingrich, and former Governor of New Jersey and former EPA Director under the Bush administration, Republican Christine Whitman.79 This I Believe also regularly celebrates American icons, broadcasting This I Believe essays from the 1950s by such national luminaries as Jackie Robinson, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Helen Keller, as well as contemporary idols like Tony Hawk,80 Bill Gates,81 Gloria Steinem,82 and John Updike.83 On national holidays, This I Believe

72 Harold Koh’s essay “The Bright Lights of Freedom” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 02/13/06 and published in This I Believe (2006).
73 John McCain’s essay “The Virtues of the Quiet Hero” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 10/17/05 and published in This I Believe (2006), as well as included in the special feature Religion and the Holidays.
74 Colin Powell’s essay “The America I Believe In” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 04/11/05 and published in This I Believe (2006), as well as included in the special features Reflections on 9/11 and The Immigrant Experience.
75 Andrew Sullivan’s essay “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 07/04/05 and published in This I Believe (2006), as well as included in the special feature Independence Day.
76 The inclusion of both Democrats and Republicans by This I Believe is discussed on page 134 preceding the analysis of Colin Powell’s essay.
77 According to a phone interview with producer Dan Gediman former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright had also requested to write an essay for This I Believe, but such an essay has not been broadcast (Harris, 2006).
78 Warren Christopher’s essay “‘A Shared Moment of Trust” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 01/23/06 and published in This I Believe (2006).
79 Christine Whitman’s essay “‘To Hear Your Inner Voice” was broadcast on Tell Me More on 06/19/08.
80 Tony Hawk’s essay “Do What You Love” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 07/24/06 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
81 Bill Gate’s essay “Unleashing the Power of Creativity and Intelligence” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 09/19/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
provides thematic essays that correspond, such as “Baking By Senses and Memories” (11/20/06) by Emily Smith on making Grandma’s pecan pie to celebrate Thanksgiving or “A ‘Silent Night’ That Brought Healing” (12/23/07) by Steve Banko on how a Christmas carol brought two American soldiers in a Vietnam hospital closer together. On the website, This I Believe also has special feature collections of essays which focus on aspects of American culture, such as “Voting and the Political Process,” “Tolerance,” “Patriotism,” “New Orleans,” “Baseball,” “Independence Day,” “Beliefs Born on the Battlefield,” “The Marines,” “World War II Veterans,” and “The Immigrant Experience” as examples.

Significantly, the majority of essays topically make no intentional connections to nationalism; only a minority of essays on This I Believe are overtly “patriotic” or take “America” as their topic. Yet, through the organizational strategies described, This I Believe provides a diverse array of “flaggings” or routine reminders, which are used to reproduce the nation (Billig, 1995). Through such reminders, national identity is formed, which includes among other things, ways of talking about nationhood. Far from spectacular, nationalism is a habitual practice for the This I Believe essayists who inhabit their national identity and see themselves as situated within the homeland. Such habits show up in the in taken-for-granted usages of deictic words like “this,” “here,” “we,” “our” which subtly reference and reinforce the nation and national belonging, “running up the flag so discretely that it is unnoticeable even by speaker or writer” (Billig, 1995: 107). These habits of thinking and speaking and listening simultaneously make the “homeland both present and unnoticeable by being presented as the context…unmindfully remind[ing] who ‘we’ are and where ‘we’ are” (Billig, 1995: 109, emphases in text).

82 Gloria Steinem’s essay “A Balance Between Nature and Nurture” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 08/22/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
83 John Updike’s essay “Testing the Limits of What I Know and Feel” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 04/18/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
84 Emily Smith’s essay “Baking By Sense and Memories” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 11/20/06 and published in This I Believe II (2008), as well as included in the special features Thanksgiving and Baking.
85 Steve Banko’s essay “A Silent Night That Brought Healing” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 12/23/07 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
86 For example, from the database themes, only 6033 essays or about 4 percent, fall under the 8 nationalist themes, whilst only 14,704 essays or about 9 percent, fall under the 4 classically liberal values.
Just as the nation is imagined as kind of “home,” so too the nationalist imagines him/herself as inhabiting this “home.” Hage explains there is a “dual mode of belonging to the national home” (2000:45). The weaker mode, which Hage terms “passive belonging,” is the sense of feeling “at home” within the nation and expecting to benefit from national resources because “I belong to the nation” (Hage, 2000:45). The stronger mode, “governmental belonging” takes belonging a step further as the nationalist additionally claims “And the nation belongs to me” (Hage, 2000: 46). Nationalists with governmental belonging perceive the national will as their own and feel entitled to contribute to the management of the nation, “if only by having a legitimate opinion” (Hage, 2000:46). They feel they have the right to position others within the nation, to say who and how many can belong, to determine who should feel at home and who should not. They attempt to enforce a national order in which “everything is where it is supposed to be” in order to make the nation feel “homely” to them (Hage, 2000: 66).

Elementary school teacher Joan Skiba’s essay “Patriotic Ponderings” (7/1/11) is an example of the utilization and expression of a governmental mode of belonging. From the first, Skiba’s national capital is on display, as her This I Believe photo portrays a middle-aged White woman, blond hair, blue eyes, dressed in patriotic royal blue with bright red lipstick hailing from McHenry, Illinois, a Midwestern town named after an Illinois statesman and veteran of the Indian Wars. Skiba grew up in a military home surrounded by patriotic messages. She identifies herself as “an Army brat raised by military minds,” the effect of which was that she became “the embodiment of a patriot, albeit a very young one.” She quotes a snippet of a poem that she memorized as a child, a favorite because of the “tremendous sense of pride” and “healthy dose of goosebumps” it inspires in her. The snippet reads: “… weary hearts are beating high! Hats off! Our flag is passing by!” Skiba remembers how “proud I was in my young heart to be an American” and feeling especially “special” and “patriotic” because she came from a military family.

87 Joan Skiba’s essay “Patriotic Ponderings” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 07/01/11 and published in This I Believe: Life Lessons (2013), as well as included in the special features Beliefs Born on the Battlefield and Veteran’s Day.

88 This poem is called “The Flag Goes By” and was written in 1694 by Henry Holcomb Bennett. Skiba actually has misquoted the snippet, which should read: “… loyal hearts are beating high! Hats off! Our flag is passing by!” It would seem that Skiba’s patriotism is more weary than loyal after her military service (1900).
Indeed, throughout American history, military service has been an essential component of citizenship and one of the central duties of civic obligation (Sparks, 2000). Significantly, women have historically been exempt from the obligation of combat, although until recently women have had the right to choose to participate in most areas of military service. As an effect of the heterosexist state and the public-private dichotomy, women have been primarily been connected to the state through their fathers, husbands, and children (Peterson, 2000: 63). Joan Skiba, however, went on to serve in the military herself, during the Vietnam War, in the Army Nurse Corps, tending to the casualties of war. Before this service, Skiba was confident in her country’s values and actions and was alarmed by the messages of the anti-war groups. She herself felt “no inclination to question my government or the war. I felt hostility toward these outliers and had no desire to hear any of their ideas…[I] believed that anyone opposing my government should just leave the country.”

While tending to the injured and dying bodies of American and Viet Cong soldiers alike, Skiba’s “youthful paradigms” began to unravel as she questioned her “naïve and uninformed” patriotism. As she “looked into the eyes of a dying, nineteen-year-old American and could not justify his death” and as she “plucked out pieces of small metal fragments from a Viet Cong soldier knowing he would survive those wounds but ultimately lose his life to his captors,” Skiba discerned for the first time the universality of national consciousness. Billig explains that nations speak a universal code of particularity, wherein each nation, through its history, identity, flag, and name, imagines itself as unique (1995). Skiba came to understand that a soldier of any nation dies as a patriot. She discovered that “war is patriotism on opposing sides. The uniforms differentiate the dogma but don’t separate the grief. The uniforms define the combatants, but their losses are universal.” Skiba’s own love of country leads her to conclude that “the young American and Viet Cong were both patriots. Each loved, each defended, and

89 On January 24, 2013 the Pentagon's rule banning women from combat positions was rescinded with the stated goal to “eliminate all unnecessary gender-based barriers to service.” (Memmott, 2013).
90 Many of the TIB essayists featured in this chapter were daughters of military fathers including Joan Skiba, Susan Cordell, Sheryl, and Aileen Mory.
91 Skiba’s statement is ambiguous as to whether the Viet Cong soldier’s are Americans and whether or not they intend to kill him.
each died for his country,” never considering the fact that perhaps these men did not voluntarily choose military service, possibly forced through conscription or compelled by poverty. As someone who believes that the state governs for her, she is unable to imagine that not all Americans (or other nationals) love their country, unable to see how the state is a system of ruling which uses citizenship to legitimate social inequalities within any national state as well as across the globe (Sharma, 2006).

Rather than make Skiba question the idea of nationalism, Skiba’s wartime experiences strengthened her nationalist desire to participate in the management of the nation. She now asserts vehemently her “responsibility as a patriotic person to be informed and to never stop questioning.” Celebrating the particularity of her nation, Skiba lauds “As an American, I can question. As an American, I have the right to oppose any of my government’s actions.” While Skiba doesn’t directly say so, her argument suggests that the anti-war protestors she resented in her youth were just as loyal to the nation as the war supporters of which she had been a part. The only difference between the two nationalists was a contrary vision of the ideal nation. She believes that “a patriotic person can question and disagree with the country she loves.”

Skiba is someone who inhabits the national will, believing that no matter whether she is in support of or against the nation’s current projects, her opinion matters. Skiba perceives the nation as her own, and believes herself to occupy a privileged position within it. More than ever, Skiba feels a “sense of belonging to this country, my love of this country, and the democratic values of this country.” She still feels inspired by the symbol of her country, the American flag, which still gives her goosebumps when it passes by. The idea of patriotism has been defined as “the persistence of love or attachment to a country,” which is to be distinguished from xenophobia, the hatred of people considered foreign or from other countries (Janowitz, 1983: 194). Patriotism has been deemed “defensive,” while nationalism is “offensive” (Synder, 1976: 43). However, drawing from a study by Kosterman and Feshbach (1989), Billig discusses how the motivations to go to war stem as much from pride in the nation as hatred of the enemy

92 In the United States, men being drafted to serve in the Vietnam War “disproportionately came from minority and working class homes and were often undereducated and close to illiterate” (Foley, 2007: 10). As the Vietnam War progressed, Viet Cong struggled to recruit, beginning conscription in 1964, such that by 1967, 60 to 70 percent of the Viet Cong were conscripted (Rottman, 2007 :12).
(1995: 57-58). He contends that the difference between patriotism and nationalism is rhetorical only, wherein, “‘Our’ loyalties to ‘our’ nation-state can be defended, even praised. ‘Our’ nationalism appears as ‘patriotism’—a beneficial, necessary, and often, American force. ‘Our’ nationalism is not presented as nationalism, which is dangerously irrational, surplus, and alien” (1995:55).

In Skiba’s essay, the national flag appears as a “consciously waved and saluted symbol,” accompanied by “a pageant of outward emotion” (Billig, 1995: 40). However, national identity continues to persist in between such burst of patriotic emotion. Most flags are “unsaluted, unwaved, mindless flags” that do not “demand immediate, obedient attention” nor require emotional displays of patriotism (Billig, 1995: 40). Instead, these millions of uncounted flags provide “banal reminders of nationhood: ‘flagging’ it unflaggingly,” transforming patriotic reactions and symbols into unconscious routine habits (Billig, 1995: 41). These constant flaggings naturalize nationhood, ensuring that national identity endures between moments of collective celebration, that the homeland is not forgotten in daily life, and that citizens are primed for future national crises. Such processes of naturalization and banal habituation are integral to the formation of national belonging.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how This I Believe claims to offer a forum for disempowered nationalists to participate in the management of the nation. In this chapter I will detail the execution of this management by exploring the connections between home and national belonging. Through their This I Believe essays, American ‘citizens’ claim national belonging by displaying and negotiating the value of their national cultural capital. In the first section, “I Belong to This Place I Call Home,” I will show how the nationalist operating in governmental mode imagines the nation as a homely place of belonging, through the ideas of neighbors and the neighborhood. In the next section, “The Right to Be Fully American,” I will demonstrate that not all nationalists experience the same degree of belonging and examine the strategies that those nationalists operating in the passive mode use for negotiating this differential inclusion, from professing loyalty and accumulating capital, to offering alternative valuations through a focus on national ideals. In the final section, “Patriotism is Central to a Nation’s Survival,” I will conclude with essays concerning the obligations and sacrifices that are deemed necessary for
protecting the homeland, detailing how the War on Terror has become a part of daily life within the family and through the media.

3.1 “I Belong to This Place I Call Home”

Benedict Anderson tells us that the geography of any nation is so vast as to be outside of personal experience; it must, therefore, be imagined (1983). Any citizen of the nation-state is familiar with only a limited part of the national territory, and so “for American patriots, the United States is not merely the America they know...they can be strangers in parts of ‘their’ own land; yet, it is still ‘their land’” (Billig, 1995:74). Despite being unable to directly apprehend the entirety of the nation, citizens imagine the nation-state as a homely totality, in which all the integral parts create an imagined whole. Through such acts of unification, the nation-state becomes not just “the place of ‘our’ personal homes—my home, your home” but also “the home of all of ‘us’, the home of homes, the place where all of ‘us’ are at home” (Billig, 1995: 75). In this way, a “mystic bond” is formed, linking together the people, the homeland, and state such that the alliance appears natural and special.

In their Special Feature “The Goodness of Neighbors,” This I Believe identifies neighbors as the building blocks of a community, who serve their function through “conversations over the back fence, in exchanging tools, labor, and gossips, and in looking out for one another.” On This I Believe there is considerable nostalgia for the kinds of belonging engendered by the idealized “small town” with its imagined harmonious community of neighbors. The classic image of the neighborhood in the United States is the ideal of the small town, considered a “microcosm of America,” a mythical place where “conflicts are resolved, differences elided, a world that stands symbolically for order” (Orvell, 2012: 14). The small town is imagined as a harmonious homogenous community, a “nurturing extended family,” a place of “townsfolk greeting one another on the street, tipping their hats, and with friendly shopkeepers and a general trust and good feeling (Jakle,1999: 3; Orvell, 2012: 130). The archetype of the small town “exists as a place of relative homogeneity and security, defined in opposition to ‘the world outside’” (Orvell, 2012: 7). P16:
In the essay “The Place I Call Home” (11/20/07) Cheryl\textsuperscript{93,94} describes her lifelong search for a hometown. As a child, Cheryl base-hopped, never staying in one place longer than four years, leading a life quite different than civilian families, having to frequently confess “I’m not from here. I have no hometown. I have no childhood friends. The only person I have known since kindergarten is my brother. I grew up in the military.” But six years ago, Cheryl found a town, “my town,” that was a “Bedford Falls movie set come to life—complete with an iron bridge, a Mr. Potter, and a pharmacy with a working soda fountain. Local family names mark the hills, roads, homesteads, and century-old tombstones.” Bedford Falls is the fictional town from the beloved American Christmas movie classic \textit{It’s a Wonderful Life} (1946), recognized by the \textit{American Film Institute} as number 20 of the 100 best American films ever made, and number one of the 100 most inspirational American films of all time (2007; 2006). Here is an example of Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra, the idea that reality has been replaced by symbols (1983). For Cheryl, the meaning of an authentic American hometown is supplied by a fictional one, Bedford Falls, and an actual town, Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, is evaluated for its authenticity based on the cinematic representation. Many Americans have not grown up in small towns, but through television and film, have cultivated a desire for the “fictitious archetypes of the neighborhood and the small town…against which the realities of urban life [are then] measured” (Orvell, 2012: x).

Cheryl’s new town lives up to its filmic glory, as she romantically describes all of the necessary components to the perfect American small-town. She starts with the big, yellow house she bought with the “humongous” kitchen that told her “it was my house.” Perhaps the features of the kitchen were so important to Cheryl because as the idea of home is built around the roles of wife and mother where the kitchen serves as “the emotional center of the home” (Greenblaum, 1981: 58). Furthermore, as a symbol of middle-class life, homeownership is part of the American Dream, considered not merely an opportunity or a reward, but almost a right of citizenship. In purchasing a home, the buyer claims an economic stake in the private property system, a stake which in effect

\textsuperscript{93} Cheryl’s essay “The Place I Call Home” was included in the special feature \textit{There’s No Place Like Home} on 11/20/07.

\textsuperscript{94} Essays which are not broadcast typically do not reference a last name.
binds the citizen to the state, and seemingly provides “tangible evidence that the system works” (Blum & Kingston, 1984: 159). But after the collapse of the U.S. housing market following the subprime mortgage crisis starting in 2007, home ownership became a source of insecurity, as millions of Americans lost their houses to foreclosure, and them, an important part of feeling at home in the nation.

After purchasing the right house, presumably during the housing bubble, Sheryl worried a little that she might not fit in: “I had a few misgivings about moving here. It’s the whitest county in the state and New Englanders are not exactly known for their warmth. My plan? Maintain a low profile.” Since this is a non-broadcast essay, there is no picture of Cheryl, but it can be inferred that Sheryl is a woman of color. While the myth of the small town primarily “organizes the feelings and perceptions of white America,” Cheryl’s essay shows how it is also resonant among the broader population, providing “a template for those who feel included in the American story, to think about culture, society, and space itself” (Orvell, 2012: 46). Like her new town, Cheryl’s fantasy home of Bedford Falls was exclusively White. The only African-American role on It’s A Wonderful Life was “Annie,” the protagonist’s family maid. Sheryl fears that her race will disrupt her fantasy, but she is pleasantly “surprised by their easy acceptance of me” and admits she “had to adjust my preconceived notions,” thereby rescuing the White fantasy of the small-town.

While the stereotype of the small town is that is occupied by Whites, such racial homegenity is something that the small town historically has labored hard to keep intact (Orvell, 2012:6). The famous Middletown studies on Muncie, Indiana discovered multiple social cleavages, reporting that social harmony was an “artifact of public rhetoric,” that there were class divisions among the white population, and that minorities within the town, specifically “Catholics, Negroes, Jews, and anything foreign,” were “allowed a particular place and function, but not full acceptance into the community” (Rottenberg, 1997; Lassiter, 2004; Lynd & Lynd, 1959 & 1965; Orvell, 2012: 139-140).

95 Yes, Orvell actually says “anything foreign” rather than “anyone foreign” in summarizing from the Middleton studies what the Middleton residents are “against” (2012: 140). The excerpts from the Lynds that he is referencing do not make reference to “foreign” practices, only to “foreign” people like “the Japanese menace, alien Communists and Anarchists,” so presumably this is an error in speech of the author (cited in Orvell, 2012:140).
The neighbor then, can be a source of anxiety, an embodiment not of sameness, but of otherness, which is “manifest in fears of difference and excess” (Almog & Born, 2012: 3). Such tensions are also prevalent in the small town, expressed through a “counternarrative of exclusion and discrimination” which was first described by Sinclair Lewis in *Main Street* (1920). This counternarrative points to the “intolerance that is often at the heart of individual communities, where the desire for purity and homogeneity has led…to the practice of excluding the ‘other’ on the grounds of religious, political, ethnic, or racial difference” (Orvell, 2012: 131). The small town is thus a symbol both of “friendly heartwarming social life” and “prejudice, segregation, and hostility to the stranger” (Orvell, 2012: 131). The idea of the small town, with its neighbors and neighborhoods, thus contains contradictions and tensions, acting as “the imagined locale for American ambivalences about culture itself” (Pinsky, 2009:15).

Cheryl begins to explore her new town, meeting all of its central characters—the librarian, the police, the local contractors, picking up the local lingo, and even standing up at the Annual Town Meeting, that classic ideal of representative democracy. Sheryl finds herself inundated with the kindness of neighbors, who “delivered banana nut bread, invited me to church, and took me to the dump. I’m invited in for coffee and told to ‘stop up anytime.’ They told me if I needed anything to just ask. People wave and beep as I run by. The neighbors watch out for me and my house.” As time passes, she begins to act neighborly herself, leaving “homemade artisan bread on doorknobs around town,” saying hello to people on the street, and inviting neighbors to “come up for dinner.” Sheryl concludes her essay victoriously, as she realizes that “I am home. Finally. This is the place I’ve been looking for all my life and I found it. It actually exists.” The ‘America’ of Sheryl’s dreams, iconicized in the myth of the small-town, is real, or at least the distinction between reality and the representation has become blurred, leaving only simulacrum. “I’m not from here, but I belong to this place I call home.”

*NPR* insider Michael McCauley contends that public radio is marked by “yuppie angst,” a “psychological neighborhood” occupied by listeners like himself who “long to recapture the innocent wonders of their childhood” and turn to *NPR* programming to “salve the emotional wounds of modern-day city dwellers” (2005:113). The nostalgia exhibited by *This I Believe* listeners for their fantasy hometown is an expression of their
feelings of insecurity, where through ideas of home, the essayists express a longing for the imagined past and its evocation in the present. Dietmar Dath has described the emotive functions of homes, which serve as "‘origin stories’ constructed as retrospective signposts…they are made for coming from” (1995). The This I Believe Special Feature “There’s No Place Like Home” describes home as “Home can be the house we grew up in, the town where we live, or where our hearts are. However you define home, it is a powerful force in our lives.” This description highlights how home is “not a geographical signpost, but an ideological signifier” less a physical place than a sense of belonging (Sharma, 2006: 8). This idea that “home is where the heart is” points to the ways in which the home is coded as feminine. Nationalism draws on a “mythology of the hearth” which speaks to the nostalgia of nationalists to “go home” to “return us once more to ‘Mum,’ she who embodies birthplace… and by extension nation” to return to “a golden afternoon in the past” (Warner, 1994). In the myth of home, home “promises an end to questing, to wandering, to trouble--home is closure, the arrival brings the story to an end” (Warner, 1994).

Such a longing for home and mother and closure is expressed in professor Susan Cordell’s essay “I Am Home” (6/24/11). In it, she expresses her desire to return to her hometown in Tennessee after she retires. Cordell says defiantly that she “takes issue with Mr. Thomas Wolfe who said ‘You can’t go home again.’” Like many of her childhood friends, Cordell “escaped small-town life at age 21, vowing never to return” and has kept that vow for 25 years. Cordell does not explain what she found so unbearable that necessitated her flight, she just assumes that everyone knows the insufferableness of provincial life. However, after this one casual comment, she spends the rest of her essay recuperating the value of her rural childhood home. For seven years, Cordell’s mother lived with her until she died, and during that time they would:

"Reminisce about days long gone: the time I set fire to the car at the drive-in. Daddy helping me wobble down the dirt road on my new bike. We whispered ancient family scandals while we cooked from yellowed newspaper recipes. And

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6 There's no place like home,” is a quote from L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900), which was recited by Dorothy (played by Judy Garland) to return home to Kansas in the 1939 film adaptation.

7 Susan Cordell’s essay “I Am Home” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 06/24/11 and was included in the special feature There’s No Place Like Home.
we could hardly wait to receive the hometown paper in the mail. Not for more recipes but for the obituaries. There was nothing more important than knowing who had passed.”

Cordell’s childhood world doesn’t exist anymore, as drive-in’s, dirt roads, hardcopy newspapers, and even knowing all of the elderly in your town are on the decline. Cordell is aware that things are different now, saying “things have changed and the past is, well, past…sure the landscape has changed and most of my childhood friends have moved away.” But for Cordell, such changes aren’t really disconcerting because “You can go home again, if you took enough with you when you left. When I left a quarter century ago, I took home with me. I tucked it away until I needed it.” It is through her timeless memories that she is able to sustain her vision of home, and it is through such a politics of nostalgia within nationalism that “At the core of the struggle for home lies the struggle for the way the story of place is told. Between what is remembered and what is forgotten, the self takes its bearings for home” (Warner, 1994).

As long as Cordell’s mother was alive, she was the embodiment of home, and thus Cordell had no need to return home for “With her there, I had home without having to visit my hometown.” Now that Cordell is an “orphan” she has visited her “mountain home” several times now, returning to “cherished haunts and superimposing memory over reality.” She has gone back to her childhood house and imagined herself “swinging until dark, running barefoot through the yard’s white clover, feeling Mother’s breath wash over me as she fixes a bee sting. I snuggle in bed with Mama Partin. I smell scrambled eggs and shoe polish as I finish breakfast and run out the door with my Buster Browns half-buckled. The sun is blindingly beautiful at the cemetery as I listen to someone play “Taps” for my dad who died when I was only 16.” Like Cheryl, Cordell constructs an idealized, surreal hometown, populated by iconographic American images of drive-in movie theaters, of fathers pushing children on bikes, of little girls swinging in the yard wearing the quintessential American shoe, each of which is set to a funeral dirge to memorialize a fallen soldier. As she recounts these memories she determines, “Yes, I took enough away, and it is serving me well. I cry. I am home.”

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98 Buster Browns were the quintessential shoe for American children at least until the sixties, named after the turn-of-the-century comic strip character Buster Brown (Warns, 2009).
The idea of home connects nation to family, such that the nation is imagined to be composed of communities of similarity, such as family, friends, and neighbors (Morley, 2000). It is in this ideological space of belonging that the neighbor emerges as a “foundational figure in modernity for both the construction of subjectivity and the organization of civil society” (Almog & Born, 2012:1). Testing the meanings of “affiliation, membership, and community” the figure of the neighbor raises the question of what kind relationship is desirable between the other and the self: “Is the neighbor understood as an extension of the category of the self, the familial, and the friend, that is someone like me whom I am obligated to give preferential treatment to; or does it imply the inclusion of the other into my circle of responsibility extending to the stranger, even the enemy?” (Zizek, Santner, & Reinhard, 2012: 6).

The question of what it means to practice neighbor-love is addressed in the essay “Neighbors Helping Neighbors” (9/12/05) written by Karna, a middle-aged woman from Storm Lake, IA. Karna says that she believes in neighbors and says, “We each have a responsibility to be a good one.” Karna’s beliefs are consonant with the biblical injunction from Leviticus 19:18 “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Karna says that she is lucky because in her small town she and her neighbors “know each other,” unlike the anonymous city full of strangers. Such knowing is expressed through acts of neighborliness, for example, in her town neighbors, most likely women, deliver Midwestern American comfort food like “chicken casseroles, banana breads, and brownies” as “notes” used to convey “welcome, concern and sympathy.” Neighborliness is expressed not just through gifts of food, but also through a shared concern for the value of their property through yard maintenance, as neighbors “water flowers, mow lawns, and shovel snow, knowing the gesture will be reciprocated.” Karna realizes that such neighborliness “isn’t true of all areas of the country” and that possibly her “way of life is a fantasy world for some.” Here, Karma acknowledges that not all members of the nation are necessarily neighbors or neighborly, that there are boundaries between those who

99 *TIB*’s interest in the family, as a symbol of the nation and as a structure essential to nationalism, can be found in the titles of its most recent book compilations, *This I Believe: On Fatherhood, This I Believe: On Motherhood*, and *This I Believe: On Love*.

100 Karna’s essay “Neighbors Helping Neighbors” or “A Piece of Their Hearts” was included in the special features *The Goodness of Neighbors* and *Neighbors* on 09/12/05.
dispense baked goods and those who don’t. She understands the sacrifices that neighborliness requires, how easy it would be to “take care of ‘me and mine’” only. But, she thinks that despite the hardships, “this is how we should live our lives, whether we’re 50 feet, 50 miles, or across the country from our neighbor.” For Karna, geographical proximity is not limited to the people living in the house next door, nor even the fellow residents of her town, but extends to the boundaries of the nation. Karna’s extension of neighborliness ends at the national border, however, beyond which the special quality of the homeland ends and a “different foreign essence” begins (Billig, 1995: 75).

Geographical proximity is considered one of the principles of cohesion for the neighborhood, but significantly neighbors can be “close” to one another in other ways: demographically, politically, cooperatively, historically, or culturally, all of which can contribute to a sense of community (Miscevic, 1999:112).

One defense of nationalism has been to give proximity moral significance, such that “the moral considerations one owes to other people decrease in proportion to their distance from one… consequently one has stronger and richer obligations to those close at hand than to strangers” (Miscevic, 1999: 115). In his essay “Our Noble, Essential Decency” (3/12/10) science fiction writer Robert Heinlein\(^\text{101}\) describes his connections to his neighbors in ever-widening circles, beginning with the people next door. There’s Doc, the veterinary doctor who will “get out of bed after a hard day to help a stray cat—no fee, no prospect of a fee,” and Father Mike who although “I’m not of his creed…If I’m in trouble, I’ll go to him…because I know that goodness and charity and loving kindness shine in his daily actions.” After personalizing these small-town characters, Heinlein moves on to a celebration of the neighborliness of towns in general, a place where, “You can knock on any door in our town, say “I’m hungry,” and you’ll be fed. Our town is no exception. I found the same ready charity everywhere. For the one who says, ‘The heck with you, I’ve got mine,’ there are a hundred, a thousand, who will say, ‘Sure pal, sit down.’” Such charity extends beyond a meal to hitching a ride, for “despite all warnings against hitchhikers, I can step to the highway, thumb for a ride, and in a few minutes a car or a truck will stop and someone will say, “Climb in Mack. How far you going?”

\(^{101}\) Robert Heinlein’s essay “Our Noble, Essential Decency” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 03/12/10 and included in the special features Neighbors and Decency.
Heinlein concludes, “I believe in my neighbors…I believe in my townspeople. I believe I know their faults, and I know that their virtues far outweigh their faults.”

Heinlein’s interpretations of the small town reflect a masculine experience of place, as he identifies the people who live in town and later on in the nation, by their roles in the public sphere, their professions, as he references the doctor, the priest, nurses, teachers, politicians, workmen, and soldiers. Heinlein’s vision of the town is consonant with liberal philosopher Tocqueville, who emphasized the importance of “an interlocking network of specific social roles” (Bellah et al. 1996:39). Heinlein’s generic neighbor is male, who he variously calls “pal” and Mack.” Through his discussion of begging and hitchhiking, he exhibits the kind of “unproblematic spatial freedom” that is more likely to be enjoyed by white heterosexual men (Rose, 1993:71). Especially for women, such activities can be dangerous, as “spaces are not necessarily without constraint; sexual attacks warn them that their bodies are not meant to be in public spaces” (Rose, 1993:71). Moreover, Heinlein’s sense of ownership over my neighbors and my townspeople is reflective of what Robert Bellah refers to as “the town father,” a character type which defines their identity in terms of the community and “experiences little conflict between their self-interest and the community’s public interest” (Bellah et al. 1996:175).

Heinlein imagines the nation much like the small town, “a place where the demands of work, family, and neighborliness intersect” (Bellah et al. 1996: 170). Heinlein believes that people are essentially “decent” and he “believes in my fellow citizens.” Citizens are distinguished from neighbors in that their names are unknown, but like in the small town, each citizen participates in the nation through their contribution to the public good, as expressed through their labor in the public sphere, while domestic labor in the private sphere is largely ignored. Heinlein discusses the variations of decency inherent to different roles, from the “patient gallantry of nurses” to “the tedious sacrifices of teachers” to “the honest craft of workmen.” As the nation is considered an extension of the family, Heinlein acts as the protective father, concerned about the moral standing of his family, evaluating their “virtues” and “faults” and whether or not their behavior is “decent.” While Heinlein mostly means to say that citizens are kind and helpful, decency is a classed and gendered adjective. It refers to whether a person conforms to standards of respectability, civility, and good taste, and especially in regards to women, whether she
conforms to conventions of sexual behavior and is thus chaste, virtuous, and modest. With the rise of the state, and the emergence of the patriarchal family structure, female purity became an important element to maintaining a family’s honor and enhancing its status (Ortner, 1978). Within nationalism, “men are positioned as having a proprietary relationship over women national subjects and because of this are able to discipline women’s practices concerning all manner of things” (Sharma, 2006: 131). Heinlein contends that despite the prominence of violence and crime in the media, “Yet for every criminal, there are ten thousand honest, decent, kindly men. If it were not so, no child would live to grow up. Business could not go on from day to day. Decency is not news.” For Heinlein, the opposite of being decent is to be a criminal, someone who breaks the laws of the social contract, and if it were not for protective fathers like himself, society would devolve into a Hobbsean state of nature, where even children could not survive.

Heinlein urges his listeners to “take a look around you” and see the American landmarks which are evidence of the moral virtue of these citizen laborers to who “From Independence Hall to the Grand Coulee Dam, these things were built level and square by craftsmen who were honest in their bones. There never were enough bosses to check up on all that work.” Significantly, Heinlein does not consider that the laborers who built Independence Hall were likely slaves, not citizens, who most definitely did have bosses who owned not only their labor, but also their freedom. Heinlein’s national imagination stretches to the decency of politicians, who despite public scorn and accusation, are mostly “low paid or not paid at all—doing their level best without thanks or glory to make our system work.” The proof of this for him is the continuance of government, that America has endured “beyond the Thirteen Colonies,” fixating on a founding moment while ignoring more than two hundred years of violence, including colonization, genocide, slavery, internment and imprisonment, and imperialism, all of which were motivated by anything but “decency” (Allen, 1994; Bacevich, 2002; Hernandez-Truyol, 2002; Horsman, 1981; Jacobson, 2000; Kaplan & Pease, 1993; Kaplan, 2005; Magdoff, 2003; Mamdani, 2004; Maira, 2009; McAlister, 2001; Panitch & Leys, 2003; Smith, 2006; Stoler, 2006; Williams, 1980; Williams, 1972).

102 Heinlein uses what Billig calls “homeland-making deixis,” where America as an entire homeland is flagged, but not named, as the taken-for-granted context (1995: 145).
In general, Heinlein’s essay ignores the complexities of racism in favor of a singular narrative of national glory. A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Heinlein lauds the soldier, with offbeat references like “I believe in Rodger Young.” Importantly, the named hero Rodger Young was featured in a famous song because among other Medal of Honor recipients his was “the perfect WASP name” while many other names were dismissed as “wonderfully unwieldy melting-pot names” (Bargepole, 1987: 38; Marmorstein, 1997: 181). Heinlein references geographical places where battles occurred that he considers especially significant to American freedom. From the Revolutionary War for independence to the Korean War against communism, Heinlein argues that “You and I are free today because of endless unnamed heroes from Valley Forge to the Yalu River.” For Heinlein, military service is one of highest forms of love of country. In Heinlein’s most famous and controversial book, Hugo Award-winning *Starship Troopers* (1959), both the Rodger Young and the Valley Forge are names of starships. By alluding in his *This I Believe* essay to this story, it warrants closer inspection as to any parallels. In *Starship Troopers*, the human species bands together in an interstellar war to defend against invading alien insects. Within the book’s utopian society, citizenship is granted to residents only after a required term of service to the state. In the book, the protagonist controversially argues that only veterans are worthy of suffrage because “A soldier accepts personal responsibility for the safety of the body politic of which he is a member, defending it, if need be, with his life. The civilian does not” (Heinlein, 1959: 24). Such notions chafe against egalitarian democratic ideals despite America’s history of limiting the franchise, yet, because, they also speak to liberal ideals that citizens share a responsibility for the common good, they can also resonate with an *NPR* audience.

From the politician, to the soldier, the nation specifically is the next concentric circle of belonging, as Heinlein states, “I believe in—I am proud to belong to—the

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103 Rodger Young was a World War II infantrymen who posthumously received the Medal of Honor for helping his platoon to withdraw by rushing a Japanese machine-gun nest. His heroic actions were famously remembered in the Burl Ives recording of “The Ballad of Rodger Young” written by Frank Loesser in 1945 (Wikipedia, 2012).

104 The U.S. has excluded from the vote at different points in time: Native Americans, Jews, Quakers, and Catholics, African American males, poor White males, women, people under age 21, prisoners, and noncitizen residents (Keyssar, 2000).
United States.” Unlike his prior whole-hearted celebrations, he tempers his favor for the nation with an acknowledgement of its “shortcomings,” using “lynchings” and “bad faith in high places” as examples. Despite mentioning the nation’s history of racism and corruption, Heinlein immediately forgets this history and recuperates the nation’s image by arguing without evidence that “our nation has had the most decent and kindly internal practices and foreign policies to be found anywhere in history.” But in fact the U.S. has a long history of indecent and cruel practices. In Starship Troopers, Heinlein defends the use of force and violence as a necessary moral obligation of the state, as the protagonist’s teacher Colonel Dubois explains, “Violence, naked force, has settled more issues in history than any other factor, and the contrary opinion is wishful thinking at its worst. Breeds that forget this basic truth have always paid for it with their lives and freedoms” (1959:26).

Heinlein then moves beyond the borders of the nation, not to other nations, or to the international community, but instead to “my whole race—yellow, white, black, red, brown.” For Heinlein, what lies beyond the nation is a “planet” filled with a teeming heterogeneity of “human beings” differentiated by race, the “majority” of whom display “honesty, courage, intelligence, durability, and goodness.” Again, Heinlein claims a kind of ownership over the entire human race and determines their moral worth. Science fiction is known for its representations of race through the concept of the “alien,” where “external encounters with aliens symbolize the internal conflicts of a humanity marked” (Lavendar, 2011: 25). Writing during the period of the Civil Rights Movement, Heinlein challenged racial perceptions by featuring non-white protagonists, such as the hero in Starship Troopers, Juancita “Johnny” Rico. However, racism in Starship Troopers manifests through nationalistic and xenophobic orientations towards the aliens, which are depicted as “not like us…communal entities…the ultimate dictatorship of the hive,”

105 To take just one example, the United States has repeatedly conducted unethical medical experiments domestically from the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments, to the Stateville Penitentiary Malaria Study, to releasing whooping cough, yellow fever, and dengue fever on U.S. cities, to a wide array of radiation experiments on infants, children, the mentally disabled, pregnant women, prison inmates, and military personnel, to the compulsory vaccination of Gulf War GIs with botulism toxin vaccine; such experiments have also been applied internationally through nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare, from dropping the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nakajima, to the use of Agent Orange on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Cole, 1998; Hornblum, 1999; Jones, 1992; Martini, 2012; Moreno, 2000; Welsome, 2000).
enemies which could not be vanquished even by the “Bugs’ planet [being] plastered with H-bombs until it was surfaced with radioactive glass” (1959:142). *Starship Troopers* speaks to the fears of the 1950s, using the Bugs to symbolize the threat of communism, and the worry that weapons would not be sufficient in an ideological war, as Johnny explains, “We were learning, expensively, just how efficient a total communism can be when used by a people actually adapted to it by evolution,” (Heinlein, 1959: 152). As the starship troopers encounter other alien species, the protagonist justifies the genocide of alien species by arguing “it will not be left in the possession of primitive life forms that failed to make the grade…the native [referring to the aliens]…was outclassed” (Heinlein, 1959:164-165). Heinlein’s *This I Believe* essay concludes with a similar kind of manifest destiny for the human species, “this hairless embryo with the aching oversized braincase and the opposable thumb—this animal barely up from the apes” which he believes “will endure longer than his home planet, will spread out to the other planets” continuing the process of colonization and the spread of empire after this planet has become uninhabitable.

Neighborhoods delimit the boundaries of home, distinguishing between such identities as insiders and outsiders, locals and strangers, citizens and foreigners (Sharma, 2006). In contrast to the neighborhoods of the small town, included in the Special Features set on “There’s No Place Like Home” are two essays written about growing up in urban neighborhoods, both of which are written by young adult (18-30) children of ‘Asian’ immigrants. In his essay “The Old Neighborhood,” (12/2/05) Stanley106 talks about how returning to his old neighborhood keeps him “grounded,” for “it tells me all that I am and all that I am not.” Stanley’s essay is significant as a contrast to all of the preceding essays on home. Stanley’s essay is significant as a contrast to all of the preceding essays on home. His essay is about “the neighborhood” or more colloquially “the hood,” rather than “home.” There is no nostalgia in this essay because this is the place that Stanley escaped, not the place that he desires to return. Never once does Stanley refer to the old neighborhood as his “home,” although he does say it is his parents’ home. As Stanley drives around his old neighborhood, he doesn’t remember

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106 Stanley’s essay “The Old Neighborhood” was included in the special feature *There’s No Place Like Home* on 12/02/05.
swings and scrambled eggs like Cordell, but rather “former hangouts and hideouts.” Stanley recalls his moments of mobility, “the countless walks home from grade school with friends down this street… waiting on that corner for rides… hours spent on public transit before any friends had a car… the insecurity and excitement of that time in my life.” Stanley describes motion in place, travelling that always led back to the neighborhood, the lack of agency to travel freely, dependent on rides from others, the waiting on corners, in hangouts, and hideouts for the moment when he might have the physical, social, economic mobility to leave the neighborhood. Stanley seems to have “made it” out of the city, but he thinks about how many of the people from his neighborhood remain in poverty, about “the strangers I shared train cars with and wonder how many are still riding those trains.” He remembers one brutal winter when he gave a homeless youth his spare change to get through the rough times. Unlike Cordell’s essay, there is a subtle sense of danger in this essay, that the homeland for Stanley contains the threat of scarcity and racism.

As he returns to the steps of his parent’s little twin home on the corner, he surveys in retrospect what “used to be my entire world.” Stanley’s home was the locus for his interactions with the world, although he didn’t understand the machinations his parents went to provide Stanley with such a strong feeling of connection to his neighborhood when he was younger. He remembers “times spent grudgingly mowing the lawn and shoveling the walkways and sidewalks” and “I used to wonder why they put forth so much effort to maintaining their humble home.” Unlike the other essayists, Stanley reveals that for minorities like his family, neighborliness and home maintenance were safety measures, ways to protect the family from discrimination and secure tentative inclusion in the community. As an old neighbor “walks past and offers me a smile,” Stanley realizes that as one of only two Asian families in the neighborhood, his parents “saw our home maintenance as a way to illustrate our values as a family and as neighbors.” This effort at acceptance apparently paid off as neighbors continue to “stop to chat and compliment the home just as they have for the past 21 years.”

At the end of his essay, Stanley drives the perimeter of his neighborhood, his car itself a sign of his class mobility. As he idles at a red light, the old neighborhood reminds him of his differential belonging to the nation, physically manifesting the symbolically
“profound distance between two stop signs.” Stops signs in Stanley’s essay are barriers signifying the enclosed space of the ‘hood and the confinement of its residents to it, as well as the restrictions placed on if and how immigrants move within the physical, economic, and social spaces of the nation.

Mobility also factors into the essay by Arar Han,\(^\text{107}\) called “Home for the Holidays” (12/31/07), in which she describes her parents’ journeying from one nation-state to another and back as they followed global circuits of capital. Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, Han’s family like Stanley’s family, was poor. Han recalls helping her mother “match double coupons with supermarket sales, stretching our food stamp dollars just a little bit further,” and calling the electric company to turn the power back on. In addition to poverty, Han’s family also faced “startling prejudice,” which she does not describe, simply saying that through such adversity her family became “friends as well as kin.” Han describes her family’s assimilation process as “inspiring, warm, and fun…a four-member team in our quest for the American dream.” She explains that “as we learned to become American, we were one another’s support.” Han acknowledges that being American is about more than citizenship, and includes a cultural component that must be learned. Han’s family was upwardly mobile, as Han’s father immigrated to America to complete his doctorate, and Han and her sister went on to higher education as well. After nearly twenty years in America, Han’s parents were well-established in their “American home,” her mother “deeply involved at church,” in line with the dominant Christian national identity, and her father was “in the final stages of becoming a U.S. citizen.” Han’s essay outlines what is required to legitimately call America home, naming such elements as economic striving, nuclear family, educational mobility, Christianity, overcoming prejudice, citizenship, and a commitment to the nation and its values.

Then, the unimaginable happened, Han’s parents moved back to Korea. Han says that “It never occurred to me that my parents could ever leave our American home.” Han does not provide a reason for why her parent’s left, but one can infer from her parent’s “tiny corporate condo” in Bundang that it was likely a job opportunity. If that was indeed the case, Han’s parents’ actions are a challenge to nationalist consciousness, as they

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\(^{107}\) Arar Han’s essay “Home for the Holidays” was broadcast on NPR.org on 12/31/07 and included in the special features Home for the Holidays and There’s No Place Like Home.
display loyalty not to the nation-state, but to the global circuits of economic flows and labor markets which cross national borders. Han’s parents “use transnational links to provide political or material resources not available within a single-nation-state” (Maira, 2009: 101). While Han’s parents’ decision to return to Korea does not align with the traditional myth of the ‘American Dream,’ it could still be considered a kind of “aspirational citizenship” as Han’s parents use migration away from the U.S. as a strategy for economic advancement (Maira, 2009: 111). Han’s parents exhibit what Aihwa Ong (1999) has termed “flexible citizenship,” striving to “accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena” by engaging in practices “favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes” (1999:6).

Han herself, however, as she is unable to imagine moving from her “American home” to a “foreign land.” She describes how her parents’ move left her feeling “empty and so afraid… sick with worry” that she would never “feel at home in my parent’s new home halfway around the world.” Within nationalism, mobility is a kind of “superdeviance” which “disturbs the whole notion that the world can be segmented into clearly define places” and “becomes a basic form or disorder and chaos” (Cresswell, 1996:85-87). As has been stressed in this section, family and nation are ideologically linked within nationalist theory, and so essential was Han’s family to her experience of feeling at home in the nation that she was concerned she would never experience the Christmas holiday season in the same way again, that “cozy, familial energy I’ve always associated with home.” The forces of global capitalism which depend upon the “labor power of the mobile multitude” have disbanded the stable family unit of Han’s youth, scattering her family across the globe as they seek new forms of livelihood and kinship (Maira, 2009:101). However, despite Han’s apprehension, she discovers that family is not predicated on the national, that the values of “trust, warmth, and love” travel well, and that her family can replicate the spirit of the season no matter where they are, because “home is not a location, but a commitment to the ones I love.”

Han’s essay touches on how home for some families is a strategy of mobility. However, after 9/11, “flexibility in national loyalty is viewed as potentially threatening when national security is perceived to be at risk, and there is a fear that this threat is both from without—from foreigners who oppose the United States—and from within—from
treacherous immigrants or ‘un-American’ citizens” (Maira, 2009: 116). Anxiety about flexible national loyalties has been used to justify the persecution of Communists during the Cold War in the 1940s and 1950s as highlighted by the *This I Believe* producers, as well as the internment of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans during WWII as described by Patricia Tsubokawa below. Maira explains that “the sovereign rights to ‘freedom’ and ‘mobility’ are unevenly distributed,” as transnational ties are considered positive for some migrants and supported by the state, whilst for other migrants, transnational ties are viewed as dangerous and scrutinized or circumscribed by the state (2009: 117). She argues that “flexibility is always in tension with control,” limited by state practices and ideologies which delineate who can and who cannot move, who are influenced by ideas about who belongs and who does not belong to the nation (2009: 117).

3.2 “Being a White American”

Understanding what it means to feel at home within the nation requires a consideration of the organization of social differences that regulate national space. Difference in this context means the identification of a person “as a member of a group that does not meet normative or hegemonic standards for subjecthood, agency, and belonging (Sharma, 2006:26). *This I Believe* essayists’ nostalgia for the small town may stem from “the fear that there may be no way at all to relate to those who are too different” (Bellah, 1996: 251). A fear of the other is reflected in the discourse of homeland security, which describes “the home in a constant emergency, besieged by internal and external threats that are indistinguishable” (Kaplan, 2004: 10). In contrast to imagining the nation as a “home,” a kind of domestic space understood through familial metaphors, after September 11th, the concept of “homeland” was introduced to Americans for imagining the nation. Amy Kaplan explains that prior to President Bush, no president had ever referred to the United States as the “homeland” during a period of crisis, and she suggests that this may have been a linguistic strategy for securing the national borders that had been exposed as permeable by the attacks (2003:58). She describes how the term homeland links national identity to geography and thus “conveys a sense of native origins, of birthplace and birthright. It appeals to common bloodlines, ancient ancestry,
and notions of racial and ethnic homogeneity” (Kaplan, 2003:86). In contrast to the opposite of home, which is foreign, Kaplan speculates that the opposite of homeland must be foreign lands, exile, diaspora, and/or terrorism (2003). She observes that in emphasizing “spatial fixedness and rootedness” the concept of the homeland departs from previous metaphors of American spatial mobility, such as a nation of immigrants or manifest destiny (2003: 86). She argues that in distinguishing between immigrants and those who can claim the United States as their “native land,” the idea of homeland takes on a “racialized cast…which even naturalization and citizenship cannot erase” resulting in “an exclusionary effect that underwrites a resurgent nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment and policy” (Kaplan, 2003: 87-88).

Nostalgic notions of the homeland “draw on comforting images of a deeply rooted past,” such as the small town, which has the effect of “legitimating modern forms of imperial power” (Kaplan, 2004: 10). But, the fear of those least proximate to us conceals the fact that nationalist claims tend to be directed towards neighbors with whom “the claimant people has close ties and interacts quite intensely,” and who often “belong to the same civic community as the claimant” (Miscevic, 1999: 111). Describing America as the homeland, in effect “polices the boundaries between the domestic and the foreign not simply by stopping aliens at the borders, but by continually redrawing those boundaries everywhere throughout the nation” (Kaplan, 2004: 9).

In this section I will discuss the context in which Whiteness came to matter and continues to matter in the United States, especially in regards to national belonging. Crucially, whiteness is a sociohistorical concept, shaped by social, economic, and political forces (Omi & Winant, 1986). Michael Omi and Howard Winant stress that racial categories and meanings vary over time and between different societies, as they are “given concrete expression by the specific social meanings and historical context in which they are embedded” (1986: 60). Historians like Theodore Allen have demonstrated how contemporary conceptions of race and institutionalized racial inequality in the United States are grounded in histories of colonialism and imperialism. In *The Invention of the White Race* he documents how the European-American ruling classes invented the concept of the “white race” as a form of social control. He explains that prior to this invention, issues of freedom and slavery were a component of the labor struggles of the
bond-laborers and the impoverished third of the free population, against the large land-engrossing elite. The new social status reduced anti-capitalist pressures by shifting these class-based solidarities into racial solidarities, enlisting the participation of the European-American laboring classes as supporters of capitalist agriculture based on chattel bond-labor. This was accomplished by transforming common law rights into white privileges, from which both free and bond-labor African Americans were excluded (1994, 1997).

Similarly, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker in *The Many-Headed Hydra* describe the many acts of resistance and eventual defeat of the many-headed hydra and the motley crew, as abstract solidarities based on race and nation divided, marginalized, and replaced identities based on particular shared experiences of solidarity. Following legislation in the 1780s and 1790s, they argue that by excluding whites from slavery, whiteness became an indicator of freedom, linking race and citizenship became linked together. As whiteness became a criterion for American identity, membership within the nation came to be predicated on membership within a specific (white) race (2000). It would be almost a hundred years before African-Americans were granted citizenship in 1870, Native Americans in 1924, and non-white immigrants in 1952, although full enfranchisement of citizens was not secured until after the American Civil Rights Movement gained passage by the United States Congress of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Takaki, 1987).

Significantly, Whiteness was not a static, unchangeable, easily definable identity, but an evolving category, as it adapted to the ever-shifting boundaries between different racial groups. Omi and Winant describe race as “an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by social struggle (1986: 68). As Whiteness came to signify a position of power, this elite identity was “often sought by those who did not possess it” (Kincheloe, 1999:163). Drawing on his analysis of Australian nationalist identity, Hage discovered that Whiteness was “not an essence that one has or does not have,” rather Whiteness was something that must be “accumulated” and “people can be said to be more or less White” (2000:20). The U.S. historical examples discussed below support Hage’s claims as applicable to U.S. context, describing how the criteria for inclusion within the category of White is contested, changes based on the historical and social context, and can be inflected by attributes like
class or religion. In referring to “Whiteness” more generally, Hage describes it as an aspiration, a “yearning” to be the “bearer of ‘Western’ civilization,” to hold a fantasy position of cultural dominance within the national field, and to claim governmental belonging (Hage, 2000: 58). Hage contends that it only “by feeling qualified to yearn for such a position that people can become identified as White” (Hage, 2000: 58). Sharma stresses how it is the relational quality of Whiteness which facilitates its function as a ruling identity (2006). She explains that in privileging Whiteness “higher on the value scale of racialization than is non-Whiteness,” the state creates a shared White national subjectivity, defining some people as “part of the National Family and others as outsiders to this” (Sharma, 2006: 56). Such an understanding is reflected in the self-perception of This I Believe essayist Greg Chapman, a corporate tax accountant who in his essay “A Journey Towards Acceptance and Love” (10/3/05) confesses “Being a White American provided me a sense of privilege, of being one of the “better” people.” Chapman’s statement reveals how nationalists claim governmental belonging on the basis of claiming to be White Americans. Significantly, Chapman’s essay discusses his coming to terms with his sexuality as a gay man, concluding that “that the stories I tell myself shape my truth, my soul and my life.” One can infer that Chapman no longer believes the story about his national superiority either and is trying to problematize that narrative also, but significantly, his identification as gay modifies his racial and national privileges based on heterosexist norms, such that the story actual is less true than it was before (Puar, 2001; Bérubé, 2001).

Scholars such as David Roediger (1991), Noel Ignativ (1995), Karen Brodkin (1998), and Matthew Frye Jacobson (1998) have historicized the shifting definitions of whiteness, detailing the ways in which the European immigrant groups which flooded into the large cities of the Northeast and Midwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were incorporated into the American racial system, and their struggles to be racialized as white. David Roediger, for example, traces the development of white

108 Gregory Chapman’s essay “A Journey Toward Acceptance and Love” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 10/03/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
109 Such a claim is considered legitimate following processes of colonialization, but it could also be argued that Native Americans have a credible claim to governmental belonging, albeit outside the national field of Whiteness.
identity and the prevalence of their white-supremacism among European-American workers in the North during the ante-bellum period (1991). He argues that groups such as Irish-Americans were able win acceptance as whites among the larger population by insisting on their own whiteness and exhibiting racism and proslavery positions. He contends that the imperative to define themselves as white stemmed from a need to rationalize their own oppressive conditions of wage labor, assuring themselves of their superior political and social location in the nation relative to Northern free blacks and black slaves. Matt Wray in his study of poor rural Whites, interrogates the term “white trash,” describing how categories of race and class combine, such that working class and poor Whites can be considered “not quite white” according to bourgeois norms of whiteness that are rooted in an imperial American history (2006).

Tomás Almaguer describes the contestation over white identity that developed in California following the nation’s westward expansion. He describes how religious and ethnic differences among European-Americans were minimized into a united white identity in response to the influx of Indian, Japanese, and Chinese populations, as well as the presence of Native Americans and Mexicans in California (1994). He details how the material interests of Whites at different class levels intersected with racial ideologies in struggles over land ownership and labor market position, and describes how the experiences of these minority groups varied based on their location within the developing racial order. For example, he details how California Indians were considered “uncivilized savages” and killed or segregated to the margins of European-American society, whilst Mexicans, despite having Indian ancestry, were considered “half civilized” and granted partial integration due to their history of Spanish colonization. In White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race Ian Haney-López examines cases in U.S legal history to reveal the criteria that were used by judges until 1952 to determine whiteness, and thus citizenship, including skin color, facial features, national origin, language, culture, ancestry, as well as scientific and popular opinion (2006).

Whiteness continues to matter as evidenced by the continued importance of white identity in many “defended” urban neighborhoods throughout the United States where residents attempt to “seal themselves off” in response to social or ecological changes (Suttles, 1972), such as Baltimore (Durr 2003), Boston (Formisano 1991; Gamm, 1999),
Chicago (Kefalas 2003, Suttles 1972), Detroit (Sucrue 1996), New Jersey (Lamont 2000), New York (Rieder 1985), and Philadelphia (Kazal 2004). In her study of the working-class descendants of the European-American immigrants living in Chicago during the 1990s, Maria Kefalas describes how the white residents of Beltway feel that they way of life is threatened by their physical and social proximity to the ghetto, which they associate with low-income minorities, specifically poor blacks, who “spread decay and disorder” (2003:51). She found that working-class whites “define and defend their place and identity in American society” by transforming their lawns, houses, and streets into an “Edenic refuge,” stressing that they will share their neighborhood only with a “carefully selected group of minorities” who recognize the importance of maintaining property and properly caring for and supervising children (2003:13, 52).

Whiteness also continues to matter in the post 9-11 context, evident in the increased visibility and shifting racialization of Arab Americans, who in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, have been consolidated into an “Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim” category, often constructed as an enemy of the nation through a kind of “racialization of Islam” as part of a backlash against persons perceived to be Arab, Middle Eastern, South Asian and/or Muslim (Naber, 2008: 1-2). Nadine Naber explains although Arab Americans have long been racialized as “white” by most government definitions, popular understandings of Arab Americans represent them as “different from and inferior to whites” (2008:1). She argues that:

“The difference between the 1914 case of George Dow (who was marked as nonwhite and eventually became ‘white’) and the 2003 case of Maher Hawas (a U.S. citizen who eventually became a ‘potential terrorist’) represents the process by which state discourses have transformed ‘the Arab’ over time, from proximity to whiteness to a position of heightened Otherness” (2008: 39).

The linking of terrorism with Otherness is also illustrated by the highly differential treatment of ‘enemy combatants’ José Padilla and Hamza (John) Walker Lindh. In their article “Threatening Bodies Resisting Containment: Enemy Combatants, War Protesters, and Same Sex Couples,” Mary Bloodsworth-Lugo and Carmen Lugo-Lugo argue that as an American-born, Puerto Rican convert to Islam, Padilla’s racialized body was a “perceived as a bigger threat than other U.S. citizens designated as enemy combatants” (2007:14). Padilla was detained without charge in a military prison for three and a half
years, in contrast to American-born White Lindh, who was granted the rights afforded by U.S. citizenship such as access to legal counsel and tried in the U.S court system. Drawing on court documents, Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo argue that Lindh’s “whiteness played a fundamental role throughout his court procedures” as expert witnesses strategically employed “racially-coded descriptors to detach John Lindh from other enemy combatants suspected to be terrorists” (2007: 15). They conclude these cases reveal how “the citizenship afforded by whiteness seems to defeat other forms of citizenship” (16).

In “Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness,” Ruth Frankenburg argues against her previous assertion that whiteness was an invisible, unmarked norm, claiming that was a “mirage...a white delusion,” and instead now insisting that “whiteness is in a continual state of being dressed and undressed, of marking and cloaking” (2001: 73, 74). Frankenberg offers a comprehensive definition of Whiteness which summarizes many of the features of White identity reviewed in this section, noting that it is a “location of structural advantage in societies structured in racial dominance,” as well as a “standpoint from which to see selves, others, and national and global others” (2001: 76). She describes how Whiteness is a “product of history” and a “relational category” whose “simultaneously malleable and intractable” meanings are “complexly layered and variable locally and translocally” (2001: 76). She emphasizes that Whiteness is often “renamed or displaced within ethnic or class namings” and associated with practices and identities that are “named as national or ‘normative’ rather than specifically racial” (2001: 76). Frankenberg notes how inclusion within the category of Whiteness is contested, and discusses the ways in which other “axes of relative advantage or subordination...inflect or modify race privilege” (2001: 76). Finally, she cautions that although whiteness is relational and socially constructed, this “does not mean that this and other racial locations are unreal in their material and discursive effects” (2001: 76).

3.3 “The Right to Be Fully American”

The previous section outlined the ways in which through the organization of social identities, “people are separated from one another not by space or place but by being ‘embraced’ by the nation and the state in highly differential ways” (Sharma, 2006:
Sunaina Maira explains that “the trope of national belonging, so powerful in modernity, is not just based on political, social, and economic dimensions of citizenship, but is also defined in the social realm of belonging” (2009:10). In this section I will explore how in order to attain national belonging, the essayists must accumulate elements associated with Whiteness, which include various forms of economic and cultural capital associated with the dominant group. The essayists discussed below are American citizens, and yet, their negative racialization, combined with their family or personal history of immigration to the United States, denies them an unproblematic sense of belonging within the nation, as they are made to feel “less national” than others, “without having to be denied, or feel they are denied, the right to be nationals as such” (Hage, 2000: 52). Significantly, both of the essayists discussed desire governmental belonging and have bought into the “democratic incentive” of accumulating national capital, but have been frustrated by what Hage call “the aristocratic logic” whereby “the very fact of this acquired capital being an accumulation leads to its devaluing relative to those who posit themselves to have inherited it or to possess it innately without having to accumulate it” (2000:64). Despite their desires for full inclusion within the nation, neither essayist can credibly claim governmental belonging, and both find that they must continually prove that they are American. Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Sharma argues that it is the “process of differential inclusion—not simply exclusion—that works to facilitate how people are seen—and see themselves— as being at home or not in the spaces in which they find themselves” (Sharma 2006: 18).

Japanese-American anti-discrimination trial attorney Patricia Tsubokawa in her essay, “America Gives My Life Meaning,” (6/24/05) describes her “belief in America” and her life-long desire to be an “All-American girl.” She begins her essay by revealing that she was born in 1951, “six years after my family was released from the Japanese-American Internment Camps.” Tsubokawa’s current job is to represent plaintiffs in discrimination lawsuits against the government, in order to agitate for the kind of civil rights that her family was denied. She testifies that she “believes that everyone is entitled to the civil rights guaranteed by our Constitution.” One would think that because of her

110 Patricia Tsubokawa’s essay “America Gives My Life Meaning” was included in the special feature Patriotism on 06/24/05.
profession, Tsubokawa would make some critical remarks about the American government’s history of, or current practices, of illegal and racist imprisonment of civilians, but instead she uses her family history to excuse the state’s actions and to provide evidence of her family’s patriotism and ‘Americanness.’

She does this by describing how her family felt “shamed,” (not outraged), how her grandfather explained to her in Japanese “shi gata ganai…it could not be helped,” and that even after all that had be done to them, they were “still loyal to their country, America.” Tsubokawa clarifies that her grandmother, mother, and father were all born in America, thus emphasizing that they were in fact citizens, and therefore Americans, not Japanese nor loyal to Japan because of their racialized features. Such ways of feelings and understandings were not specific to Tsubokawa’s family, but representative of sentiments among Americans of Japanese ancestry. Yasuko Takezawa explains in response to evacuation, internment, and the war, many Issei and Nisei felt like “second-class citizens.” Japanese ethnicity was stigmatized leading to feelings of guilt and shame during and after the war. After the war, Takezawa describes how the Nisei strived for social and cultural assimilation, ceasing to speak Japanese, moving away from Japanese American communities, identifying as American, and teaching their Sansei children, like Patricia, that “being of Japanese ancestry was not advantage in American society” (1995:195).

Like many Nisei, Tsubokawa’s parents went to great lengths to make her “believe that I was the All-American girl.” Tsubokawa realized that her racialized features and her ethnic name were negatively valued traits in the field of national belonging, noticing as a child that she “looked different” and that “my last name was hard to pronounce because every new teacher struggled to say my name at roll call.” Despite, or perhaps because of these traits, Tsubokawa strived to accumulate certain forms of Whiteness and claim more governmental belonging to the nation. She fondly remembers being a Brownie Scout.

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111 Issei, Nisei, and Sansei are Japanese language terms referring to first, second, and third generations of immigrants within the United States (Takezawa, 1995).
112 Brownie Scout is the name for the second and third grade level of Girl Scouts of the USA, an American-founded and now global organization formed in 1912 as a correlate to Boy Scouts of America. Girl Scouts of the USA currently has a membership of over 3.2 million girls and adults, with more than 59 million women alumnae in the U.S. Nearly 60 percent of women in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives are former Girls Scouts (Girls Scouts, 2012). (In fact, I was a Brownie Scout!)
as a young girl, stating definitely her “love” for the uniform because “That little brown dress with matching beanie cap made me look like the other Brownie Scouts.”

Tsubokawa’s desire to efface her negatively racialized features and blend in with Whites through group conformity continued into high school as she became “a song leader with pom-poms and matching uniforms.” Her efforts paid off, as by her senior year “everybody could say my name and I felt like I belonged,” and as proof of this belonging her class elected her both student body vice president and onto the homecoming court.

Following graduation, Tsubokawa describes the “passionate days of my youth” through the lens of American history, describing in romantic tones the dramatic happenings of 1969, “That year when Americans walked on the moon. When the Vietnam war was raging. Young people like myself were idealistic and full of questions. It was the summer of love and the spirit of Woodstock spread over my generation in a wave of anti-establishmentarianism.” As the “All-American girl,” Tsubokawa’s response to these nationwide rebellious trends was to continue her pattern of national accumulation, and marry straight out of high school her “surfer boyfriend” and have their first baby on that most ‘American’ of holidays, Christmas Day.

Tsubokawa writes that her generation had to grapple with the “imperfections” of the country, growing up with “President Truman’s decision to drop the Bomb” and “President Nixon’s decision to resign,” never suggesting that she might have some influence over those decisions. In this instance, Tsubokawa does not imagine herself as occupying such a privileged position as to inhabit the national will; here she does not claim governmental belonging. The tension of differential belonging leads Tsubokawa to make clear distinctions between the state, its citizens, and the ideals behind the nation. For Tsubokawa, the “values of freedom, honesty, diversity, and tolerance” are what define America as a nation, forming “our competitive edge in a world that looks to us to see how we live together.” This clinging to ideals seems to be a strategy for coping with what Hage calls, “the trauma of the subject who is not being heard” (2000:208). For those people whose national capital is devalued, who feel that they ought to have more governmental power, reasserting the ideals of the nation provides a sense of control and stability, a way to imagine the nation as theirs, despite evidence to the contrary.
As a lawyer, Tsubokawa lauds the U.S. legal system, impressed by how “we do not hide our problems, we put them on trial and allow everyone to watch how we try to find justice…working toward the ideal rule of law.” 113 Despite knowing from both personal and professional experience that legal citizenship is insufficient to guarantee protection under the law, Tsubokawa does not mention the USA PATRIOT Act nor the recent detentions of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian Americans and immigrants, an omission that is typical of This I Believe. Instead, Tsubokawa says that “some days are better than others” when defending civil rights. Maira explains that “dramatic enactments of exclusion from cultural citizenship are on a continuum of historical practices that have culturally and racially constructed nonwhite groups, such as Asian Americans, as ‘perpetual foreigners,’ despite legal citizenship (2009:82). In the face of the state’s War on Terror, Tsubokawa is coming to terms with the fact that she is “no longer an All-American girl” and lives in a “complicated world with shades of grey all around me.”

This turn to the refuge of ideals is not exclusive to racialized minorities and in fact many of the essays in the database talk about the importance of the values in the founding documents to their own understanding of what it means to be an ‘American.’ Oftentimes these essayists are soldiers, who seem to need such enduring and concrete representations in order to make sense of the military actions they are required to take. In a Special Feature on Patriotism, This I Believe selected the following essay from the database, “Custodians of the Constitution,” written by James,114 an officer in the United States Navy (2/27/07). Deployed to the Middle East and to Africa, he carried a pocket-sized Constitution with him, which he often read in his tent. James says “I believe in our Constitution…because it helps me to sleep at night when my body is tired and mind

113 While Tsubokawa does not directly cite the following, in 1944 in Hirabayashi vs. United States, Yasui vs. United States, and Korematsu vs. United States, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066, which ordered the creation of exclusion zones for people of Japanese ancestry (Hatamiya, 1994: 24). However, in 1988 the Senate and House under President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, officially apologizing on behalf of the United States for the internment of Japanese Americans, saying that the mistake was “caused by racial prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership” and offering monetary reparations (Hatamiya, 1994: 1). The case of the Japanese American internment is in fact a rare instance in which the United States eventually acknowledged some wrongdoing in its domestic wartime practices; however internationally the Unites States has a reputation for refusing to be held accountable for its alleged crimes abroad and its routine practices of terrorism in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and many others (Mamdani, 2004).

114 James’ essay “Custodians of the Constitution” was included in the special features Patriotism and Beliefs Born on the Battlefield on 02/27/07.
distraught to know that I serve ideals, not a person; that I serve you and I, not myself.” In
James’ essay he outlines why he believes in the Constitution, describing some of the
problems that the founding fathers faced in writing it, many of which still exist today, and
celebrating the ways in which these problems were overcome. There is a sense that
perhaps James is critical about the war of which he is a part, but these past achievements
of supposed national success remove the state from critique, and like Tsubokawa, at best
allow for a failure of individual leaders or administrations. James as much says so when
he outlines, “Our country is not perfect; our leaders even less so. I am imperfect. Though
freedom, equality, and civility are the ideals to which we are committed, at times, even
they are imperfect. But that does not mean that our ideals are not worth upholding,
revering, maintaining for future generations.”

At a moment when any wavering in allegiance to the project of freedom and
democracy brings intense scrutiny for signs of betrayal to the nation, it becomes
increasingly difficult to be critical of the state, especially for negatively racialized
minorities like Tsubokawa. Like her grandparents and parents did when faced with racist
questions of disloyalty to the nation, Tsubokawa can only say that the “ambiguity” of a
complex world makes her “hold on to my belief in America even closer.” Asserting that
America is hers too, Tsubokawa avows, America “gives my life meaning.” She clings for
security to the ideals of America, as well as to the entire edifice of the nation-state,
declaring that more than ever she “now need[s] to believe in my country, America.”

Hage explains that the fantasy of the nationalist is to construct the ideal nation,
and through this task the nationalist finds purpose and meaning. He explains “The
nationalist is…always a nation-builder, a person whose national life has a meaning
derived from the task of having to build his or her ideal homely nation, a national
domesticator” (2000: 71). But the ideal nation can never be achieved, because then the
nationalist would cease to be meaningful. Therefore the fantasy is maintained by
imagining an “other” which prohibits the realization of the ideal nation (2000:71). For
Tsubokawa there is a tragic tension in her essay. She believes that she is a member of the
American nation and desperately yearns for the homely America promised to her by her
family and the Constitution, but she is also an ‘other,’ whose very existence according to
the fantastical logic of nationalism threatens the domestic space and requires expulsion.
Tsubokawa attempts to resolve this tension through her continued belief in the ideals of the nation, and working on civil rights cases for greater inclusion in national space. Tsubokawa’s holds what Hage would term a sense of “passive belonging,” such that because of her non-White status, full national inclusion remains a “normative aspiration” that remains unfulfilled (Sassen in Maira, 2009: 82).

Non-White essayists on *This I Believe* recognize the cultural components of national belonging and seek at once to name the contents of the dominant cultural capital—what constitutes Americanness, challenge the value of or unequal distribution of those contents that they feel illegitimately classify them as less national than others, and strive to be recognized as at least as national, as ‘American,’ as those in a position of national dominance. Another lawyer, here commercial litigation attorney Yasir Billoo, in the essay “The Right to Be Fully American” (12/11/06) discusses the difficulty of being denied national belonging in the United States. A self-identified “American Muslim of Pakistani descent,” he describes how his fellow Americans’ inability to see him as anything more than a “terrorist” makes him feel like a “foreigner.” Despite resisting the label for himself, Billoo does not argue that no one should be so understood, thereby upholding the national/foreigner distinction.

He calls attention to a fundamental contradiction in U.S. society: “I am an American and like almost everyone here, I am also something else” (Billoo, 2006). Here, Billoo is articulating a dominant discourse that the United States is a country of immigrants, captured in the “melting pot” metaphor, which encourages immigrants to “melt” into a singular American culture through assimilation (Jacoby, 2004). This idea is also captured in the popular motto, *e pluribus unum*, which means “out of many, one.” In Billoo’s opening statement he questions the presumed racial/ethnic/cultural unity of “the people.” He states that he was “raised to believe that America embraces all people from all faiths,” but he reveals that recently this belief has become threatened as his identity has “come under attack” (Billoo, 2006). Jacoby argues that after September 11th, driven by racial, cultural, and national fears, pessimism that assimilation is no longer possible.

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115 Yasir Billoo’s essay “The Right to Be Fully American” was broadcast on *All Things Considered* on 12/11/06 and published in *This I Believe II* (2008), as well as included in the special features *Faith and Life* and *The Immigrant Experience.*
has increased, while at the same time, “the nation has grown ever more anxious about what many imagine are the unassimilated in our midst” (2004: 10).

Part of Billoo’s argument for why he is an American is his legal status as a citizen and his promise of fidelity to the nation-state, attesting “Twice, I have sworn to uphold and protect the Constitution and the laws of this nation: once when I became a citizen and once when I became an attorney” (Billoo, 2006). Another part of his argument for why he is an American is that he considers the U.S. home, stating, “I live and work every day with the thought that this is my home. This is the place I can’t wait to get back to when I go overseas. I feel the same relief many of you do standing in customs line and just hearing English again. It is the simple relief of coming home.” The comfort of hearing English is evidence of Billoo’s national identity, wherein it is assumed within nationalist ideology that all citizens of a nation speak the same language, because “language is still commonly assumed to be the central pillar of ethnic identity” (Edwards in Billig, 1995: 14). As a further testament to his rightful national belonging, Billoo proffers that when he is abroad, in his nation-state of Pakistan where he was born, he defends his new homeland “America, our way of life and our government’s policies,” rejecting his biological family members who “are quick to point the finger at America for any world problems” in favor of his adoptive national family. This is the only time in his essay that Billoo uses the pronoun “our,” a tentative attempt to include himself in the communal language of national belonging and speak on its behalf, which contrasts sharply with his frequent usage of “you” to speak to the audience and his reference to Americans as “them”, which reinforces the overall ambivalence that Billoo experiences about his level of national acceptance.

Despite possessing some of the necessary cultural capital of national belonging—citizenship, living and working in the U.S., professing loyalty to the nation and defending it abroad a homely feeling within U.S. borders, and the comforting familiarity of English -- Billoo laments that this is insufficient national capital to be accepted as fully American. He bluntly names the characteristics which devalue his already accumulated national capital and exclude him from full national membership: “I am an immigrant. I am a Muslim. I was born in a foreign land, my skin is not white, and I have facial hair even though it barely passes for a beard.” He finds that his Muslim identity is both inescapable
and ever a liability for him, because even when he is not engaging in obviously Muslim practices of daily prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan, he is still identified as a Muslim by others and discriminated against because of this identification. He explains that, “I am also a Muslim when I walk through the airport security or in the mall when I accidentally leave a bag of recent purchases unattended. Every day, I have to introduce myself to new clients, judges, and other attorneys and actually think of how I can say my own name so that it might sound less foreign, less threatening.” He discovers that he must defend his Muslim identity and “Islam, my beautiful religion” to Americans whose only point of reference is negative media images of terrorists. Billoo explains that “I tell people to envision me when they think of Muslims and Islam, not the terrorist mug shots they see on TV. When they can do that, I feel like an American, just like them. When they cannot, I feel like a foreigner.”

Mahmood Mamdani explains that post-9/11 political discourse in America and throughout the West distinguished between “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims.” Using what Mamdani calls “culture talk,” this discourse turned religion into a political category, defining “good Muslims [as] modern, secular, and Westernized” and “bad Muslims as doctrinal, antimodern, and virulent” (2004:24). “Bad Muslims” were the terrorists and “good Muslims” were “anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime and would undoubtedly support ‘us’ in a war against ‘them’” (2004:15). The discourse of “culture talk” divides the world into categories of premodern, modern, or antimodern, and perceives the violence of ‘terrorists’ to be irrational and senseless (Mamdani, 2004:19). Islamic fundamentalism has been variously interpreted as premodern (Fukuyama, 1992), antimodern (Lawrence, 1989), and postmodern (Ahmed, 1992). Mamdani describes the conception of premodern peoples as “those who are not yet modern” which “encourages relations based on philanthropy” (2004:18). He describes the conception of antimodern peoples as those who are “not only incapable of modernity, but also resistant” which results in fear and “preemptive police or military action” (2004:19). Roxanne Euben argues that these various designations of the relationship of Islamic political to modernity “not only connote historical periods, but delineate normative orientations toward such initially Western ideas and commitments” such as reason, science, and secularism (430). Arguments about “good” and bad” Muslims are rooted in
the binaries of colonialism wherein “whiteness represented orderliness, rationality, and self-control, and non-whiteness chaos, irrationality, violence, and the breakdown of self-regulation” and justified practices of domination against the uncivilized, premodern or antimodern nonwhite Other (Kincheloe, 1999:2).

In this essay, Billoo attempts to portray himself as a “good Muslim,” a loyal citizen who defends the actions of the American government and believes in its democratizing mission against other “bad’ Muslims, even in his family, who are critical of the state’s imperialist practices and state-sponsored violence. Such categories of “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims” are ideological, “quasi-official names for those who support and oppose American policies…as there are no readily available ‘good’ Muslims split off from ‘bad’ Muslims, which would allow for the embrace of the former and the casting off of the latter” (15). Unfortunately, the implication of this discourse was that Muslims were now guilty until proven innocent; “unless proved to be ‘good,’ every Muslim was presumed to be ‘bad.’” (2004:15). This made Muslims like Billoo understandably upset to be perceived by default as terrorist, and consequently very motivated to secure their national belonging. Billoo’s essay is an example of the ways in which, according to Mamdani, “[a]ll Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against ‘bad Muslims.’” (2004:16). Billoo argues that he has “the basic right to be fully American and fully Muslim,” but Kaplan explains that “empire” is threatened by what she terms “translation,” such that “to speak both Arabic and English, or to practice Islam and be a U.S. citizen, has the potential not of building bridges and cultural exchanges, but instead of exciting the suspicion of treason, sabotage, and espionage” (Kaplan, 2004:15).

Billoo concludes his essay with an attempt to circumvent the idea of America as a Christian nation, to valorize Islam and retrieve its national value by demonstrating the compatibility of Islam within the ideology of nationalism. Through interpreting nationalist teachings from the Quran, he attests that, “The Quran teaches us that God created us from a single pair, and made us into nations and tribes so that we may know each other, not so that we may despise each other.” Unlike Patricia Tsubokawa, Billoo is despondent to the possibility that the discrimination he experiences can be remedied through legal agitation for civil rights. Instead, he concludes his essay with a spiritual
appeal to the contemporary religion of modernity, nationalism, and its God, the nation-state, humbly entreating “I pray that America will keep me within its embrace.”

Billoo’s essay accepts many of the hegemonic ideas of nationhood, especially the idea that the nation-state is the natural “home” of the citizen. Billoo’s essay also reveals contradictions in nationalism, pointing out that national belonging is not inclusive of all citizens and, therefore, that “the people” are racialized, gendered and must pass hegemonic restrictions of permissible religious and other practices. I interpret Billoo’s essay as offering what Stuart Hall (2002) describes as “negotiated codes,” which means that Billoo’s essay does not completely reject dominant American ideas of nation and race, quite the opposite in fact. In seeking recognition and legitimacy for “Muslim” as an identity with national cultural capital, he offers oppositional understandings of what “being American” can mean. He tries to denaturalize the national association with Whiteness or with Christianity and rejects the efforts of dominant national groups to impose on him a devalued national identity or a subordinate position in the national order.

The desire for national belonging and the struggle to have a legitimate say about the conditions of one’s national belonging can also be observed in the essay, “My American Dream” by middle-aged “M” from Los Angeles, California, who does not provide his/her full name because he/she is a self-identified “illegal immigrant” (06/04/07). M’s essay was selected by This I Believe from the database to be included in a special feature on “The Immigrant Experience” and as will be demonstrated, this essay does not challenge dominant understandings about national belonging, but like Tsubokawa and Billoo, tries to challenge their differential inclusion by drawing on national ideals. M begins his essay with the claim that “My American dream is simple—traveling, buying my own home, retiring when I turn 60, avoiding traffic tickets, and becoming a legal resident of the United States.” M attempts to situate himself within the narrative of the American Dream by aligning his personal goals with the national ethos that through hard work and “honest” living, prosperity and upward social mobility can be

116 M’s essay “My American Dream” was included in the special feature The Immigrant Experience on 06/04/07. The gender of the essayist is not specified, so generic masculine pronouns will be used for convenience, despite their obvious bias.
achieved. He connects his biography to the founding fathers and stress like Billoo that America is a country of immigrants, arguing that “from the pilgrims aboard the Mayflower to the migrant workers working in today’s farms, America was founded on the blood and sweat of immigrants.”

M works to distance himself from the idea that he is a criminal, placating, “If you know me, you know I am the last person who would break the law” and he claims that when he first arrived at the age of 15, “I was miserable at the idea of being here illegally.” He appeals to the audience’s sense of social justice when he petitions that his parents wanted a “better future” for him “free of the promised poverty waiting in my native country.” M does not identify his “native country” by name, choosing instead to concentrate on the lack of economic opportunities available there and make visible the conditions of poverty which motivated his migration:

“the ingrain corruption and lack of law enforcement caused my country’s economy to deteriorate so badly that workers had to look abroad for jobs if they ever hoped to move out of poverty…a country where people graduate with degrees in medicine but work as manual laborers, where every day thousands of hopeful visa applicants wait in line to leave the country, where working overseas as a housemaid pays better than a white-collar job domestically” (06/04/07).

Drawing such a contrast between his native country and the United States, M reinforces ideas of American exceptionalism. He admits that “When I was growing up in my country, I grew up with the impression that being in the United States was like stepping into heaven. We all looked in envy at the immigrants returning from “the States.” We wanted to be like Americans.”

M works to convince the audience that he is worthy of citizenship, by emphasizing his educational achievements, having obtained a bachelor’s degree and graduated in the top one percent of his class while in the United States, and his model behavior, confessing “I try to be as law-abiding as possible, because I want to stay “under the radar.” He seeks to assuage nativist concerns regarding “if we illegal immigrants really drain more than our fair share of the nation’s resources” saying that for his part he pays “at least 30 percent of my wages in taxes.”

He concludes his essay with assertions of patriotism, loyalty, and gratitude to the nation, claiming that “first generation immigrants like me make the best American
citizens because while my heart breaks for my native country, I love the United States for the opportunity it has given me and my family. I know that living in America is a gift not to be taken for granted.” M’s admission that he still feels attachment to his “native country” threatens M’s professed allegiance to the United States, wherein flexibilities in national loyalty warrant suspicion. M contests that his dream should not be considered invalid just because he is not an official citizen. He asserts, “I have my American dream and I believe it is no different from the American dream of the native-born American. Everyday I work, I hope, I pray that my biggest dream will come true—that someday I will be given the chance to proudly say, I am an American (legally).”

M’s essay is interesting for the ways in which despite being formally excluded, as well as criminalized, from national belonging, he nonetheless is accepting of nationalist ideas and desires national inclusion, both cultural acceptance and formal citizenship. M explains his wish to become a permanent resident primarily in the dominant terms of legal and illegal. He does not discuss how his lack of a permanent legal status makes him excludes him from the protections and benefits of the American national state which are granted to people categorized as American citizens. He is not critical of the distinction between illegal and legal workers, nor does he demand that he ought to be granted the same rights and entitlements as any other worker in the country, rather he just wants to be included in the legal category. M does not question the power of the state to criminalize his movement, nor does he discuss the restrictive immigration policies of the United States that forced him to migrate illegally. Instead, M takes personal responsibility for his condition of illegality by justifying his lack of alternatives, attempting to be an otherwise law-abiding immigrant, and pleading for the nation and the state to recognize him as American. Without questioning the social relations that organize his inability to migrate freely or legally, M must rely on these same exploitative social relations to fulfill his dream, making its achievement remote. This is because as Sharma explained in her study of Canadian migrant workers, nationalist ideas like Canadianness, or in this instance, Americanness, organize and legitimate competition between different categories of workers, revealing that “the exploitation of all workers, including White workers in Canada, hinges upon the commonsensical acceptance of extra-coercive state action against those rendered as foreign-Others” (2006: 149).
3.4 “Patriotism is Central to a Nation’s Survival”

I have already discussed how ‘America’ is imagined as a home, and how the people who live in ‘America’ desire to feel “at home” in it. In this final section I will talk about the various ways in which the homeland is defended and made secure. All of the essays in this section reflect on the concept of civic obligation and the duties that the citizen owes to the nation-state. The focus of this chapter has been on the feeling of national belonging, and while it is true that women in the United States have the formal right to vote and participate in the democratic process, their full inclusion in national belonging remains “ambiguous and uncertain” (Phillips, 1991:34). Citizenship remains “gendered in the details of its entitlements and duties” (Billig, 1995: 124; Yuval-Davis, 1997). As considered earlier, women and children are symbols of the home, “not seen as participants, but as signifiers, much as the flag or the seal or some other object” (Levy, 2000: 213). Men, “are expected to answer the state’s ultimate call to arms; they are the ones who will pursue the conduct of war, shooting and being shot, raping but not being raped, in the cause of the homeland” (Billig, 1995: 124). In the national community, men are accorded the role of actors and initiators, whilst women are relegated to the role of objects, “ornaments of public life and facilitators of men’s actions” (Levy, 2000: 197). Rather than the nation belonging to them, women “construct the mythology of nationhood” (Eisenstein, 2000:42). Consequently, in times of war like when the This I Believe essays I have analyzed were being written, women symbolize the home that needs to be protected.

The first of the essays I include in this section raise the issue of a woman’s duty to the nation. This I Believe has featured many essays written by soldiers and veterans, but only one of these was written by a woman, an invisible one who wished to remain anonymous to protect herself from potential violence. Her This I Believe essay, “Finding Redemption Through Acceptance,” (12/09/07) broadcast under the pseudonym Alex Anderson, will be examined in depth in the following chapter in the discussion on torture. Historically, full citizenship has been predicated on the risk of death in service to the state, and therefore “those who are not vulnerable in the context of national defense are subordinate citizens, subject to the obligations but not recipients of the full benefits of membership in sovereign states (Ranchod-Nilsson & Tetreault, 2000: 16). The historical
exclusion of women from combat duty, which has since been lifted, raises the question of whether or not women can be fully accepted as soldiers or citizens. During the struggle for suffrage, women’s rights activists were able to successfully argue that women serve the nation in a unique way, albeit “slightly-less-than-first-class citizenship,” by giving birth to children, risking their own lives through labor and delivery, to produce the next generation of soldiers (Sparks, 2000). While the details of the suffragist’s arguments no longer apply nor compel, women’s roles as mothers and caregiver continue to carry value. If “men may be called upon to sacrifice their bodies, women are to prepare themselves to sacrifice their sons and husbands,” as well as their brothers, sisters, daughters, mothers and fathers (Billig, 1995:126). Essentially, “Nationalism reduces women to their motherhood…as mother, nurturer, caregiver” (Eisenstein, 2000: 40). While the nation-state may be patriarchal, “nationalism in not confined to males” as during times of national crisis, both men and women, and even feminists, have expressed high levels of support (Billig, 1995: 126; Conover and Sapiro, 1993). Nationhood is an integral part of daily life in which everyone (men, women, feminists, and liberals alike) inhabits and banally prepares for the moment when national sacrifice is required. The following This I Believe essays will describe how women on This I Believe express their patriotism through their identification as mothers and wives continuing to revert to patriarchal role-playing for how they can serve the country in times of war.

From the broadcast essays heard on NPR’s Weekend Edition, Aileen Mory,117 is an adjustments manager for an industrial supplier. In her essay “Sharing the Tragedy of War,” (4/13/08) she argues for the reinstatement of the military draft. She believes that “In terms of the Iraq war, this country’s burden is being shouldered by a select few.” She states that her own family has been “insulated” from the war, while others have been “devastated.” Mory suggests that the weight of military service is differentially distributed, but she does not detail which groups are more affected, nor does she attempt to explain why her family enjoys the privilege of insulation. Mory claims she has been “against the war from the start,” but has never acted on that opposition in any way, stating it “never translated into a protest march in Washington or a letter to my

117 Aileen Mory’s essay “Sharing the Tragedy of War” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 04/13/08.
congressman.” She admits that she has “failed” the test of her core belief, that “democracy is a shared responsibility.” Mory remarks that it is “chilling” how “our troops are risking their lives thousands of miles from home, while my life is essentially unchanged. I’m not saying that I don’t care. I’m saying I don’t care enough.”

Mory, who finds her life unchanged by the war, clearly belongs to the privileged nation, protected by her governmental belonging, secure in the invulnerability of her own rights, despite the obvious violations of rights of others—both citizens and noncitizens. Mory frames her analysis in terms of “democracy,” which she describes as universal or shared responsibilities, rather than rights, such as the right to bear arms (or not) or the right to freedom of speech (or silence). And despite arguing that she is for shared responsibility, she is unwilling to take any for herself, preferring for the government to force her into engagement through the threat of death to her children, to essentially take away her rights and to cause “universal pain.” Mory takes for granted that her right to free speech will remain so that she can protest if this should ever actually happen. The problem she claims is that “every parent does not have to fear losing a son or daughter [and] every politician does not have to face that fear in his constituents.” For her, the face of the soldier is invisible, she knows “he’s out there, but he doesn’t have a face—certainly not the face of my child.” She feels that if her children were drafted into “the wrong battle” that she would fight it “tooth and nail.” For Mory, the need to become actively involved in public issues occurs only when citizens like herself experience threats to their own or their community’s self-interest (Bellah et. al, 1996: 181).

The only way that Mory feels this problem can be remedied is by “forcing” citizens “kicking and screaming if necessary…to be part of this democracy.” But what she does not realize or does not admit is that there are many citizens, like Patricia Tsubokawa and Yasir Billoo, who yearn to be a more included in the national community and democratic process. She also fails to acknowledge the terror already directed at South Asian, Muslim, and Arab communities in the U.S., who have found themselves a target of a kind of invisible “war at home” (Maira, 2009: 263). Post 9/11, the U.S. has become divided into “two nations…those who were, or believed they could be, targets of the War on Terror, and those who were not” (Maira, 2009:268). Mory asserts that “‘we the people’ should not have a choice about our level of involvement” and that until then, “the
decision to go to war will continue to be to easy.” Unfortunately, many people in the U.S. already do not have a choice about their level of involvement, and it is “the liberal belief in the inherently democratic governance of the state which becomes the premise on which repression is enacted against those who are not worthy of cultural citizenship or inclusion in the democratic project” (Maira, 2009:277). Mory concludes that war ought to be a “shared tragedy,” that what has been “missing” from her definition of democracy was pain, “universal, democratic pain” because ultimately, she argues, “we can’t truly share in the responsibility for our democracy until we all share in its suffering.”

Mory interprets her role as a citizen through her role as a mother protecting her children, as does This I Believe essayist Becky Herz,118 in her essay “My Husband Will Call Me Tomorrow” (1/15/07). In it, Becky describes her daily routine as she waits for her husband to return from his deployment to Iraq. Each mundane domestic action--drinking coffee, changing diapers, doing laundry, walking the dog--is punctuated by her steadfast and resolute affirmation “I believe my husband will call me tomorrow.” In this essay, Becky portrays herself in only one dimension, as the wife of a soldier and the mother of his child. She maintains the homefront cheerfully, trying to “make the best of it,” whilst “keeping her fear at bay” through a refusal to acknowledge the real possibility of her husband’s death. Her portrait shows Becky in the hospital just after giving birth, looking exhausted from her own battle, but determined. Her swaddled infant daughter is held to her face by unknown hands, as Becky looks not at her child, but off into the horizon, scanning perhaps for her husband beyond the boundaries of her body and her country.

Such a dogged focus on the American soldier and their families is also present in Mory’s essay. She does not talk about the impact of the Iraq War on Iraqi soldiers and civilians. Although Mory mentions her “quietly held” initial opposition to the Iraqi War, she does not explain her reasons for her opposition, or her reasons for inaction, and reveals that today she “doesn’t know what to think. I want our soldiers to come home, but can we really abandon the Iraqi people to what is essentially a civil war of our own

118 Becky Herz’s essay “My Husband Will Call Me Tomorrow” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 01/15/07 and published in This I Believe II (2008), as well as included in the special feature Family Members in Military Service.
making?” Bringing our troops home is a populist trope that allows for the end of the war, without having to talk about its causes or consequences. Most political inclinations can agree that bringing the troops home is desirable, although debate rages as to whether such an act would be prudent. Mory’s question reflects this concern, and is perhaps a critical stance in her essay, in that she admits that the U.S. is responsible for creating a civil war, although her question contains imperialist overtones of the weaker ‘Iraqi people’ needing the protection of the stronger, civilizing U.S., now cast in the role of “peacemaker.” Her understanding of the causes of war is also uncritical, as she describes how “if my way of life is threatened by outside forces, I’ll be forever grateful to that soldier guarding the wall.” Here, she uses a nationalist interpretation, imagining the nation/nation-state as surrounded by a literal wall, in which those outside the territorial or cultural boundaries of the U.S. are trying to destroy the ways of life of those within.

On This I Believe, there are no Cindy Sheehans, as motherhood seems to be inimical to maintaining critical opposition to war, despite deeply held beliefs. In her essay, “Do What You Have To Do,” (1/25/08) author-illustrator and first-generation American Kim Ann Schultz describes how she was unable to sustain her “humanitarianism” when her firstborn son joined the Marines following “the days of 9/11 and the so-called War on Terror.” Unlike Mory, Schultz was unable to remain insulated from the war, as her adventurous son, Daniel, “a partier, paintballer, and road-tripper…traded one set of risks for another when he enlisted.” When he placed a “forbidden” call to Schultz one night to tell her of his deployment to Iraq, she said that even though it “hurt in my throat” she told him “do what you have to do so that you come back home…And I will say it to him again and again.” Schultz avows that she doesn’t believe “in war or in the politics or the big money that drives it. I believe in art and in learning and in the peace that evolves from these best of human elements. I believe we could better serve humankind with armies of artists, musicians, and teachers, not armed sons and daughters.” But these beliefs wither in the face of Schultz mothering instincts, as she clearly states, “As his mother, I believe in his unequivocal right to do whatever he

119 Cindy Sheehan is an American anti-war activist whose son was killed in the line of duty in the Iraq War (Wikipedia, 2012).
120 KimAnn Schultz’s essay “Do What You Have to Do” was published in This I Believe: On Motherhood (2012) and included in the special feature Family Members in Military Service on 01/25/08.
needs to do in order to survive.” Schultz suspends her personal beliefs not just to protect her own son, but also out of motherly concern for Daniel’s new military family, because “Duty bound, he will have brothers to fight with, a team to protect, a job to get done.” Schultz is aware that war can damage more than the physical body, and so she intends to continue to nurture her son when he completes his deployment, “I will be ready to absorb any displaced rage and fear, any bit of undigested war he brings back home with him. I vow to see to it that his heart and mind eventually find their way back home as well.” Schultz concludes her essay with a sentimental moment when both she and her son gazed at the moon simultaneously from different locations, a celestial moment of connection between a proud patriotic mother and her cosmically heroic son the soldier as “The sunlight reflecting off that pockmarked orb was connecting me to my child just as surely as had I put my arms around him. I felt like a navigator and had found my star, and that star had found my son.”

Like Schultz, Elyn, in her essay “My Son, My Hero,” (9/23/07) expresses her motherly fear for her soldier-son’s life. Elyn articulates her worry for her son’s safety as a particularly motherly concern. When her son tells her he hopes to go to Iraq, his “words penetrate like a sharp sword into the deepest recesses of my heart, places only other mothers would be familiar with.” She describes how his service has affected her daily life by her emotional ritual of watching the evening news “when the nightly news comes on and the proud faces of our young heroes who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan are flashed across the screen, I cry like any mother would. I know it could be my son’s face.”

Most people in the United States can be said to be “consumers” of war like Elyn, who watch scenes of “destruction and death by the media rather than by direct experience,” gazing at “representations of war that come from places perceived to be remote from the heartland” (Kaplan, 2006: 693). Such distance mystifies the “imperial might” of the United States to its own citizens, for whom empire is “so invisible that it cannot be widely named, despite its global reach” (Maira, 2009: 56). Unlike Mory or Schultz, Elyn does not express opposition to the War on Terror, too consumed by her domestic duties to get involved in the management of the nation, taking comfort that the

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121 Elyn’s essay “My Son, My Hero” was included in the special feature *Family Members in Military Service* on 09/23/07.
national will is aligned with her own. Elyn trusts that the cause is just because she explains “I have no time in my busy day to argue over the rightness or wrongness of our government’s decision to enter into war. The laundry, dirty dishes, bills, and a report is due for work tomorrow. I can only pray we are able to do our best to help bring honor and dignity to our distant neighbors who long for the same precious moments of life, and love, and liberty that I enjoy each day.”

Elyn is the only *This I Believe* essayist in this chapter to call the people in Iraq “neighbors” and she believes that her son is a hero for helping to bring “precious moments of freedom” to them. Elyn accepts what Sunaina Maira calls “the paradoxical logic of ‘benevolent imperialism or ‘imperialism for democracy’” (2009:52). This logic uses the language of human rights, such that “freedom becomes the justification for dominance and neocolonial occupation” (Maira, 2009:52). Imperial power is therefore recast as humanitarian intervention, such that Elyn can imagine her son on a civilizing mission, rather than on a mission of aggression. Elyn feels “pride and admiration” for her son who is “willing to die” for what he believes in, which causes her to “cherish each new day I awake in this beautiful land of America.” Maira argues that such a “denial of knowledge of the workings of imperial power” is central to how empire works, allowing citizens like Elyn to “suppress the guilt that comes with the awareness of its impact while also enjoying its benefits and privileges” (2009: 56). However, linkages between U.S. Middle East policy and the terrorists acts of 9/11 were marginalized in the U.S. media, “framed as an act of ‘evildoers’ who hated something as broad and vague as ‘freedom,’ rather than say, something as concrete and specific as U.S. foreign policy,” making it difficult for average Americans like Elyn to have an awareness of terrorism as anything other than a “moral failing…incomprehensible as a political act” (McAlister, 2005: 279). These layers of omissions lead to a “culture of repression” wherein many Americans live in “a fictional universe where causality is reversed and the United States is seen only as the victim, not the perpetrator, of terror” (Maira, 2009: 56). Such is the case in this next essay by comic book artist Frank Miller.

U.S. media and popular culture have been crucial sites for representing formal and informal state practices to the public and for justifying U.S. foreign policy and military interventions (Rogin, 1993; Kaplan, 2006). Drawing from the work of James Der Derain,
Caren Kaplan explains that for people in the United States, “war is not at all elsewhere, but deeply imbricated in every-day life as a ‘military-industrial-media-entertainment’ network” (2006:694). National consensus for the War on Terror has been achieved through various kinds of propagandist strategies, from hiring advertising executive Charlotte Beers as undersecretary of state for public diplomacy to “sell the Bush Message” to the America public, to forming a “Hollywood 9/11” committee with White House senior advisor Karl Rove to create public service announcements, and informing the content of television program like JAG, The West Wing, and reality shows like Profiles from the Frontline or Military Diaries (Thrupkaew, 2003: 110). In 2005, Marvel Comics published special editions of its superhero comics for the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, which were launched in a ceremony featuring Donald Rumsfeld (Dawson, 2008). This I Believe’s contribution to the media’s post-9/11 “imperial spectacle” was to feature a hyperpatriotic essay by comic book writer Frank Miller. Frank Miller is best known for titles Batman: The Dark Knight Returns and Sin City. Miller had announced in early February at the WonderCon 2006 comic-book convention that in his next graphic novel, titled Holy Terror, Batman! Batman would take on Osama bin Laden. Miller conceptualized his new comic as a contemporary “piece of propaganda” where “Batman kicks al Qaeda’s ass” (cited in Brownstein, 2006). Comic book aficionado Ziauddin Sardar describes Miller as “[r]enowned for his neoconservative, reactionary values, he sees violence as cleansing. His heroes seek vengeance with unflinching brutality. He specializes in degrading women and glorifying cruelty. He thinks Islam is a fascist genocidal creed” (2006). Channeling the jingoistic comics of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Miller recalls how “Superman punched out Hitler. So did Captain America. That’s one of the things they’re there for. These are our folk heroes. It just seems silly to chase around the Riddler when you’ve got al Qaeda out there” (Glaister, 2006). Miller wants his new comic to be “a reminder to people who seem to have forgotten what we are up against” (Sardar, 2006). He says that his new comic is “bound to offend just about everybody,” but that he is ready for his “fatwa” (Dawson, 2008).122

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122 A “fatwa” is an Islamic legal pronouncement issued by an expert in religious law, but in popular language as Miller is using it, “fatwa” means a death sentence or declaration of war (Kabbanni, 2012).
This I Believe waited three years before broadcasting an essay on the date of September 11th or which took 9/11 as its subject. Of all the possible essays and essayists that might have been selected, This I Believe chose to broadcast Frank Miller’s123 “That Old Piece of Cloth” (9/11/06). Despite airing a brief announcement February 16, 2006 about the upcoming comic, Morning Edition waited to broadcast Miller’s This I Believe essay until the more symbolic 9/11 date to underscore the legitimacy of his arguments. In his essay, “That Old Piece of Cloth,” Miller recounts his changing perceptions of the American flag. He begins in his youth, when the flag to him “stood for unthinking patriotism. It meant about as much to me as that insipid peace sign that was everywhere I looked: just another symbol of a generation’s sentimentality, of its narcissistic worship of its own past glories.” Growing up in the 1960s amongst “flower-child twaddle,” Miller describes his frustration with his “ex-hippy” and “Vietnam vet” high school instructors who taught him “more about John Lennon than…Thomas Jefferson,” as well as the “quant relic” patriotism of his “FDR-era” parents. Feeling left out of the dominant national discourse, Miller rejected the countercultural values of his pacifist teachers and the flag-focused “idolatry” of his elders in favor of an abstract patriotism based on “noble, indestructible ideas of independence and rebellion” written by his idols Madison and Franklin and Adams and Jefferson.

However, all that changed for Miller after September 11th when “All of a sudden I realized what my parents were talking about all those years.” Miller describes the day in graphic terms, “that sunny September morning when airplanes crashed into towers a very few miles from my home and thousands of my neighbors were ruthlessly incinerated — reduced to ash… Breathing in that awful, chalky crap that filled up the lungs of every New Yorker, then coughing it right out, not knowing what I was coughing up.” Miller’s imagery is intense and disturbing, as the listener must imagine inhaling charred human remains, recalling images of the dusted people crying and fleeing the footprint. Miller intimately identifies with these people who he calls “neighbors” and this place he calls “my home.” Suddenly Miller embraces these people as “his people,” reflecting, “Just like

123 Frank Miller’s essay “That Old Piece of Cloth” was Morning Edition on 09/11/06 and published in This I Believe II (Allison and Gediman, 2008), as well as included in the special features Reflections on 9/11 and Independence Day.
you have to fight to protect your friends and family, and you count on them to watch your
own back…. patriotism is central to a nation’s survival.” For Miller, the intrusion of the
foreign terrorist into national space has threatened the security of the national family and
undermined the sovereignty of the state to protect the borders of the national homeland.

Sounding like one of the character’s from Heinlein’s Starship Troopers, it is this
issue of “survival” that is at the core of Miller’s new appreciation for patriotism. As a
comic book writer, Miller’s job is to “make up bad guys” and “imagine human villainy in
all its forms,” but after September 11th, Miller no longer had to imagine the villains
because, “Now the real thing had shown up. The real thing murdered my neighbors. In
my city. In my country. For the first time in my life, I know how it feels to face an
existential menace. They want us to die.” THEY want US to die, he says. For Miller,
villains are a thing, an other, a mindless force bent on destruction. Until now this monster
had existed outside his reality, but suddenly the enemy had breached the borders and
invaded “his” city, “his” country, “his” home. Historically in the United States, war has
almost always been elsewhere, conducted “at least a border—if not oceans and
continents—away,” but the attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon brought
the war home (Kaplan, 2006:693.) For Miller, not just the geographical borders of the
nation-state, but also the ideological borders of the imagined community of the nation
have been breached by an unimaginable community of ‘Others.’

Miller no longer takes patriotism for granted, seeing it as “something
precious…something perishable” embodied in “that old piece of cloth.” For Miller,
patriotism has materialized out of the realm of ideals. He says, “Patriotism, I now believe,
isn’t some sentimental, old conceit. It’s self-preservation.” Miller’s newfound patriotism
isn’t about the ideals of independence and rebellion, rather, it’s about their opposites.
Miller now advocates allegiance to and defense of the nation, regardless of what it stands
for. In fact, Miller argues that one should defend the nation no matter what—“warts and
all” he says. Miller quotes his patriotic model, recounting, “Ben Franklin said it: If we
don’t all hang together, we all hang separately.” In other words, if “we” U.S. citizens
question each other, then we will surely die by the hands of the terrorists. Echoing then-
President, George W. Bush, he is suggesting that if you’re not with ‘us,’ if you are critical
Miller personalizes Franklin’s quote further, by inciting listeners to do their part for the nation, prompting, “you’ve got to do what you can to help your country survive.” Here this “what you can do” refers to citizens sticking together, being watchful, and fighting against the terrorists who are out to get ‘us.’ Miller concludes this call to action with a cynical “That’s if you think your country is worth a damn,” which is meant to shame citizens into conforming. Like President Bush, Miller puts forth a simplistic and apocalyptic discourse of good versus evil, in the name of what he believes to be national security, rather than imperial dominance. Miller seems convinced of America’s innocence and unwilling to confront the culpability of the U.S. His essay conceals the ways in which the supposedly counterposed ideas of “security” and “terror” are “ideological frameworks within which the American empire exercises its strategies of domestic and overseas dominance and exploitation” (Maira, 2009:62). Miller’s essay makes an extreme turn-around from start to finish, initially representing “that old piece of cloth” as a tired and worn-out expression of patriotism, and concluding by recuperating “that old piece of cloth” as a symbol of the timeless defense of the nation.

3.5 “A Picture of the American Spirit”

In this chapter I have attempted to show how the nation is flagged discursively in the This I Believe essays through banal reminders of the nation, which continually remind listeners of the homeland, their national identity, and their degree of national belonging. Nationalism is flagged not just in political discourse or by politicians, but also in everyday speech by ordinary people concerned about their homes, neighbors, neighborhoods, families, and belonging, as well as immigration, foreigners, terrorists, war, flags, and national ideals. Through the constant flaggings in media programs like This I Believe, nationhood becomes inhabited and the homeland is made homey, at least for some.

Those nationalists with governmental belonging, who claim a privileged relationship to the national will, exercise their powers of symbolic violence to detail the most valuable contents of national capital. Those nationalists whose national capital is
devalued or even non-existent, struggle against their passive belonging for the right to feel at home and to have a legitimate say in how such homeliness is defined. The state exercises the politics of fear to foster collective paranoia and hyperpatriotism, using the war to “justify the targeting of internal enemies who must be cleansed from the national body politic” (Maira, 2009:244). Such fear can be “generative and unifying” for those Americans who are included in the discourse of national belonging, providing them with a sense of moral and spiritual purpose (Maira, 2009: 273). The liberals on This I Believe were not immune to the fear of terrorism, frequently identifying with U.S. nationalism out of the fear of “a social order in which their racial, national, or imperial privileges would be threatened,” and which were in need of protection (Maira, 2009: 276). The This I Believe essays corroborates Billig’s assertions that “banal nationalism” is deeply imbricated in daily life, preparing citizens to defend the homeland or to sacrifice on behalf on the nation. Unfortunately, the effects of differential national belonging mean that for those not included in the homeland, national sacrifice refers not to voluntary military service abroad, but rather to involuntary repression at home.
4. “Our Greatest Strength in Dealing with the World”

Imagining foreignness is an integral part of nationalism. National subjects need ways to explain both “who ‘we’ are” as well as “who ‘we’ are not” (Billig, 1995: 78). This is because “the nation is always a nation in a world of nations,” and in order to define ‘our’ unique national identity and distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them,’ ‘we’ must compare ‘ourselves’ to other ‘nations,’ which also claim unique national identities (Billig 1995:61). Beginning in 2007, the This I Believe website revised its introduction, modifying its self-description from a “national project” to an “international project.” This change occurred after various engagements with the series by ‘foreign’ institutions and ‘citizens.’ For example, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation produced its own version of This I Believe in 2007 featuring “Canadian citizens,” hosted by conservative politician Preston Manning. A few of the essays in the database are written in Spanish, and in 2007 a Spanish translation of the This I Believe book of U.S. essayists was published in Spain by Plataforma Editorial. Another change was that submissions increased to the online database by U.S. nationals living abroad, as well as ‘foreign’ nationals. Such international essays were submitted from more than 71 nation-states from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe,124 including essays submitted by entire classes of students. Initially the database search feature allowed for searching by nation, but that feature has subsequently been removed. Without this feature, the participation in This I Believe of people outside of the U.S. is concealed as the essays written by foreign nationals have not been broadcast on the radio or published in the books.

People have ways of talking about being situated within the wider world of nations. Speaking about foreign places and peoples becomes a routine rhetorical process. The This I Believe essayists casually make references to a wide range of specific nations as well as regional areas of the world, without necessarily a conscious intention for those nations or nationalism to be the focus of their essay. Conceptualizing an international

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124 Some of the international essays are written by Americans living abroad, but many others are written by foreign nationals. The essays by foreign nationals have not been broadcast on the radio or published in the books, save for an occasional Canadian, like internationally-known Christian peace activist James Loney. While outside the scope of this project, the essays by foreign nationals seem to reflect a global desire to participate in American culture, which frequently speaks to a universal audience (Billig,1995).
order composed of imagined ‘foreigners’ is a habitual practice for these essayists as they inhabit their national identity. Significantly, such representations do not result in the imagination of foreigners as undifferentiated “Others.” Instead, hierarchies are constructed with ‘our’ nation attributed positive qualities defined as ‘normal’ and all other nations measured as deviations from ‘our’ standard. As will be demonstrated in the essays that follow, people and places imagined as foreign are overwhelmingly characterized in unimaginative and other negative ways on This I Believe. Hannah Arendt argued that banality does not mean harmless or benign (1963). Rather, what banal nationalism does is reproduce nation-states (nation states that have the capacity for mobilizing vast armaments) and prepare national populations to support military campaigns to defend the nation-state against foreign enemies when necessary. For the most part, “foreigners are not simply ‘others’, symbolizing the obverse of ‘us’” (Billig, 1995: 83). At the most basic level they are imagined as ‘nations,’ belonging to the universal code of nationhood, and therefore inherently like ‘us.’ However, under certain conditions a foreign nation-state is perceived to be threatening to the universal code of nationhood. Under these conditions, nation-states can come to be defined as ‘enemies’ and “placed outside this order of nations” (Billig, 1995:91). The extent to which various foreign nation-states and nationals are categorized as more or less similar or different to ‘us’ will fluctuate depending on shifting historical relations of power (Billig, 1995).

Paying attention to these historical power shifts, in this chapter, I will argue that the ways in which the This I Believe essayists imagine America’s role in the world, its relationship to other nation-states and the people who live in them, as well as its relationship to immigrants within the United States, is supportive of U.S. practices of imperialism. In the first section, “The Beacon of Light to the Darkest Corner of the World,” I will examine the essayists of foreign policy government officials and well-travelled ‘citizens,’ who effuse a story of U.S. exceptionalism, imagining the United States as the epitome of democracy and freedom, especially in contrast to other nations that are imagined as despotic and not free. In the section, “Abused, Terrified, Little Creature,” I will detail how the This I Believe essayists imagine the United States as a benevolent and humanitarian force, rescuing people, especially oppressed Muslim women, from the ‘senseless’ violence imposed upon them by their anti-modern nation-
states. Then, in the section “Hell is What Causes Terrorism,” I examine the essays of soldiers who imagine America as a force of good engaged in a battle against evil, describing how the essayists discussions of torture justify the military intervention of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, whilst deflecting attention away from U.S. practices of torture. In the final section, “A Variety of Kettles Peacefully Share The Stove” I examine how the discourses of multiculturalism, those of diversity and tolerance are complicit with practices of exclusion, working together to legitimate America’s power to position ethnicized Others within the nation-state and around the world.

4.1 “The Beacon of Light to the Darkest Corner of the World”

Following the events of 9/11, the Bush administration emphasized freedom and liberty as central to American national identity. In the concluding paragraphs of his State of the Union Address in 2002 President Bush asserted:

“In a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we’ve been called to a unique role in human events. Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential. Our enemies send other people’s children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed. We stand for a different choice, made long ago on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life. Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom’s price. We have shown freedom’s power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom’s victory” (Bush, 2002b).

In a content analysis of Bush’s public statements, David Domke found that freedom and liberty were identified as “defining moral qualities of the nation… as the noblest motivations, highest aspirations, and God’s wishes for all” (2004: 91, 93). In a 2004 poll nearly half of adults identified “freedom” as the one word that best expressed what it means to be an American (Cillizza, 2006). These values also “occupy a vital point of intersection for the political and religious heritages that have defined the nation,” connecting God, America, and freedom through foundational documents such as the Declaration of Independence, which grants that “all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (1776). For Christian fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals, freedom and liberty serve as the foundation for a mythology that the United States is a “chosen
nation” divinely appointed “for the awesome responsibility of serving as a light to the nations” as prophesied in the Book of Isaiah (Cherry, 1971: vii; Bellah, 1975). Drawing also on the biblical mandate in the gospel of Matthew to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,” many Christians in the United States believe that God desires freedom and liberty for all peoples, and that ‘America’s’ chosen status is based on the “creation, defense, and global spread of freedom and liberty” (Domke and Coe, 2008:65).

Conservative Christians tend to support a strong U.S. military, conservative foreign policy, and the spreading of individual freedoms because they believe that “making sure that freedom and liberty flourish locally and globally is akin to doing God’s will” (Domke, 2004; Domke and Coe, 2008: 65). After September 11th, President Bush preached what Domke calls “the universal gospel of freedom and liberty” (2004: 93). Reflecting a “fundamentalist certainty” Bush identified freedom and liberty as values with “global appeal and benefits…universal norms crossing cultural and historical contexts,” whose defense and promotion ironically justified policies that for many people produced outcomes of less freedom and liberty, including the preemptive foreign policy doctrine and its application in military action in Iraq (Domke, 2004: 115). On the evening of September 11, the president said, “America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world” (Bush, 2001).

The phrase “beacon of light” often cited by U.S. leaders, has its origins in the 1630 sermon “A Model of Christian Charity” given by Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, aboard the ship Arbella in Salem harbor prior to their landing in what would become the United States of America. In this sermon, Winthrop uses a phrase “city on a hill” from the Parable of Salt and Light from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. As described in the biblical passages Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden…In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (New International Version, 2011). In his own sermon, Winthrop imagined that the polity he and his fellow Puritan were about to found would be governed according to the laws of God and serve as a model of governance for the world, preaching, “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us” (Beardsely, 1997). The idea of the city on a hill was reintroduced to the American public
in the 1961 in the “City On a Hill” speech given by President-elect John Kennedy to the residents of his home state of Massachusetts. This speech also features the emergence of the “beacon of light” phrase. In this speech, he addresses the “contribution” that Massachusetts has made to “our national greatness,” citing “its leaders…its principles…its democratic institutions…have served as beacon lights for other nations as well as out sister states” (Kennedy, 1961). He says that he has been guided by the standard set by Winthrop, and that America remains a model for the world, as “Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us—and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill—constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities (Kennedy, 1961).

Winthrop’s vision of the United States as a “city on a hill” is one of the founding ideas of American exceptionalism, which holds that because of its national ideals, history, and origins, the United States is unique compared to other nations, and has a special mission, ordained by God, to be a “beacon of light” to the world (Lipset, 1996; Masden, 1998).

“Freedom” thus came to form part of the lexicon of the language of antiterrorism. Along with words like terror, terrorist, terrorism, evil, homeland, and empire, antiterrorism has become the “core organizing and unifying principle” underpinning and strengthening post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy (Barry, 2003: 30). Like anticommunism before it, antiterrorism has popular resonance and bipartisan support. It “establishes a logic for strategic alliances with unsavory governments (from Israel to Saudi Arabia), justifies increases in military budgets, and provides a persuasive rationale for an ‘endless war’ against ‘evil’ (Barry, 2003: 31). Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, at least 54 governments assisted the United States in its programs of secret detentions and extraordinary rendition, thereby breaking domestic and international laws and authorizing human rights violations including the practice of torture, all under the rubric of antiterrorism (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2013). By invoking ideas like “freedom” to justify America’s violations of liberty at home and abroad, we can see how concepts are a site of struggle and the ways in which the powerful coopt concepts to legitimate their own purposes. British historian Ian Fletcher explains that “The history of freedom is really the history of contests over its constructions and exclusions” (cited in Foner, 1994: 437).
This I Believe has broadcast several essays by former U.S. governmental officials, including two secretaries of state and one assistant secretary of state, whose duties were to manage the foreign affairs of the United States. Colin Powell’s essay was the second essay broadcast by This I Believe, and Harold Koh and Warren Christopher’s essays were both broadcast during its first year, so these essays perhaps represent what This I Believe considers its most important messages. The essays below show how these officials use the idea of “freedom” to describe America’s unique identity, renewing a sense of national pride, and garnering support for U.S. military interventions against other nation states described as not free. Both Powell and Koh utilize what Ali Behdad calls “the myth of the immigrant America” to shore up U.S. power and legitimate the United States as the fulfillment of a democratic project, producing “the retrospective illusion that freedom and equality, not brutality and conquest, were the principles upon which the nation was founded” (2005: 7).

Before discussing these essays, I want to address the fact that This I Believe has included essays from politicians from both sides of the political aisle. I would argue is in keeping with the general practices of NPR news programming to avoid the accusation of liberal bias and maintain a “fair and balanced” perspective. As described in “This Liberals Believe,” this approach has resulted in the pro-establishment bias and overrepresentation of Republicans documented by FAIR (Rendall & Hart, 2005). While it might seem that the inclusion of essays by Republican politicians on This I Believe would contradict my argument that This I Believe is a place for liberals to feel heard, to exclude them would actually go against the liberal demand for objectivity. Its also feasible that the audiences might be curious about the personal beliefs of Republican politicians, and amenable to listening to them in an essay format and on a program that is purportedly less divisive and committed to finding out what beliefs Americans share in common.

As this dissertation strives to document, Republicans and Democrats share a basic acceptance of the underlying principles of liberal styles of governance, disagreeing mainly over their proper application. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Victor Ray explain that in regards to foreign policy, governmental officials like Colin Powell can serve under both Democratic and Republican administrations because they are merely “variations on an imperialist theme” (2009: 178). Bonilla-Silva and Ray describe how despite having
lied for the Bush Administration about finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Powell is considered an “independent” and his endorsement and advice on foreign policy issues was sought out by McCain, Hilary Clinton, and Obama during the 2008 election (2009). Powell chose to endorse and vote for Obama in both the 2008 and 2012 elections, citing in part Obama’s commitment to ending the war in Afghanistan and counter-terrorism record (Rosenthal, 2012). Powell is also considered a “post-racial leader” and in that vein, he lauded Obama as a candidate who was reaching out in a “more diverse and inclusive way across our society” and offering a “calm, patient, intellectual, steady approach” to the nation’s problems (Bumiller, 2008). For all of these reasons, the liberal audiences of This I Believe might be interested in hearing about Powell’s beliefs and might even find them to be morally resonant with their own liberal and nationalist beliefs.

In “The America I Believe In” (4/11/05) Colin Powell employs the symbol of the immigrant to recover America’s image for disillusioned Americans, while also reasserting America’s role as a global superpower. Writing his essay in the aftermath of the controversial re-election of George W. Bush and in the face of anti-American sentiments following the continued occupation of Iraq, Powell’s essay works to “suppress the collateral damage of the War on Terror,” in an effort to restore America’s self-image as a “strong democracy,” and to garner continued support for “the ongoing war for freedom” (Maira, 2009:267). Powell uses his own immigrant history and multiracial background to represent multiculturalism at home, as well as a new world order abroad based on a universal morality of freedom. Powell says that “We are a land of immigrants: A nation that has been touched by every nation and we, in turn, touch every nation.” What does Powell mean by “we touch every nation?” While an ominous tone might be suspected, as in ‘our’ power stretches to the ends of the earth, what Powell means to say, is that ‘we’ are an inspiration around the world because of our peaceful, multicultural, democratic society, because of our freedoms. Behdad explains that the idea that the United States is “an immigrant nation, hospitable to the huddled masses, makes us feel good about ourselves, regenerating in us a profound sense of national pride” (2005: 7). Echoing President Bush, Powell says that the importance of maintaining America’s positive reputation is due to America acting as a model of morality for all nations, “the beacon of light to the darkest corner of the world.” Using the “beacon” reference, Powell
expresses the nationalist desire to both protect and to spread ‘American’ values and dominant notions of ‘American-ness.

Powell’s *This I Believe* essay constructs a highly idealized portrait of America, one in which America offers citizenship to new immigrants, “lives by the Constitution,” “inspires freedom and democracy around the world” and reaches out “with a big, open, charitable heart to people in need around the world.” It is important for nationalism that a belief in these ideals continues, and Powell counters those American’s concerned about the current administration’s policies with “I believe the America of 2005 is the same America that brought [his parents] Maud Ariel McKoy and Luther Powell to these shores.” By linking all immigrants into a singular narrative, the actual history of immigration is denied, “eclips[ing] both the violent history that characterizes the peopling of America and the actualities of the nation’s immigration policies that continue to regulate, discipline, and exclude certain ‘aliens’ to this day” (Behdad, 2005:3). Moreover, by describing the United States’ immigration policy as motivated by a “big, open, charitable heart” Powell disregards how “open-door immigration was born of a colonialist will to power and a capitalist desire for economic expansion (Behdad, 2005: 3). Rather than being motivated by humanitarian concerns, Behdad points out how “legislative debates about immigration…have focused on such issues as national security, the social costs of immigration, and the economic advantages and disadvantages of foreign labor” (2005: 8).

Powell comforts those Americans who are worried about increasing anti-American sentiment by saying that despite the fact that “America sometimes seems confused and is always noisy” the “world wants to believe in America.” Even in the face of hostility, Powell says he also “encountered an underlying respect and affection for America. People still want to come here. Refugees who have no home at all know that America is their land of dreams. Even with added scrutiny, people line up at our embassies to apply to come here.” The *This I Believe* Special Feature *The Immigrant Experience* says essentially the same things, imparting “In the heated debates over political policy, it’s easy to forget that America is largely a nation of immigrants. For those who came to this country from distant lands generations ago, to the recently naturalized citizen, the American dream is a powerful draw for people around the world.”
What Powell does not discuss is that for many of those refugees their dreams of immigration will not realized. Consider that in 2008, the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide stood at 42 million: 15.2 million refugees, 26 million internally displaced persons, and 826,000 whose asylum claims had not been adjudicated, and yet the U.S. admission ceiling for refugees in 2008 was just 80,000 (Kerwin, 2011: 4). Immigration statistics for 2004 published by the Department of Homeland Security listed 75,536 applications for refugee status with 49,638 admissions, a rejection rate of 34 percent. This was an improvement from 2003 when there were 42,705 refugee applications and 25,329 admissions, a rejection rate of 41 percent (Rytina, 2005). These numbers do not reflect the many refugees who were unable to access the United States. In an analysis of the U.S. refugee program, Donald Kerwin pointed out that post-9/11 immigration-related security measures, combined with U.S. interdiction policies, has prevented many refugees from reaching the United States to apply for asylum (2011:1).

These kinds of statements about America as a “beacon of light” and the “land of dreams” draw attention away from the fact that the real value of migrants to the U.S. is in the form of their labor (Allen, 1994, 1997; Behad, 2005). These kinds of statements also elide the gross disparities within the global system which lead to the United States appearing as a “desirable” place to work and live. By ignoring the material bases of global inequalities and international migration patterns, that immigration to the United States is an effect of “always-global social relations of capitalism, racism, and sexism” can be disavowed (Sharma, 2006:128). Powell uses the figure of the immigrant to shore up American power, as he proclaims that America’s “greatest strength in dealing with the world is the openness of our society and the welcoming nature of our people.” But, according to Powell, America’s openness to immigrants is also ‘our’ tragic flaw. It made ‘us’ “vulnerable” to attack and in response America took what he says were “appropriate and reasonable” measures “to protect ourselves by knowing who was coming into the country, for what purpose and to know when they left.”

Powell emphasizes the importance of border controls as he cautions that we must be selective in choosing who to allow into our nation, warning “We must be careful, but we must not be afraid.” Analyzing immigration discourse in Canada, Sharma revealed an “association between ‘terrorism’ and migration” which resulted in the idea that “terror
was admitted into Canada through faulty border controls” (Sharma, 2006: 135). She argues that in the name of protecting the nation from terrorism, such state practices of targeting non-Whites who fit a certain racialized profile have resulted in more terror for the increasing number of migrants fleeing “war zones, poverty, dispossession, and displacement” since 9/11 (Sharma, 2006: 137). Sharma describes how these cross-border migrants from the Global South now “face intense restrictions on and increasing criminalization of their mobility to and within the national spaces they try to make home” (Sharma, 2006: 125). Far from being only a victim of terrorism, the U.S. state has also selectively nourished or ignored the terror of some against others, “dishing out collective punishment, with callous disrespect for either ‘collateral damage’ or legitimate grievances” (Mamdani, 2004:230).

While Powell argues for the reasonableness of the stringent extermination protocols enacted after the terrorists attacks, he admits they facilitated “Anti-American sentiment.” Powell puts it lightly when he laments, “Unfortunately, to many foreigners we gave the impression that we were no longer a welcoming nation.” Unconstrained by another superpower, post-9/11, the United States adopted a new foreign policy strategy based on “aggressive antimultilateralism, warlordism, and moral absolutism” exercising “power unimpeded by partnerships, alliances, or rules, without apology for its imperial status” (Barry, 2003: 30). Barry describes “warlordism” as the shift in power and responsibilities from the U.S. State Department to the Pentagon in relation to foreign policy, resulting in the “sheer exercise of power, unconstrained by international norms, treaties or alliances” (2003: 34). This “big stick” approach “stirred up a global hornet’s nest…alienating key European allies, most Arab countries, large swaths of the developing world, and even Canada and Mexico” while also “stoking tensions” between India and Pakistan and between Israel and Palestine” (Feffer, 2003: 18).

A known multilateralist who struggled to be heard in the Bush administration, Powell expresses concern regarding how this change in America’s international reputation will affect the economy, worrying “They [migrants] started to go to schools and hospitals in other countries, and frankly, they started to take their business elsewhere.” To Powell, this is an unacceptable outcome, something that “We can’t allow to happen.” In order to remedy ‘our’ sullied reputation and curb the threat of economic
and political isolation, Powell suggests “A good stay in our country is the best public diplomacy tool we have.” Here, Powell seems to be comforting those Americans who don’t understand “why they hate us,” suggesting that if ‘they’ only knew ‘us’ better, they wouldn’t hate ‘us.’ He never suggests that perhaps ‘we’ need to get to know ‘them’ better and learn why ‘they’ are afraid to come ‘here.’

As an example of what a “good stay” might look like, Powell provides a vignette that illustrates the ideal relationship between American citizens and foreigners, reflecting what he says is “the America I believe in.” In the vignette, a group of twelve Brazilian exchange students were unable to pay the bill at a fast-food restaurant in Chicago and were afraid, but the waitress negotiated with the manager on their behalf, who decided to waive the bill. According to Powell, the manager had relayed through the waitress the message he was “glad you are here in the United States. He hopes you are having a good time, he hopes you are learning all about us. He said it’s on him.” Of all the possible stories Powell could have chosen he selected one which featured relatively benign exchange students who were visiting temporarily, from a country often perceived as nonthreatening, located in a quintessentially American city and place of business, who were so poor as to be unable to pay for cheap fast-food, faced possible legal consequences, and needed to beg for charity, which they then received from benevolent Americans. Powell’s vignette portrays America’s primary relationship to foreign countries as humanitarian, a myth which creates misunderstandings about the reality of international relations for many Americans.125

Powell’s ideas are supported through essays like “The American Dream Lives On” (3/29/13) by Yasmina Shaush,126 a high school student who immigrated with her family to the United States from Ukraine when she was seven years old. Like Powell, Shaush calls America “a beacon,” the “Land of Opportunity,” a land that serves as a litmus test to all other lands; a land where the self-made man is found on every corner; a land where wealth and social status do not inhibit one’s potential. Anything is possible in

125 For example, Americans mistakenly believe that “U.S. foreign aid constitutes roughly 20 percent of the federal budget, rather than less than one percent” and thus remain confused about the causes of anti-Americanism which appear to be “rank ingratitude” (Pemberton and Feffer, 2003: 189).
126 Yasmina Shaush’s essay “The American Dream Lives On” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 03/29/13.
America, anything.” Shaush is extremely grateful to have been raised in American, calling her immigration experience “a gift, one that should never be wasted.” Like Powell, she describes non-democratic nations as “dark,” attesting “While my mother grew up in the shadows of communism, I was raised in the light of freedom and democracy.” Like Powell, Shaush refutes the existence of anti-American sentiment among foreign nationals by citing continued immigration. She says that “In lieu of the 9/11 attacks news outlets report that hatred for the United States is common. This is simply a fallacy. Countless people travel across oceans, jump across fences, and float in small boats to seek amnesty in America’s gilded doors….the zeal to live in America still exists.” One thing that stands out in Shaush’s essay is that her status as an immigrant is not obvious, allowing her to “pass” as a White American. She says, “I am an immigrant. To discern me from the crowd of purebred, made-in-Americans is impossible. I speak with no accent and dress no differently. I am American, through and through.” However, Shaush’s identification of pure-bred Americans as the normative standard, and her very need to state that she is an American, places the identity in question, belying her aspiration for full national belonging.

Through discourses like those presented by Powell and corroborated by Shaush, the administration sought to achieve international cooperation for its policies through its “hearts and minds campaign,” presenting the United States as “an enviably open, prosperous, and democratic society” in hopes of convincing other countries to “emulate it or go along with its policies” (Thrupkaew, 2003: 108). Overall, this public diplomacy campaign abroad was unsuccessful because the intended audiences “didn’t need to be sold on the merits of freedom and democracy, but needed to hear how the United States was upholding those values at home and abroad” (Thrupkaew, 2003: 114). Those with anti-American sentiment wanted explanations for the Bush administrations’ undemocratic foreign policy,127 and the person to offer such explanations is the next This I Believe essayist, former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

127 Such as the “bias toward Israel in the Palestinian-Israel conflict, tendency to support authoritarian regimes, insistence on continuing sanctions against Iraq... rejection of international treaties to reduce global warming and ban land mines, and exempting itself from the rulings of the International Criminal court” (Thrupkaew, 2003:115).
under the Clinton administration and Legal Advisor to the State Department under the Obama administration, Harold Koh.

Like Colin Powell, Harold Koh’s parents immigrated to the United States. Also like Powell, Koh chooses to make his parents’ immigration experience from South Korea the pivot around which he interprets his own experience of visiting foreign nations as a human rights official for the U.S. State Department. In his essay, “The Bright Lights of Freedom” (02/13/06) Koh attests that his parents immigrated “here” fifty years ago from South Korea. He describes his parents’ South Korea as one lacking in education and freedom, as suffering under Japanese colonial rule—“forbidden to speak Korean or even use their Korean names,” as a dictatorship, as able to sustain democracy only “for less than a year in the 1960s before tanks rolled and a coup d’etat toppled the government.” He then contrasts Korea with the United States. He places his father in a modern car driving down the road and exclaiming, “This is a great, great country. Here, we can do what we want.” Koh goes on to describe how his father “savored freedom like fresh air,” “loved the freedom to follow his passions: for John F. Kennedy, for Fred Astaire, for Ted Williams” and marveled at how “the world’s most powerful government had just changed hands without anyone firing a shot.” His father tries to impart to Koh that the crucial distinction between Korea and the United States is the kind of government each has, telling him “Now you see the difference: In a democracy, if you are president, then the troops obey you. In a dictatorship, if the troops obey you, then you are president.” Koh’s father seems to be alluding to the May Sixteenth Military Coup that occurred in South Korea in 1961 led by Major General Park Chung Hee. His statements simplify the process of coups. In this instance, President Yun Po-sŏn and Prime Minister Chang Myŏn were democratically elected in 1960, and yet, the increasingly politicized and factionalized military distrusted this government and desired for national reform (Han, 2011). Yong-Sup Han argues that part of the success of the May Sixteenth Military

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128 Despite occupying a high position of governmental power, Koh requires a TIB biographical blurb which explains his Asian face and Asian name. This unsaid crisis of national identity described in chapter three “The America I Believe In” is contained by locating him territorially as being born in Boston, one of the oldest American cities in the United States, and by describing him as a lifelong baseball fan, the iconic American pastime.

129 Harold Koh’s essay “The Bright Lights of Freedom” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 02/13/06 and published in This I Believe (2006).
Coup stemmed from the division within the civilian political leadership, in particular the rivalry between Po-sŏn, a leader of the Old Faction, and Myŏn, a leader of the New Faction. Myŏn, who was also the commander-in-chief of the South Korean armed forces, chose to flee rather than fight the coup, “depriving the government of the opportunity to strike Park at his most vulnerable moment” (Han, 2011: 52). In contrast Po-sŏn accepted the coup, which allowed him to stay on as head of state, and “not only legitimated the military coup but countered his old enemy” (Han, 2011: 52).

Koh’s father also fails to acknowledge the role on the United States in influencing coups across the world. In this instance the United States had had “an overwhelming presence in South Korea in the years leading up to 1961,” including liberating the Korean Peninsula from Japanese colonialism in 1945, helping create a strong anticommunist regime and then defending South Korea from military takeover during the Korean War, exercising operation control over the South Korean armed forces, and financing more than ninety percent of the government budget, “thus overseeing and shaping South Korea’s major social and economic policies” (Kim and Baik, 2011: 58). No evidence exists that the United States was covertly involved in the overthrow of the Chang Myŏn government, but the U.S. denial of the possibility of a coup in order not to deter potential opposition suggests how the United States was able to “influence South Korean politics without actually exercising its power” (Kim and Baik, 2011: 63, 81). Also, the recognition of the United States was essential to the success of the coup, and the United States exerted pressure on a “hesitant, if not resistant” Park to return South Korea to civilian electoral politics, as well as supported the coup’s goal of developing the national economy (Kim and Baik, 2011: 68).

As discussed in chapter two, the model of liberal democracy that Koh is celebrating, with its discourse of the state representing the interests of the nation, conceals the fact that the state is a system of governing (regardless of whether that state is a democracy or a dictatorship) and that certain groups of people are not fully included in the socially constructed category of “the people.” There is no questioning of whether or not “the national state ought to be sovereign,” and this tacit acceptance “legitimates practices that differentiate between citizens and those categorized as ‘foreigners’ not only across national borders but also within” (Sharma, 2006: 5).
Koh continues to assert the uniqueness of the United States by arguing that dictatorships are the norm around the world, describing how he “traveled to scores of countries” and “everywhere I went—Haiti, Indonesia, China, Sierra Leone, Kosovo—I saw in the eyes of thousands the same fire for freedom I had first seen in my father’s eyes.” He describes the eyes of the North Koreans especially as “lifeless, unfocused stares I had first read about in Orwell’s 1984...people whose aspirations had been crushed by a government that would not provide for their most basic needs.” Koh thusly reinvigorates old Cold War fears about the dystopic effects of totalitarianism and tugs on the fears of patriotic heartstrings by reiterating the enjoyment of freedom in the U.S. and the threats to it from others. Interestingly, Koh also uses his own racialized body as evidence for the righteousness of Western ideals of universal human rights. He cites an interchange between himself and “an Asian dictator” (a metonym which assumes that there is no need to specify the particular Asian dictator by name or nation reproducing the racist stereotype of the indistinguishable “Asian”). He claims that the “Asian dictator” opposed the imposition of “Western values on his people,” claiming that “We Asians don’t feel the same way as Americans do about human rights.” In response, Koh points to his own face to tell him that he was wrong.

By pointing to himself, Koh challenges the leaders’ essentialist ideas about identity. Hage argues that nationalism “before being an explicit practice or mode of classification, is a state of body” (2000:45). What this means is that nationalism is a form of spatial management, a way of bodily engaging with social space. Acting as an American imperialist, Koh feels spatially empowered to use his body as an extension of his national identity to classify the dictator into his proper space within the wider world of nations. He uses his “Asian” face to embody the relation of power between the dominant United States and a dominated “Asian” nation. Koh seems to be saying that his American national identity trumps his racialized Asian identity, yet he also continues to classify the dictator by his racialized identity rather than his national identity.

While perhaps it might be expected that governmental officials would produce a discourse of the United States as exemplifying the ideal of liberal democracy and condemning all other nations as frighteningly repressive, such sentiments were also represented in Special Feature essays written by peace corps workers, travellers, and
soldiers. In his essay, “A Beautiful Country,” (5/7/07) Tony\textsuperscript{130} writes about how “freedom is an elusive goal.” He begins his essay with a mild critique of America, emphasizing confused national priorities and describing the “difficulty of preserving and expanding freedoms, even in a “free” country.” But Tony believes that these problems will eventually be remedied, because “America will never be a finished product” and what “drives” Americans is the “freedom to reexamine our national values and make adjustments when needed.” Tony gives a brief history of the extension of the vote to women and to blacks, as evidence of America’s progressive expansion of freedoms. Tony asserts that it is this “unending experiment in expanding freedom, justice, and welfare to everyone” that makes America “special” and which make Tony feel “Lucky to be an American.” In contrast, Tony describes the lack of freedom in other parts of the world as “misfortune and madness.” As a Peace Corps worker, Tony “lost dozens of Igbo friends in ethnic killings that led to the Nigerian Civil War. While this senseless slaughter continued around me, diseased children and their parents with distorted limbs were crawling to my door begging for a penny.” Tony also taught at the university level in Beijing, a year after “the Tiananmen carnage” and “will never forget the bullet holes in the hallways” nor “the emotional anxiety of my Chinese students who were afraid to discuss the June 4, 1989 massacre.”

Mamdani explains that the modern sensibility is horrified not by pervasive violence as such, but by “violence that appears senseless, that cannot be justified by progress” (2004:4). When political violence is interpreted as senseless, it usually gets explained either “in cultural terms for premodern society” due to an absence of modernity or in “theological terms for a modern [or antimodern] society” due to evil and moral perversion (Mamdani, 2004: 4). Tony’s essay incorporates both explanations, seeing the violence as caused by the lack of democracy, but also describing it as madness. These experiences reminded Tony of his “good fortune to be born in the United States” and he learned that “Everyone wants to come to my country to live.” Tony explains that “In Chinese, the word for America means ‘beautiful country’ but he thinks that “The word ‘America’ is the sound of the soul’s yearning for growth and freedom.” By categorizing

\textsuperscript{130} Tony’s essay “A Beautiful Country” was included in the special feature \textit{Patriotism} on 05/07/07.
nations into the categories of premodern, modern, or antimodern, this “history of modern colonization stigmatizes those shut out of modernity as antimodern because they resist being shut out” (Mamdani, 2004:19). Also, by explaining the political violence of other nations in cultural or theological terms, Mamdani cautions that “we are unable to think through the link between modernity and political violence” that link being that political violence is a component of the exercise of modern power (2004:4).

Like Tony, Holly considers herself fortunate to live in the United States. In her essay “A Universal Ideal” (5/15/06), Holly describes herself as a “a big fan of the American flag” despite being an “an avowed globalist.” Holly claims that she “can be counted on to interject a ‘non-American view’ when discussing everything from politics and religion to sports and food,” yet despite these claims, her essay takes a very ‘American’ view of the world. Holly’s experience of locales as diverse as Beijing, Bratislava, Nairobi, East Berlin, and Cartagena was that these were “places where flags flew but freedom was nowhere to be found.” Holly spends the majority of her essay on a formative month in 1981 when she travelled to Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe and met a Bulgarian woman who “had once been an author but was no longer allowed to write.” Holly observed during her time there that “Churches were mostly museums. Home ownership was non-existent as were public juries. No one I came in contact with seemed able or willing to speak freely.” Travelling across the border, she witnessed “a cadre of border guards search our riverboat for contraband, including smuggled letters, of which there were a few on board.” These experiences made Holly feel “a strange mix of sorrow and gratitude” and she “saw anew the value of the freedoms I enjoyed back home in America.” Holly links these freedoms to the symbol of the American flag. She explains that “Woven into its linen fabric are all the freedoms I treasure most: The right to speak my mind without fear of imprisonment. The guarantee of a jury of my peers. That I can own a home or attend church at no one’s discretion but my own.” After leaving Eastern Europe, Holly “sobbed” at the sight of the first American flag she saw, and 25 years later, she “remains devoted to our flag.” Holly flies her flag outside her home most days of the year, rain or shine, neither raising nor lowering the flag in support or protest of war, but

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131 Holly’s essay “A Universal Ideal” was included in the special feature Patriotism on 05/15/06.
rather maintaining a constant appreciation for the “the freedom to think, to dream, to be.” Holly believes that freedom is “a universal ideal, one that I, as a citizen of the world, never want to take for granted.”

Essays like Holly’s provide the rationale behind what Melanie McAlister (2005) terms “benevolent supremacy” and Sunana Maira (2009) terms “benevolent imperialism” or “imperialism for democracy,” a discourse which justifies invading other countries to bring ‘freedom’ to their people. This discourse is encoded in The Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention articulated through the United Nations’ Security Council and is largely seen to have originated with President Clinton’s administration (Abiew, 1999). In cases of perceived humanitarian intervention, progressives and liberals have often been “the main proponents of a more assertive U.S. military” (Barry, 2003: 33). This idea of liberating oppressed peoples has resonance, as evidenced by the change in name of the war in Afghanistan from Operation Infinite Justice to Operation Enduring Freedom.

Similarly, in the absence of evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction or ties to al-Qaeda, the Bush administration justified its continued war with Iraq on the basis that “the war was to be fought for liberty” (McAlister, 2005: 287). Bush promised the Iraqi people that U.S. military power would be used to “tear down the apparatus of terror…to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free…no more executions of dissidents, no more torture chambers and rape rooms…the day of your liberation is near” (in McAlister, 2005: 288).

This strongly ideological approach to international politics was at the heart of neo-conservatism which asserted that “U.S. foreign policy should be formulated on the basis of (conservative) morality as well as strategic interests” (McAlister, 2005: 289). Administration officials articulated this new vision with statements about the “inherent goodness and redemptive mission of the United States” in America’s endless war against evil, characterizing select nations as part of the “axis of evil” and terrorists as people who “hate freedom” (Barry and Lobe, 2003: 47). For liberals who might experience discomfort with such moral absolutism, the logic of the freedom framework produced an uncomfortable problem such that “to oppose U.S. policy was to suggest that Arab or Muslim peoples did not have the right to democracy; support for the push toward war was brandished as an antiracist credential” (McAlister, 2005: 289). In using the language
of human rights, “freedom becomes, paradoxically, the justification for dominance and neocolonial occupation.” (Maira 2009, 51-52). Thus both Powell’s and Koh’s essays reflect official U.S. policy for how to garner support for its military interventions.

While American imperialism is a reality for millions around the world, the concept of empire to describe U.S. global power has long been “rejected in the United States as a left-wing polemic, a contradiction in terms” with such disavowals allowing U.S. imperialism to persist without being acknowledged as such (Kaplan, 2004: 3). However, after 9/11, the concept of empire was rehabilitated in popular discourse, with a proliferation of approaches debating “not just whether the United States is an empire, but what form of empire it could, and should, take” (Maira, 2009: 45). Two main discourses emerged, the first of which was put forth by neoconservatives, and celebrated the United States fulfilling its “Manifest Destiny” as the only superpower remaining after the Cold War. In order to maintain global supremacy, the United States must use military force, such as “preemptive strikes against any potential rivals and perpetual war against terror, defined primarily as the Muslim world... remaining vigilant against those rogue states and terrorists who resist not our power, but the universal human values that we embody” (Kaplan, 2004: 4). The second discourse of the “reluctant imperialist,” put forth by liberal interventionists, asserted that the United States has had the burden of empire “thrust upon it by the fall of earlier empires and the failures of modern states, which abuse the human rights of their own people and spawn terrorism” (Kaplan, 2004:4). In order to restore global order, the United States must use its military power, economic acumen, and moral authority to “save the people of the world from their own anarchy, their descent into an uncivilized state,” remaking the world in our image (Kaplan 2004:4). This discourse fits with earlier colonialist discourses asserting the incapacity of inferior races of self-governance and supports the racialization of Arabs and Islam in the United States (Said, 1978:48).

Both the neoconservative and the liberal interventionist interpretations of the origins of empire assert America’s exceptionalism, that “America is the apotheosis of history, the embodiment of universal values of human rights, liberalism, and democracy” (Kaplan, 2004: 5). According to this logic, the United States claims the authority to “make sovereign judgments on what is right and what is wrong” for everyone else and
“to exempt itself with an absolutely clear conscience from all the rules that it proclaims and applies to others” as will be discussed further in the section “Hell Causes Terrorism” (Hassner in Kaplan, 2004:5). Despite using violence to enforce its universalism, resistance to the U.S. imposition of empire is viewed as “opposition to modernity and universal human values” (Kaplan, 2004:6).

4.2 “Abused, Terrified, Little Creature”

Fantasies of rescue are part of a long history of U.S. imperialist cultural rhetoric which asserts that it is the messianic mission of the United States to bring ‘freedom’ to select parts of the world, even if that means using military force. From places as diverse as Vietnam and Iraq, the U.S. military has long borrowed the colonial strategy of claiming to “emancipate” the “subjugated” in order to undermine resistance (Elliott in Maira, 2009: 225). The idea of liberating an oppressed people motivated Michael Whitehead\(^\text{132}\) to write his called “We Will See The Job Through” (11/11/07) which was also broadcast on NPR.org. In this essay, Whitehead, who served in the United States Army and Army Reserves for thirty years, writes about his experiences of the “Iraqi people,” a highly nationalized term that Whitehead uses, and his promise to them that “after awakening them from their nightmare we would lead them to the democracy that they deserve.” Whitehead’s experiences in Iraqi were not what he anticipated and because of this, he has “struggled to communicate what I learned there” and “hesitated to speak my mind.” When Whitehead arrived in Iraq, he says he did not “believe in” the “Iraqi people,” expecting to find fulfilled the imagined stereotype of “an Iraqi with his fist held high in anger.” Instead, his “most enduring memory” was “an Iraqi family, the mother in full-length abaya carrying a baby and the father, walking ahead in a white dishdasha, and holding a small child.” While Whitehead did find the “Sunnis of Ramadi” to be “sullen and suspicious” he was impressed with the “industriousness, piety, courtesy and sense of family” of the “Shias of Hilla, Diwaniyah, Najaf, Karbala and Kut.” Through such moral evaluations, Whitehead seems to be assessing the worthiness of the people he is risking his life to liberate.

\(^{132}\) Michael Whitehead’s essay “We Will See the Job Through” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on 11/23/07, as well as included in the special feature Beliefs Born on the Battlefield.
Whitehead helped to create a women’s rights center in Karbala and was impressed by the courage of “the Iraqi woman who came forward despite great personal danger to lead” it. He showed the woman a picture of his daughter and the woman gave him a postcard to give to his daughter. Even though he did not learn this woman’s name, he thinks of her often, and believes that the personal “sacrifices” that he and his family have made were “made for this woman.” Whitehead wants to believe that he is helping the Iraqi people and that they are unafraid of him. He is comforted when an Iraqi woman lifts her baby’s arm to wave at him, “an American soldier wearing a helmet and body armor, and carrying a loaded weapon.” He feels relief when “grown men in tears” thank him for “helping to remove the terror and the horror that had beset these men’s lives for over 30 years.” These acts lead Whitehead to leave Iraq able to say that he “believes in the Iraqi people.” Thus, while the story is ostensibly about “the Iraqi people,” Whitehead remains the central protagonist of his story, absolved of responsibility for U.S. violence perpetrated against Iraq by his humanitarian mission.

After previous justifications for invading Iraq had been discredited, human rights, especially women’s rights, became the focus of the ideological efforts of the U.S. state. The focus on the treatment of women in Islamic culture provided a justification for a U.S. presence not only in Iraq, but also to other nations pertinent to U.S. interests, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan (Rajiva, 2005). Like Whitehead, the Bush administration used women’s liberation to defend the War on Terror, with First Lady Laura Bush contending “The brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists…[and] the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (in McAlister, 2005: 282). The abuse of women was identified as “not just one among many abuses, but the quintessential failure of Islam, the one that most conclusively defines the regressive nature of Islamic society” (Rajiva, 2005: 146). The logic of this “gendered ideology” worked to “repress the Arab Muslim male on the one hand and to ‘liberate’ Muslim women on the other” (Zine in Maira, 2009: 221). White men like Whitehead, and white women like Laura Bush and Eve Ensler below, tried to “save brown women from brown men” (Spivak in Maira, 2009: 225).

Through the discourse of bringing freedom to Muslim women, Maira argues that gender rights can become a “pawn to justify U.S. military interventions” (Maira, 2009:
This is because despite its rhetoric of feminism, “American policy has been as inimical to the welfare of women [in Iraq] as it has been to the welfare of the whole country [Iraq],” as evidenced by tens of thousands of female deaths, millions of females wounded, plus “families destroyed, homes blown to bits, rapes, assaults, abductions, malnutrition, injuries, lost wages and possessions, and the rise of reactionary laws” (Rajiva, 2005: 148). Women are also being held prisoner at places like Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib; videos of the rapes of these women are shown to the male prisoners as part of their torture, and there are even reports of male and female children being abused there, including being sodomized in front of their parents (Rajiva, 2005). The deafening silence of media coverage in the United States on these horrifying and misogynist practices, is “one of those singular absences that more than any misstatement reveals the falsity of the propaganda of liberation” and the failure of a feminism that turns to the U.S. state to “rescue” women (Rajiva, 2005: 132).

By utilizing a universalizing discourse of women’s rights, such “human rights feminism detaches violence against women from its historical and political specificity and evades the complicity of United States in global conflicts” (Maira, 2009:225). While aspiring for an international vision, this failure to more complexly situate these violences reinforces a nationalist perspective, which ultimately is sympathetic to U.S. interests. Mainstream feminism in the United States struggles to acknowledge reasons other than religion for women’s subordination in Iraq and Afghanistan, disregarding factors like poverty or processes of imperialism. Maira describes how after 9/11 U.S feminist and playwright Eve Ensler organized performances and political conferences showcasing the plight of oppressed Afghan women called “Afghanistan is Everywhere” which included a new reading in the “Vagina Monologues” called “Under the Burqa.” Focusing on issues which were important to American women, like personal and sexual liberty, mainstream American feminists failed to consider whether these issues were important to Afghan women, and for the most part also ignored the work of women’s movements in Afghanistan to address their own social, economic, and political situation and voice their grievances (Maira, 2009). Similarly, as Whitehead’s essay demonstrated, he was more interested in the idea of his advancing of Iraqi women’s rights than in the actual work being done by women in Iraq themselves, even failing to learn the name of the woman
who was to lead the women’s center he purportedly created. Whitehead’s inability to accurately “see” Iraqi women was similar to mainstream feminism’s “failure to engage the complex political and economic situation that for many women in Afghanistan made the burqa either a low-priority or a non-issue” (McAlister, 2005: 282).

Many mainstream feminists in the United States struggle with the idea that not all Muslim women desire to be free of their religious head coverings. Alaa El-Saad, 133 in her essay “America’s Beauty Is In Its Diversity” (1/29/09), writes about her decision to wear the hijab, which is the least conservative form of the Muslim veil, as a choice and as a practice she began in the sixth grade. She explains that in America, there is freedom of religion and speech, and the freedom to be “different” and to “stand up for who and what you are.” She likes to wear the hijab for the traditional religious reasons, which are “sign of maturity and respect toward my religion and to Allah’s will,” but also she wears it “to be different” because she doesn’t “usually like to do what everyone else is doing.” She explains that “I want to be an individual, not just part of the crowd.” El-Saad attempts to construct her headscarf not as challenging to modernity nor to feminism, but as an expression of her American individualism, as just another kind of accessory that is part of her personal style. In so doing, she seeks to subvert ideas that the veil is something “undesirable” something that warrants action and possibly exclusion. While she worried that the other children would “make fun of me or be scared of me and pull off my headscarf,” she found that they were mostly curious and “respectfully” asked her questions. She remembers feeling “proud to be a Muslim, proud to be wearing the hijab, proud to be different,” and argues that “everyone is different here, in one way or another. This is the beauty of America.”134

In her essay “The Power and Mystery of Naming Things” (3/20/06), Eve Ensler focuses on her personal experience of incest rape and her struggle to speak out about her traumatic experience. She then generalizes her experience as a world-wide phenomena, in

133 Alaa El-Saad’s essay “America’s Beauty Is In Its Diversity” was broadcast on Tell Me More on 01/29/09.
134 In the section, “A Variety of Kettles Peacefully Share the Stove” I will discuss in more detail how the discourse of diversity mystifies the relations of power between “different” identities, such that Muslim women like El-Saad must worry that empowered nationalist others will attempt to reach out and spatially position them as objects by removing their veils against their will.
which women everywhere are naming the violences that are committed against them. She writes, “I think of women naming the atrocities committed against them by the Taliban in Afghanistan, or women telling of the systematic rapes during the Bosnian war, or just recently in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, women lining up in refugee camps to name their nightmares and losses and needs. I have traveled the world and listened as woman after woman tells of being date raped or acid burned, genitally mutilated, beaten by her boyfriend or molested by her stepfather.” On the one hand, this rhetorical act of identification is meant to establish an affinity between women who have experienced violence in the United States and in other national states. Despite trying to construct a universal solidarity based on women’s shared experiences of violence, Ensler’s essay constructs the foreign nations she names as very scary places for women to live. Rather than encouraging an act of identification, in her attempt to relativize the litany of violences, acid burns and genital mutilations jump out as strange and especially brutal violences, that seem foreign and repulsive. Iranian-born and veil-refusing writer Azar Nafisi, in her essay, “The Mysterious Connections that Link Us Together” uses a similar technique to argue that it is only through empathy that the “vast differences” between people from different “worlds” can be overcome through a “shock of recognition” (6/18/05). Like Ensler, Nafisi provides examples of the characteristic kinds of violences experienced by people from different “worlds,” naming: “a child left orphaned in Darfur, a woman taken to a football stadium in Kabul and shot to death because she is improperly dressed, the pain experienced by an Algerian woman, a North Korean dissident, a Rwandan child, an Iraqi prisoner” (Nafisi, 6/18/05).

Listeners are expected to know the uniqueness of these essential particularities, to be familiar with what the pain of an Algerian woman is, and how it differs from other pains experienced by other women in other national states, as well as other pains experienced by men or children in Algeria. Such familiarity is possible because stereotypes are repetitions of hegemonic beliefs (Barthes, 1983). Nafisi’s essay utilizes metonymic stereotypes, in which a particular type of violence against women is used to represent the essence of a nation’s identity (Billig, 1995). The use of such metonymic

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135 Azar Nafisi’s essay “The Mysterious Connections that Link Us Together” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 07/18/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
stereotypes demonstrates that part of the unique identity of a nation, in addition to its name, flag, and anthem are the types of violence that are associated with being particular to it. This means that when a listener hears “Darfur orphan” or “Algerian woman,” there is no interpretation or critical thought required, only “an imaginative act of unimagination” (Billig, 1995: 102). Here again we can see how politics are currently understood through the language of Mamdani’s concept of “culture talk,” which assumes that “every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence. Culture talk after 9/11, for example, qualified and explained the practice of ‘terrorism,’ as ‘Islamic.’” (2004: 18). Nafisi is employing culture talk when she refers to different essences/cultures/nations as the source of violence, rather than specifying the unique set of social relations, social relations that often cross nationalized boundaries, that produced specific violences.

4.3 “Hell is What Causes Terrorism”

The humanitarian justification of the United States to bring ‘freedom’ to the oppressed in order to defeat those who “hate freedom” evades the complicity of the United States in provoking and perpetuating such violence. In this section I will explore how in order to sustain the narratives of U.S. exceptionalism and benevolent supremacy, the This I Believe essayists make no mention of the American torture of ‘enemy combatants,’ instead providing accounts of instances in which the people of Afghanistan and the people of Iraqi suffered under despotic regimes, thereby justifying humanitarian interventions, or providing accounts of instances in which Americans were tortured, effectively deflecting attention away from the role of the United States in contributing to global experiences of terror, whilst maintaining the perception of a threat to the nation that is so essential to national subjectivity. No mention is made in the This I Believe essays of the role of the United States in contributing to the experiences of terror, no examination of how “behind the rhetoric of liberation of people lies the reality of the disciplining of populations—mass detentions, evacuations of cities, torture, and terror bombing” (Rajiva, 2005: 131). The topic of torture shows up on This I Believe, although mostly in subtle ways. It is not the subject of a Special Feature nor is it a theme in the database, but multiple essays make the witnessing of, experience of, or participation in
torture a focus of their essay. There is a theme in the searchable database called “Good and Evil” with 1775 essays in it, and the topic of torture shows up in other themes like “Citizenship,” “War,” “Injustice,” “Integrity” or “Discrimination.”

During the historical moment after September 11th, exclusionist practices, including torture and internment, became an acceptable response for how to relate to other nation-states defined as fundamentalist, uncivilized or differently civilized, as well as for how to manage the problematic presence of citizens and non-citizens within national space who were racialized as Muslims and/or ‘terrorists.’ evades the complicity of United States in provoking and perpetuating such violence. Such exclusionist practices were justified through the ideology of national security, which interprets global happenings as part of the war on terror, antagonistically viewing other national states and the world in general as potentially hostile. Richard Barnet argues that the ideology of national security “distorts the meaning of security by defining it primarily in military terms,” relinquishing nonmilitary means of gaining security, and ceasing to test the reality of danger (in Staub, 1992: 255). Such a distortion is reflected in comments by President Bush when he asserted “ “I just want you to know that, when we talk about war, we’re really talking about peace… The security of our homeland, the need to make sure that America is safe and secure while we chase peace is my number one priority for the country” (2002a).

Under the ideology of national security, the protection of the nation-state is prioritized as more important than the protection of civil rights, such that “security trumps rights” (Mamdani, 2004: 17) As a result of this kind of logic, torture and other human rights abuses exercised at such “spaces of exception” as Guantanamo in Cuba, Abu Ghraib in Iraq, and Bagram Prison in Afghanistan “make U.S. violations of international law the norm” (Maira, 2009: 50). With twenty-four internment camps around the globe, imprisoning a minimum of 30-40,000 people, seventy to ninety percent of whom are estimated as innocent by the Red Cross, torture is not an aberration, but a “common, flagrant, and systemic practice” within the “American gulag” (Rajiva, 2005; 21, 32). The inhabitants of these American military prisons are classified as “enemy combatants,” and denied both the due process rights of criminal defendants under the protections of U.S. domestic law, as well the rights established under the Geneva
Convention under the protections of international law. President Bush explained that “After the chaos and carnage of September 11th, it is not enough to serve our enemies with legal papers” (2004). Under this “penal regime” the United States “indefinitely detains, secretly transports, and tortures uncounted prisoners from all over the world… all the while keeping itself immune from accountability and keeping prisoners from the safeguards of any of these systems” (Kaplan, 2005: 851). Through such strategies as creating new and legally ambiguous territorial spaces and categories of persons, the U.S. is able to obscure and deny its exercise of imperial power. Moreover, by “condemning human rights abuses of which it is also systematically guilty” its hypocrisy on its claim to wage war to protect human rights is evident (Rajva, 2005; 182).

In his essay “Recovering the Hope of Children,” (11/9/08) TJ Turner discusses his experiences in northern Afghanistan while deployed there with the Air Force’s 455th Expeditionary Mission Support Group. Turner’s essay dovetails with Powell’s essay, describing the desired relationship of “benevolent imperialism” between the U.S. and foreign nations, as “we” charitably swoop in to save the supposedly powerless and grateful oppressed peoples. For neoconservatives, bringing democracy to the nations of the Middle East means specific things, including: individualism, free market capitalism, protection of private property, and good relations with the United States (McAlister, 2005: 290). For all of the This I Believe essayists analyzed in this chapter, the United States “exemplifies the ideal of liberal democracy and should dominate any ‘universal’ order that would emerge” (McAlister, 2005: 290). Turner’s essay facilitates listeners’ ability to imagine the foreign, as it shows the stark differences between the quality of life in Afghanistan and the United States. He begins by describing the haunting physical landscape around Bagram, which is “both ruggedly beautiful and desperately poor…peaceful and serene, but punctuated with unbelievable violence and the scars of decades of conflict.” By referring to the history of violence in Afghanistan, Turner mitigates the current violence. He observes the “destruction” inflicted by the “seven-year conflict with the Soviets,” which has left “damaged houses, damaged bodies, and an area where landmines coexist with children playing in the fields.” Afghanistan then sounds

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136 TJ Turner’s essay “Recovering the Hope of Children” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 11/09/08, as well as included in the special features Hope for the Future and Veteran’s Day.
unimaginably brutal and utterly foreign to *NPR* listeners as they worry about the soldiers they know deployed here, and cannot imagine their own children frolicking amongst landmines. In this land of “extremes,” Turner comes to the realization that “this is what hell is like.” It makes sense that Afghanisan would be portrayed as “hell,” for this is where the ‘evil’ terrorists are purportedly to be found. After describing the grim experiences of its residents, he defines hell in less spatial and more affective terms: hell is “not a place that’s destroyed, but when hope is destroyed. I saw this in the faces we passed.” Befitting the neoconservative’s fusing of religion and politics, Turner’s essay employs “Culture Talk” to describe Hell as a place (Afghanistan) and a state (hopelessness) in which the damned (Afganis) must.

Turner then goes on to describe an interaction he had with one of the residents of the Panjshir Valley, an old man and his grandson, a familiar relationship to listeners. As the military vehicles passed, the man “pulled the child in close…his expression seemed hostile, but maybe it was just the snow and the cold.” Turner does not seem to appreciate that there might be good reason for people in Afghanistan to not welcome or appreciate the American military presence. Believing himself to be on a humanitarian, even angelic, mission, Turner reacts to such distrust with hurt and a desire to win the affection of the Afghani people. Turner holds a teddy bear out of the window for the little boy, which he promptly grabs and hugs. The old man says thank you in his native language “Tashakkur,” and smiles, and Turner thinks that he saw the return of hope on that man’s face, “hope that his grandson wouldn’t live in the same world he did.” It is of course hardly a coincidence that a U.S. soldier on patrol in Afghanistan is lugging around teddy bears, likely a part of the U.S. State’s strategy of “winning hearts and minds,” which leads Turner to conclude “I believe in the power of teddy bears.” Turner reflects that the discussions “in our nation” about the global war on terror overlook the root cause, that “hell is what causes terrorism…it’s about pure desperation, and feeling like there’s no way of recovering the hope of childhood.” Turner, a soldier, can see humane reasons for why people engage in acts of terrorism. Terrorists aren’t evil, but hopeless. Turner thus portrays the Afghani man as helpless to improve his grandson’s living conditions, dependent upon the charity of more powerful (and wealthy) men like Turner (paid by the US state military apparatus) to give their children hope.
In his essay, “The Strength of a Man’s Soul,” (11/11/08) Arabic linguist Jeff Carnes describes his first conversation with an Iraqi, which was an account of torture. This conversation took place while Carnes was serving in Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division in 2003. Carnes says that unlike Tony and Turner’s experiences, most of the Iraqis that he met were hostile to his presence and told him “Halt! Go home!” But one man bravely “approach[ed] a soldier from the most powerful army in the world just to tell his story.” Muhammad was a critic of “Saddam Hussein’s despotic regime,” and was jailed for six years following a “Stalinist show trial.” Carnes says that Muhammad lost everything he had “because he spoke the truth.” Significantly, this “truth” that Muhammad confirms for Carnes fails to acknowledge that the United States historically supported Saddam Hussein’s regime, for example, providing satellite photos and intelligence, as well as weapons and equipment during the war from 1980-1988 between Iran and Iraq (Chomsky, 1999; Hahn, 2011; McAlister, 2005). The U.S. alliance with Iraq was undertaken with the intention to suppress Islamic fundamentalism and “contain the influence of Khomeini’s Islamic government” (Lake, 1994: 48).

While imprisoned, Muhammad was tortured, and showed Carnes “the scars from his ankles to his wrists.” He was also “forced to sit helpless as they raped [his wife] in front of him until she died of a heart attack.” As a listener, I find it uncomfortable to hear about such violence, to which Carnes goes into detail with almost grisly relish. Such atrocities are used as evidence to justify the war in Iraq, despite irrefutable evidence of torture being practiced by American soldiers on Iraqis held in U.S. prison camps and elsewhere. After listening to Muhammad’s gruesome experiences, Carnes does not express horror or sympathy, but instead feels that his liberatory mission has been justified, asking Muhammad, “What do you want to do now that you are free?” Muhammad’s response was not political, but a humble desire to “go to Kuwait and have a family.” Throughout the conversation, Carnes has been impressed with Muhammad’s fortitude and what he gleans from it is an admiration that “the human soul can endure and flourish under even the most trying circumstances.” The men continued to chat late into the night over MREs (Meals Ready-to-Eat) about “everything from the regime to soccer

137 Jeff Carnes’ essay “The Strength of a Man’s Soul” was broadcast on NPR.org on 11/11/08.
to life in the United States” and parted ways the next morning never to see each other again. This essay solicits a fear of the cruel ways of foreign nations and legitimates the need for American military presence there. There is a sense that initially Carnes felt that he should not be there, as evidenced by the constant admonishments of the locals telling him to leave, but he says that “Muhammad gave me the confidence to be able to speak with Iraqis with my Wisconsin-accented Arabic.” In other words, he felt he had every right to be there. Again, like Whitehead, Carnes places himself as the central protagonist of his story all the while claiming to speak for “Muhammad.”

One of the most unusual essays broadcast on This I Believe was written by an anonymous interrogator at Guantanamo Bay writing under the pseudonym Alex Anderson, who attempts to provide an inside glimpse into what “really” goes on in the prison camps. The biographical blurb uses the feminine pronoun, so I assume that Alex is a female. This makes the essay even more interesting, as female interrogators, such as Lyndie England who was convicted for her role in the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, are increasingly being used in the American military to torture and to inflict sexual degradation and humiliation on Muslim males (Rajiva, 2005).

In Alex Anderson’s essay “Finding Redemption Through Acceptance,” (12/09/07) the opening line is “I believe in the power of redemption,” and throughout the essay it is ambiguous as to who is being redeemed—the solider-author, the American prison camp system, or the enemy detainee.

In this instance, the interrogator starts with a controversial description of leaving Iraq after 18 months of service due to what appears to be post-traumatic stress, wherein the author experienced insomnia, hallucinations, and was “plagued by dreams of explosions and screaming,” which eventually resulted in hospitalization. The author’s stated reason for leaving though was a feeling of defeat after the Abu Ghraib scandal broke. The author states that “I left because I felt I could not make any difference anymore. Those events simply undermined all of our work.” Whether the revelations of torture practiced by US military personnel at Abu Ghraib undermined the process of interrogation or whether the solider-author is referring to the undermining of her faith in humanity (the latter is alluded to), the author states that “I don’t have any torture stories

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138 Alex Anderson’s essay “Finding Redemption Through Acceptance” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 12/09/07 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
to share. I think many people would be surprised at the civilized lifestyle I experienced in Guantanamo.” The author describes a typical interrogation session in which she would meet with her “client,” a label the author personally chose to refer to the detainees assigned to her, and they would “play dominoes, I’d bring chocolate, and we’d talk a lot.” One of the detainees even “joked that I was his favorite interrogator in the world and I joked back that he was my favorite terrorist.”

In this portrait of camaraderie, Anderson imagines that she is a kind of therapist or missionary. The author says she doesn’t know “what kind of difference [she] made to the mission in Guantanamo” but that she found “redemption in caring for my clients” and “it saved my life—or at least my sanity.” Here, the idea of a mission can mean either a military mission or a spiritual mission. Anderson clearly identifies at the outset of her essay that she is aware that her “clients” are “murderers and rapists...some committed crimes so horrific that I lost sleep wondering if they were set free…and that given the chance, they’d kill you to get out.” And yet, she tries her best to humanize them, the opposite of what happened at Abu Ghraib, using the slogan “hate the sin, not the sinner”\(^\text{139}\) One of Anderson’s detainees asks why she does not hate him, and she replies that “Everyone has done things in their past that they’re not proud of. I know I have, but I also know God still expects me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself,” an answer which causes him to weep and reply “That’s what my God says too.”\(^\text{140}\) The author concludes that redemption occurs through acceptance, which is “powerful to those who receive it and more powerful to those who give it.”

Interestingly, the author did not choose the word forgiveness, which would have been the more Christian interpretation, but rather chose a word that was more like tolerance, which gives power to the giver. The practice of tolerance (to be discussed more in depth in the section “A Variety of Kettles Peacefully Share The Stove”) is one of the conceptual tools of multiculturalism. Ironically, the U.S. Defense Department espouses its embrace of multiculturalism at these prisons, citing its “tolerance and provisions for

\(^{139}\) This is a quote from Mahatma Ghandi, not Jesus Christ, although neither are cited in the essay. This quote is often used as a Christian approach to dealing with the ‘problem’ of homosexuality.

\(^{140}\) Anderson’s reply is a direct quote from Matthew 22:37-40, although no citation is made in the essay.
Islamic observances” (Kaplan, 2005:14). However, while giving such lip service to multiculturalism, Abu Ghraib revealed that the religious beliefs of the prisoners were in fact used against them. For example, Muslim prisoners are provided with a Quran, but in 2003 *The Washington Post* reported prisoner complaints of the prison guards desecrating the Quran, including throwing it into a toilet (Mintz, 2005).

Anderson’s essays corroborates Bush’s claim that the abuses at Abu Ghraib were aberrant, as he expressed “Their treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people. That’s not the way we do things in America” (Stout, 2004). For most Americans, the images of Abu Ghraib released on the *CBS News* program *Sixty Minutes II* on April 28, 2004 were horrifying, provoking widespread revulsion. Significantly, the desire to repair America’s national image became paramount. Such images are shocking to Americans because they disrupt the national self-image of the United States as the epitome of freedom and the safe haven of civil rights. Americans were encouraged to accept the government’s claim, articulated by representatives like Joint Chiefs Chairman Air Force General Richard B. Myer that “All you have to do is look at the photographs and know that’s not how we do business. We don’t torture people…Our adversaries, they celebrate deaths of innocent men, women, and children…We don’t celebrate this” (in Rajiva, 2005: 23). Myers’ makes a clear distinction between the national “we” and the foreign “they,” arguing that torture is not representative of “us,” but an aberration, and contending that although “We, the ‘good guys,’ do exactly the same as the ‘bad guys,’ our acts are not the same because we are not the same” (Rajiva, 2005: 23). The implication is that “if we are willing to be nasty in protecting our nice nation, it does not mean that we have stopped being a nice nation” (Hage, 2000:107). As discussed earlier, “culture talk” ascribes the violences committed by ethnicized Others to their ‘essence,’ while offering political justifications for ‘our’ violence.

And yet, contrary to Myer’s claims, the images clearly depicted U.S. soldiers torturing and celebrating torture, which threatened to expose the U.S. occupation as a mission not of liberation, but of conquest. Despite claims that the soldiers were acting without sanction, it was revealed that under the machinations of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques,” including physical and psychological coercion were covertly approved to “Gitmoize” the prison system in Iraq,
extending the endorsement of torture which President Bush had authorized again those classified as “enemy combatants (Hersch, 2004). McAlister likens the photographs to images of lynchings in the post-Civil War South, where smiling Whites posed next to murdered African-Americans, with “no sense of shame...believ[ing] themselves to be free of censure” because the “racial violence depicted was entirely justified in their eyes, by their own racial hate” (2005: 302). McAlister argues that the images from Abu Ghraib revealed the power of American imperialism, in which American national culture was posited opposite Islamic culture. Drawing on Etienne Balibar (1991), she explains how through ideologies of neo-racism, national cultures can be racialized, such that Islam, the Middle East, and terrorism can become “fused together” and “mark entire groups of people as immutably and intangibly inferior” (2005: 302). The torture at Abu Ghraib revealed the processes of ethnicizing which are central to the inhabitation of the national will, as each nation is posited to be composed of a homogenous “people” who rightfully belong there whilst others are defined as foreigners. Ethnicizing organizes horizontally and spatially the supposedly inherent cultural and social differences between putatively different kinds of people (Balibar, 1991; Sharma, 2006:10). Each ethnicized group is said to feel a strong need to maintain and protect their seemingly distinct and discrete identities (Miles, 1993). Thus, “the nation occupies not only a territorial space, but also an ideological space of belonging” (Sharma, 2006: 10). McAlister contends that although politicians were careful not to “vilify all Muslims” she explains that nonetheless “ ‘Islam’ functioned as a synecdoche for a particular set of pathologies—an excessive devotion to religion, a tendency towards violence and jihad, the oppression of women, failure of democracy, and irrational hatred of the United States” all of which fed an imperial kind of racism, and worked to legitimate American violence against Iraqi prisoners (2005: 302). The Abu Ghairib images undermined the moral authority of the United States that was central to the liberal national self-image of the reluctant imperialist, revealing the United States as a perpetrator of human rights abuses.

While Anderson’s essay on her experiences working in American prison camps denied the practice of torture, three other essays on This I Believe describe the authors’ personal experiences of being held in foreign prison camps. These This I Believe essays deflect attention from American practices of torture, while also justifying such practices
by focusing on the barbarism of the enemy. One account of torture was written by
photojournalist and documentarian Molly Bingham141 in her essay “Serving and Saving
Humanity” (11/18/09) in which she describes being “arrested, accused of being a spy,
interrogated and held in solitary confinement at Abu Ghraib” for eight days in March
2003 when Saddam Hussein still controlled Iraq. She describes how during her
imprisonment, Bingham sat “alone in a cold, dusty six-by-nine-foot concrete prison cell
with nothing but a wool blanket and the constant fear of death.” Bingham’s essay is a
way to overlook accounts of American torture of ‘enemy combatants’ at Abu Ghraib by
providing an account of Iraqi torture of an American, and a woman no less, which is
something the American military denies doing.

The earliest essay that discussed the topic of torture broadcast in 2005, written by
a familiar face and a familiar story, former American prisoner of war in Vietnam, U.S.
Senator John McCain. In John McCain’s essay142 “The Virtues of the Quiet Hero,”
McCain talks about his “determination to act with honor and integrity” and to “serve
causes greater than his own self-interest” (10/17/05). While it is well known that McCain
was captured and tortured during his deployment in Vietnam from 1967 to 1973 for his
refusals to yield to the demands of his captors, his This I Believe essay does not focus on
his struggle to protect his own honor while being held prisoner. Instead, McCain recounts
“an example of honor” that he witnessed “in the most surprising of places.” Held in
solitary confinement, tied in torture ropes, a guard silently entered McCain’s room during
the night to loosen his ropes, returning again in the morning to tighten them. Some
months later, that same guard drew a cross in the sand with his sandal to indicate to
McCain their shared Christian faith, taking a few moments to “venerate the cross” before
rubbing it out and walking away. Even under extreme conditions, McCain discovered the
humanity of the enemy, an enemy who he believed had faith not just in God, but like
McCain (and the U.S. Constitution), that “We are all equal and endowed by our Creator
with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” McCain’s essay

141 Molly Bingham’s essay “Serving and Saving Humanity” was broadcast on The Bob Edwards Show on
11/18/09.
142 John McCain’s essay “The Virtues of the Quiet Hero” was broadcast on All Things Considered on
10/17/05 and published in This I Believe (2006), as well as included in the special feature Religion and the
Holidays.
echoes Powell’s and Koh’s earlier sentiments on the almost-global lack of freedom, which, in their view, and the view of the U.S. state, warrants American intervention. McCain’s essay reiterates the conservative understanding that America’s status as a nation chosen by God is based on the simultaneously spiritual and national defense and global spread of freedom. David Domke argues that Christian fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals are motivated by the “great commission” biblical mandate from Matthew 28:19, which “instructs believers to ‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ (Domke and Coe, 2008:65). He explains that the command to spread Christianity is easiest to implement in “places where political and religious freedoms are present” and therefore “making sure that freedom and liberty flourish locally and globally is akin to doing God’s will” (Domke and Coe, 2008: 65).

The next essayist was a written by a Christian missionary and peace activist James Loney.143 Loney is a rare case of a non-American being broadcast on This I Believe. In his essay “All Beings are Interconnected” (7/2/07) Loney describes with chilling neutrality his day-to-day existence while being held hostage by Iraqi militants in Baghdad for 118 days in 2005 with three other men, one of whom was killed. The one who was killed was an American, Tom Fox, and I would argue that Loney’s essay is included in the series as an account of an instance of the torture and murder of an American, specifically a White Christian American. Loney’s essay tells the story that Fox cannot. Loney describes how the men were “handcuffed and chained” together in a “cold, paint-peeling, eternally gloomy, 10 by 12 foot room” by armed captors and he remembers feeling that he had “vanished off the face of the earth.” He provides a vignette of a particular thrill, when the captors “treated us to some Pepsi,” but contrary to listeners’ expectations, it was not the beverage, but the bottle, that the men were excited about. Loney explains that “it’s not easy to relieve yourself in urgent circumstances when your right and left had are handcuffed to someone else’s right and left hand. Sometimes, despite our most careful efforts, we ended up with an unfortunate mess.” To deal with this problem, the men employed an “Unfortunate Mess Rag,” and it is clear from Loney’s use of such code words and/or euphemisms that he is uncomfortable speaking about the

143 James Loney’s essay “All Beings Are Interconnected” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 07/02/07 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
shameful inability to control or clean up bodily functions. There is almost a ribald humor in the essay, as Loney goes on to describe how one of the captors they called “Uncle” unknowingly used the rag to clean his greasy fingers. These attempts to sanitize the experience of torture, as well as Loney’s omission of the necessarily gruesome details of his fellow companion’s death, add to the disturbing nature of the essay.

Loney then attempts to generalize the experience of terror, to argue that being held captive and holding captive are metaphors for understanding the relations of power within the wider world of nations. He argues that “there are many ways we can hold one another captive. It might be with a gun, an army, a holy book, a law, an invisible free market hand. It doesn’t matter how we do it, who we do it to, or why.” Like McCain, Loney attributes his captors’ actions to his lack of freedom, for although “Uncle” held “keys in one hand and gun in the other, his power over us seemed absolute, but he was not free. He said so himself on one of those interminable days when we asked him if he had any news about when we would be released. He pointed glumly to his wrists as if he himself were handcuffed and said ‘When you are free, I will be free.’” For Loney, freedom is only possible when “we turn away from dominating others” arguing that “whenever we soil someone else with violence, whether through a war, poverty, racism or neglect, we invariably soil ourselves.” Loney exposes the irony of liberal imperialism, revealing how liberal values like freedom are damaged by attempting to impose them by force. Ryan explains “a creed that insists on the value of choice is the last creed that should be rammed down anyone’s throat” (2012: 122).

Loney doesn’t specifically state in his essay that the United States dominates others, leaving his critique, at least in this context, vague. Arguably, his essay can be read as an account of an instance in which the United States was dominated through the hostage threat. Although Loney and Fox went to Iraq with the intention of intervening nonviolently to aid people they viewed as systematically oppressed, Fox was ultimately murdered by the people he saw as victims, negating his argument or at least making ambiguous with whom the responsibility for violence lies. Ultimately, Loney’s advocacy of freedom is motivated by a spiritual mission, as he concludes his essay by stating that ultimate freedom is achieved in communion with God, when we discover,
quoting St. Paul, one of the first Christian missionaries, the “glorious freedom of the children of God.”

4.4 “A Variety of Kettles Peacefully Share The Stove”

Following 9/11 many politicians, especially Democrats, advocated for tolerance. Democratic Senator from Massachusetts Edward Kennedy, cautioned Americans that “…it is wrong and irresponsible to jump to conclusions and make false accusations against Arabs and Muslims in our communities. Above all, we must guard against any acts of violence based on such bigotry. Please do your part in defending America's rich religious and ethnic diversity” (cited in Elaasar, 2004: 4). Similarly Democratic Representative from Michigan John Conyers implored, “We must ensure that these acts of terror do not slowly and subversively destroy the foundation of our democracy: a commitment to equal rights and equal protection” (cited in Elaasar, 2004: 4). In response, conservatives like Mark Steyn complained that “Liberals will tell you that ‘diversity is our strength’ while Talibanic enforcers cruise Greenwich Village burning books and barber shops [and] the Supreme Court decides sharia law doesn’t violate the ‘separation of church and state’” (2006: flap). Bannerji argues that the idea of diversity is a central tenant of liberalism, the “cornerstone of a pluralist liberal politics and its legitimation” (2000: 36). Diversity is also a much lauded value on NPR and This I Believe. For example, the This I Believe Special Feature called Life Lessons on Diversity, summarizes the collection with the following: “Diversity is a fact of life, and each day can bring a new experience with someone who may be racially, culturally or politically different from ourselves. So do we accept these encounters as a learning opportunity, or do we react with fear or prejudice?” There is also a This I Believe Special Feature called Tolerance which showcases an image of a black-skinned hand intertwined with a white hand. The summary for this collection reads “The French writer Voltaire called tolerance a ‘consequence of humanity’ and the first law of nature. Yet some of us practice it more successfully than others.” Tolerance, acceptance, and respect for diversity are important ideas on This I Believe, with the theme of tolerance garnering 1,518 essays in the browsable database. Because diversity is of central importance to the This I Believe audience, it is important to problematize the idea and examine how it operates as more than just a simple description of multiplicity.
Drawing from her work on Canadian multiculturalism, Himani Bannerji contends that diversity forms part of a “governing concept of a complex discourse of social power…and a device for social management of inequality” (Bannerji, 2000: 36). She explains that “diversity is not equal to multiplied sameness, rather it presumes a distinct difference in each instance…distinctly different from each other and whatever it is that is homogenous” (2000: 41). These differences signify both social value and power and are relational. Heterogeneous difference “suggests otherness” in relation to the ideologically homogenous “we” of the “essential quality of whiteness, the ideological signifier of a unified non-diversity” (Bannerji, 2000: 42). Drawing from his work on Australian multiculturalism, Ghassan Hage asserts that there is a distinction between those who embody “diversity” and those who tolerate/appreciate/value this supposed trait. Diversity is something exterior to the “we,” for “if we are diversity there would be nothing to ‘appreciate’ and value’ other than otherselves” (Hage, 2000: 140). As a result, those “diverse” others who exist “outside of this moral and cultural whiteness are targets for either assimilation or toleration” (Bannerji, 2000: 42). Scholars such as Bannerji and Hage are critical of the ideas of liberal multiculturalism, interrogating the ways ideas like diversity and tolerance reproduce dominant structures of power, including nationalist structures.

Within multiculturalism the discourse of enrichment is central to the discourses of diversity and tolerance. Ethnicized others are valued in so much as they enrich those belonging to the dominant culture. Hage explains that, “While the dominant White culture merely and unquestionably exists, migrant cultures exist for the later. Their value…lies in their function as enriching cultures” (2000: 121, emphases in text). This I Believe essays employ the discourse of enrichment whenever White Americans make positive references to foreign places they have travelled, foreign people they have met on their travels, or foreign cultural practices they experienced while on their travels. Positive evaluations of “diverse” ethnic cultures show up on This I Believe in casual references, such as in Robert Fulghum’s144 “Dancing All the Dances As Long as I Can” (10/28/07) where he recalls the wise words of an old Greek woman who convinced him to dance at a

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144 Robert Fulghum’s essay “Dancing All the Dances As Long as I Can” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 10/28/07 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
village wedding in Crete and his more recent trip to Buenos Aires to learn the tango; in Becky Herz’s “My Husband Will Call Me Tomorrow” (1/15/07) where she recounts the comfort of curling up with souvenir blankets from Guatemala and Peru to “warm the empty space in the bed” left by her deployed husband; or in Yolanda O’Bannon’s “Living What You Do Every Day” (11/6/06) where she describes how in order to cope with her embarrassment of serving coffee, she embraces her husband’s Tibetan heritage by imagining herself serving tea to a monk as a form of respect.

Occasionally, This I Believe essays are entirely devoted to positive descriptions of cultural diversity. One category of these positive evaluations are written by White Americans who have integrated a foreign cultural practice into their daily lives. These essayist can be considered what Hage calls “cosmo-multiculturalists,” people who express their class-acquired capital to appreciate ethnic diversity through their knowledge of “ethnic” music, food, and practices (2000). He defines the cosmo-multiculturalist as “an essentially ‘mega-urban’ figure detached from strong affiliations with roots and open to all forms of otherness…a class figure and a White person, capable of appreciating and consuming ‘high-quality’ commodities and cultures, including ‘ethnic culture’…as long as it knows and keeps to its place as a function or the cosmo-multiculturalist subject” (Hage, 2000: 201-202).

In “Sweet Friday,” Lena Ann Winkler (2/19/07) describes her adoption of the tradition of Tkbili P’araskevi or Sweet Friday, in which friends and family gather late Friday afternoon to share in sweets and each others’ company, a tradition that she learned while working for a non-profit in the Republic of Georgia. Every Friday afternoon in Georgia, the cooks, drivers, doctors, office staff, and bosses the author encountered would “convene in the basement kitchen to feast on cake,” connect, and relax. She confides how this tradition is helping her family to cope with “our uncertain and frighteningly divorce-dominated life. I feel a responsibility to keep up with small traditions like Sweet Friday and not slip into dread or self-pity.” She likens her family’s current emotional state to that of Georgia “collapsed and worried, but bright with

145 Yolanda O’Bannon’s essay “Living What You Do Every Day” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 11/26/06 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
146 Lena Ann Winkler’s essay “Sweet Friday” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 02/19/07.
personality, strength, and hope.” She finds that the “extravagant sweetness of the afternoon, the regularity of the occasion, the attention to detail, and the anticipation” all contribute to making this “indulgence” a tradition in her family.

In “The Perfection of Character” Angelina Michetti\(^{147}\) (10/23/06) explains her adherence to the Japanese philosophy of dojo-kun that is the foundation of her Shotokan karate-do practice. She tells how “my beliefs are an ancient system created for bodyguards who lived and died for their emperor. But I am alive and breathing in America in the 21\(^{st}\) century. My beliefs are a paradox. My Judeo-Christian heritage says strive to create a meaningful life. Have respect for others. Be peaceful. It’s all me. My being, my life. But my beliefs are also Japanese principles. There is no individual. No me. There is blind obedience.” These two essays illustrate how ethnic cultures “exist for” the benefit of White Americans who hold the power to value this culture positively or negatively.

Another category of positive evaluations of ethnic cultures are written by ethnicized Americans describing their ‘own’ cultural practices. The function of the essays of these ethnicized Americans is to exhibit ‘their’ culture as a representation of the cultural diversity that America has, to be “living fetishes deriving their significance from the White organizing principle that controls and positions them within the [American] social space” (Hage, 2000:161). There are no This I Believe essays broadcast by ethnicized Americans about their international travels to foreign places to learn the tango or eat pastries, nor any about their practicing a martial art. This is because within the White nation fantasy that is central to American nation-ness, these essayists are imagined as having no will, and their cultures are imagined as mummified; they exist and come to life only as a part of America’s multicultural collection (Hage, 2000). The essays for the most part reflect racist stereotypes, for example Sommer and Harjo’s essays both portray indigenous cultures as primitive, shamanistic and connected to nature, whilst Taw’s essay describes Southeast Asians in an Orientalist manner, as exotic, ancient, and cavorting with primates, and finally Ma’s essay essentializes nationalist character stereotypes of China, France, and the United States.

\(^{147}\) Angelina Michetti’s essay “The Perfection of Character” was broadcast on Morning Edition on 10/23/06.
In her essay, “Learning to Trust My Intuition,” Cynthia Sommer\(^{148}\) (7/10/06) describes her reacceptance of her Chicano, Latino, and indigenous identified parts of herself which she had left behind in her quest for a career in business. She claims that she comes from a culture which acknowledges the supernatural, is closely aligned with nature, and embraces intuition. She recalls how she “grew up with a grandmother who administered herbal home remedies, and applied concoctions like olive oil and salt to bumps on the head. She also listened as we retold our dreams, helping to decipher their meanings.” Sommer talks about her transition to executive director of a cultural arts center, where artists used culture to express their intuition through Danza Azteca Flor y Canto, or teatro, and where she discovered her totem animal the lizard, which urged her to listen to her own intuition. In “A Sacred Connection to the Sun (7/8/07),” Native American poet Joy Harjo\(^{149}\) describes how indigenous peoples experience a spiritual and familial connection to the sun that is maintained through rituals, despite the onslaught of modernity. She explains, “When explorers first encountered my people (emphasis added), they called us heathens, sun worshippers. They didn’t understand that the sun is a relative and illuminates our path on this earth. Many of us continue ceremonies that ensure a connection with the sun…. there is no mistaking this connection, though Wal-Mart might be just down the road.” Harjo describes how even when in New York City, she maintains her indigenous rituals, presenting her newborn granddaughter to the sun in the middle of Times Square, standing “beneath a 21st century totem pole of symbols of multinational corporations, made of flash and neon.”

In “Finding Prosperity by Feeding Monkeys,” Harold Taw\(^{150}\) (11/14/05) writes about his struggle in the United States to continue his birthday ritual of feeding monkeys to bring prosperity to his family, a ritual bestowed upon him when he was born in Myanmar by a blind, Buddhist monk living alone in the Burmese jungle. In the Burmese jungle, “monkeys were as common as pigeons,” but in America, “feeding monkeys meant

\(^{148}\) Cynthia Sommer’s essay “Learning To Trust My Intuition” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 07/10/06 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
\(^{149}\) Joy Harjo’s essay “A Sacred Connection to the Sun” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 07/08/07.
\(^{150}\) Harold Taw’s essay “Finding Prosperity By Feeding Monkeys” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 11/14/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
violating the rules” and lead Taw to all kinds of monkey-finding adventures, in zoos, pet stores, and laboratories. Finally, in his essay “A Musician of Many Cultures,” Yo-Yo Ma151 (3/10/08) born in Paris to Chinese parents and raised in America, describes his identity as comprised of these three different cultures. Ma explains that initially he tried to choose to “be” just one national culture to the exclusion of the others, but when that wasn’t “comfortable,” he “selected” the “values” from each that would “become part of who I was.” Essentializing the national cultures, Ma integrated into his identity what was “unique” from each: “the cultural depth and longevity of my Chinese heritage, the deep artistic traditions of the French, and the American commitment to opportunity and the future.” He then explains how he has explored many “musical traditions” and has found that like his own identity, “creative power exists at the intersection of cultures.” Each of these essays embodies a neo-racist understanding of cultural differences, suggesting that there are inherent, essential differences between different ‘kinds’ of people from different, always homogenized “nations” and/or “cultures” (Balibar, 1991).

Joel Engardio152 in the essay “Learning True Tolerance’ (11/25/07) uses a metaphor for explaining tolerance that is useful for understanding the multiculturalist perspective of the White nationalist manager. Engardio explains, “We don’t have to be each other’s cup of tea, but tolerance lets a variety of kettles peacefully share the stove.” Within multiculturalism, each diverse culture must be objectified, numbered, and positioned within its own space (one teapot per burner), each contributing what Hage would call the value of “unpreturbing enrichment” to the “economy of otherness” (too crowded with more than four teapots per stove) (Hage, 2000: 122). Ethnic others are positioned inside the nation on the stove, but at the same time, they are kept symbolically separate within it, neither totally included nor totally excluded. The national manager uses the practices of tolerance to “produce and regulate the value of togetherness, to maximize the homely feeling of the White [Americans] positioned at its centre” (Hage, 2000: 128).

151 Yo-Yo Ma’s essay “A Musician of Many Cultures” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 03/08/08 and published in This I Believe II (2008).
152 Joel Engardio’s essay “Learning True Tolerance” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 11/25/07 and published in This I Believe II (2008), as well as included in the special features Tolerance.
As argued in previous chapters, *This I Believe* is a format for those nationalists who claim to inhabit the national will to attempt to exercise and reproduce their governmental belonging, to feel in control of ‘their’ nation. The kinds of violence explored in the previous section can be understood as nationalist practices of exclusion exercised by what Hage would call “Evil White Nationalists,” while the kinds of tolerance explored in this section can be understood as nationalist practices of inclusion, exercised by what Hage would call “Good White Nationalists” (2000). Hage argues that both the evil and good practices of White Nationalists “emanate from the same structure of categorization of national otherness, but they are different deployments of this structure in different contexts” (2000:107). In other words, both practices rely on ethnicizing and ideas of difference in order to manage national space, one by removing the Other from the nation, one by positioning the Other differentially within the nation. Hage explains that tolerance and intolerance coexist within multicultural societies because those who have been asked to refrain from intolerance still retain the capacity to exercise this power and experience a reaffirmation of their position of power in their ability to exercise their intolerance at will. Tolerant and intolerant nationalists exist on a continuum, only differing in opinion on the conditions of inclusion/exclusion and how the Othered ought to be managed within national space (2000).

Arguing from the position of a nationalist manager, the essay “Be Cool to the Pizza Dude” (5/15/05) by Sarah Adams reveals how the acts of toleration and acceptance act as exclusionary forces on the tolerated and accepted. Adams’ essay describes her White national fantasy of how “difference” should be managed, through the deceptively playful metaphor of pizza delivery. In the essay, Adams implicitly likens the pizza delivery man’s car to the statue of liberty, whose light atop his “rusted Chevette glows like a beacon,” bringing sustenance to all who seek him “young and old, families and singletons, gays and straights, blacks, whites, and browns, rich and poor, vegetarians and meat lovers alike” (2005). As listeners know perfectly well, those who seek the sustenance of the statue of liberty are immigrants, and in using this pizza metaphor, Adams suggests that America is still the land of equality, a melting pot where differences

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153 Sarah Adams’ essay “Be Cool to the Pizza Dude” was broadcast on *All Things Considered* on 05/15/05 and published in *This I Believe* (2006).
of all kinds can be accommodated. Such melting is directly referenced in her quip, “In the big pizza wheel of life, sometimes you’re the hot bubbly cheese and sometimes you’re the burnt crust. It’s good to remember the fickle spinning of that wheel.”

Adams’ essay is a form of what Bourdieu calls “symbolic violence” in her attempt to relativize differently positioned social categories, likening for example racial identity to dietary preference. Her essay is also ideological in its effort to mystify the causes of social inequalities, arguing that power differentials (bubbly or burnt) are random, rather than structurally organized. Using this “strategy of condescension,” Adams profits from the symbolic denial of social distance between these hierarchical positions, while simultaneously reinforcing the social distance (Hage, 2000:87). Adams blatantly states that there are social rewards for practicing tolerance, which are “a grateful universe” (read: immigrants who are supposedly ingratiated to the dominant for choosing not to overtly exclude them) which will bring you “happy luck in return” (2005). Through her concurrent assertion of both social proximity (we all eat pizza) and distance (but you were unlucky enough to get the burnt crust) Adams avoids the negative accusation of discrimination and results in such favorable assessments as “He/she is tolerant for someone who has the power not to be” (Hage, 2000: 87).

Pizza delivery men are often immigrants and so Adams’ imagery can also be interpreted as representing the grateful, soon-to-be upwardly mobile beneficiary of Americanness. Adams goes on to flex her nationalist will by describing how she feels about these supposedly upwardly mobile immigrants and the nation-state that purportedly services the needs of all of these different groups of people. Adams explains that “Sometimes when I have become so certain of my ownership of my lane, daring anyone to challenge me, the pizza dude speeds by me…remind[ing] me to check myself as I flow through the world.” She states that “As he journeys, I give safe passage, practice restraint, show courtesy, and contain my anger.” Here we can read the pizza man’s poor driving to symbolize the immigrant who does not yet know the rules of the ‘road’ (read nation). But as a Good White nationalist, Adams exercises tolerance towards those with less national capital than she has. Relations of power are not challenged in the discourse of tolerance, because importantly, “when those who are intolerant are asked to be tolerant, their power to be intolerant is not taken away from them. It is, in fact, reasserted by the very request

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not to exercise it,” as Adams essay makes quite clear that she is practicing restraint (Hage, 2000: 85). Adams explains “I am the equal to all that I meet because of the kindness in my heart.” Tolerance is therefore a practice, not an attitude, and it is a practice which originates from position of power and facilitates the positioning of the Other by setting limits on belonging. Hage claims that “behind every White multiculturalist affecting a position of respectability…there is another White gleefully grinning and saying ‘Good on you,’…‘You show them’…or ‘She’s so naughty’” (2000: 246). This idea is captured in Adam’s photo that is included with the essay, a portrait of her with a twinkle in her eye and a coy smile on her face that is being discreetly covered by her hand. Adam’s portrait embodies both positions, revealing the fundamental affinity and ultimate complicity between the “good” and the “evil” White nationalist, as Hage, tongue-in-cheek, puts it.

Many of the *This I Believe* essayists writing about what they perceive to be the morally good practice of tolerance are caught up in what Hage calls, the “fantasy” of the White nation. Despite their desire to negate the extremist evil nationalist practices of outright exclusion and physical violence, they “share and inhabit along with the White ‘evil’ nationalists the same imaginary position of power within a nation imagined as ‘theirs’” (Hage, 2000: 79). As the following essays will demonstrate, from Hayne’s attempts to manage diversity, to Hardings’ search for connection, to Haibi’s desire to accept, to Chaston’s strategy of commonalities, all of these White American men “share in the conviction that they are, in one way or another, masters of national space, and that it is up to them” to debate and decide and to worry over how ethnicized Others, “as silent and passive objects to be governed” ought to be “welcomed, abused, defended, made accountable, analyzed, and measured” (Hage, 2000:17).

In his *This I Believe* essay “Inviting the World to Dinner,” (01/12/09) American expatriate Jim Haynes describes the weekly Sunday Salons he holds in his Paris atelier for the “first 50 or 60 people who call” in which he attempts to “introduce everyone in the whole world to each other.” Haynes is known for his unusual travel guidebooks to

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154 Jim Haynes’ essay “Inviting the World to Dinner” was broadcast on *All Things Considered* on 01/12/09 and published in *This I Believe: Life Lessons* (2009), as well as included in special features *2009 in Review, Travel,* and *Life Lessons Learned From Strangers.*
nine Eastern European countries and Russia, in which rather than describe the local sites, instead contain “short biographies of people who would be willing to welcome travelers into their cities.” Haynes appears to be a collector of sorts, outlining with pride the unusual “specimens” attending a “typical mix” at one of his dinners: “a Dutch political cartoonist, a beautiful painter from Norway, a truck driver from Arizona, a bookseller from Atlanta, a newspaper editor from Sydney, students from all over, and travelling retirees.” This is a fairly non-threatening mix, mostly intellectuals from Western countries, despite Haynes claim that “People from all corners of the world come… All ages, nationalities, races, and professions gather here.” Haynes’s dinners are a kind of performance attended by multicultural people who enhance Haynes’s value through his exhibition of them. Hage explains that it is this “relationship of power between the exhibitor and the exhibited that is on show and from which the exhibitor derives his or her capital” (2000:153). The celebration of multicultural diversity is really then an appreciation of the capacity of the exhibitor to classify, collect, control, and exhibit ethnicized otherness (Hage, 2000). And like the national manager who fantasizes that he can control “ethnic mixing” within national space, measuring proper proportions and diluting concentrations, so too Haynes imagines that he plays a role in directing the performance: purposely providing no organized seating to encourage mingling, making a point to “remember everyone’s name on the guest list and where they’re from and what they do so I can introduce them to one another” in the hopes that they will connect and form friendships, marriages, and even produce babies.

Haynes fits the profile of the cosmo-multiculturalist and imagines himself as a kind of international manager, paraphrasing one of the first (British) American writers on human rights, revolutionary Thomas Paine, “Like Tom Paine, I am a world citizen. All human history is mine. My roots cover the earth.” Hage explains that collectors operate within a “fantasy of total power, a yearning for complete control” and, indeed, Haynes’s statement takes his imperialist fantasy to phantasmic proportions. Hayne’s describes his approach to dealing with otherness as one of tolerance. He contends that “I have long believed that it is unnecessary to understand others, individuals, or nationalities; one must, at the very least, simply tolerate others. Tolerance can lead to respect and finally, to love. No one can ever really understand anyone else, but you can love them or at least
accept them.” Here again, Haynes displays his powerful position in the binary between tolerator/tolerated, respectful/respected, lover/loved, acceptor/accepted as he encourages others in the powerful position not to exercise their power, not be intolerant, disrespectful, hateful, or rejecting. Haynes clearly states that the purpose of multiculturalism is not to “understand” difference, not to understand the reality of ethnicized Others from their own point of view. Haynes’ finishes his essay with a command, “Ok, now come and dine,” a final authoritative exhibition of his power over his diverse collection of guests whom he hosts.

Another This I Believe essayist known for his collection of performances with ethnicized Others is Matt Harding, an internet celebrity known for his viral videos which show him dancing with people from over 70 countries on all seven continents. In his essay, “Connecting to a Global Tribe,” (03/29/09), Harding describes his insights into the human condition and his own responses to living in a globalized world. His early videos show Harding dancing alone at national landmarks around the world, as he documents the United States’ global dominion, exercising his power to literally stomp all over the world, having a party for one, without ever engaging the people who live in these places. This I Believe provides a clip of the video, “Where the Hell is Matt 2008.” In his most recent videos, Harding dances with people from around the world to the same Western pop song, taking special care to stage the performances and the performers to emphasize their national and racial differences, and to identify where in the world the dancing is taking place. Performers from Western nations are predominantly White, wearing Western clothing and dancing in large choreographed groups in front of cityscapes, like a plaza with a fountain in Seville, Spain, a ballroom in Vienna, Austria, above the cityscape of Edinburgh, Scotland beside the ruins of a castle, or on the steps of a fire station in League City, Texas. In contrast, performers from non-Western nations are predominantly non-White, wearing “traditional” “ethnic” clothing, dancing with local instruments and according to “local custom,” in front of rural scenes. For example, in Lesedi, South Africa, Harding wiggles his hips with a costumed man wearing a giant mask in front of a thatch hut while two men play drums in the background. In Bali,

155 Matt Harding’s essay “Connecting to a Global Tribe” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 03/29/09.
Indonesia, young women in long skirts with sashes stretch out their arms and sway their hips down the stairs of ruins. In Al-Muzahmiyya, Saudi Arabia, men in white tunics and pants wearing turbans dance on a rug in the desert with drums. In Torolj, Mongolia, a man and a woman in bright tunics and hats stand in front of two ponies on a tundra with a mountain in the back. And, in Poria, New Guinea, two men with face paint, feathered headdress, and bark skirts struggle to mimic Harding’s awkward movements. Like Haynes, Harding is a collector of multicultural diversity, striving through four videos to collect as much “diversity” as possible, and gaining prestige and sponsorship through his capacity to exhibit and sell ethnic otherness.

In his essay, Harding takes a kind of social evolutionist position in which he describes how his “caveman brain” feels “threatened” when meeting people outside of his “tribe” who “look or behave differently.” By employing the word “tribe,” Harding is reproducing the colonialist language of ‘primitive,’ ‘uncivilized’ ‘races’ whose difference from the colonizers are interpreted as inferiorities which legitimate their exploitation. Harding admits that he is “fantastic at seeing differences” and submits that “everybody is.” He finds that he must actively “override the tendency” to feel afraid and work to “see before the differences…the things that are the same.” In his admittance that differences make him afraid, Harding suggests that difference is more than a descriptive term, more than “heterogeneity without implied power relations, ulterior aim or use” (Bannerji, 2000:35). Moreover, his binary of difference/sameness is a nationalist one, in which in his desire to force a feeling of sameness, Harding is speaking in the voice of the (inter)nationalist manager, setting the terms of how best to position the ethnicized Other in order to order to synthesize some kind of ideologically homogenous “we” that can be used to govern this diversity. Despite his own and others’ “need to feel connected to one another” Harding struggles to “reduce and contain my exposure to a world that’s way too big for me to comprehend.” He finds that dancing with people, seeing them “smile and laugh and act ridiculous,” reduces the sense of difference and discomfort he feels. Harding realizes that he doesn’t “need to travel to influence lives on the other side of the

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156 Harding is sponsored by 23 and Me, South African Airlines, Google Earth, and Visa (Where the Hell is Matt.com)
globe,” and that “like it or not” his “tribe” has grown into “a single, impossibly vast social network.”

Haynes and Harding appreciate diversity through enriching dinners and dancing with ethnicized Others. In contrast, the next two essayists tolerate diversity under conditions of war, working together with ethnicized Others to achieve common goals. In “Untold Stories of Kindness,” U.S. military medic and blogger Sergeant Ernesto Haibi 157 (11/13/06) describes the human extremes he witnessed while on tour in Iraq, “I saw bravery from both soldier and civilian, and I saw horror and destruction from them, too. I saw hate and loathing from all sides, and I saw caring for children, rebuilding of hospitals and schools, and feeding the poor. Not by a government but by individuals, by one man [sic] helping another man [sic].” He explains that for all of the news stories of “death and destruction,” Haibi says that there are “thousands” of untold stories of “kindness and caring.” Haibi recounts an eight-hour firefight he was in with Zarqawi insurgents after they killed over one hundred “innocent civilians” and how when it was over, Iraqi civilians and American troops worked together to “help out.” But he complains that “it shouldn’t take a war for people to get along.” He claims to recognize the humanity of people in all of their complexity, stating that he believes in “mankind—not gods, devils, not angels, and not spirits.” Haibi thinks that the passions that lead to “wars, intolerance, religious persecution, and political extremism” ought to be redirected towards “acceptance” through the recognition of “oneness,” such that “the zealot, politician, soldier, and outsider can come to a place where man [sic] is just that: man [sic].” Unfortunately, Haibi’s desire for oneness is defeated by his own words, as he reifies contested categories like zealot or outsider, as well as his call for a unity of man, to the immediate exclusion of half of the world’s population, women. Bannerji emphasizes that desiring unity without addressing the role of power relations, is a “reductionism that hides the social relations of domination that continually create ‘difference’ as inferior and thus signifies continuing relations of antagonism” (2000:97). As discussed throughout this dissertation, nationalism as a theory depends on the discourse of unification for its

157 Ernesto Haibi’s essay “Untold Stories of Kindness” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 11/12/06 and published in This I Believe II (2008), as well as included in the special features Decency and Veteran’s Day.
legitimation, the nation needs to “imagine a principle of ‘com-unity,’” to believe that it exists to serve “the common good,” (Bannerji, 2000: 97). Bannerji contends that nationalism uses the discourse of multiculturalism in order to “neutralize” difference by asserting that the sources of “otherizing differences” are nothing more than cultural diversity, denying that they are organized through relations of class, gender, and racism (Bannerji, 2000:96-97).

Retired U.S. Sergeant Major Larry Chaston,158 in his essay “Becoming Friends,” (11/29/07) similarly struggles to acknowledge the power relations inherent to relationships based on identities. He opens his essay with the belief that “when people find their commonalities they can get along and become friends.” His essay centers around a problem he faced while stationed at a firebase in Afghanistan. Mimicking official U.S. state discourse, Chaston says his mission was to “gain back their freedom” for the local “Pastoon”159 people who had long suffered under the “fundamentalist ideas” of the Al-Qaeda, “to win their hearts as well as their minds.” The main obstacle he describes is that the soldiers were Christians [and Chaston makes sure to put in parenthesis “Catholic, Mormon, and Protestant,” as though it is very important to him to note the differences between the three denominations] and thus considered “infidels.” Its unclear from Chaston’s essay how he knows that the soldiers were Christian, nor does he mention whether they were actively religious or not. What is clear is that this identity was antithetical, at least in the minds of the villagers, to Islam. The problem that the soldiers and villagers shared was the rebuilding of a destroyed mosque, but because the soldiers were not Muslim, they “could accidentally desecrate it with thoughtless acts,” and thus the villagers rejected their assistance. Chaston was intent to complete his mission and gives off the impression that he did not take the Muslim concerns of defilement seriously, rather he sought to find ways around what he perceived to be a trivial problem—“I told Abdul we were the same: we both believed in strong family, we both honored the laws of Moses, and we both prayed to the same God.” Abdul was not convinced by these so-

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158 Larry Chaston’s essay “Becoming Friends” was included on 11/29/07 in the special features Life Lessons Learned From Strangers and Life Lessons on Diversity, and published in This I Believe: Life Lessons (2011).

159 More commonly spelled “Pashtun,” alternatives include Pushhtn, Pakhtun, Pukhtun, Pathan or Pastoon. For another instance of the “pastoon” spelling, see Ross-Sheriff, 2006.
called shared beliefs and asked, “Do you pray to Allah?” Not to be defeated by a
technicality, Chaston replied, “I pray to the God of Abraham,” and this was acceptable to
Abdul that they could work together. The solution arrived at was that the military would
pay “a local architect to design the mosque, local laborers to build it, and all of the
materials, the bricks and logs, from local suppliers,” while also “providing security and
support.” The mosque is rebuilt and Chaston concludes that by working together, “the
infidels and the Pastoons,” they have successfully “repaired the damage al-Qaeda had
done to the community.” Thus, Chaston’s example of “becoming friends” documents
how he strategically used the religious beliefs of the villagers in order to achieve his own
(political/militaristic) goals.

Chaston provides another example of supposedly finding commonalities to
achieve joint goals by describing how his executive officer, a farmer from Idaho, desired
to “destroy all of the unexploded rockets in the surrounding fields” and went house to
house “offer[ing] to destroy the ordnance to keep the children safe.” The village farmers
and fathers also desired the removal of the explosives and came to the officer directly to
show him where the bombs were located and request their removal. Chaston concludes
with a Christian reflection about how “God has placed each of us on this earth with a
mission, part of which is to get along with our brothers and sisters, no matter what their
creed or culture.” Chaston’s idea of “getting along” seems equivalent to tolerance
especially when “creed or culture” are seen as obstacles to be overcome, rather than tools
for finding connections. His final words are that “when people find their commonalities,
they are more likely to come together and become friends, even under the most stressful
conditions.” Whilst “commonness” has been offered as a solution for overcoming
identities based on difference, the kind of commonness that Chaston describes is different
from Sharma’s idea of “commonality” where relationships of diversity are formed
through “empathies and connections [which] are based in practice” (2006). The practices
that the soldiers and the villagers share are rooted in unequal, imperial relations of power.
It would be extremely difficult for Afghans to feel friendship toward American soldiers,
even if they occasionally pay to rebuild a Mosque or remove ordnance, when under the
duress of those “stressful conditions” that Chaston mentions. Friendship is impossible
when thousands of Afghan civilians are being killed yearly by U.S. soldiers, drones, and
bombs, and treated inhumanly by U.S. soldiers, documenting a complete lack of empathy on the part of American soldiers (Human Rights Watch, 2008).  

In this final essay, “We Are Each Other’s Business,” (11/7/05), Noble Peace Prize Forum keynote speaker, Eboo Patel attempts a critique of multiculturalism, but is unable to transcend the limiting categories which organize social difference because his thinking is structured through the symbolic violence of nationalism. Patel opens his essay by clearly positioning himself within the nation as an American Muslim, citing the same quote from the Quran that Billoo from the previous chapter cited, “I created you into diverse nations and tribes that you may come to know one another,” and declaring his faithfulness to the ideals of the nation, “I believe America is humanity’s best opportunity to make God’s wish that we come to know one another a reality.” Once Patel has finished demonstrating his right to speak on behalf of the nation, he launches into a critique of the iconic Norman Rockwell illustration “Freedom of Worship.” He describes the illustration thusly:

A Muslim holding a Quran in his hands stands near a Catholic woman fingering her rosary. Other figures have their hands folded in prayer and their eyes and their eyes filled with piety. They stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the same direction, comfortable with the presence of one another and yet apart. It is a vivid depiction of a group living in peace with its diversity, yet not exploring it.

Patel critiques this normative depiction of religious pluralism by acknowledging that “we live in a world where the forces that seek to divide us are strong” and in such a world it is not enough to “be comfortable with the presence of one another, and yet apart. We must do more than simply stand next to one another in silence” (2005). Patel thinks that diversity needs to be “explored” and that we need to “come to know one another.” He believes like other good nationalists, that diversity is enriching, something to be valued, quoting African-American poet Gwendolyn Brooks who writes, “We are each other’s business; we are each other’s harvest; we are each other’s magnitude and bond” (Patel, 2005).

Photographs document U.S. soldiers urinating on Afghan corpses, posing with dismembered Afghan corpses, as well as the treatment of enemy combatants in American prison camps (Hanifi, 2012).

Eboo Patel’s essay “We Are Each Other’s Business” broadcast on Morning Edition on 11/07/05 and published in This I Believe (2006), as well as included in the special features Faith and Life and Standing Up to Bullies.
Patel tells a story from his youth growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, where he ate lunch with “a Jew, a Mormon, a Hindu, a Catholic, and a Lutheran” (Patel, 2005). During these meals he and his friends would enact the Norman Rockwell illustration, as different religious practices regarding food were tolerated in silence, no questions asked, and no explanations offered deeper than “my mom said.” In the hallways, he ignored the anti-Semitic slurs directed at his Jewish friend, neither confronting the racists nor comforting his friend. Patel recalls how his Jewish friend confided in him that “he feared coming to school those days, and he felt abandoned as he watched his close friends do nothing. Hearing him tell me of his suffering and my complicity is the single most humiliating experience of my life.” Patel now realizes that “action” is necessary in order for what he calls “pluralism” to flourish.

Patel hopes to prevent religious extremism and intolerance through his work as an interfaith youth organizer. Within his organization, young people discover the beliefs that diverse religions share in common. During this historical moment, when political violence is understood as the outcome of religious extremism, ideas like Patel’s are controversial, as there is significant anti-Muslim sentiment among the religious and political right. For example, New York Republican representative Peter King held a series of Homeland Security Committee hearings on “The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response” justifying the hearings on the claims that “80 percent of American mosques are radicalized” and that “the Muslim community does not cooperate [with authorities] anywhere near to the extent that it should,” calling American Muslims “an enemy living amongst us” (Sargent, 2011).

Patel’s essay is the only essay on This I Believe that problematizes the practice of tolerance; however, by utilizing the problematic formulation of “identities” Patel ultimately reinforces the persistence and naturalness of social differences. By identifying himself as an “American Muslim” and by grouping people into “diverse nations and tribes” Patel uses nationalist modes of social organization and by stating his belief in “America as humanity’s opportunity,” he extends the ideas of American exceptionalism set forth by Powell and others discussed in this chapter. By referring to terrorists or religious extremists as the divisive forces in the world, he fails to acknowledge other contested divisions produced by racism, class inequalities, patriarchies, or heterosexism.
Similarly, by categorizing his friends by their religious identities, “a Jew, a Mormon, a Hindu, a Catholic, and a Lutheran,” he maintains that there are distinct differences between them. By grounding his basis for commonness within national and religious ideas, rather than shared lived experiences, his vision of “pluralism” is ultimately unable to transcend the limitations of multiculturalism and acknowledge the fluid solidarities that develop between people through cooperation and linkages of multiple and shifting mobilities (Sharma, 2006).

4.5 “Our Own Moral Compass”

In this chapter I explored how This I Believe essayists’ imagination of difference is a critical component to the maintenance of their sense of national belonging. I identified various ideological and discursive tools that the essayists employed for conceptualizing and talking about their relationships with people constituted as foreigners. Discourses of American exceptionalism, benevolent supremacy, human rights feminism, culture talk, terrorism, diversity, and tolerance expressed by the essayists on This I Believe work to subtly prepare its audience to view foreigners and even certain nationals denied a governmental sense of belonging, as potentially threatening and, when necessary, priming this audience to support the imperialist practices of the nation-state against those defined as outside the embrace of national subjecthood. The This I Believe essayists use of concepts like freedom or diversity make it difficult for them to develop an awareness of how imperialism operates and hard for them to comprehend the social, political and economic causations of acts of terror. When the United States is imagined to reluctantly take up the burden of empire in order to save the world’s people from themselves, when the United States is seen as the victim, rather than the perpetrator of terror, when the United States is believed to be the bastion of that crucial White democratic-tolerance-freedom-of-speech essence, the result is a total misunderstanding about the reality of international relations and U.S. foreign policy. By imagining Others, foreign or domestic, as objects to be removed or positioned, to be excluded or conditionally included, tortured or tolerated, reproduces the relations of power wherein the White American governmental subject is the central figure within the fantasy space of the White nation.
Through the essays, I showed how Evil White Nationalists and Good White nationalists each are merely positions on a spectrum, each holding lower and higher thresholds of tolerance, but each equally possessing the power to exercise or suspend their capacity to be tolerant, and each totally committed to realizing a fantasy of national space through the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others. I argued following Hage that there is a relationship between the way that ethnicized Others are treated within and outside of the nation. The message of the existence of prison camps like Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib is not only to threaten the wills of the foreign ‘terrorists,’ but also to caution against the activation of the wills of domestic ethnicized Others. This becomes evident though the post 9/11 disappearances of Muslim immigrant men into what has been described as the “vast system of American immigration prisons…[which] now hold more than 200,000 people each year” (Nguyen, 2005:7).

President Obama hoped to distance himself from those who would condone U.S. practices of terror. Upon taking office, one of President Obama’s first acts was to issue an executive order limiting the powers of American interrogators and circumscribing enhanced interrogation techniques. He justified this act by stating “Today we are engaged in a deadly global struggle for those who would intimidate, torture, and murder people for exercising the most basic freedoms. If we are to win this struggle and spread those freedoms, we must keep our own moral compass pointed in a true direction” (cited in Simons, 2012). However, by positing evil, torturing terrorists who hate freedom against good, innocent Americans who love democracy, Obama perpetuates the same ideological framework of freedom which lies at the heart of the neoconservative approach to international politics and has been a long-standing rhetorical strategy of United States presidents. This is not surprising considering that both evil and good nationalists share the same fantasy structure of the White Nation. In chapter five, “Finding New Pride in America,” I will discuss Obama’s contested position within the national field of power and explain why many liberals consider Obama to be a Good White Nationalist.

Since his election, President Obama has continued and sometimes expanded President Bush’s counterterrorism practices, including military commissions, indefinite detentions, and drones, setting his limit—rhetorically only-- at torture, as evidenced by the continued operation of Guantanamo Prison. Since Obama has been in office, there has
been a fourteen percent increase in the percentage of Americans who support the use of torture, now forty-one percent (Zegart, 2012). According to the professor who created the survey, “Respondents in 2012 are more pro-waterboarding, pro-threatening prisoners with dogs, pro-religious humiliation, and pro-forcing-prisoners-to-remain-naked-and-chained-in-uncomfortable-positions-in-cold-rooms” and pro-assassinating terrorists than in 2005 (Zegart, 2012). Zegart found statistically significant results that it is the media, especially spy-themed entertainment, which has influenced this increased approval for torture. From this analysis of This I Believe essays, we can see that the fundamentals for intolerance, including torture of the other, are a banal part of nationalism and embedded in even the most tolerant of media formats, like This I Believe. While many liberals believe that “George W. Bush [was] an illegitimate leader who has destroyed the righteous values established by the ‘Founding Fathers’ of American society (supposedly freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness),” the persistence of the war on terror against ethnicized Others shows how “changing the ‘representative’ while leaving the social relations that organize particular experiences intact” is an ineffective strategy for social change (Sharma, 2006: 127).
5. “Finding New Pride in America”

To proclaim “I Believe” is commonly considered a Christian statement of faith. On National Public Radio’s This I Believe, listeners are asked to write and share essays about what they believe. Essayists are instructed to describe the “core values that guide their daily lives” and each essay contains within it at least once the affirmation, “I Believe…” (www.thisibelieve.org). National public radio successfully appeals to individuals labeled as “inner directed” and “socially conscious,” individuals for whom public radio serves as a kind of “secular church” according to public radio producer Larry Josephson (Mitchell, 2005:133; Tolan, 1996). Josephson goes on to say that public radio holds a “moral contract” with these listeners, charged by the 1967 Carnegie Commission to “provide a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard” in return for the financial and political support of its audience (McCourt, 1999: 4). Such religious language is also expressed on This I Believe, as host Jay Allison reflects how “These essays are more like prayers than sermons. They do not contain counsel for others as such. They hold, instead, the wrestling and reckoning of individuals wanting to make things clear to themselves” (Allison, 2008: 8). The radio program This I Believe is not overtly religious, but I contend that it is in part a liberal reaction to the faith-based politics driven by Christian conservatives which have dominated public discourse and policy since the Reagan administration, a politics in which “God and country [were] fused” (Domke and Coe, 2008: 138). In an effort to show that conservatives do not own the public discourse on morality, This I Believe describes itself as “a way to demonstrate that those who don’t identify strongly with a particular creed or theology also believe deeply in core values which bring meaning to their lives” (This I Believe HOW Manual: 4).

The search for a morally resonant discourse by the listeners of This I Believe is part of the struggle to define the ideological borders of the nation, to name what constitutes ‘Americanness’ and contest who should and should not belong. Importantly, as discussed in the chapter “The America I Believe In” it is not only the stranger who causes anxiety, but also the neighbor, people who share the same space as ‘us,’ but who are not like ‘us,’ in this instance, because of religious and political differences. During the eight years of the Bush Administration, Democrats lost their aristocratic status as the
“natural disinterested protector and guardian of an equally natural national order” (Hage, 2000: 67). Whiteness is not monolithic, it is not an essential, nor a stable category, rather it is a field of power in which ruling groups compete amongst themselves for domination, for the right to manage national space and impose its own symbolic violence. For liberals, their unique vision of the White nation was in crisis, threatened by the religious fundamentalism of conservative Republicans. Hage argued that for Evil White nationalists in Australia, the loss of their privileged sense of governmental belonging was experienced as “a loss of the national reality that has acted as their support” leading to a “fear of insignificance” (Hage, 2000: 219). It would seem that Good White nationalists in the United States experience similar feelings when the national order that they identify as their own no longer feels like ‘home,’ as they worry about the fate of the liberal nation and their location within it, and seek to reestablish the hegemony of liberal nationalist.

This I Believe is thus also a response to the supposed lack of a Democratic Party consensus about “what values the party represents and the relative ordering of those values” (Domke, 2004: 171). Writing in the wake of John Kerry’s 2004 presidential race defeat, political analysts contended “people don’t know what it is the party stands for…Democrats must say loud and clear what it is they believe in” (Carville & Begala, 2006: 3-4). This I Believe claims to offer its listeners the opportunity to talk about morality, to say what they believe in, and to find out what they have in common through what This I Believe describes as “basic human beliefs that do not divide us, but that serve the commons: social justice, hard work, creativity, gratitude, kindness, service, a search for meaning amid the mystery of life and death” (Allison, 2008:7). All of the essays on This I Believe contain the statement, “I Believe…” One way to understand belief is to contrast it with the ability to know. To “know” is to understand something as a fact or truth and to have complete confidence about this understanding. What we “know” is often taken-for-granted, normal, hegemonic. The essayists on This I Believe are no longer to confidently say what they “know,” because as Hage would explain it “the order of things (in the nation) is no longer his order of things, the language (of the nation) is no longer his language, and there is no coercive apparatus…willing to impose and guarantee his language and order” (Hage, 2000: 217).
Once the shift is made from I “know” to I “believe,” an element of uncertainty is introduced. To believe “is an act that commits me and in which I invest something important, possibly that which is most important” (Berger, 1992: 124). To believe is have “faith.” Usually, one must profess faith “in” something. Those who state what they have faith in, suggest through their mere need to have faith in it, that it has not proven itself to be a fact, completely true. For example, when someone says, “I believe in you,” the very act of needing to say it places in question its veracity. To believe then requires being faithful, an active loyalty and fidelity to a belief despite doubts, without proof, and against evidence. Faith is the active management of doubt, the desire to believe, rather than to know. The things that people believe in require maintenance. People need “plausibility structures” or social support for their beliefs about the world. In the absence of any such social support, a belief is untenable, and in the presence of complete support, a belief becomes a truth and requires no effort of faith (Berger, 1992). For listeners eager to contribute to the management of American identity, especially for those who want to see their liberal values expressed publicly and politically, and in response to ambiguities about what it is that Democrats believe in, This I Believe offers its listeners the opportunity to state what they believe in, and provide one another with a degree of social support so as to maintain those beliefs, with the hope that these beliefs will once again become things known. Hage explains that “if they are not to suffer from an identity crisis, nationalists have to be faced with constant ‘empirical’ confirmations of the adequacy of their conceptions of themselves, their nation, and their national yearnings” (2000: 218).

5.1 Searching for a Morally Resonant Discourse

In attempt to formulate a morally resonant discourse that would rearticulate and reaffirm the national identities of liberals, Democrats made faith outreach a priority in 2005, working to improve their “religious literacy” and “to formulate a sincere expression of progressive faith in the hopes of capturing the “values voter” (Stanley, 2010). President Obama commented on the power of morally resonant discourse for speaking to constituents when he reflected at the 2006 Sojourners Call to Renewal Conference, “If we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal
morality and social justice” (2006). Obama stressed that the discomfort of some progressives and secularists with religion has “often prevented us from effectively addressing issues in moral terms” (Obama, 2006). Not content to cede the battle to conservatives to define which values are ‘American’ and which are ‘un-American,’ Barack Obama’s declared at the 2004 Democratic National Convention Obama that “We worship an awesome God in the blue states” (Stanley, 2010).

Deliberately infusing faith and morality into their political campaigns, candidates engaged in such practices as confessing in their personal stories the role that faith has played in shaping their values, quoting the Bible, running advertisements on Christian radio stations, or holding faith forums and poverty tours (Gibbs & Duffy, 2007). The 2008 Democratic National Convention was unique in hosting an interfaith prayer and worship service, including a gospel choir and a recitation of the Torah, as well as special caucus meetings where people of faith could come together like other “affinity groups” (Lawton, 2008). Joe Turnham, an evangelical Christian and chair of the Alabama Democratic Party hoped that these faith-based initiatives would demonstrate that “Democrats are people that pray. They are people that seek forgiveness. They are people that seek for higher meaning and truth in life and that really do follow scriptural precepts for how we live our lives. And it’s a barometer of how we may govern” (Lawton, 2008). Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton, and John Edwards “walk[ed] a sensitive line, weaving into their personal stories the role their faith has played in shaping their values, while signaling that those values remain ecumenical and expansive” so as not to offend members of minority religions or secular voters (Gibbs & Duffy, 2007).

Democrats soon discovered that implementing the “God Strategy” wasn’t resonating with voters in the ways that they had hoped. In the first place, there were questions as to how “authentic” the candidates expressions of faith really were and whether the candidates were just trying to exploit religious voters. Hillary Clinton

162 The “God strategy” refers to a carefully constructed set of “particular beliefs, articulated within the framework of a campaign for political office, and offered as either the motivation for or the value structure underlying specific public policies” (Medhurst, 2005:151-160). Both Republicans and Democrats have employed the God strategy. The most recent configuration has been a kind of political fundamentalism, first emerging in the early 1980s with rise of the Christian Right and the Moral Majority, and achieving preeminence with the Bush Administration following September 11th (Domke and Coe, 2008).
cautioned “If faith is an element of who you legitimately, authentically are, great. But don't make it up, don't use it, don't beat people over the head with it” (Gibbs & Duffy, 2007). But more significantly, the 2006 elections results proved that rather than closing the Democrat’s 30-year God gap, Democratic House candidates pulled in 67 percent of the secular vote, an increase of seven percentage points more than in 2004 (Gibbs & Duffy, 2007). Such statistics reinforced the importance of nonreligious voters to the Democratic coalition. Unlike Republicans, who by a 2-to-1 margin say the “President should use his faith to guide his decisions,” Democrats reject this idea by a similar margin (Gibbs& Duffy, 2007). According to Pew Research, the largest share of Democrats are “Liberals,” a group which has doubled in proportion since 1999, and now comprises 17 percent of the population, 19 percent of registered voters, and affiliates as 59 percent Democrat, 40 percent Independent, and 1 percent Republican. This group is 83 percent White, 49 percent have a college degree, and the least religious of all the Pew typologies, with 43 percent seldom or never attending religious services. Eight-eight percent of “Liberals” agreed with the statement “I worry that the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality” (Pew, 2005). The Democratic Party has since reduced its religious language, as evidenced in references to God in their platforms—4 references in 2000, 7 references in 2004, 1 reference in 2008, and 0 references in 2012,163 (Liptak, 2012). David Silverman, president of American Atheists, responded to the exclusion of “God” in the platform, stating “We are looking for the inclusion of everyone and we are hopeful that that inclusion will continue to the point that we can depend on Mr. Obama to repeal the faith based initiatives and reinforce the separation of church and state” (Liptak, 2012).

5.2 “Barack and Me”

The point of this discussion on faith is so to show how Democrats were searching for a way to talk about values, but they made the mistake of trying to speak about values the way that Republicans and conservatives do, using religion. But, Democrats do not require a religious foundation in order to build a resonant moral discourse. As I have

163 In 2012, 1 reference to God was restored after 3 controversial voice votes (Cameron, Henry, Pergram, 2012).
shown throughout this dissertation, liberalism, with its ideas of the common good and public debate, and its values of freedom and tolerance and individualism is the morally resonant discourse for This I Believe listeners. I want to suggest that a possible explanation for why This I Believe stopped broadcasting on NPR in 2009 and moved to The Bob Edwards Show on Sirius XM Satellite Radio is because with the election of Democratic President Barack Obama, the beliefs of liberals were once again dominant, featured daily in the leading stories on NPR news, and thus a program featuring the voices of liberals was redundant. In the following section I will discuss the various ways in which Obama both expressed and symbolized the liberal discourses which the essayists on This I Believe believe in so passionately. I will argue that what Obama calls on Americans to believe in is the idea of the nation and its liberal ideals.

For starters, Barak Obama’s beliefs on free speech, on divisive politics, on the need for dialogue, and his promises of hope, all resonated with the concerns voiced by This I Believe producers and essayists discussed in the chapter “This Liberals Believe.” In response to concerns about restrictions on freedom of speech, Obama cited the importance of an America where “We can say what we think, write what we think, without hearing a sudden knock on the door” (2004). In acknowledgement of the anger and desire that liberal nationalists felt for participation, Obama promised to return to them a nation where “We can participate in the political process without fear of retribution, and that our votes will be counted -- or at least, most of the time” (2004).Echoing This I Believe’s concerns over the increasing polarization of politics and the accusations that liberals weren’t patriotic, Obama chastised, “We can’t expect to solve our problems if all we do is tear each other down. You can disagree with a certain policy without demonizing the person who espouses it. You can question somebody’s views and their judgment without questioning their motives or their patriotism” (2010). Obama also agreed with This I Believe’s calls for dialogue and compromise, saying “This kind of vilification and over-the-top rhetoric closes the door to the possibility of compromise. It undermines democratic deliberation. It prevents learning… It makes it nearly impossible for people who have legitimate but bridgeable differences to sit down at the same table and hash things out” (2010). Finally, Barack Obama provided the “hope” to liberals that This I Believe claimed got Americans of the 1950s through the dark days of
McCarthyism. Placing his faith in a liberal government of, by, and for the people, Obama asserted, “Hope is the bedrock of this nation; the belief that our destiny will not be written for us, but by us; by all those men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is; who have courage to remake the world as it should be” (2008). Like the This I Believe essayists, Obama placed his faith in belief, proclaiming “We are not a collection of red states and blue states. We are the United States of America. And in this moment, in this election, we are ready to believe again” (2008c, emphases added).

Tim Wise argues that in his speeches, Obama embraced “the dominant national narrative generally accepted by the white majority,” effectively distancing himself from “the larger black community, which has long seen the United States far differently than most white Americans have, due to the way that they have experienced its institutions (2009: 89). Such distancing was particularly evident in the so-called “race” speech that Obama gave in response to the controversial sermons delivered by his pastor Jeremiah Wright. In this speech, he criticized Wright for expressing views which “denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation, and that rightly offend white and black alike,” views which Obama claimed “expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country — a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America” (2008).

In this same speech, Obama described the nation’s founding by referring to the “Farmers and scholars, statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution” which Wise refers to as “the white version of why they came, one that conveniently forgets the way they behaved once they actually got here” (2009: 90). In such ways, Obama is able to elide problematic histories of exclusion and oppression and minimize the participation of whites in creating or passively benefiting from them. Wise argues that for the most part Obama refuses to challenge the dominant histories or structures, instead “he seems to go out of his way to praise them, something that is no doubt soothing to white folks” (2009: 90).

Enid Logan describes how in his 2004 DNC speech, Obama offered a “triumphal black American origins story…one that was, crucially, vastly different from that of the

164 Eduardo Bonilla Silva and Victor Ray refer to Wright’s statements as “realistic and backed up by reams of social science data” (2009).
The overwhelming majority of African Americans” (2011:75). She describes how through his story, one could imagine “the slave transformed into a voluntary migrant” as his biography emphasizes his grandfather’s escape from “British, not American tyranny” and his father’s arrival in the United States “not as a slave, but as a student” (Logan, 2011: 77).

In this speech, Obama described how “through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before him” (Obama, 2004). Logan says that Obama “rewrote the Horatio Alger myth,” placing himself “not at the margins, but squarely at the center” of the American Dream narrative (74). By placing himself within the dominant White narrative of the nation, Obama essentially claimed that he was a Good White Nationalist with a legitimate right to speak on behalf of the nation, an identity that was acceptable to many White voters. Savvy to Obama’s claims, comedian Chris Rock spoofed an Obama campaign advertisement, in which he said:

“Hi, I’m Chris Rock with a special message for white people. In times like these, you need a white president you can trust. And that white president’s name is Barack Obama. If you want a white president, I got a polo wearing, Hawaii-living, home beer-brewing, league bowling guy for you — Barry Obama, he’s juuuuuuuust white” (Poor, 2012).

Bonilla-Silva and Ray contend that without a progressive social movement politics that will effect real structural changes, Obama provides only a symbol of diversity, and essentially “gives us white supremacy in blackface” (2009: 178).

Logan argues that President Obama won the presidential election, “not in spite of race, but because he offered an appealing, carefully mediated version of blackness that a majority of the electorate readily consumed” (2011: 8). The following This I Believe essay, “Barack and Me” (10/22/08), submitted by Katie, illustrates the ways in which NPR listeners were able to feel comfortable with Obama. Katie begins her essay with a question “Am I crazy to compare myself to Barack Obama?” as she admits that on the surface they have little in common. Katie first points to the lack of shared identity categories, as she is a white woman raised in Connecticut by parents of distant European

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165 Horatio Alger was a 19th century American author whose novels featured characters who successfully escaped poverty through hard work and bravery.
166 Katie’s essay “Barack and Me” was submitted to the database on 10/22/08.
descent who are now approaching their fiftieth anniversary, unlike Barack Obama who is a man of multiracial descent raised abroad and in Hawaii of parents who divorced and are now deceased. And there are other points of difference as well, as she explains that she is not a parent, has no experience with the law through her work as a writer, photographer, and architect, and “can barely muster the courage to speak to groups.” And yet, Katie focuses on the parts of his biography to which she can relate, such as they are close in age, and she likes to consider him “someone who might have been a classmate of mine or married one of my friends.” She suspects that they might share the same taste in movies and says that “While I can’t envision having a beer with Obama, I can imagine we might enjoy some tea together.” Despite their differences, Katie gushes “I see my best self in Obama.”

Katie believes that she and Obama “share an outlook,” produced in part through their shared “top notch educations” and access to the “opportunities that are available only here in the United States where black folks and women have been rising through the ranks.” She locates herself and Obama in a shared history of struggle for civil rights, “shaped by all that has gone before us” whose vision is now being realized for “this is our time which shouldn’t be surprising.” Neither reactionary nor radical, Katie describes her shared political orientation with Obama as being “products of now. We are neither ahead of our times nor behind them.” Katie admires Obama’s “writer’s sensibility” as well as his “temperament,” saying it the thing that most distinguishes him. As some who appreciates the fair and balanced methods of NPR, she also appreciates those qualities in her head of state. Compared to herself, she ascertains that Obama is “more reasonable in the face of antagonism…steadier when circumstances fluctuate… thinks more broadly when minutiae threaten to distract.” She believes that they both have the “empathetic observer’s talent,” that quality produced through a liberal education which allows the “capability to see more than one side of many issues” and can be used to “analyze and connect.” This ability to treat ideas objectively she says “makes room for hope, dialogue, and progress rather than the defeatist, divisive, status quo.” Katie concludes her essay with the thought that “we can all be like Obama; we all have the capacity to hope, negotiate, and move forward if we observe with empathy…It’s really not very audacious.”
According to Tim Wise, Obama was perceived as “racially nonthreatening, as different from ‘regular’ black people, as somehow less than truly black, or as having ‘transcended race,’” (2009: 23). Senator Joe Biden described Obama as “the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy” (Thai & Barrett, 2007). Wise argues that Obama has become the “Cliff Huxtable of politics,” by which he means that like the dad character from The Cosby Show, Obama is “a black man with whom millions of whites can identify and to whom they can relate” (2009:87). On election night Karl Rove, the former Bush strategist, made a similar comparison, explaining “We’ve had an African-American first family. When ‘The Cosby Show’ was on, that was America’s family. It wasn’t a black family. It was America’s family” (Arango, 2008). Rove’s statement suggests that blackness isn’t American, that blacks who don’t conform to the Huxtable model are less American, and that it is only through the transcendence of unacceptable blackness that the Huxtables and the Obamas were able to become part of the nation. Patricia Williams writing in The Nation, critiques the idea of transcendence by observing how:

“‘Transcendence’ implies rising above something, cutting through, being liberated from. What would it reveal about the hidden valuations of race if one were to invert the equation by positing that Barack Obama “transcended” whiteness because his father was black?” (quoted in Hart, 2007).

Wise problematizes the term as well, pointing out how it “presumes, if only by implication, that there is something negative about blackness, something to be avoided, or if it can’t be avoided, at least finessed, worked around, smoothed over” (2009:86).

Ideas of transcendence are part of what Tim Wise refers to as “Enlightened Exceptionalism,” a form of racism which “allows for and even celebrates the achievements of individual persons of color, but only because those individuals generally are seen as different from a less appealing, even pathological black or brown rule” (2009:9). Enlightened exceptionalism allows Whites to continue to hold negative views of the majority of people racialized as Black, whilst making exceptions for individuals like Obama who are seen as different, thereby “confirm[ing] the salience of race and machinations of white hegemony” (Wise, 2009: 9). Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, in their audience research on The Cosby Show, found that the “acceptance of the Huxtables as an everyfamily did not dislodge the generally negative associations white viewers have of
“black culture’” (1992: 110). Instead, Wise explains that setting a standard for all blacks to be “Obama-like in style, affect, erudition, and educational background” in order to be considered by Whites as “competent or trustworthy” has the effect of “reinforcing anti-black antipathy” (2009:10).

In order to broaden his appeal, during his campaign Obama worked to emphasize that he was “the guy next door” and “as American as apple pie,” shunning his suit coat and drinking Bud beer with members of the VFW (Nicholas, 2008; Martin & Smith, 2008). Harvey Gantt, the first black mayor of Charlotte asserted, “He has got to make Americans understand that he comes from the same place that most of them come from. He has to bend over backwards to show that he is like them” (Martin & Smith, 2008). In his first television advertisement, Obama presented the following version of his biography “I was raised by a single mom and my grandparents. We didn’t have much money, but they taught me values straight from the Kansas heartland where they grew up,” omitting references to his Kenyan father or childhood abroad (Martin & Smith, 2008). However, Logan argues that attempts to emphasize Obama’s “Midwestern roots, patriotism, Christian faith, and ‘everydayness’ were “fundamentally out of line with the core message of the campaign” (2011:72). What was compelling about Obama was the unconventional and extraordinary dimensions of his biography, which articulated a “multicultural, cosmopolitan vision of the nation,” and provided “evidence of the extraordinariness of the nation” (Logan, 2011: 73-74). Obama worked to integrate his biography into the narrative of the American Dream, referencing the immigrant aspirations of his father and grandfather, and professing in his 2004 DNC keynote speech, “I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all those that came before me, and that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible” (Obama, 2004).

Part of what makes Obama acceptable to conservatives and liberals alike, is his exercise of what Logan refers to as “the new politics of race,” which she describes as an elaboration of the ideology of colorblind individualism defined by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. She describes how blacks who abide by the new politics are “accepted or tolerated” by political conservatives and “loved, adored, or, as in Obama’s case—exalted” by political liberals, resulting in a kind of Obamania (2011: 47). Logan identifies seven principles of
the new politics of race, which she describes as a “bargain made between white Americans and upwardly mobile blacks…in exchange for full integration into the American mainstream, and in the name of racial harmony” (2011: 37). One dimension of the new politics described in Katie’s essay relates to style, in which post-racial icons like Obama “adopt an open, friendly, nonthreatening manner in order to counter the unease or discomfort that other blacks have cause whites to feel” (2011: 38). Voters appreciated Obama’s charisma, smile, articulateness, and his seeming inability to display anger.

Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. contrasted Obama with the immediate successors of Martin Luther King Jr., emphasizing that Obama “understood the importance of language and the need to frame social debate in a way less likely to alienate whites” (Mabry, 2008). In an article in The Washington Post, an interviewee commented that if Obama were more like Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton “I probably wouldn’t like him as much” (Duke, 2007). Tim Wise explains that “white folks never like angry black people…no matter the source of their anger, and especially if that anger be expressed in the course of administering a corrective to our…national narrative” (2009: 141). This explains in part why Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s sermons denouncing the histories of institutional racism and imperialism in the United States, and Michelle Obama’s remark about being “proud of her country” for the “first time” were not well received, and both were criticized for being anti-American, for believing that “America is more a source of shame than pride” (Malkin, 2008). An acquaintance of Obama’s, Mary Pattillo, a professor at Northwestern University explains:

“Obama knows this is a majority white country. He is acutely aware how his discussion of race and racial politics will be interpreted and received by whites. We who work in the white world are always mindful of not making whites feel threatened. You can't get angry as a black person working in white America. To get a message across, black professionals are always thinking about the perfect balance of assertiveness and non-threateningness” (Kaufman, 2007).

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes it as “disturbing” that as part of his post-racial strategy, Obama “distanced himself from most leaders of the civil rights movement, from his own reverend, from his own church, and from anything or anyone who makes him ‘too black’ or ‘too political,’” a tactic historically employed by members of the anti-minority members of the right (Bonilla-Silva & Ray, 2009: 178).
5.3 “Leaving Identity Issues to Other Folks”

Logan identifies such disassociations as additional dimensions of the new politics of race, which include the need to “distance yourself from divisive, angry, or otherwise problematic black public figures” as well as “give up the language of grievance, victimhood, and confrontation” and “play down the significance of racism…affirm the past is the past and that things today are far different (Logan, 2011: 38-41). John Powell contends that postracialists “see both the civil rights activists and the explicit racists as locked in a past struggle that is already antiquated” (2009: 788). He explains that according to this view, this struggle is perceived as distracting and divisive because “we are in a post-racial world where race really does not matter to most Americans” (2009:877). Obama has distanced himself from so-called racial partisans and their methods, and is seen to represent a new generation of post-racial leadership. Terence Samuel describes Obama as representing “a strain of up-tempo, non-grievance, American-Dream-In-Color politics…determined to move beyond both the mood and the methods of their forebears” (2007). An interviewee of the Washington Post, Katie Lang, 32, a Tampa insurance executive, explained that “Obama speaks to everyone. He doesn't just speak to one race, one group” (Duke, 2007). Obama argued that national unity transcended racial divisions, proclaiming at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, “There’s not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there’s the United States of America” (Obama, 2004). Obama turned away from identity politics, collective rights, and affirmative action to focus on universal and classed-based programs which would appeal to a wide range of constituents, talking about “income inequality, not black unemployment… inadequate educational opportunities, not the endemic poverty in black neighborhoods that results…globalization and outsourcing, not the loss of high-wage, low-skill manufacturing jobs that built and sustained working- and middle-class black communities” (Samuel, 2007).

In the This I Believe essay, “Leaving Identity Issues to Other Folks,” (07/11/05) Yellow Pages saleswoman Phyllis Allen\(^{167}\) works to depoliticize structural differences, by reducing the political struggles of African-Americans to “identity issues,” asserting

\(^{167}\) Phyllis Allen’s essay “Leaving Identity Issues to Other Folks” was broadcast on All Things Considered on 07/11/05 and published in This I Believe (2006).
that collective action is ineffectual, and by suggesting that inequalities are best dealt with individually, rather than collectively. Consistent with the strategies of the new politics of race, Allen rejects the messages of previous Black leaders and social movement struggles in favor of a raceless identity. Allen begins her essay by describing how her identity as a Black woman has changed through the decades according to what the dominant Black discourse of the time dictated. She begins in her childhood in the fifties when she was “colored” and her “place was in the balcony of the downtown theater, the back of the bus, and the back steps of the White Dove Emporium” (2005). At that time, her mother told her that she could not change these facts, and that her only recourse was personal development, stating “People do what they do. What you got to do is be the best that you can be” (Allen, 2005). She then moves into the sixties when she saw on the television images of “German shepards snapping at a young girls heals” and “children just like me going to school passing through throngs of screaming, angry folks [notice that Allen doesn’t say White folks], chanting words I wasn’t allowed to say.” Allen was told by her preacher that they were “Negroes” now and that she “had to be brave and stand up for my rights, marching in the streets for our freedom” (Allen, 2005). In the seventies she was “Black and angry, my clenched fist raised, [as] I stood on the downtown street shouting.” Allen was guided by activists like Huey, H. Rap, and Eldridge who said that there was to be “no more non-violence or standing on the front lines quietly while we were being beaten” (Allen, 2005). In the eighties she became “hyphenated,” an “African-American” who believed in the “the elusive promise of the Motherland.” She describes how in pursuit of her “heritage” she became a “pseudo-African, who’d never seen Africa” and surrounded by “people who’d never been closer to Africa than a Tarzan movie speaking broken Swahili.” Then in the nineties Allen became just “a woman whose skin happened to be brown, chasing the American dream” because this was what everybody said to do (Allen, 2005). Allen concludes her essay by saying that it’s now the millennium and it “ain’t about me.” She says that now she’s “free to be whoever I choose to be—a good friend, lover, parent, woman” and decides that she will “leave those identity issues to other folks” (Allen, 2005).

Allen’s essay provides a first-person account of the collective history and individual struggle for civil rights. But she ultimately retreats from the significance of
these politics, brushing them off as a passing fad embraced by people eager to be told what to think and do. She ignores that these various identities were made possible through social movements which engaged in political struggle to create the conditions by which Allen can now consider herself free to choose her identity. She is also unable to see that the colorless identity that she now experiences is but another Black identity that is embedded in political struggle, one in which race is being denied or erased. Allen’s ideas about being the best she can be part of the discourse of meritocracy, which argues that anyone can get ahead, regardless of their structural position. This discourse shifts attention for social problems away from their institutional causes and places responsibility onto the individual. It also disempowers social movements, which are defined as engaging in merely identity politics rather than actual politics and disconnects individual Blacks from participating in social movements because they believe, like Allen does, that social movements don’t achieve anything significant. Ultimately, Allen ends up in the same disempowered place she began in, convinced that there is nothing that can be done except to do what her “Mama” said and “be the best that I can be” (2005).

Allen’s belief that the millennium has ushered in a color-blind, race-neutral society is reflective of the idea of colorblind individualism described by Bonilla-Silva (2010). He explains that colorblind racism developed in the late 1960s to “explain contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010: 2). Rather than explaining structural differences as a result of biological or moral inferiority, color-blind racism attributes inequality to “market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and imputed cultural limitations” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Bonilla-Silva describes color-blind individualism as “formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order…the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil rights era” (2010:3). Especially relevant to this dissertation is the ways in which color-blind individualism draws on ideas associated with liberalism, ideas of equal opportunity, choice, individualism, work ethic, and rewards by merit to justify what Bonilla-Silva calls “racially illiberal goals” (2010:7). He goes on to explain that employing the language of liberalism to interpret racial inequalities allows “whites to appear ‘reasonable’ and even ‘moral,’ while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010:28).
Wise contends that the belief in meritocracy with its emphasis on individual initiative is central to the new forms of racism informed by color-blind individualism (2009). Logan notes that post-racial leaders avoid talking about racism as systematic or institutional, choosing instead to “focus on individual achievement, self-help, and self-reliance” and “repudiate the choices and lifestyles of the black poor” (2011: 42). Logan describes how Obama criticized the “failings of low-income black men” in his speeches, “calling on ‘Ray Ray,’ ‘Cousin Pookie,’ and other mythical low-income black males to get up off the couch, go vote, and be responsible fathers to their children” (2011: 42). Kevin Gray details how Obama has taken to “playin’ blacks,” meaning “to fool or use a person or persons,” describing black people as “dirty and lazy” as well as “fat and stupid,” and perpetuating “the lie that black men have no morals” (2008). In Obama’s speech “A More Perfect Union,” he encouraged the African-American community to move beyond the “racial stalemate” by “embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past” and “binding our particular grievances…to the larger aspirations of all Americans” as well as:

“…taking full responsibility for our own lives — by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny (Obama, 2008).

Consistent with the tenants of colorblind individualism, President Obama stressed the need for personal responsibility among blacks. Wise explains that meritocracy makes it “easier to rationalize racial domination and inequity, to rationalize white advantage and privilege, and to accept blatant injustices on a mass scale, since they can be written off to aggregate gaps in effort, ambition, or work ethics between whites on the one hand, and blacks and Latinos on the other” (2009: 107).

Obama was said to symbolize the confirmation of this myth, evidence that if you work hard you can be anything you want to be, proof that racism was no longer systemic or institutionalized because if Obama can make it, anyone can. Liberals like African-American columnist Clarence Page admitted, “It’s hard to argue that our society is irredeemably racist when our multiracial electorate just elected a man with African roots and an Arabic-sounding name to be commander-in-chief” (2008). The New York Times
reported that on election night, a prevalent interpretation of the meaning of Obama’s victory was “Black people in America, you have no more excuses” (Kaufman and Fields, 2008). One interviewee, Mike Kluchar, a white 43-year-old assembly-line worker who voted for Mr. Obama said that “They...have a president, they can't say society is holding them back anymore.” Another interviewee, Kenneth Stepney Jr., 25, a student at Richmond's Virginia Union University, confessed that electing a black president “strips us as African-Americans of every excuse, every ‘ism,’ every schism we've tried to hide behind. He can do his part but we have to do ours as well. We can't hold the government responsible for our failings” (Kaufman and Fields, 2008). Howard Winant explains that post-racial advocates instruct “racially defined minorities to ‘pull themselves up by their own bootstraps’…and to accept the ‘content of their character’ as the basic social value of the country (2001: 175).

While serving as a special advisor at the White House Council on Environmental Quality, Van Jones168 wrote the This I Believe essay “My Father Deserves Spectacular Results” (03/26/09). In it, he describes the kind of responsible black father, and grandfather, identified by Obama as necessary for the moral renewal of the black community, one who instilled in his son the values of personal responsibility, no excuses, and the need to make a contribution and help others. Van Jones describes his father as “born black and poor in the segregated South,” a “no-nonsense hard case” who “started life with next to nothing, but he found a way to help countless young people climb out of poverty.” Van Jones’ father was a middle school principal who “specialized in taking public schools that were failing poor kids, and transforming them into centers of safety and learning.” Van Jones’ father taught his students to be autonomous by instructing them “I tell these kids, don't lean on me. Lean on yo’ self” (emphasis in text). Van Jones’ father had confidence in his son and in Obama, believing that “despite the obstacles, we have so much more going for us.” He would always say to Van Jones “I don't see no dogs and fire hoses stopping you from doing anything.” Van Jones’ father expected his son to beat the odds, to succeed “no matter today’s difficulties,” and Van Jones’ professes that “Daddy would not have accepted anything less than spectacular results from us [“us”

168 Van Jones’ essay “My Father Deserves Spectacular Results” was broadcast on Tell Me More on 03/26/09.
presumably refers to Van Jones and Obama, but may also refer to all blacks]. Even when Van Jones’ father asks what Van Jones’ refers to as “tough questions,” he sticks to the logic of universal and class-based interests, telling Van Jones, “Black faces in high places don't make nobody free, boy. Folks can't eat them sound bites of yours. How many jobs did you get for people this week? Folks need some paychecks around here, son, and they ain’t getting any. And what are y’all gonna do about these banks?” (emphasis in text).

And so, Van Jones plan for “uplifting urban youth” is by “getting them green jobs in the solar industry and green construction so that society could fight poverty and pollution at the same time.” For Van Jones’ father, Obama was one the only things that could make him smile in his dying days, and Van Jones explains that “By then Daddy knew he was not going to make it. But he believed that Obama would.”

Logan explains that “Americans of all races were drawn to Obama by the sense of redemption that he seemed to offer, and by a desire to feel good about the United States again” (2011: 22). Bonilla-Silva & Ray explain that for those racialized as blacks, “Obama is a symbol of their possibilities; he is their Joshua…the culmination of the long civil rights movement, evidence that we are finally home” (2009). In other words, many interpret Obama to offer not only the hope of, but the realization of, full inclusion within the nation.

5.4 “It’s Not Just Rhetoric Anymore”

Drawing on the work of Claire Kim, Logan describes how Obama’s election was understood through an “American triumphalist narrative,” as vice was transformed into virtue and the greatness of the nation was reaffirmed. Roger Simon expressed on NBC’s Meet the Press, “If America actually nominates him and then votes for him for president and elects him, this will be a sign that we are a good and decent country that has healed its racial wounds” (cited in Hart, 2007). NPR legend Garrison Keillor celebrated that the election of Obama had improved America’s international reputation (2008), evidenced by congratulatory emails from admiring Danes and Swedes and a comment by the French junior minister for human rights which said, “On this morning, we all want to be American so we can take a bite of this dream unfolding before our eyes” (2008). Keillor wonders, “When was the last time you heard someone from France say they wanted to be
American and take a bite of something of ours?” Keillor proclaims that we can all “walk taller” and stop pretending to “look Canadian” because “Next time you fly to Heathrow and hand your passport to the man with the badge, he’s going to see ‘United States of America’ and look up and grin (2008).

Comments like Keillor’s point to the ways in which the election of Obama was understood as a “special sort of victory for whites, who proved themselves to be more tolerant, more colorblind, and more jubilantly egalitarian than anyone had suspected (Logan, 2011: 24). Former chairman of the Tennessee Democratic Party Bob Tuke asserted, “Obama is running an emancipating campaign. He is emancipating white voters to vote for a black candidate.” (cited in Kaufman, 2007). Glen Ford suggested on Counterspin that Obama “has given white people a kind of satisfaction—that race no longer matters in America, and all the sins of the past can be washed away through the act of loving this man” (cited in Hart, 2007). Such comments lend support to Logan’s assertion that post-racial blacks like Obama “offer liberal whites psychic or cultural goods that they need, want, or crave, including ‘authenticity,’ identity, acceptance, redemption, innocence, and a sense of being good and moral people” (2011: 47). Bonilla-Silva and Ray suggest that Obama acts as the “magical negro” for whites, a term derived from films studies which refers to black characters like John Coffey in The Green Mile or Laurence Fishburne in The Matrix who serve as vehicles for white development (2009: 179). Shelby Steele argues that Obama offered whites the opportunity to escape the “constant threat of being stigmatized as a racist” and “experience racial innocence” proving through with their ballot that they are color-blind (2008). Steele describes Obama as a “candidate of destiny” and the 2008 political campaign as a “morality play,” one beset by the high drama of such questions as “Will his victory mean America's redemption from its racist past? Will his defeat show an America morally unevolved?” (2008). The answer that Obama provided in his November 4, 2008 victory speech was “If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible…tonight is your answer” (Obama, 2008b).

The 2008 presidential election brought a flood of essays to the This I Believe database grappling with these very questions. This I Believe broadcast only one essay about the election of Barack Obama, titled “Finding New Pride in America,” (12/4/08)
written by Michael Gabby, a middle-aged White American elementary school teacher from California. This essay articulates the triumphalist narrative, the ways in which Obama’s victory provided whites with a sense of relief, absolution, and vindication, and proof of the nation’s progress towards the fulfillment of liberal values. Writing on November 5th, the day after the election, Gabby says that on this day he feels he can assert “I believe in the American people,” whereas “yesterday, I wouldn’t have made this statement.” Such a reclamation of national identity and love of country is the kind of change being sought by This I Believe. Like many NPR Activists, Gabby was politically involved, an eager Obama supporter, who “put up yard signs and made small online contributions to the campaign.” But Gabby was doubtful of the likelihood of success for a Democratic Party candidate, with liberal views, who was racialized as ‘Black.’ Parroting the Obama slogan, Gabby admits “in my heart, I couldn’t bring myself to truly believe, ‘yes we can!’” As someone Hage would term a “Good White Nationalist,” Gabby feels the need to explain his uncertainty, to justify why he didn’t believe that the liberal ideals of meritocracy, equal rights, and tolerance would be realized. Gabby points to the history of racism in the U.S. for answers, but his position as a White American affords him the luxury of believing that this history of systemic racism is in the past, as he does not consider himself to personally be a part of it when he explains “as a 38-year-old, I missed the overt and institutional racism which would have outlawed my interracial marriage.” Gabby fails to provide an explanation for why it is that if overt and institutional racism no longer persist, he couldn’t bring himself to “dare to dream I would live to see a black man elected president.”

Gabby’s family discusses “black history,” from which he says his children have learned that “being any shade of brown in America has always meant being excluded from things as profound as freedom or as simple as drinking water from a public fountain.” His usage of freedom is a bit ambiguous, but in counterposing it to segregation, it suggests a veiled reference to slavery, an uncomfortable topic for liberals, because it reveals the contradiction that the state that they laud as valuing “freedom” was built on slavery, as well as the role that whites played in racial oppression. Like many

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169 Michael Gabby’s essay “Finding New Pride in America” was broadcast on Tell Me More on 12/04/08 and included in the special feature Taking Inspiration From Dr. King.
liberals, Gabby’s discussion of racism begins with the Civil Rights movement in which many liberal Whites participated. Gabby shows his children picture books about this historical moment when tolerance triumphed, and as his children ponder the pictures of racial segregation and discrimination, they ask him “Even me, daddy?” and he responds “Even you, baby.” Throughout his essay, as a Good White Nationalist Gabby can never even bring himself to use the word ‘Black’ when talking about his own family—instead, he prefers to talk colloquially of “shades of brown,” as though this is a benign physical description, rather than a racialized one. He seems oblivious to the fact that Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians are often colloquially racialized as ‘brown,’ although legally in U.S. history they have been racialized contradictorily, sometimes White and sometimes non-White (Maira, 2009). Also troublesome is the sense that it is somehow better to be ‘brown’ than ‘black’ or that it is preferable to refer to someone by the color of their skin than their racialized identity—this despite admitting that his children’s names “Maya, Malik, and Marcus don’t sound presidential.” “Presidential” in this context is to be read as White. Despite his desire for racial equality, Gabby continues to attach social meaning to skin color, as he weeps over the new reality that “the first lady will look like my wife. Brown children like mine will play on the White House lawn.”

Gabby desperately wants to believe in meritocracy and equal opportunity, and he admits that he has “been guilty of perpetuating the American myth that children can be anything they want if they just try hard enough.” But with the election of Barack Obama, he believes that meritocracy is no longer a myth, and Gabby says that he can now “confidently” tell his children that “this is America where they can be anything that they put their minds to. Its not just rhetoric any more.” The election of “Barack Hussein Obama” has restored Gabby’s liberal belief in democracy. Twice in the essay, Gabby references Martin Luther King, who is amongst the most quoted person in the This I Believe broadcast essays. To support his argument that meritocracy has been vindicated with the election of Obama, and perhaps also to alleviate some of his own discomfort with racializing his own children, Gabby paraphrases King’s idea that a man should be judged based on the “content of his character” rather than the “color of his skin.” At the end of Gabby’s essay he refers to Michelle Obama’s controversial pride statement, in which she proclaimed “for the first time in my adult lifetime, I’m really proud of my
country” (Obama, 2009). Gabby can’t say that he has ever felt that way, only that he is empathetic, stating that he “understands where she’s coming from,” but mitigating that such “words from a person in her position weren’t prudent.” Gabby says that after the election he is “MORE proud to be an American than at any other point in my life.” This of course is the title of his essay, “Finding NEW pride in America,” such that the supposed elimination of racist inequality is now just one more thing for which Gabby can be proud of America and the American people. He concludes his essays with an admission of guilt, not of any complicity on his own part in the history of racial inequality, but rather a misjudgment of the tolerance of the American people, confessing, “I underestimated the American people. I was wrong.” Gabby’s essay concludes with an enthusiastic legitimation of the inclusivity of the nation and the success of citizenship, as well as an admonishment of skeptics like himself who doubted that liberal ideals could be realized. Yet, because for Gabby, the election of Obama signifies the end of racism as a pervasive social force, it makes it all the more difficult to address the structural inequalities that continue to persist for those who are negatively racialized.

This is one of the great ironies of This I Believe, that although the intention of the essayists is to engage in morally “good” practices and beliefs like tolerance, they are based on the same fantasy of White nationalism as the morally “bad” practices and beliefs of the intolerant. Tolerance and intolerance continue to coexist because liberal nationalists like Gabby who utilize the discourse of tolerance see in its hail a confirmation of their power, a recognition of their centrality to the nation as a White governmental subject and manager of national space. Gabby’s portrait on the This I Believe website symbolizes this idealized tolerant national family, wherein the White governmental subject, the father, expresses his appreciation for diversity by choosing to include in his family, the nation, the nonwhite Other, his wife and children, who through their dress signify their aspiration to Whiteness. Beneath a great tree in front of a picket fence, the entire Gabby family poses in their middle-class attire, presumably off to Easter services to celebrate the promise of new life and renewal. Clean-cut Gabby, dressed in a button-down shirt and tie, stands holding an Easter Lily, the symbol of peace in one arm, while the other arm embraces his “beautiful wife,” who holds their son Marcus in sweater-vest on her hip. In between the couple, smiling eldest daughter Maya, hair pulled
back, wearing a innocent white dress with pastel pink sash and delicate necklace standing beside her brother Malik, who is wearing a three-piece pastel suit and tie in the center of the family, grinning like a future president of the United States of America because its “not just rhetoric anymore.”

Good White nationalists like Gabby and Obama who embrace the tenants of multicultural liberalism differ from Evil White nationalists primarily in deciding the proper management of the nation, one emphasizing who should be included and how, the other focusing on who should be excluded and how. During the Bush administration, inclusivist ideas like tolerance were discredited based on fears that terrorists threatened the White American nation. Such fears remain, expressed in the 2008 election by conservatives who accused Obama of having “third-world, terrorist roots” and identified him as a “foreign, dangerous, alien other” (Logan, 2011: 119). Logan argues that while the Democratic campaigns focused their discussions about Obama primarily on the “black/white divide” the Republican campaigns worried less about Obama’s blackness than his “racial otherness” (2011:119). Daniel Tope describes how “Obama’s opponents crafted a narrative that merged notions of American identity with nationalism, security, and White nativism and cast him in opposition to these ideas” by combing a fear of terrorism with elements from Obama’s biography (2008:4). Tope explains that the Republican discourse was reminiscent of “the anticommunist furor of…Joe McCarthy,” as Obama was constructed as “more than an alien other” but as a “dangerous enemy” (2008:4). He suggests that “in a farcical way, history appeared to repeat itself” as Michelle Bachman, House Representative of Minnesota, agitated for kind of House un-American Activities Committee investigation into un-American politicians, a “diatribe” Tope interprets as “aimed squarely at Obama” (2008:4). As exclusivist ideas have lost some of their legitimacy, Evil White nationalists express their anxiety about their own location within the national field of power through attacks on Obama’s national identity. However, as argued within this dissertation, evil and good refer merely to differing thresholds of tolerance. So for members of the far right of the political spectrum,170 “Barack Hussein Obama—black, Muslim, Arab, foreign—is simply incompatible with

170 Such a members of the Birthers or the Tea Party
the nation” (Logan, 2011:123). But significantly, Good White nationalists similarly rely of ideas of difference to distinguish between those who embody diversity and those who tolerate or appreciate diversity. Thus, without acknowledging or addressing the history of injustices and ongoing organization of social differences which are integral to the structure of the nation, tolerance provides only an illusion of equal opportunity and inclusion.

5.5 Summary of Conclusions

Throughout this dissertation I analyzed the ways in *This I Believe* provides its listeners on *NPR* with an American national identity by which to imagine themselves, others, and the world. Using *This I Believe* as a case study, I argued that it is a liberal style of nationalism which resonates with the *NPR* activist audience. I showed how liberal ideals of citizenship and state organization were employed to articulate the nation, shape national imaginaries, and sustain the fantasy of the White nation. I described how the essayists use the program to give public expression to their private values, to claim their membership to the nation, and to manage the boundaries of the national public.

In Chapter Two, “This Liberals Believe,” I described the ways in which *This I Believe* discursively produces the people by arguing that the public sphere is in crisis, and that such claims, and the social relations upon which they rest, articulate intellectuals into the nation and secure their cultural authority to shape national understandings. Extending Hage’s idea of the white nation fantasy structure, I argued that the liberal ideas of good nationalists had become marginalized, and described how changes in the political environment, from cuts to public media funding and rhetorical attacks by conservatives, to the threats to free speech and civil liberties in the wake of the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act, Department of Homeland Security, and preemptive War in Iraq, resulted in feelings of anxiety for many members of the public radio audience. I argued that the essayists were concerned that their interests and values were not being represented in the public sphere, and turned to what is considered the only national news network friendly to liberals values, *National Public Radio*, and employed *This I Believe* as a vehicle to reclaim their voice and viewpoint and enact their citizenship. I showed how *This I Believe* works to reestablish the hegemony of liberal nationalism, by acknowledging listeners’ liberal
belief that everyone has an equal right to be heard and to participate in the management of the nation, helping them to rediscover their personal connection to the nation, and facilitating the discernment of a liberal national identity and moral discourse.

Defending traditional liberal values like freedom of speech and the press, as well as the rule of law and the right to due process, I analyzed how the essayists argue that protecting these basic rights is what it means to defend freedom, to provide security, and to be an ‘American.’ Comparing the current political climate to McCarthyism, I described how the producers of *This I Believe* laud these essayists as brave for risking the accusation of being called ‘unAmerican’ by expressing what are considered dissenting beliefs by the Bush administration. I described how the producers of *This I Believe* express a classical liberal aversion to forms of authority that are not representative of the nation, emphasizing the importance of individual moral autonomy and self-reflection by cautioning essayists about the dangers of not knowing one’s beliefs. I argued that this emphasis on belief is based on the liberal ideal that the authority of the state is legitimated through an educated citizenry and because the state is understood as the instrument of the people, rather than an apparatus of ruling, liberals look to the individual, the people, and the common good as the source of power. I contended that in keeping with this idea that a person can only be fully autonomous when they are free to follow their conscience and exercise their freedom of choice, *This I Believe* refrains from persuading listeners to agree on the same beliefs, yet at the same time *This I Believe* is hopeful that some form of value consensus can be reached, eager to legitimate the liberal democratic ideal of the nation-as-people. Because *This I Believe* is adamant to keep the essays within the sphere of private beliefs rather than public issues, *This I Believe* advocates for discussion and national dialogue to take place off air, in the voluntary associations of the public sphere where public opinion can be formed. I argue that by restricting the range of acceptable speech to private belief and discussion, rather than public issues and debate, this produces an idealization of consensus and, ironically, a suppression of diversity, which combined with their lack of acknowledgement of structural inequalities, denies any possibility of equal participation within the public that *This I Believe* is articulating.
In Chapter Three, “The America I Believe In,” I described how nationalism is a banal part of everyday life, drawing on Hage’s concepts of “passive belonging” and “governmental belonging” to interpret the different ways in which the essayists identify with the nation based on their location within the national field of power, and detailing the ways in which the This I Believe essayists struggle over the value of their national capital. In these ways, I described how unequal power relations are reproduced, as I argued that the experience of national belonging and not belonging is connected to the organization of social differences that regulate national space. By examining the processes of national identification as articulated by the essayists, this chapter reveals the contents of the national habitus of the essayists, and shows how This I Believe facilitates the production of a particular subjectivity that contributes to the realization of national state power.

Analyzing essays on home and neighbors, I showed how Hage’s concept of governmental belonging is experienced, describing how those who can legitimately claim to be White Americans express their perception of being “at home” in that nation by taking for granted their right to legitimately speak on behalf of the nation and contribute to its management. I argued that those who hold a privileged position within the nation feel secure in the invulnerability of her own rights, based on their liberal belief in the democratic governance of the state, despite the obvious violations of rights of those citizens (and noncitizens) without full national belonging. I described the essayists’ desires to make the nation feel homely and explained how using the myth of the small town, the nation is imagined to be composed of communities of similarity, a national neighborhood of neighbors.

I then described how the idea of neighborhoods delimits the boundaries of home, describing how the desire for homogeneity and security nurtures practices of exclusion and hostility to the stranger. Analyzing essays on patriotism and “the immigrant experience,” I showed how Ghassan Hage’s concept of passive belonging is experienced, describing how those who are not accepted as White Americans express their perception of not being “at home” in the nation. I described how for these essayists full national belonging remains an unfulfilled aspiration. I detailed how these essayists by challenge the value of or unequal distribution of those contents that they feel illegitimately classify
them as less national than others, striving to be recognized as at least as national, as American, as those in a position of national dominance. I argue that they base their arguments for full inclusion on the liberal ideal of equality and find purpose and hope through the fantasy of constructing the ideal nation.

I argued that it is through the constant flaggings that naturalize nationhood, as reflected in the *This I Believe* essays, that citizens are primed for the moment when national sacrifice will be required. Analyzing essays about how the War on Terror has become a part of daily life, I described how the security of the homeland is feared to be at risk from without, as well as within, as flexibilities in national loyalty are considered potentially threatening. I described how citizens are called on to demonstrate their civic commitment/obligation, defending U.S. imperialist practices as a necessary moral obligation of the state through ideas of freedom. I argued that those essayists with governmental belonging identify with U.S. nationalism out of the fear that their home(land) and their racial, national, and imperial privileges are threatened and in need of protection. I described how these essayists reflect a gendered understanding of citizenship, with military service standing as one of the highest demonstrations of love of country, and mothers unable to maintain critical opposition to war, actively working to suppress any awareness of the workings of imperial power, in order to justify the potential sacrifice of the lives of their family members to the nation-state. I argued that for essayists with full national belonging, such fear can be unifying, providing a sense of moral purpose and a willingness to defend the nation. In contrast, I argued that for essayists without full national belonging, the homeland can be a place of insecurity, especially for those identified as “Muslims,” who must prove that they are not terrorists by defending the actions of the American government.

In Chapter Four, “Our Greatest Strength in Dealing with the World,” I showed how national otherness is an integral component of the construction and maintenance of the fantasy of the White nation. I described the struggles between Evil White Nationalists and Good White Nationalists to manage the boundaries of the national public, to determine the conditions of national inclusion or exclusion. I argued that liberal ideals of freedom, security, terrorism, diversity, and tolerance rely on ideas of difference to reproduce nationalist structures of thought and reconstitute the national identities of the
This I Believe audience as they struggle for domination within the national field. I contend that these ideas impede essayists’ efforts to comprehend the causations of acts of terror or to develop a critical awareness of how imperialism operates.

I described how after September 11th, the Bush administration emphasized freedom and liberty as central values of ‘American’ national identity, as well as values with global appeal and benefits, whose defense and promotion justified U.S. foreign policy. I explained that such messages resonated with many Americans, especially among Christian fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals, who believe that American is divinely appointed to champion the cause of freedom. I outlined how freedom thus became the organizing principle of antiterrorism discourse, justifying stricter border and immigration control domestically, as well as the “liberation” of the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. I showed how during the historical moment after September 11th, exclusionist practices became the dominant response amongst Evil White nationalists for how to relate to other nation-states defined as fundamentalist, uncivilized or differently civilized, as well as for how to manage the problematic presence of citizens and non-citizens within national space who were racialized as Muslims and/or ‘terrorists.’

Analyzing This I Believe essays by foreign-policy governmental officials, military personnel, and well travelled ‘citizens,’ I showed how the essayists celebrate the United States as a model of liberal democracy in a world that that they characterize as lacking in freedom, violent and antimodern, occupied by people who yearn for basic human rights. I describe the essayists’ support for what they interpret as the humanitarian motivation of the United States. I described how this motivation is understood through the discourse of bringing ‘freedom’ to the oppressed, ‘Muslim’ men and women who have been terrorized by despotic governments, even if that means using military or occupying force, in order to defeat those who “hate freedom.” I argued that such a universalizing discourse detaches violence from its unique set of social relations, relations that often cross nationalized boundaries, and evades the complicity of United States in provoking and perpetuating such violence. I argue that in order to sustain the narrative of U.S. exceptionalism, the essayists make no mention of the American torture of ‘enemy combatants,’ instead providing accounts of instances in which Americans were tortured, effectively deflecting attention away from the role of the United States in contributing to
global experiences of terror, whilst maintaining the perception of a threat to the nation that is so essential to national subjectivity.

I argued that the *This I Believe* essayists were uncomfortable with morally ‘evil’ nationalist practices of exclusion, choosing instead to emphasize what at that time was a minority point of view, the morally ‘good’ nationalist practices of tolerance and acceptance with their valuation of cultural pluralism and diversity. I analyzed how non-White essayists write about their ‘own’ cultural practices, whilst White essayists write about how their experience of ‘other’ cultures enriches their lives, revealing the distinction within multiculturalism between those who embody diversity, and those who tolerate or appreciate diversity. I analyzed essays which described feelings of exclusion because of their social ‘difference, revealing how toleration and acceptance act as exclusionary forces on the tolerated and accepted. I then analyzed essays on diversity, arguing that despite the essayists’ claims of inclusivity, their shared conviction that they possess, as national subjects, the power to make decisions about how to manage those defined as national objects, revealed the limitations of the discourse of tolerance to overcome nationalist modes of social organization and acknowledge the multiplicity of contested divisions produced organized through relations of class, gender, and racism that create ‘difference.’ I argued that discourses of multiculturalism help to deny social relations of domination in order to maintain the veneer of unification that nationalism requires for its legitimation. I argued that by imagining others, foreign or domestic, as objects to be removed or positioned, and setting limits on what will and will not be tolerated, both practices of tolerance and exclusion reproduce the centrality of the White nationalist within national space, and guard against those who would threaten dominant understandings of Americanness. I argue therefore, that both Evil White Nationalists and Good Nationalists occupy a shared imaginary position of power within the White nation fantasy, as worried White national subjects struggling for domination within the nation field through disagreements over how national others ought to be managed, disagreements which are based on their varying thresholds of tolerance.

In this final chapter, “Finding New Pride in America” I argued that *This I Believe* was part of a larger liberal response to the conservative hegemony over morality, in which both the essayists and the Democratic Party were grappling for a morally resonant
discourse, a language which would unite and empower them, reinvigorate their national identification, define what they believed in and describe the parameters of the ideal nation. I argued that amidst ambiguities about their location in the national political field, *This I Believe* essayists were eager to find both an outlet, and support, for the expression of their beliefs about the proper management of the nation. I described how initial efforts by the Democratic Party focused on integrating religious language and the ideas of the faithful, but these efforts did not resonant with their core constituency, many of whom are nonreligious, and most of whom support the liberal idea of the separation of government and state. I argued that instead, it is liberalism that is the morally resonant discourse for Democrats, as well as for the essayists on *This I Believe*, which is why the election of President Barack Obama resulted in Obamania amongst liberals.

I showed how Obama resonated with *This I Believe* essayists by employing a new politics of race that was compelling to White Americans. I described how this new politics involved such strategies as embracing the dominant national narrative, avoiding implicating Whites in problematic histories of exclusion, and denying ongoing systemic oppression. I detailed how Obama identified his multicultural biography as a uniquely American experience, offering his success and apparent transcendence of race as evidence of the greatness of the nation and the triumph of liberal ideals. I contend that Obama symbolically offered all Americans a sense of redemption, providing non-Whites with the possibility for full inclusion within the nation, providing Whites with racial innocence, and providing the nation itself with an apparent victory over racial inequality.

However, I argued that such redemption was really only symbolic because liberal ideas like color-blind individualism, meritocracy, and multiculturalism fail to acknowledge the reality of structural inequalities and place the responsibility for social change onto the already marginalized. The new racial politics in which Obama participates identifies the identity politics and affirmative action policies of the post-Civil rights leadership as illegitimate, denying that there are institutional barriers to equality. Instead, the new racial politics emphasizes personal responsibility, focusing on the character and work ethic of non-Whites, who are encouraged to give up their grievances and transcend their limitations through individual achievement and self-reliance. The new racial politics also emphasizes universal interests, couched in nationalist arguments that
we are all Americans, without recognizing the ways in which hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship shape people as more, or less, or not at all, American. I argued that by supporting Obama, Whites are able to claim that they are good nationalists, truly blind to color, redeemed of the nation’s history of racism and absolved of responsibility for the inequalities of non-Whites, which absent a program for substantive justice, means a greater entrenchment of the myth of the American Dream.

5.6 “Change We Can Believe In”

Because belief occurs at the moment of rupture between the known and unknown, in the spaces where hegemony has not been fully secured, belief offers an opportunity of consciousness for reorganizing plausibility structures, the potential for offering a clearer vision to those who suffer from “blind faith.” In this way, beliefs are choices (just like This I Believe host Jay Allison said) and hold the possibility for change. This I Believe essayist Randy Komisar\textsuperscript{171} expresses this idea in his essay “Engaging Heart and Mind” (10/26/08) when he professes “I believe in the transformative power of belief itself—that we express our true nature based not upon what we know, but what we believe in.” If the “true nature” of liberals is a desire for equality and social justice, then these people who hold individual choice in held in the highest regard could choose not to believe in the limiting concepts of liberalism, and instead choose to “disconnect ideas of home from ideas of sameness and difference” (Sharma, 2006:162). Just as Michael Mullane argued, the relations of ruling are both “wonderfully strong and terribly fragile” and require what he called “the Tinkerbell effect” in order to continue to exist. The state and the nation are imagined; they are a form of social relations which require people to believe in them in order for them to have legitimacy and power, and which require ongoing ideological maintenance in order for them to retain their naturalness.

Liberal nationalism suggests that electoral politics are the vehicle for achieving substantive justice, that if only the proper representatives were elected that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness would be realized for all. Crucially, equality can only be realized by challenging the ideological foundations of nationalism, wherein only some

\textsuperscript{171}Randy Komisar’s essay “Engaging Heart and Mind” was broadcast on Weekend Edition Sunday on 02/06/08.
people can fully belong to the ‘nation’ and legitimately make claims as to its management. Without such a challenge, however, there can be no real understanding or transformation of the global structures which perpetuate the social organization of differences. Crucially, if structural inequality is believed to no longer exist, if the nation is imagined as a “deep, horizontal comradeship,” and if the public sphere is imagined to be equally accessible to all, than the discursive space for talking about how national belonging is based on practices of both inclusion and exclusion, is utterly foreclosed (Anderson, 1983:7).

During this moment out of the political center, liberals had the opportunity to realize the ideological character of key liberal concepts, as they witnessed conservatives use ideas of “freedom” to disregard the rule of law, freedom of speech, and civil liberties through the creation and implementation of the U.S.A. Patriot Act and Department of Homeland Security, as well as to justify the preemptive War in Iraq and the practice of torture at detention centers like Abu Ghraib, and Guantanamo. These controversial measures were taken on behalf of the ‘nation,’ leaving liberals offended and confused, refuting “not my nation,” as the state acted out violence which they considered illegitimate in their name. This was an opportunity for liberals to see that the state is an apparatus of ruling, that it benefits from the existence of the idea of the nation, that it does not take into account the common good of everyone who lives there, that it does not require consent to subordinate those who are positioned as foreigners within or outside of the nation, that the idea of ‘Americaness’ legitimates not only the rule of White Americans over non-Whites and non-Americans, but over most Whites, including in this instance, liberals.

As the relations of exploitation and oppression were being unmasked, this was an opportunity for liberals to “speak truth to power,” to ask “what nation?” and “why nation?,” to realize through their own feelings of not belonging how ideas of home work to separate and position people based on differentiated identities. Early This I Believe producer and essayist critiques on restrictions to freedom of speech and rule of law were hopeful steps in this direction, but with the election of President Barack Obama, the essayists’ confidence in liberalism was restored, as they chose to believe that they “could go home again,” that they were still ‘the people,’ and that the state once again would rule
in their interests. Roxanna Harlow is skeptical of how much has changed since Obama has been elected, pointing out:

People are already joking about reorganizing the historical timeline into BB and AB: Before Barack and After Barack. Hmm. Before Barack (BB), the United States was a racist, patriarchal, imperialistic power that, through the language of freedom and democracy, strived to maintain White, global dominance. Now, After Barack (AB), the U.S. is a racist, patriarchal, imperialistic power with a Black head of state that, through the language of freedom and democracy, continues in its efforts to maintain White, global dominance in a smarter and less obvious way. That “change” doesn’t excite me (Harlow, 2008:6).

For the This I Believe essayists however, it was following President Obama’s 2008 campaign slogan, “change we can believe in,” a change in representative, without a change in the social relations that organize their privileged membership in the nation, combined with the triumph of liberal ideals and a confirmation of the goodness and tolerance of liberal nationalists. As Katie concluded in her essay, “It’s really not very audacious” (10/22/08).
## 6. Appendix

### Table 1: Detailed Description of Essays Cited

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<td>10/14/07</td>
<td>“Finding the Strength to Fight Our Fears.”</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Humor &amp; laughter</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Illness</td>
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<td><strong>Immigrant</strong></td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Injustice</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<td><strong>Peace</strong></td>
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<td>Pets &amp; animals</td>
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<td>Place</td>
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<td>Values &amp; spirituality</td>
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**NOTE:**  Nationalist Themes in Bold  
Classic Liberal Themes in Italics
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