DISSERTATION

THE STORIES OF U.S.: NATIONALISMS AMONG COLLEGE EDUCATED WHITE WOMEN WHO VOTED IN THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2025

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ABSTRACT

THE STORIES OF U.S.: NATIONALISMS AMONG COLLEGE EDUCATED WHITE WOMEN WHO VOTED IN THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Relatively recent sociological theories of nationalism understand the nation as variable processes whereby the nation is (re)constructed, albeit in different ways, via nationalism. Nationalism includes nation-oriented meanings and sentiments people embedded within socio-political contexts continually (re)formulate and imbue the nation with, which is how the nation is *subjectively* (re)created. Research on U.S. nationalism, however, primarily focuses on the subjective content of nationalism while the subjective contextualization of it remains understudied. In addition, although many aspects of nationalism are gendered, how women experience the nation and (re)create it is rarely examined. Addressing these gaps in the literature, this dissertation examines both the subjective content and the contextualization of U.S. nationalisms from the standpoint of college educated white women who voted in the 2016 presidential election. Utilizing in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews, I describe the various, yet patterned, ways America and Americans were constructed among interviewees and I examine the how they contextualized their expressions of nationalism. I argue "true" Americans' experiences with the American Dream were used to evaluate America's greatness, or lack thereof, which shaped the national sentiment the interviewees expressed. Findings provide key insight regarding: 1) the relevance of the American Dream for constructions of America, 2) how Americans and "true" Americans were constructed, 3) how gender relations, as well as those concerning other statuses, were used to contextualize nationalisms, 4) why expressions of

nationalism can be ambivalent, and 5) how forms of nationalism are intertwined in constructions of American national membership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation hinged on my own work as well as that of the many people who were on this journey with me. First, I am forever grateful to those who participated in this research and to my advisor. To each and every woman who participated in this research, thank you so very much for your time, energy, and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Please know this dissertation would not exist without you, and I sincerely hope I have done you and your stories justice. Lynn, your never-ending support, guidance, patience, and thoughtful insight also made this dissertation a reality. You never gave up, so I did not either. I sincerely appreciate you as a mentor and as a friend.

To my committee, thank you all for your time, constructive feedback, and support throughout this project. David McIvor, thank you for sitting on my committee as my outside member. Your constructive feedback is greatly appreciated. Mike Lacy, thank you for your encouragement, wisdom, and thoughtful insight not only in relation to my dissertation but throughout my graduate career at CSU. Tara Opsal, thank you for sharing your knowledge throughout this process. I appreciate your expertise and support both of which made this dissertation better.

I would also like to thank the Love family. I sincerely appreciate everything you all did for me, including welcoming me into your home, letting me tag-along with you, and sewing back together the seam of my interviewing blouse. Without your kindness, my dissertation would have been much more difficult to tackle. To my mom, Meredith, and the Rost, Wellenius, and Wong families, thank you for your support with this project and with my travels. You housed, fed, and

provided me with much needed companionship and resources. James, Carole, Troy, and Rebecca, I appreciate your help with this project as well. Hannah, I am thankful for the writing sessions you organized – they did wonders for my productivity as did our conversations. Emily, I appreciate the thoughtful feedback on chapter drafts, and thank you and Kelsea for taking the time to do practice interviews and for allowing me to talk though ideas.

Finally, thank you to Karl, Petey, Leroy, and Justin. Karl, Petey, and Leroy, I am grateful for the stress relief and clarity your cuddles, playfulness, and insistence on getting outside and going on walks provided me while I was writing this dissertation. Justin, none of this would have been possible without you. I am forever grateful for your encouragement, unwavering support, and the sacrifices you made during this process. In truth, we accomplished this together, and thank you for always having my back.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation was sparked from a conversation I had with a relative who told me she felt like she knew America again. This occurred shortly after the 2016 presidential election. Like several women I interviewed for this project, my relative said that she had not felt America was as it "should be" for us for a long time but was now more optimistic and she credited the election for rekindling her sense of comfort and familiarity with America and being American. In the months following, I thought often about this conversation and the questions it raised, particularly as exit polls indicated a sharp divide among college educated white women (see CNN 2016). People, of course, can vote for a candidate for many reasons, but research demonstrates a relationship between nationalism and vote choice (i.e., Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Deckman and Cassese 2021), so my conversation with my relative along with exit polls prompted questions about what women in this group thought about America, what it should look like, and why.

Indeed, what did college educated white women think America should look like for us and why? Who did they think "we" were and why? How did they understand the America in which they and other Americans lived, why, and were their understandings connected to their feelings about America? With these questions in mid, this dissertation seeks to understand the nationalisms women in this group expressed towards America and Americans by examining the standpoint (Haraway 1988; Harding 1993) from which their expressions of nationalism were situated.

In what follows, I introduce the theoretical framework used in this dissertation and

discuss its research questions and research objectives. I then introduce the research methods I utilized to answer my research questions and accomplish the objectives of this research. Finally, I provide an overview of this dissertation, including its contributions to scholarly work on nationalism.

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

Relatively recent sociological theories of nationalism understand the nation as variable processes, or practices, whereby the nation is (re)constructed, albeit in different ways, via nationalism (i.e., Brubaker 1996; Calhoun 1997). Nationalism includes meanings and sentiments people embedded within socio-political contexts continually (re)formulate and imbue the nation with, which is how the nation is *subjectively* (re)created (Brubaker 1996; 2004; 2009; Calhoun 1997; Bonikowski 2016; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). In this sense, nationalism is induced from socio-political contexts, so examining how people account for their expressions of nationalism in relation to the nation in which they live and experience is as important for researchers to engage with as examining the content of people's expressions of nationalism. Research on U.S. nationalism, however, primarily focuses on the subjective content of nationalism (i.e., Smith 1997; Citrin et al.1994; Schildkraut 2002, 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Hanson and O'Dwyer 2019; Agius, Rosemond, and Kinnvall 2020; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Deckman and Cassese 2021), while the subjective contextualization of it remains understudied.

In addition, although nationalism is gendered, gendered nationalism is often ignored in the relevant research (McClintock 1996; Walby 1996, 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997). The relatively few studies that examine gendered aspects of nationalism focus on understandings of women's

role in the nation as mothers and the reproducers of nationals and national culture (i.e. Yuval-Davis 1997), perceptions about the feminization of nations (i.e. Deckman and Cassese 2021), and understandings of nationalism as masculine projects (Enloe 1989; Bracewell 2000; Huysseune 2000; Puri 2004). This dissertation, however, examines how white, college educated women who voted in the 2016 presidential election constructed America and Americans through their experiences with America. In doing so, I highlight the ways gender relations, as well as those concerning other statuses, were used to contextualize and justify expressions of U.S. nationalism. As such, in addition to examining how gender relations were used to contextualize America, this dissertation understands women as active (re)creators of nation, both of which are underexamined in existing research on nationalism.

Contributing to the scholarly literature on U.S. nationalism, the *objective of this research project was to address the standpoint of both the subjective content and the contextualization of U.S. nationalism among college educated white women who voted in the 2016 presidential election.* To accomplish this objective, I engaged with two main research questions:

1. In what ways are Americans and America, including what America is and what it should be, constructed among interviewees?
2. How do interviewees contextualize their constructions of Americans and America, or what matters to them for their constructions?

Findings discussed in this dissertation further contribute to research on U.S. nationalism in several important ways. First, findings demonstrate the importance of the American Dream not only for constructions of what America should be for "true" Americans but for expressions of national sentiment, including hubris, shame, embarrassment, and/or ambivalence oriented

towards America and being American. I argue the interviewees' experiences with the American Dream were related to their expressions of nationalism because the American Dream was how the interviewees made sense of what America should be for Americans, so it was their expectation. As such, the interviewees' experiences with the American were used in their evaluations America's greatness and to contextualize, or justify, their expressions of national sentiment. This finding highlights the significance of the American Dream as a meaning and as an experience for expressions of U.S. nationalism, which supports the hypothesis proposed by Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016) that nationalisms are connected to one's experiences of the American Dream.

Second, findings demonstrate how interviewees' constructions of Americans were intertwined with their evaluations of America and the national sentiment they expressed. While research indicates that constructions of American national membership are related to expressions of national sentiment (i.e. Hjerm 1998; Ariely 2011), findings in this dissertation, I argue, offer insight into how and why they are related. Indeed, interviewees evaluated America and contextualized the national sentiment they expressed in relation to *Americans'* ability to experience the American Dream, not just their own ability to experience it. Because of this, I argue constructions of American national membership, or who was understood to be American, were inseparable from expressions of national sentiment.

Third, findings demonstrate a variety of ways American national membership was constructed and highlights how civic and cultural nationalism, as well as political and/or ethnocultural nationalism in some cases, were incorporated into these constructions. While much research examines the content of American national membership (i.e. Citrin et al. 1994; Smith

1997; Schildkraut 2002, 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Hanson and O'Dwyer 2019; Whitehead and Perry 2020), the ways that civic, cultural, ethnocultural, and/or political nationalism are intertwined in constructions of Americans is understudied despite research demonstrating that such nationalisms co-exist in most countries (i.e., Shulman 2002). I argue to understand why variation in constructions of Americans exists, one should examine the ways forms of nationalism are simultaneously used in relation to statuses people deem culturally relevant.

Finally, findings discussed in this dissertation contribute to existing scholarly work on U.S. nationalism by illuminating how national sentiment is not only informed from understandings of "what is" but from understandings of "what could be." Indeed, I argue that expressions of hubris oriented towards America and being American were shaped by experiences with the American Dream as well as experiences which fostered hope that America could become great for "true" Americans. In cases where national sentiment was impacted in both of these ways, expressions of it were ambivalent. I argue this ambivalence was due to perceived conflict between understandings of what was and what could be. While a few studies engage with ambivalent expressions of national sentiment (i.e. Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012), most studies, including those examining the U.S., do not (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016).

Research Methods

Because the objective of this dissertation was to address both the subjective content and contextualization of U.S. nationalism expressed by college educated white women who voted in the 2016 presidential election, I utilized qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews as my

research methodology. In total, I interviewed 69 college educated white women who lived in Colorado, Kansas, and North Carolina and who voted in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Qualitative methodology allows for and emphasizes "naturally emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to experience" (Berg 2004:11) because its purpose is to attempt to, "…make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:3). Quantitative methods are necessary to demonstrate statistical relationships between variables, which can only be accomplished through the use of large, representative sample. Qualitative methodology, on the other hand, allows researchers to gain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the meanings imbued by a small group of research participants through the collection of rich, contextual data. The collection of such data was necessary to answer my research questions, and I utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews as my data collection methodology.

In-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews allow for the collection of rich, detailed data. Indeed, such interviews allow researchers to explore general topics, such as nationalism, while uncovering the participant's point of view, or their expressions of nationalism and their contextualization of them. This is because this style of interviewing affords participants the latitude to frame and structure their responses. Here, the participant's perspective on the topic under examination unfolds as the participant views it, not how the researcher does. As such, semi-structured, in-depth interviews allow for the emic perspective necessary to understand subjective understandings, logic, and meanings (Marshall and Rossman 2011; Rubin and Rubin 2012; Creswell 2013), all of which were the objectives of this research in relation to nationalism.

Dissertation Overview

To situate and answer the research questions and meet the research objectives discussed above, included in this dissertation is a literature review, a discussion and explanation of the research methodology and methods I used in this dissertation, three empirical chapters, which are topically and thematically organized, and a discussion chapter that concludes this dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I situate my research questions within the existing scholarly literature on nationalism. In this chapter, I discuss various theoretical explanations of nation and nationalism, including substantialist and processual approaches towards these topics, and I discuss how the current research fits with this broader scholarly context including how it builds upon it and contributes to it. Chapter 3 specifically discusses the qualitative rationale for this research, which included grounded theory methodology and the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews for data collection. In addition, I explain my site selection and sampling methods, and I discuss the process of gaining entrée, my use of gatekeepers, my role as a researcher and my position within the research context, as well as difficulties I experienced during the research process.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the empirical findings of this research, are divided topically. Within each chapter I discuss the findings thematically. Chapter 4 centers on the "great" America, or the way the interviewees understood that America should be for Americans. Here, I address the significance of the American Dream for their understanding of a "great" America, which was commonly expressed by interviewees. This chapter includes a discussion about what the American Dream was according to the interviewees, as well as how it worked and why it was so important for America's greatness. Specifically, I discuss the roles democracy, equal access to opportunity, and the fulfillment of the social contract that was seen to exist between individuals

Americans, American society, and the U.S. government, played in facilitating the American Dream, upon which America's greatness hinged.

Chapters 5 focuses on the interviewees' constructions of American national membership, or who they understood to be American and "true" Americans. Their constructions of national membership revolved around two facets: 1) who they understood to be involved in the social contract in the first place, or Americans, and 2) among those involved, who they understood to fulfill their individual end of the social contract, or "true" Americans. Unlike their understanding of a great America, the interviewees' understandings of Americans and "true" Americans diverged albeit in patterned ways. I thematically discuss the ways these constructions diverged as well as why they did from the logic of the interviewees. Here, relations concerning gender, sexuality, political affiliation, religious affiliation, race, and/or type of citizenship were used, albeit in different ways, to justify one's inclusion into and exclusion from the "true" Americanness, in particular, on cultural or biological grounds. Chapter 6 focuses on the interviewees' understandings of America's actual greatness, or lack thereof for "true" Americans, or those who were viewed to be a part of the social contract and who also fulfilled their end of it. I discuss the perception of America's actual greatness among a handful of interviewees, how it related to the fulfillment of the social contract as well as democracy and equal access to opportunities, as well the experiences they drew upon to justify their perception. In addition, I discuss their expressions of national sentiment their understandings of America's greatness induced relating to nation and nationality-oriented feelings.

The majority of interviewees, however, saw America as lacking greatness because the American Dream did not unfold for many "true" Americans, however constructed. I discuss their

perception of America, how it related, albeit in different ways, to the unfulfillment of the social contract as well as democracy and unequal access to opportunities (and for whom). In addition, I discuss the experiences they drew upon to justify America's lack of greatness and the nation and nationality-oriented feelings their perceptions induced. Finally, in this chapter I address how hope that America could become great (if it lacked greatness) impacted interviewees' expressions of national sentiment, and I discuss the experiences they drew upon that fostered their hope.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter in this dissertation, provides a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications the findings of this research have for research on nationalism. Further, I discuss the limitations of this research as well as potential directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: NATION AND NATIONALISM

Nation is a notoriously ambiguous concept. Origin stories and ontological assertions about the existence of the nation vary in the literature, as do definitions of the concept (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Billig 1995; Brubaker 1996; Calhoun 1997; Smith 2000; Ting 2008; Bonikowski 2016). Despite this ambiguity, scholars agree that the concept of nation should not be conflated with that of the state, and that nation and nationalism are entwined (Smith 1983; Walker 1990; Calhoun 1997; Ting 2008). While some scholars argue nationalism is a consequence of nation (i.e. van den Burghe 1978, 2001; Geertz 1993), others argue nation is a consequence of nationalism (i.e. Gellner 1983; Billig 1995; Brubaker 1996, Calhoun 1997). Either way, nationalism is conceptualized as political consciousness, ideology, practices, and/or meanings and sentiments that are either: 1) common to a nation (i.e. van den Burghe 1978, 2001; Anderson 1981; Gellner 1983; Smith 1986; Geertz 1993), or 2) expressed towards the nation (i.e. Brass 1979; Kosterman and Feschbach 1989; Billig 1996; Brubaker 1996, 2012; Calhoun 1997; Bonikowski 2016; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2023; Byrd 2023).

The first approach, often called substantialism or groupism, treats nations as substantive communities (see Brubaker 2004, 2009; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The second approach is processual (Brubaker 2009) and practice-based (Bonikowski 2016). Here, the reality, or existence, of a nation shifts from a substantive community to a "contingent event", a "conceptual variable", and a "practical category." (Brubaker 1996:16). Nations, in other words, are not understood as "things in the world" but as "perspectives on the world," with concomitant questions shifting from the substantialist *what* [is a nation]? to the processual *how* [is the

nation]? (Brubaker 2009:32). From this view, nations are (re)produced via *nationalisms* and thus are variable *processes* which cannot be confined to describe any overarching "groupness" of a nation (Brubaker 1996; Calhoun 1997; Bonikowski 2016). Indeed, from this constructionist lens, research must examine the ways a nation is (re)produced by nationalism and uncover the socio-political contexts in which people are embedded and (re)formulate nationalism (Brubaker 2004; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Özkirimli 2017).

Much research examining U.S. nationalism relies on the constructionist, or processual, approach of nation (see Citrin et al. 1994; Smith 1997; Schildkraut 2002, 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Hanson and O'Dwyer 2019; Rosemond and Kinnvall 2020; Whitehead and Perry 2020; Deckman and Cassese 2021; Woods et al. 2023), yet most of it focuses on the content of U.S. nationalism and less on the contextualization of it (but see Cohen 1996; Blee 2008; El-Haj 2010; Hochschild 2016;). Additionally, although the process of nationalism is gendered (McClintock 1996), gendered aspects of nationalism are often ignored in the relevant research (Walby 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997). In the U.S., the few studies that examine gendered aspects of nationalism largely focus on beliefs about the feminization of the U.S. (i.e. Deckman and Cassese 2021). Such research yields insight into U.S. nationalism, but how women experience and construct the nation, as well as the ways gender relations are used to contextualize the U.S., remain understudied.

This dissertation addresses these gaps. It utilizes qualitative semi-structured interviews to examine U.S. nationalisms expressed by college educated white women who voted in the 2016 presidential election. In doing so, it *contributes to the literature on nationalism by focusing on the various, yet patterned, ways interviewees expressed nationalism oriented towards America*

and Americans as well as how gender relations, and relations concerning other statuses, were used to contextualize the U.S. and justify their expressions of nationalism. I focus on college educated white women who voted in the 2016 presidential election because, according to early exit polls, their vote was split between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton (CNN 2016). Although one can vote for a candidate for any number of reasons, research examining the U.S. demonstrates a relationship between nationalism and vote choice (see Whitehead and Perry 2020; Deckman and Cassese 2021), which suggests that nationalisms among this group of women may also diverge. Because of this, I focused my research on these women in particular.

In what follows, I situate this dissertation within broader literature on nationalism. The first section provides an overview of substantialist research on nationalism. In this section, I delve into particular substantialist theories of nation and nationalism, including primordialism and developmentalism, and I discuss the contributions of these theories and critiques of them. I then provide an overview of the processual approach of nation and nationalism. In this section I discuss various processual theories, their contributions to the literature, and why I utilized this approach in my dissertation.

Substantialism

The substantialist approach to nation treats nations as substantive communities, or "homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes" (Brubaker 2009:28). For some substantialist scholars the existence of nations is deemed natural, timeless, and fixed (i.e. van den Burghe 1978). Nationalism is a consequence of nation, moreover, such that a nation must exist in order for nationalism to exist. For other substantialist scholars, however, nations *develop* over time (i.e. Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983).

Here, the nation is a consequence of nationalism, so nationalism is commonly viewed as a part of the development of nations. Both accounts argue nationalism is common to a nation and use nationalism to describe the "groupness" of nations (Brubaker 2009:30). As such, nationalism is understood to be homogeneous and static (Verdery 1993; Brubaker 2009) and often based on *a priori* assumptions about the content of nationalism (Bonikowski 2016), which promote normative conceptions of what a nation should be (Calhoun 1997; Ting 2008). In what follows, I discuss primordialism and developmentalism, both of which are included in the substantialist literature on nation and nationalism.

Primordialism

Primordialism is one of the oldest theoretical traditions of nation and nationalism, and it is among the most heavily critiqued traditions because of its emphasis on the naturalness and/or timelessness of nations (Chandra 2001; Brubaker 1996; 2009; Wimmer 2013; Özkirimli 2017). Primordialim, however, is not a singular theoretical understanding of nation and nationalism (Smith 1998; Özkirimli 2017). Indeed, there are scholars who act as "analytical naturalizers" of nation and those who act as "analysts of naturalizers" of nation (Brubaker 2004:83). Scholars who act as analytical naturalizers of nation treat nations as substantive communities that exist in the world as natural, biologically derived groups. Scholars who act as analysts of naturalizers, on the other hand, assert that people *assume* the nation is a timeless, biologically derived group, and this assumption binds a national grouping together as substantive communities.

Pierre van den Berghe (2001) exemplifies primordial work and acts as both an analytical naturalizer and an analyst of naturalizers. Indeed, van den Burghe (2001:274) posits that all ethnic and national groups have "…an objective, external basis…" to their existence because

such groups, "…are fundamentally defined by common descent and maintained by endogamy." He goes on to ague, however, that common descent can be "real or putative." In this sense, ethnic groups, and therefore nations, which he defines as "politically conscious ethnie" (2001:273), exist as substantive communities because they can be biologically derived groups – analytically naturalizing the nation – or groups that are assumed to be biologically derived by their members – analyzing naturalizers of nations.

The logic behind the nation's biologically derived existence revolves around kin selection because this biological process provides the genetic tool for animal, including human, sociality. Indeed, kin selection, as described by van den Burghe (1978:402), means that:

> an animal can duplicate its genes directly through its own reproduction, or indirectly through the reproduction of relatives with which it shares specific proportions of genes. Animals, therefore, can be expected to behave cooperatively, and thereby enhance each other's fitness to the extent that they are genetically related.

In other words, kin selection facilitates mutually beneficial cooperation and fitness enhancement among genetically related people, which is also the basis for ethnic and national groupings. In effect, ethnic and national groups can share a common descent that is maintained over time, which binds that group together.

Yet van den Berghe (2001:274) also writes that these groups "are super-families of (distant) relatives, *real or putative* [emphasis mine], who tend to intermarry and who are knit together by vertical ties of descent reinforced by horizontal ties of marriage." Assumptions of shared descent are not the same thing as actual shared descent, but each provides the basis for sociality and solidarity within ethnic and national groups. Indeed, people use cultural indicators of group membership, such as language, accents, and clothing, as markers of genetic ties, and

such markers allow for more inter-group and less intra-group discrimination in kin selection. In this sense, even if common descent is assumed, it is often deemed as real enough "to become the basis of these powerful sentiments we call nationalism, tribalism, racism, and ethnocentrism" (van den Burghe 1978:404). Because of this, ethnic groups are the foundations of nations whose solidarity and sociality are based on real or putative common descent, and nationalism is an ethnic group's demand for political autonomy. Here, there must exist an ethnic group to gain political consciousness (a nation) and demand political autonomy (nationalism).

For van den Burghe, lineage, whether putative or real, determines ethnicity out of which some collective form of political consciousness emerges. Here, it is not that some people in an ethnic group attain political consciousness, the entire group does. From van den Berghe's (2001) primordialism, nationalism is organic (Smith 2010) because it emerges out of these assumed or real natural groupings and consists of those group's demands for sovereignty. This understanding of nationalism is critiqued for limiting it to group demands for sovereignty, which cannot and does not offer insight into nations that have achieved sovereignty. Indeed, from this definition nationalism is largely confined to historical inquiry (Bonikowski 2016).

Some primordialist scholars, however, never act as analytical naturalizers of nation because they present the naturalness and timelessness of nations as assumptions people have about their nation (i.e. Shils 1957; Geertz 1993). Here, the nation as a substantive community is not actually biologically derived; rather nations are substantive communities because people attribute blood ties to national groupings. This understanding of nation is exemplified by the work of Clifford Geertz. Like van den Berghe (1978; 2001), Geertz (1993) addresses the relevance of lineage, language, and cultural practices in relation to national groupings; however,

Geertz does not suggest these matters are in-and-of themselves primordial. Indeed Geertz (1993:259) writes:

> By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens'—or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed 'givens'—of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves.

Geertz (1993) argues that ethnic and national groupings are bound to one another through *assumed* primordial attachment. The word 'assumed' and the reference to culture in the quote above indicate that primordial attachments are grounded in perceptions and beliefs people have, which is what makes such attachments "givens" and powerful. While Geertz (1993:259-60) points out that the strength of these primordial attachments vary by person, society, and time, he argues that for virtually every person, society, and at almost all times, attachments form from the perception of natural connection. In this sense, nations are formed and exist on the basis of assumed primordial attachments (Smith 2010) whereby people profoundly feel and believe in the primordiality of their nations, or their naturalness and timelessness.

Primordial accounts of nation, such as Geertz's and van den Burghe's, highlight the importance and relevance of emotion and affect for nation and nationalism (Eller and Coughlan 1993; Calhoun 1997; Özkirimli 2017). Some critics of primordialism argue that this focus on emotions is the most important contribution of this perspective since the concept of nation often evokes strong and passionate feelings (Smith 2008). However, there is substantial variation among people's sense of attachment to and solidarity felt towards their nation (see Brass 1979; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016), which is not accounted for by primordialist understandings of

the nation since attachment and solidarity are 'givens' used to describe the nation as a substantive community. Indeed, as Smith (1986:3) readily admitted, scholars do "endow nations and ethnic communities with more static 'solidarity' than closer investigation at any point in time might warrant."

Primordialism, including the work of van den Burghe and Geertz, is connected to ethnocultural nationalism, which is nationalism concerning national membership, or who is a member of a nation. In substantialist work more broadly, ethnocultural nationalism is used by scholars to describe the groupness of nations – historically Eastern nations in particular – in terms national membership that is based on ancestral ties (real or putative) that are identified by race and/or cultural practices, such as religion, language, and/or traditions and customs (Shulman 2002).

Research, including van den Burghe's, that conflates national membership with actual ancestry (analytical naturalizers of nation), is criticized for understanding ethnic (and therefore national membership) as relatively fixed because it is deemed biologically derived (Brass 1991; Calhoun 1997; Brubaker 2009; Özkirimli 2017). This is problematic for a few reasons. First, it can limit our understanding of nations to places where there has been little immigration and the people are genetically, racially, and culturally homogeneous. Such understandings offer exclusive and prescriptive definitions of nation which do not reflect the racial, cultural, and genetic heterogeneity of many, if not most, modern national groupings (see Shulman 2002; Ting 2008). Second, this understanding of nation ignores the role individual choices and deliberate decision-making play in ethnic and national membership. For example, people can and do choose to immigrate and assimilate into different national groupings, regardless of their race and

ancestry, in order to obtain better opportunities for themselves and their significant others. Far from being biologically fixed, national membership is constantly altered, negotiated, and redefined by people as they make sense of, react, and adjust to changing circumstances (Brass 1991).

On the other hand, scholarly work that depicts national membership based on putative ancestry, which includes the work of both Geertz and van den Burghe, is deemed analytically useful. This is because such work describes a way that people can define national membership (Coakley 2018). In this sense, primordialism can work as an analytical tool to understand ethnocultural nationalist expressions of national membership. However, Brubaker (1996) argues researchers using this analytical tool should neither conflate this category of analysis with actual categories of practice nor use it to describe the overarching groupness of a nation in relation to national membership, as is done in much primordialist work. This argument also applies to civic nationalism, which defines national membership based on citizenship, territory, and rights shared by citizens (Yuval-Davis 1997). Historically, civic nationalism was used to describe the groupness of Western nations, in particular, but when adopted as an analytical tool it can describe another way people can define national members (Shulman 2002).

Developmentalism

In contrast to primordialism, developmentalist understandings of nation and nationalism emphasize tracing, "the long-term political, economic and cultural changes that led, over centuries, to the gradual emergence of nations…" (Brubaker 1996:19). From this line of substantialist work, both nation and nationalism emerged in the past two centuries and are consequences of modern processes such as industrialization (Gellner 1983), secularism

(Anderson 1991), and capitalism (Nairn 1981). As opposed to primordialist arguments, which tend to argue that nationalism is a consequence of an assumed nation, many developmentalist understandings argue that nation is a consequence of nationalism. Nationalism, however, like its use among primordialists, is used by developmentalists to describe the groupness of nations as substantive communities often in terms of ideology and national sentiment common to the nation (i.e. Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983). This is largely why this theoretical tradition of substantialism is critiqued.

Exemplifying a developmentalist understanding of nation and nationalism, Gellner (1983:1) argues nations emerge *out* of nationalism, which he defines as "a political principle which holds the national and political unit should be congruent." From this view, nationalism invents nations, so nationalism is a necessity of the modern world. As such, the point of any theory of nationalism is to explain how and why nationalism emerged (Gellner 1983; 1996). In particular, Gellner (1983) argues nationalism is a product of industrial-social organization because it connects culture and the state. Nationalism is necessary for modernizing states because a specialized division of labor needs a unified high culture, which is reinforced by a specialized education system. Gellner's (1983) argument, then, looks like this:

industrialization → nationalism → nation

Here, Gellner's (1983:55) assertion that, "nations can be defined only in terms of the age of nationalism" is grounded by his logic that nations emerge, "when general social conditions make for standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just the elite minorities." Indeed, for Gellner (1983:57):

> Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low culture had taken up the lives of the majority and in some cases the totality of the population. It means the general diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements for a reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of the previous complex structure local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves.

Gellner argues against the ethnic and biological determinism found in much primordialist work by demonstrating that nation is developed via modern processes, and his theory implies that nations are created to satisfy the political principle of nationalism (Calhoun 1997).

Going in a different developmentalist direction, Anderson (1991) argues theories of nationalism should not be confined to the cultural and political factors that facilitate the emergence of nation. Instead, he insists that theories of nationalism must address the profound attachments to the nation a given population feels. While Anderson addresses the modern processes that gave rise to nations as "imagined communities," including secularism and print capitalism, the question Anderson (1991:4) poses is, "what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices?" From this framework, nation is "an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1991:7), one, moreover, that evokes strong emotional connections to the nation.

For Anderson, nation is imagined because, "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." It is imagined as bound because all nations have boundaries. It is imagined as sovereign because it emerged in the age of Enlightenment and

expansive social change wherein the legitimacy of divinely ordained rulers was challenged. Finally, it is imagined as a community because, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1991:6-7). For Anderson, nationalism is this sense of comradeship, which makes it possible for so many people to voluntarily die for their nation.

The issue with developmentalist theories, including those of Anderson and Gellner, is not their focus on the formation of nations, which involves economic, political, and cultural transformation; rather, the issue is that such theories largely treat nations, once formed, as static, substantive entities (Brubaker 2009; Bonikowski 2016). While Gellner (1983) subverts the relationship between nation and nationalism, he treats nations, once formed via modern processes, as static, bound, and homogeneous entities. Even Anderson (1991) takes for granted the powerful attachment and self-sacrificing devotion people can feel toward their nation and uses it describe the groupness of nations (Walker 1994; Brubaker 2009). Here, Anderson asserts that nationalism is fundamentally about the attachments felt and horizontal fraternity fostered among a population who collectively imagine themselves as a nation, but he neither addresses the processes that change the strength of such attachments nor the fact that many lack such feelings of attachment.

Why is this problematic? It assumes the population feels these attachments and fraternity and that such feelings are static (Brubaker 2009). Such assumptions obviate engagement with variability in nationalism and thus efforts to understand the conditions under which some people lack attachment to "their" nation, fail to feel a sense of "horizontal comradeship", or imagine "their" nation differently than others in the same population.

This is a limitation of substantialist understandings of nation and nationalism. Indeed, research indicates that nationalism, including both expressions of national sentiment and national membership: 1) are composed of an array of sentiments and national membership constructions (Brass 1979; Brubaker 1996; Skey 2011; Miller-Idriss and Rotherberg 2012; Bonikowski 2016), and 2) vary among a national population (Brubaker et al. 2007; Miller-Idriss 2006; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016. Further, research demonstrates that expressions of national sentiment are often ambivalent (Idriss-Miller and Rothenberg 2012). While substantialist understandings offer great insight into particular expressions of nationalism, they fail to engage with and explain known variation within it.

The Processual Nation

The constructionist, or processual, approach towards nation and nationalism differs from substantialist understandings by questioning the ontological existence of nation and associated static, monolithic depictions of it and nationalism (Calhoun 1997; Brubaker 2009). The nation as a process, or practice, involves examining the concept of nation as a fluid, contextual, and dynamic set of interpretations (Bonikowski 2016). Here, the nation is understood to be a deeply contested concept whose meaning is constantly negotiated and (re)constructed by people who are embedded in concrete contexts (Brubaker 1996; Ting 2008; Bonikowski 2016). In other words, nations do not exist as substantive communities and nationalism is not a singular ideology, political consciousness, sentiment, or meaning assumed to be common to all nations or even shared among a given national population. Instead, this line of theory focuses on nationalist practices and understandings. This includes attention to understudied aspects of nationalism,

such as the ways gender relations inform nationalist projects and the (re)production of nation in everyday life (i.e. Billig 1995; McClintock 1996; Walby 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997).

This approach takes neither nations nor nationalism for granted since it argues that nationalism can neither be confined to describing some overarching "groupness" of a nation nor can its content be assumed a priori due to the conflation of categories of analysis with categories of practice (Brubaker 1996; Bonikowski 2016). Indeed, the point of research on nationalism from this lens is to examine the ways nation is imbued with meanings and sentiments well as the socio-political contexts in which people are embedded and (re)formulate nationalism (Brubaker 2004; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). In what follows I discuss several processual understandings of nation and nationalism, including banal nationalism, discursive formation, instrumentalism, and cognitive-based formation.

Banal nationalism

Billig's (1995:5) approach towards nationalism critiques substantialism, which tends to associate nationalism with "those who struggle to create new states or with extreme right-wing politics." Research focusing on the creation of states often understands nationalism as belonging to "others" — those who have yet to complete their nation-building processes. This is an issue for Billig (1995:5) because nationalism is "ours," it is a part of established nations as well, and it is not simply a "temporary 'mood' that manifests itself only under times of crisis." Billig rejects this understanding because established nations continue to exist during settled times, or times not marked by widespread socio-political change. This is because established nations are reproduced via banal nationalism, which consists of routine habits and practices that remind us that we live in and are a part of nations.

Billig argues people make assumptions about what a nation is, and information used in those assumptions comes from different sources. National histories, for example, tell the story a people and their ways of life, as well as those of other people, so nations cannot be imagined without also imagining foreign nations. In other words, there can be no "us" without a "them," and stereotypes are how we distinguish ourselves from them. "We" represent the normalized standard against which others' particularities are recognized, and unique national cultures are associated with territories – "our" homeland and "their" homelands – and the entire world is composed of cultural communities tied to specific geographical spaces. In this sense, banal nationalism relates to how those in established nations maintain a sense of we-ness through everyday practices, such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, saluting the American flag, and uttering and hearing the words "we," "our," and "here." In addition, Billig argues politicians are important to banal nationalism because their faces and words are constantly in the media. Their words, in particular, reach millions daily, and what they say and how they say it is important because they often present themselves as representing the national interest and thereby evoke the national "we," which reminds us of who we are and where we live.

Contributing to the processual approach of nation and nationalism, Billig (1995) focuses on established nations and how the nation is reproduced via banal nationalism through a processual understanding of nation. Indeed, established nations do not just exist in the world as substantive communities as with the substantialist approach towards nation and nationalism; rather, established nations are continually reproduced via the routine, habitual practice of people. In this sense, nationalism is neither particular to some people nor some places, which expanded the applicability of nationalism for understanding the reproduction of established nations.

Discursive formation

Like Billig, Calhoun (1997) takes issue with the tendency of substantialist analyses to reify nation, or treat it as a substantive community, often based on assumptions of solidarity. While Calhoun argues some level of solidarity describes nations, he asserts that solidarity exists among an array of groupings (from families to sports teams), so it cannot in-and-or-itself be used to identify a nation. This is where nationalism comes in. Calhoun (1997:3) defines nationalism as a "discursive formation," which is "a way of speaking that shapes our consciousness." These discursive formations play a crucial in the production of national understandings because it is a particular way of thinking about social solidarity, or "us."

Calhoun cites 10 distinguishing claims concerning the discourse of nation. These included: boundaries, indivisibility, sovereignty, an ascending notion of legitimacy, popular participation in collective affairs, direct membership, culture, common descent, and historical relationships to a particular territory. None of these claims are definitive in terms of defining a nation, however, because Calhoun argues nations cannot be defined objectively; instead, nations are constituted through discourse. Specifically, he argues (1997:5):

> [N]ations are constituted largely by the claims themselves, by the way of talking and thinking and acting that relies on these sorts of claims to produce collective identity, to mobilize people for collective projects, and to evaluate peoples and practices.

In this sense, the recognition of nations cannot occur by identifying any universal essence, or nature, of them, even if it is putative. Rather, nations are "particular ways of thinking about what it means to be a people," and the crucial point to grasp "is that nations can only exist within the context of nationalism" (Calhoun 1997:99). Nationalist discourse, in other words, defines nations.

Discussing Andersons's (1991) concept of imagined communities, Calhoun (1997) argues such communities are *ways of constructing social reality*. In other words, imagined communities are nationalist discourses, which can vary and are not inherently right or wrong (although critiques of them may be necessary). In this sense, attempts to confine nationalism to a single, master variable (i.e. shared political consciousness, national attachment) are pointless. While such variables may explain the contents of particular nationalisms, they neither explain nationalist discourse in-and-of itself nor nations. As such, Calhoun (1997:8) argues researchers need to engage with nationalism "in its multiplicity of forms."

While Billig's (1995) work centers on the (re)production of established nations via banal nationalism, Calhoun's (1997) work centers on the (re)productions of nations more broadly via discursive formation. Imagined communities as discursive formations of nation are *ways of constructing the nation,* so nationalism is a variable process. This is an important contribution because it invites exploration into the various ways people construct and reconstruct the nation.

Instrumentalism

Instrumentalist work on nationalism similarly addresses variation, but it also seeks to contextualize various expressions of nationalism, which are key components to processual approaches towards nation and nationalism (Brubaker 1996; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). Contributing to the processual approach towards nation and nationalism, Brass (1979) stresses the relevance of variation in expressions of national sentiment based on instrumental facets nationality. He argues nationality is a convenient tool used by competing elites for garnering support among national members (Smith 1986). Like Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1991), Brass (1979) argues against primordialist assertions of ethnicity and nationality as products of common

ancestry (real or putative), but unlike these developmentalists, Brass argues that nationality, as well as ethnicity, are continually (re)defined and constructed in response to changing conditions and influences of political elites. In his work, Brass engages with the more contingent and fluctuating facets of nation, and brings into focus important contextual factors, such as economic interests and political dynamics, that impact expressions of nationalism. Like other instrumentalists, Brass (1979), tends to focus almost exclusively on economic and political conditions and ignores how other contextual factors, such as the needs, experiences, interests, and hopes of people, matter for nationalism (Smith 1995; Hempel 2004).

Cognitive formation

Cognitive-based formation of nation expands on varieties of nationalism as well as the contexts from which nationalisms are induced. Like Calhoun (1997), Brubaker (1996, 2004, 2009) critiques the reification of nation as substantive communities. Instead, nation should be conceptualized in "relational, processual, dynamic eventful, and disaggregated terms," and we should think of nations as "practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects, and contingent events." (Brubaker 2004:167-168). Indeed, Brubaker (1996) argues shifting attention to the variable and contingent character of nation because it allows us to distinguish between categories and groups and to problematize the relation between the two. With *groups*, Brubaker (2004) argues, researchers end up asking what a given uniformly grouped people want, demand, or aspire towards and how they think of themselves and others. With *categorie*s, however, researchers are compelled to focus on the processes and relations that generate a sense of national membership and national sentiment.

In addition, problematizing groupness helps researchers focus their attention on the cognitive dimension of nationality. Ethnicity, race, and nation, Brubaker (2002:174-75) argues, exist only and through perceptions and interpretations; he writes:

> They are not things in the world but perspectives on the world. These include ethnicized ways of seeing (and ignoring), or constructing (and misconstructing), of inferring (and misinferring), or remembering (and forgetting) …They include systems of classification, categorization, and identification, formal and informal. And they include the tacit, taken-for-granted background knowledge…through which people recognize and experience objects, places, persons, actions or situations as ethnically, racially or nationally marked and meaningful.

For Brubaker, cognitive perspectives can help us advance the processual approach because instead of just asserting that nationhood is constructed, such perspectives can help us comprehend how they are constructed and contested. Indeed, cognitive approaches can help us determine when and how people identify themselves and perceive others in ethnic or national terms via examinations of contextual factors that induce nationalism. Indeed, Brubaker (1996:17) argues, "Nationalism is not engendered by nations. It is produced — or better, it is induced — by political [as well as economic and cultural fields]. In other words, context matters, and it matters in ways that extend beyond the political and economic focus of instrumentalist accounts.

Constructionist, or processual, theories of nation and nationalism differ from one another based on how each conceptualizes the nation, which include established nations and banal nationalism (Billig 1995), instrumental nationalism (Brass 1979), discursive nationalism (Calhoun 1997), and cognition-based nationalism (Brubaker 1996, 2004, 2009). Despite these differences, however, constructionist theories of nation and nationalism generally assert that: 1) nations are subjectively understood, 2) nations are (re)created via nationalisms, 3) nationalisms vary, and 4) nationalisms are contextually situated. In these ways, the constructionist approach is

distinct from the substantialist one. Indeed, nations do not exist as substantive communities because there is not an overarching "groupness" to nations that nationalism can describe. Nationalisms vary, so the ways nation is (re)constructed vary as well (see Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Özkirimli 2017).

The Current Study

This dissertation incorporated the constructionist approach to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways are Americans and America, including what America is and what it should be, constructed among interviewees?

2. How do interviewees contextualize their constructions of Americans and America, or what matters to them for their constructions?

The constructionist approach was utilized in this dissertation because it not only engages nation-oriented variability but seeks to explain to it. *Because this dissertation was fundamentally about exploring the ways college-educated white women who voted in the U.S. 2016 presidential election expressed nationalism and examining the contexts from which their expressions were situated, the processual approach towards nation and nationalism was necessary to utilize.* In doing so, this dissertation also relied upon substantialism as an *analytical tool* to examine expressions of nationalism related to expressions of ethnocultural definitions of American national membership. In addition, I used civic and cultural nationalisms as analytical tools to examine expressions of American national membership. While civic nationalism is used to describe constructions of national membership based upon citizenship, territory, and rights

shared by citizens, cultural nationalism refers to constructions of national membership based upon symbolic heritage which includes language, religion, customs, and/or traditions (Yuval-Davis 1997).

In relation to gendered nationalism, the few studies that examine it focus on gendered aspects of nationalism, such as understandings of women's role in the nation (i.e. Yuval-Davis 1997), perceptions about the feminization of nations (i.e. Deckman and Cassese 2021), and understandings of nationalism as masculine projects (Enloe 1989; Bracewell 2000; Puri 2004). Women, however, are active re(creators) of nation, and this dissertation examines nationalism as situated knowledge (Haraway 1988) whereby the standpoint from which the interviewees contextualized and justified their expressions of nationalism is explored (Harding 1993). In doing so, I discuss the ways gender relations, as well as those concerning other statuses, were used to contextualize and justify expressions of U.S. nationalism.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter I discuss and qualify the qualitative research methodology utilized for my dissertation. I begin by discussing my rationale for using qualitative methodology for this project, including grounded theory methodology. I then provide an explanation for this project's research design, and I discuss my rationale for the sampling and data collection methods I used. I then address data management and analysis methods I used, and I discuss how I fit into the research context as well as the challenges I experienced as a researcher.

Methodology and Qualitative Rationale

From the constructionist framework individuals develop meanings through experiences and these meanings are varied and multiple. As such, researchers need to examine the complexity of meaning and how it is socially derived and negotiated. Indeed, meaning is not simply imposed, or stamped, on individuals; rather, it is produced via experience, so much constructionist research relies on examining contextualized and subjective understandings of the world to inductively generate theory (Crotty 1998; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba 2007; Creswell 2013). As opposed to testing pre-determined hypotheses about the meanings with which America and Americans are imbued, the purpose of my dissertation is to elucidate and understand those subjective meanings in the first place. As such, this dissertation is exploratory in its scope because the goal is to uncover the nationalisms expressed by respondents and to understand the subjective logic behind their expressions of nationalism. To accomplish this goal, qualitative methodology was necessary for a couple of important reasons.

First, qualitative methodology accommodates and emphasizes "naturally emerging

languages and the meanings individuals assign to experience" (Berg 2004:11) because the purpose of it is to study people in natural settings (Marshall 1996; Creswell 2013; Phillips 2014) and to attempt to, "…make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:3). While quantitative methods are necessary to demonstrate statistical relationships between variables, which can only be accomplished through the use of large, representative samples (Ragin, Nagel and White 2004), it is qualitative methodology that allows researchers to gain an in-depth, nuanced understanding of the meanings imbued by a small group of research participants through the collection of rich, contextual data.

Second, qualitative methodology is used to, "develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining" (Creswell 2013:48), which makes it especially appropriate for exploratory research. Indeed, qualitative approaches accommodate the adaptability, flexibility, and continuity exploratory projects, in particular, require. This is because qualitative methodology allows: 1) the researcher to respond when the unexpected happens, 2) the researcher to incorporate unexpected, or new, information as it arises and investigate new directions of interest based on that information, and 3) the research project to evolve as information is gathered (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Because my dissertation research questions were exploratory and focused on subjective meanings of America and Americans and understanding the contexts from which these meanings were situated, I utilized qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews to answer them (Rubin and Rubin 2012; Creswell 2013).

Grounded theory methodology

Grounded theory methodology is a pragmatic qualitative approach to research because

findings are emergent as data collection and analysis is an "ongoing interpretation of meaning" (Suddaby 2006:633). Here, the research and the researcher can adapt and change as new information is collected and can therefore effectively build theory from the ground up (Charmaz 2006). Grounded theory methodology is thus well-suited for this research project because it is an iterative process, which allowed me to evaluate, re-evaluate, and refine my data analysis as new and/or unexpected data emerged (Charmaz 2006). Indeed, throughout this project, I continually collected, compared, and analyzed data, which denotes the iterative process. Using data to verify emergent themes against existing ones to develop theory is fundamental to grounded theory methodology (Maxwell 2012), and doing so allowed respondents' subjective understandings to steer the direction of the research, which ultimately gave way to more nuanced research questions, such as why some interviewees' expressions of national sentiment were ambivalent. This was necessary for this project because it centered on understanding respondents' subjective meanings of America and Americans and the thematic patterns of them that emerged across individual cases (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

Research Design

Because research questions determine the methodology used to answer them, a qualitative, grounded theory approach was necessary for my dissertation. In this section, I discuss the qualitative research design I used for my dissertation, including site selection, participant selection and access, entrée, as well as my use of in-depth semi-structured interviews for data collection. IRB approval for this project was given in August of 2018.

Site selection

Choosing a site and sample is fundamental to the design of any qualitative study given that researchers cannot study *all* people in *all* places (Marshall and Rossman 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2014:101) discuss the importance of being critical when choosing sites to study to increase the quality of the data that is gathered, and they recommend choosing research locations where:

> (a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest is present; (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relationships with the participants in the study; (d) the study can be conducted and reported ethically, and (e) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.

Given these recommendations, the sites selected for this dissertation were Colorado, North Carolina, and Kansas, which are discussed below.

Colorado and North Carolina

Colorado and North Carolina were chosen for two of the three research sites because research participants could be recruited based on existing personal relationships. Indeed, having spent a good portion of my life living in each state and having family and personal friends located in each state, I had a solid network of people living throughout Colorado and North Carolina to draw upon for the participant recruitment process. While some of the participants living in these states were personal friends or family who met the criteria for inclusion (n = 4, Colorado; n = 3, North Carolina), most of the participants were recruited through friends and family (n = 19, Colorado; n = 20, North Carolina) to broaden the sample via the inclusion of a wider range of participants from different age groups, political party affiliations, and geographical locations in each state. Including in the sample participants who extended well

beyond my own personal contacts was done to help maximize variation in the data collected, which is important for attaining data saturation (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

For the recruitment of respondents I did not directly know in Colorado and North Carolina, I had trusted gatekeepers who introduced me (in-person or via phone or email) to potential participants living in rural, suburban, and urban areas. Qualitative researchers have long documented the importance of gatekeepers for providing access to communities and people of interest (Marshall and Rossman 2011; Phillips 2014). Having the support from gatekeepers provided this research with credibility and opened my access to many white, college educated women who may not have been willing to talk to me otherwise. In fact, all of my gatekeepers personally provided introductions (in-person or via phone or email) between myself and potential participants they knew. Rapport and entrée are critical within qualitative studies that involve researcher-participant interaction because the trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of findings are bolstered through access to and the establishing trust with participants (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Marshall and Rossman 2011).

Regarding North Carolina, I traveled there twice and stayed for a week with the first visit and two weeks with the second. During both visits, I conducted pre-scheduled interviews with existing contacts, and I was introduced to potential participants during each trip. During the first trip, I was introduced to several women by my gatekeepers who were willing to participate in this research. If we were unable to schedule an interview that week, I met up with them during my second visit. The second visit was intentionally longer in duration than the first to help ensure I had the time and flexibility to interview women I could not during my first visit as well as women who were recruited after my initial visit. My first trip to North Carolina was confined

to the eastern half of the state. During this visit, all participants lived in the coastal and eastern piedmont regions of the state. My second trip to North Carolina was largely focused on the mountain region, but it included a few women (n=4) who lived in the piedmont region. In addition, three interviews with participants who lived in the coastal region were conducted during the second trip because these women were unable to be interviewed during my first trip due to scheduling conflicts. In total, I interviewed 23 women living throughout the state of North Carolina.

Regarding Colorado, throughout January 2019 through June 2020 I regularly traveled throughout the state to conduct interviews. A little under half of these interviews (n=10) included women living along the Front Range region of Colorado from Colorado Springs to Fort Collins. The remaining interviews (n=12) were conducted with women living in the mountain, southern Colorado, and Eastern Plains regions of the state, which largely constituted the sample of women living in rural areas in Colorado. In total, I interviewed 22 women who lived throughout the state.

Kansas

Kansas was chosen for one of the three research locations because I had three trusted gatekeepers from whom initial participants were identified and recruited. Unlike Colorado and North Carolina, prior to this research I had no existing personal relationships with anyone living in Kansas, but I did have relationships with people living in Colorado who grew up in Kansas who introduced me to potential interviewees in that state. It was from these three gatekeepers alone that initial participants in Kansas were identified and recruited. Once I interviewed and became familiar with those initial participants, I asked them if they knew anyone who fit the

criteria for inclusion and who may be willing to participate. If they did, I asked whether they could facilitate an introduction on my behalf. In total, I conducted interviews with 24 women throughout the state of Kansas. Much like Colorado and North Carolina, I included a wide range of participants living in different geographical locations in Kansas who belonged to a wide range of age groups and political affiliations. Including in the sample participants who extended beyond my own personal contacts was done to help maximize variation in the data collected, which was important for attaining data saturation (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

Much like North Carolina, I made two separate trips to Kansas to recruit and interview respondents. The first trip was about a week in duration while the second was about two weeks long. During each visit, I conducted a few pre-scheduled interviews with women my gatekeepers put me in contact with, and all other interviews during these trips were scheduled and conducted while I was there. My three gatekeepers and I intentionally scheduled my trips to the state around social events so they could each personally introduce me to potential participants. During the first trip, which included the High Plains region of the state, the social events consisted of a retirement party, a political club gathering, and a dinner party. For the second trip, which included the South-Central, North-Central, and Northeast regions of the state, the social events consisted of a church luncheon, two women's club meetings, and a birthday party. During each event, I was introduced to several women, and I conducted a total of 10 interviews during my first trip and 14 during the second trip.

Entrée

With each participant involved in this research, I disclosed the purposes of my research and outlined what participation would entail upon recruitment (Creswell 2013). I also answered

any additional questions potential participants asked about the research, such as questions asking how and why I chose this topic and whether the interview would "test" their factual knowledge. Many recruits expressed initial concern about lacking a breadth of knowledge about facets of U.S. history, policy, and law. I explained to them that the interviews were not geared towards gauging their factual knowledge about the U.S. I made it clear that there were not factually, or objectively, "right" or "wrong" answers to the interview questions because I was interested in their own subjective understandings of the U.S. and Americans. For most participants, introductions facilitated by gatekeepers coupled with time spent with them explaining the purpose of the research, articulating what participation would entail, and discussing that I was interested in subjective understandings and accounts established the trust and rapport needed for entrée. However, there were a few instances where entrée was more difficult to attain.

Many of the women I interviewed (n = 11) were acquaintances of friends of friends of family of my gatekeepers. In other words, there were five degrees of separation between us — the most separated anyone interviewed for this dissertation was from me. Along with this separation came some difficulty in gaining entree with six of those participants, in particular, because of the initial lack of rapport and trust I had with them. Although I was introduced via telephone or email to each of these participants by someone with whom they were acquainted, these six women expressed concern about my intentions as a researcher and how they would be portrayed in this research based on their political beliefs. All of these interviewees self-identified as Republicans, and they were hesitant to participate because they were concerned about anti-conservative bias in my research, which they readily told me.

With each of these women, I spent between 30 minutes and an hour in-person explaining the purpose of the research and my values as a researcher. I tried to make it clear that neither me, as a researcher, nor my research was about judging, or condemning, their understandings, beliefs, values, experiences, and/or the logic behind them. I explained to them that what I wanted to accomplish as a researcher was to understand, through their eyes, how they made sense of the U.S. and Americans and why. As Weis and Fine (2000) discuss, researchers must engage with ethical considerations involving the roles of outsider and insider in relation to participants, which includes establishing supportive, respectful relationships without stereotyping, using labels that participants do not embrace, and acknowledging those voices will be presented in the final study (Creswell 2013). Upon hearing more detail about my research, myself, and my intentions as a researcher, each woman agreed to do an interview.

Aside from my personal networks and the accessibility of gatekeepers in each state, the sites for conducting interviews were also chosen because they covered distinct geographical locations within the U.S.—the West (Colorado), the Midwest (Kansas), and the South (North Carolina). Within each state participants residing in rural and urban, including suburban, areas were recruited and interviewed. Diversifying the locations of data collection, coupled with the diversification of participants interviewed in each state, helped ensure variation within the data itself, which provided a stronger base for reaching data saturation and therefore bolstered the reliability of this research (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

Participant selection and sampling

Given that this study is exploratory, it was not my goal to draw a random, representative sample of white, college educated women in the U.S. Ungar (2003) argues that instead of

providing statistically generalizable results, qualitative research provides rich, locally constructed accounts of a phenomenon that can bolster transferability across contexts. My approach towards participant selection, or sampling, as well as the general research design of this dissertation, was oriented towards answering the research questions instead of producing statistically generalizable results. As such, the sampling methods for this dissertation included both qualitative snowball and theoretical sampling, the latter of which was incorporated after data collection began. See Table 2.1 for respondent demographics by state and generation.

Table 2.1. Respondent Demographics by State and Generation

State	Generation							
		GOP	DEM	IND	Rural	Urban	Bachelor's Degree	Grad / Professional Degree
	The Greatest Generation							
NC		0	1	0	1	0	1	0
CO		1	0	0	0	1	1	0
KS		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Baby Boomer							
NC		5	2	1	6	2	7	1
CO		4	2	2	5	3	6	2
KS		4	3	1	5	3	5	3
	Generation X							
NC		2	2	1	3	2	4	1
CO		3	3	1	3	4	4	3
KS		4	2	2	5	3	6	2
	Millennial							
NC		2	3	2	3	4	4	3
CO		1	4	0	3	2	3	2
KS		3	3	2	3	5	7	1
	Generation Z							
NC		1	0	0	0	1	1	0
CO		1	1	0	0	2	2	0
KS		0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Snowball sampling was utilized throughout this project largely for recruitment and sample diversification purposes. Here, I initially drew upon existing contacts to find and interview willing participants. I then began to draw upon the networks of those I interviewed for potential participants to reach a wider range of women who may be interested in participating in my research. I did so to expand the sampling frame beyond participants I or my gatekeepers knew, which aided in attaining data saturation by helping to maximize variation in the data (Marshall 1996). During this process, I made sure my sample of participants included an array of political party affiliations (i.e. Democrats, Republicans, Independents), age groups (21 - 91 years old), and degrees earned (i.e. Bachelor's, Master's, Ph.D.).

In addition, I utilized theoretical sampling once themes began to emerge from the existing data. I utilized theoretical sampling for two main goals related to attaining data saturation. First, I intentionally, or purposively, sought out disconfirming cases that challenged existing themes in the data. To do so, I sought out potential interviewees based on age, for example, that were lacking in my existing sample to see whether their expressions of nationalism diverged from existing themes and if so, how and why they did so. Second, I intentionally sought out confirming cases that confirmed and/or further fleshed out existing themes in the data. To do so, I sought out potential interviewees based on political affiliation, for example, to see whether their expressions of nationalism confirmed those expressed by politically similar others. Both of these goals further aid in attaining data saturation because they help ensure thematic analyses are thorough and exhausted (Marshall 1996). I engaged in both snowball and theoretical sampling until new data resulting in new themes stopped, and once I confirmed new information was no longer being gathered from interviews, data collection ended because the lack of new information suggested data saturation (Guest, Bunce, Johnson 2006).

In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews

During my one year and a half duration of data collection, from January 2019 through June 2020, I traveled to Kansas and North Carolina twice, gathering an extensive set of qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interview data from a sample of college educated, self-identified white women. Additionally, during the same period, I regularly conducted qualitative interviews with comparable women living throughout Colorado. Prior to collecting any data, I submitted a research proposal to the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I was granted exempt determination approval for this study on August 16, 2018.

In-depth qualitative interviews allow for the relatively efficient collection of rich, detailed, empirical data, which is necessary to adequately build theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Semi-structured qualitative interviews, in turn, allow researchers to explore general topics to uncover the participant's view while allowing the participant leeway in terms of framing and structuring responses. Here, the participant's perspective on the topic unfolds as the participant views it, as opposed to how the researcher views it. As such, semi-structured, in-depth interviews allow for the emic perspective necessary to understand subjective understandings and meanings (Marshall and Rossman 2011).

I used Rubin and Rubin's (2012:xv) responsive interviewing style, which involves asking main questions, probes, and follow-up questions and emphasizes, "the importance of working with interviewees as partners rather than treating them as objects of research." To explore nationalisms, I used a semi-structured interview guide to ensure that, "the participant's perspective…unfold[s] as the participant views it (the *emic* perspective) not as the researcher

views it (the *etic* perspective)" (Marshall and Rossman 2011:144), which is a fundamental principle of qualitative research.

The interview guide incorporated former President Trump's 2016 campaign slogan "Make America Great Again." I chose to utilize this slogan because nationalism is *variable processes* through which the nation is (re)produced and is induced by political, economic, and cultural fields, or contexts (Brubaker 1996). This slogan is fundamentally about constructions of America and meanings with which America is imbued and, because it is practice-based (we (re)make America), it lent itself well for examining they ways interviewees contextualized the nationalisms they expressed.

Drawing from past research in this area, and in particular the work of Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016), the interview schedule includes questions oriented towards addressing national hubris, national membership criteria, national hubris, and national identification, which also relate to national meaning. While I specifically asked all participants about national membership criteria (i.e. can you describe who Americans are?), the other components were addressed with probe questions if participants did not discuss them during other points in the interview (see Appendix A for the Interview Guide).

The length of each interview ranged from an hour to two hours. Each interview was scheduled at a time and a place of the respondent's choosing to help ensure her comfort, and all respondents were provided with an overview of topical and participant-based information upon their initial recruitment. Informed consent was reviewed and signed by each participant before their interview began, and each interview was audio-recorded with an Olympus digital audio recorder with the consent of the participant prior to the start of their interview. I took detailed

post interview notes and transcribed all the interviews myself within five days of the actual interview to help ensure the interview context (i.e. emotional responses from participants) was accurately documented.

Data analysis and management

At the outset of the interviewing process for my dissertation, I created an interview matrix that included the interviewee's pseudonym and the geographic location, date, time, and length of the interview. I entered all the aforementioned information into a spreadsheet as each interview was completed. I personally transcribed verbatim each interview within five days after it took place and with the completion of each transcription, I uploaded them into ATLAS.ti where I began analyzing the data as the data collection process continued. I stored all collected data in a secure and password protected location on my computer, and I omitted the names of the participants on the files and instead used pseudonyms.

Rubin and Rubin (2012:201) indicate that qualitative interview data analysis is a process that begins with raw interview data and moves to an interpretation that entails, "classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together description of events into a coherent narrative." Further, Ambert et al. (1995:884) explain, "Qualitative research often begins initial analysis even while data are being collected" and that "the process of doing qualitative research is cyclical and evolutionary rather than linear-as is the process typical of quantitative research." As such, throughout this research process when I transcribed each interview, I also engaged in preliminary data analysis to identify emerging themes (open coding), and I created a codebook.

As I continued the data collection and analysis process (they were simultaneous in this research), many more codes and memos were added to the codebook as new themes emerged. Generally, data analysis occurred in three stages: 1) *open coding*—searching for general themes and patterns that emerge in the data; 2) *axial coding*—searching for more generalizable thematic patterns; and 3) *representative coding*—selecting interview quotes that represent relevant findings (Marshall and Rossman 2014). I revisited and reread transcripts multiple times as new themes emerged, and new codes were identified.

Limitations of Qualitative Research

Although qualitative methods have become more popular in social research, as with any method, there are limitations. The most common critique of qualitative research is its lack of generalizability (Bryman 2008; Yin 2015). However, Marshall (1996) and Yin (2015) argue that the methodological goals of generalizability, multiple hypothesis testing, and multivariate analysis are not meant to be compatible with goals of qualitative research. Instead, it is more appropriate to develop a sampling framework with a goal of representing and addressing variability across and within cases/individuals rather than generalizability across cases/individuals, which was the approach I used in this dissertation.

Ethical Considerations

There are many ethical considerations in all research that involves human subjects, and the first step for my dissertation was to clearly outline the details of my study and submit a proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Colorado State University prior to collecting any data. As directed by the IRB, the identity of the participants is kept confidential and

anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. In addition, any identifying information about the participants, such as physical descriptions, specific job titles, and specific locations in each state, are omitted. I hope that being diligent in protecting individual identities and any identifying information helped to reduce some of the ethical dilemmas of the project.

CHAPTER 4: THE GREAT AMERICA

Nationalism is not singular, static, or homogeneous condition common to all people in all places or particular to some people in some places. Rather, the perspective I take in this dissertation is that nationalisms are political and cultural processes that are reproduced in everyday life and include diverse sets of nation-oriented meanings, practices, and affective orientations that can vary between people and among the same people over time (Billig 1995; Brubaker 1996; Calhoun 1997; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). As such, scholarly work on nationalism seeks to uncover the meanings people imbue 'nation' with and to examine the concrete sociopolitical contexts in which people live, (re)formulate, and express various nation-oriented feelings and understandings (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016).

Based on this conceptualization of nationalism, this chapter explores the meaning with which the interviewees imbued a 'great' America. The first section focuses on the meaning of America and describes interviewees' understandings of a "great" America. Here the American Dream, which involved hard work and success, was identified as a cornerstone. Next, I discuss the conditions of great America, including opportunity, democracy, and the freedom they afford, which interviewees said allowed the American Dream to be realized for Americans. The third section focuses on the moral foundations of the American Dream as a social contract between individual Americans, American society, and the U.S. government, and examines its relationship to a great America. I conclude the chapter by discussing its main findings and how they relate to the following chapter.

The America Dream and the Great America

I began each interview by asking the participants to explain what the slogan, "*Make America Great Again*" meant to them, and this section focuses on these responses as well as those to the subsequent interview questions which asked the interviewees to describe their own subjective understanding of a "great" America. Somewhat surprisingly the interviewees' descriptions of a 'great' America were strikingly similar to one another regardless of their ages, political party affiliations, or where they lived: all emphasized the American Dream, defined as the idea that Americans could achieve success through hard work. Depicting the connection between the American Dream and a "great" America was common throughout the interviews. Eve a 27-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the New Bern, NC metro area, for example, said, "The American Dream and a 'great' America are a package deal. A great America is great because anyone who works for it can be successful and deserves success because they worked for it." Similarly, Judy a 70-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural Kansas observed:

> My vision of a great America is a place where hard work is valued and is what moves those of us who do it forward. I reckon it's called the American Dream. And, so when America is great, so is the American Dream. Those of us who've worked hard get the kind of life we've worked for. It's a decent life that's a consequence of our work and it applies to any American who's worked hard.

As both Eve and Judy demonstrate, a "great" America was an America in which the American Dream flourishes for those who worked hard. While the words the interviewees used to depict and describe the dream varied, they nonetheless revolved around the themes of success, hard work, and the relationship between them. Each of these themes is addressed below.

Success

When describing a "great" America, participants consistently referenced the American Dream, and a key component to this dream was success. Sometimes referred to as having a "decent life" or a "good life," success was characterized as a "product, or an "outcome," "accomplishment," or "achievement," that was earned over time and included both material well-being and feeling fulfilled with one's work. Discussing success in terms of material well-being, Laura, a 37-year-old self-identified independent who lived in the Research Triangle metro area of North Carolina, said:

> It doesn't matter how you think about it; your finances are in order or they're not. People may want more money and nicer things, but they have to be able to pay for them. So, it's black and white; you can afford a decent life, or you can't. And that's the thing; success is earned, or it should be, so it's an achievement that takes time to achieve because it takes time to earn…Being successful is about being able to afford what you need and what you have while saving for retirement and having a nest egg, and that takes time to obtain. It [success] isn't about swimming in debt to look like you have a decent life when you actually don't, but you don't have to end up rich or anything either.

Laura highlighted several important components involved in the material facet of success that were commonly addressed in the interviews. First, one did not need to be rich to be successful. Further, success was not about accumulating debt to pay for core needs or to appear as though one was financially stable. Rather, material well-being was understood as the ability to afford one's core needs in addition to saving money for retirement and having a "nest egg," or savings. Second, success was understood as an achievement, or an outcome, that took time to realize because it had to be earned. While material well-being was regularly highlighted throughout the interviews, it did not solely define success. This was because success also involved a subjective sense of fulfillment with one's work. Julie, a 47-year-old self-identified independent who lived in the Eastern Plains of Colorado, discussed both facets of success in the following excerpt:

> Julie: I would say the American Dream is synonymous with a great America. America should be a place, country, society – whatever you want to call it – where Americans can achieve success. Whatever the pace [at which one achieves success] doesn't matter too much, it's more that success is an actual accomplishment for those who've earned it.
>
> Noel: You mentioned success a couple of times. Can you talk about what success means to you?
>
> Julie: Sure. Success is definitely about finances; it's having enough money to live and having a cushion there, too. So, I mean people can pay their bills, pay them on-time, buy the things they need, have some money left over for emergencies and investments or whatever, discretionary funds I guess, and they can save some for retirement, too. I mean, no one needs to own a ski chalet in Telluride on top of all that. I mean, I think it [success] is much more basic than that. Success isn't all bells and whistles; it's simply having what you need and a cushion there, too … I also think success is about being fulfilled in some way, which depends more on the individual and what they personally need from a job to feel that way. You know, it isn't just about the objective, financial side of things. It has this very personal, or I guess subjective, side, too. You know, let's face it, there's people who make plenty of money, but aren't happy with what they do; and there's people who love what they do, but don't make enough money, and I think success is really about both.

Much like Laura, Julie discussed success in terms of material well-being, or "having enough money to live and having a cushion there, too." However, as Julie pointed out, success was more than the "objective, financial side" because it included a "personal," or "subjective," side as well. Some interviewees referred to this facet of success as feeling "satisfied," "fulfilled," or "satiated" with one's work, while others described it as feeling or being "content," having a "meaningful life," or feeling one's own "sense of accomplishment." But, regardless of the ways the interviewees phrased it, this facet was about a subjective sense of fulfillment, or achieving, at least to some extent, what one personally wanted and needed in one's work to feel satisfied. Further addressing both facets of success, Jess, a 23-year-old self-identified Republican who lived in the Wilmington, NC metro area said:

> Jess: My dad's a corporate lawyer, and he makes good money. Growing up, we had all we needed and more, like that kind of a situation. But anyways, my dad always told me to find a job that pays worth a damn and one that makes me feel worth a damn because we

> need that piece of it. He also always told me to never just expect my life would turn out like his. Like he really taught me that that kind of life is earned. So, for me that's what success looks like; it's about making enough money, but money isn't everything, like literally that type of situation, and I think that's true. So yeah, I'm trying to figure out what I can make a living at with my degree and something I think would let me feel like, I don't know, like human, like my individuality or whatever. I'm looking for something that will give me what I need to feel my own sense of accomplishment, you know?

Similarly discussing both facets of success, Sylvie, a 39-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Wichita, KS metro area said:

> Sylvie: One could make all the money in the world and still lack a meaningful life. I'm a general practitioner. I make more than enough money, but I actually find meaning in my work, too, because it satiates me and gives me purpose, and that's important. That's not to say there aren't moments when I don't want to go to work or dislike my job, or aspects of it; I have those moments just like anyone else, but I don't think people can feel that way all the time because it [work] has to provide us with some sort of satisfaction. For some, they may find that in a job they're not all that into because it allows them to provide for their families, and there's nothing wrong with that. But what I'm trying to say is that there has to be something there that satiates us. Work's not just about money; it has to be meaningful in some sort of way, whatever that looks like for particular people.

Julie, Sylvie, and Jess each expressed that success was composed of both self-fulfillment and material well-being. While material well-being was linked to financial stability, fulfillment was about the individual feeling purpose, meaning, satisfaction, and/or accomplished in the work they do. As Sylvie pointed out, if satisfaction, or fulfillment, did not come from the work itself, it could come from the ability work gave people to "provide for their families." In this way, financial well-being could offer a sense of fulfillment for people, so the facets of success were not always discussed as being mutually exclusive by the interviewees. However, the broader point Sylvie, like the other interviewees, made was that in order to be successful one needed to experience both fulfillment and material well-being whether there was a relationship between them or not. Together these facets constitute success and, as discussed below, success coupled

with hard work constituted the American Dream. This Dream, moreover, was fundamental to the interviewees' constructions of a "great" America.

Hard work

Much like success, the relevance of hard work to the American Dream was emphasized throughout the interviews. In a great America, participants indicated that when people "pull their weight" and "work hard," they earned their own success. Expressing this idea Kim, a 44-year-old self-identified Republican who lived in the Denver metro area, stated:

> We work hard and achieve hard, and America should be the magical place where that life happens, you know, you put in the work and you reap the rewards. That's a great America…I think earning success is really important because the American Dream is about everyday people, just regular people, being able to be successful when they work for it.

Similarly, Ellie, a 28-year-old self-identified Democrat who lived in suburban Kansas, and Bertie, a 77-year-old self-identified Republican who lived in rural North Carolina respectively said:

> Ellie: For me, I feel like a big part of a great America is doing it yourself, like people have pull their weight, and some of us may start at the bottom, but we should be able to work our way up—like, the point being *work* [her emphasis] our way up…If you do what you need to do to get into college, do the all the work there, graduate, get a job, and do a good job, then, you know, you're doing what you're supposed to, so you should be able to make ends meet and get a job that does it for you. But, also, I feel like going to college isn't the only way you can have a successful life. I mean, you don't need a bachelor's [degree] to be a plumber, so it doesn't make sense for someone who wants to do that to have to go to college. I feel like anyone should be able to figure out what they want to do, like what makes them content, gain the skills, work experience, and learn new things that can help them get a job they want and move up, and that's not just about college, or like having a degree.
>
> Bertie: I was raised in a farming household and none of my kin had a proper college education back then. Mama and Daddy worked all day, and us kids worked before and after school most days. We weren't wealthy by any stretch of the imagination, but we

> always had what we needed, and mama and daddy had purpose in what they did, and this is what America ought to look like for Americans. Our life growing up, and my life as a grown woman, I have what I need, I have a bit extra, and I find purpose in my labors, and I worked hard for the life I have. And, hard work is hard work, isn't it? It doesn't matter what you're working towards, just like it doesn't matter where you're starting from, because you're doing what you ought to be doing, so you ought to see success.

For the interviewees, hard work was understood broadly and was often discussed in terms of people doing what they "ought to be doing," which included gaining and developing the skills, knowledge, and experience they needed for success. While this often was linked to graduating from college, it was not limited to this, as both Bertie and Ellie pointed out. Indeed, it did not matter what one was "working towards," whether it was farming, plumbing, or nursing, for example; what mattered was that one worked hard, or gained and further developed the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for success regardless of the occupational field. As Kim, Ellie, and Bertie observed, in a great America success was experienced by "regular," "normal," and/or "everyday" hard working people, even when they started "at the bottom," because they earned it via hard work.

In this sense, the American Dream was characterized as both, an end—achieving success—and a means to that end—hard work. Hard work and success, in other words, constituted the American Dream, whereby the former earned one the latter in a great America. Interviewees further observed that conditions were present in a great America, which included opportunity, democracy, and the freedom they fostered, which enable this relationship. These conditions were regularly addressed by the interviewees when they discussed how and why the American Dream flourished in a great America, and each are discussed in depth in the following section.

Conditions in a Great America that Enabled the American Dream

An important caveat in the relationship between hard work and success, and therefore the American Dream, emerged in the interviews concerning the intervening roles of opportunity, democracy, and the freedom they afforded in a great America. These conditions were commonly addressed by the interviewees when they answered the following interview questions: "When you think of America being great, what does that mean to you;" "What does a great America look like?" "What does your life (and/or others' lives) look like in this great America?" "What makes America great?" "What needs to change to make America great?" and "Whose responsibility is it to make America great [again]?"

In a 'great' America, the interviewees commonly observed that opportunity and democracy thrived, and, because of these conditions, the American Dream was said to as well because of the freedom opportunity and democracy afford. On the one hand, opportunity, which was commonly called "paths," or "doors," for success was important because it allowed the freedom to achieve the American Dream as an end by providing freedom for it to operate as a means to that end. In other words, opportunity freed one from barriers that hindered or prevented the path from hard work to success and thereby gave one the freedom to achieve success when they worked hard. On the other hand, democracy was important, interviewees said, because it creates opportunity, and the freedom opportunity can afford, and, moreover, does so in a way that is fairly accessible to all through protections and enforcements that help Americans to realize the American Dream. In other words, for the interviewees opportunity and democracy were conditions in a great America that enabled the American Dream to operate as an end for those who worked hard, and as a means to that end for everyone, regardless of one's starting point. This did not mean that everyone experienced success in this America; it meant that anyone could if they worked hard because the American Dream operated as a means to success.

Opportunity

Interviewees discussed opportunity in a "great" America as enabling the American Dream as means to an end, and they did so in a couple of ways. First, opportunity was present and allowed one's hard work to matter as a means for achieving success. Illustrating opportunities in this way, Erica, a 26-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived near the Western Slope of Colorado said:

> The dream is that we can actually achieve success when we work for it; that's what a "great" America is all about in my opinion. And, for that to happen opportunities have to be there, and that part of it gets left out a lot, I think. Like it's disconnected from the American Dream a lot of times because we tend to, or most Americans, focus so much on the work part of it, but the general idea is that anyone can achieve whatever they want when they put their mind to it, but behind that, which again is often unacknowledged, is that anyone can do that because America is the land of opportunity. So, opportunities have to be there so that when we work hard, we actually get somewhere. I mean, without opportunities it literally wouldn't matter how hard we work because there wouldn't be a job for us, or a promotion, or a raise, or the educational path we need to get anywhere. So, I think opportunities are necessary for the American Dream to actually work.

Similarly, June, a 63-year-old, self-identified independent who lived in the Ashville, NC metro area, stated:

> Any sort of great America would be the land of opportunity. It [a great America as a land of opportunity] goes hand-in-hand with the American Dream, you know, there wouldn't be one without the other. That's just common sense. You can't expect anyone to get the kind of life they want and one that they're expected to have when there aren't paths to get there. I don't care how hard someone works, they're not going to end up with a good financial situation or have much luck finding satisfying work if they're stuck with nowhere to go because there's no jobs for them, or career advancement, or no access to education and training programs they need to get the kind of work they want and ought to be able to have.

As highlighted by Erica and June, a "great" America was the "land of opportunity" wherein opportunity existed, such as jobs and employment, career advancement, promotions, raises, education, and training programs. For the interviewees, the link between hard work and success

was shaped by opportunities present in a great America. Indeed, opportunities had to exist, "so that when we work hard, we actually get somewhere," in terms of achieving "a good financial situation" and "satisfying work." Without job opportunities, for example, it would not matter how hard one worked to attain financial well-being and fulfillment because success would not be readily available for one to access.

More than "paths," or "doors," that existed in a "great" America, opportunities were also resources that were available and accessible to "all of us," "everyone," or "anyone," whether an individual worked hard or not. This was the second way the interviewees portrayed opportunity, and it was important because it had to do with "equal" or "fair" access to opportunity for everyone. Here, it was not enough that opportunity simply existed in a "great" America for some of us; opportunity had to be readily accessible to all of us regardless of who one was and/or where one started in life, so that some did not have "paths" or "doors" towards success available to them that others did not. Addressing the importance of the accessibility of opportunity for the American Dream, Katie, a 26-year-old self-identified "Trumper" Republican who lived in the Topeka metro area, for example, said:

> Some families have more money and connections than others, but in a great America that wouldn't come with special opportunities, like those people getting jobs or getting into schools that others, who worked just as hard or even harder, don't get because they don't have those connections and things like that. And the same goes for being Black; like Black people getting jobs, or getting into schools, over just as qualified, or even more qualified, whites just because they're Black. In a great America, there wouldn't be opportunities for some and not others. We would all have the same sorts of paths available to us. Do you know what I mean? Like those same job opportunities and school opportunities would be there regardless of who you are, or who your family is, so we would all be able take that path if we chose to because they would be there for all of us. Decisions like that can't be made for us, and success wouldn't even on the table if opportunities were unavailable, or blocked off, for some of us because of how they get unfairly divvied out.

In a similar vein, Megan, a 38-year-old, self-identified "moderate" Republican who lived in a small city in Kansas, said:

> You have to do the work, but the chance to succeed has to be there. No matter how hard you dig, you can't dig a river with a spade, yet that's what ends up happening a lot of times, and that means the system isn't fair. If America were great, all Americans would see doors, and the same sorts of doors, in front of them, and we would all be able to open them when, or if, we wanted to. That's equal opportunity. And, all I mean by that is that we would all have the opportunity to go to college if we wanted that. That doesn't mean that everyone goes to college; some may not want to go, you know, you don't need to go to a university to cut hair if that's what you want to do. And some won't do the work to get into college, even if they need it for what they want to do. But, whatever happens, the point is those doors are there for all of us even if people choose to not work hard. Whether someone decides to go to college, or whether someone does the work to get into college, or whatever the situation is, that's a different matter, but those doors would be there for all of us, and that's what's important.

In relation to the accessibility of opportunity, or "fair" or "equal" opportunity, the interviewees' understanding was that in a "great" America, regardless of "who you are," "who your family is," or whether people choose to work hard or not, everyone would have access, and the same access, to the same sorts of opportunities. This was important because it ensured: 1) everyone had similar doors to open in their pursuit of the American Dream, whether one decided to work for the dream or not, and 2) people's pursuit of the dream via hard work would earn them success. If some people's opportunities were limited, or "blocked off," because some doors were not readily available, or available at all, then "the system isn't fair." Similarly, if people chose to work hard and did so in pursuit of their dream, but were unable to attain success because opportunities were unavailable and/or inaccessible to them, then their hard work did not matter and the system was not fair. In this sense, the interviewees' "great" America was fundamentally about freedom: everyone was free to achieve their American Dream as an end because everyone was free from barriers that hindered or prevented the American Dream from operating as a means.

Sen (1998:57) argues positive and negative forms of freedom are distinct from one another yet can be "thoroughly interrelated and intertwined." In relation to opportunities and the American Dream, the interviewees saw these forms of freedom as interconnected and intertwined. Indeed, positive freedom, or the freedom the respondents discussed that focused on the availability and accessibility of options concerning the pursuit of the American Dream from which people could choose, as well as their ability to achieve success when they worked for it, was possible because of negative freedom, or the freedom they discussed that focused on the absence of barriers to "fair" opportunity that, if present, would constrain, or prevent, individual choice and/or one's ability to achieve success (see 1998). In terms of negative freedom, the lack of barriers to "fair" access to opportunity in a great America, was tied to democracy.

Democracy

The concept of democracy was consistently discussed alongside opportunity when the participants articulated their understandings of a "great" America. The interviewees shared the view that democracy made opportunity more accessible to everyone as well as the American Dream more broadly. Discussing the relationship between a "great" America and democracy in terms of fair access to opportunity, Trudy, a 66-year-old self-identified Republican who lived in rural Kansas said:

> I really do believe that democracy is important for the American Dream because it's electing officials who represent us and our needs, wants, and interests. That's important because it's the foundation of the avenues, or opportunities, they [elected representatives] make sure are available to everyone, and everyone gets a say in that by voting…Without democracy, I doubt we would have many, or any, of the opportunities we need to be able to make anything of ourselves because the government wouldn't have to answer to us. They wouldn't have to worry about being voted out of office because they're not voted in. And that goes back to having equal opportunities. They [elected representatives] are not just accountable to some of us; they're accountable to all of us, so they hear about it

> when opportunities are there for some but not others, and they have to address that. It may take a while, but they're held accountable for doing it because we can give them the boot if they're not listening or if they're dillydallying around instead of doing their damn job.

Similarly, Grace, a 28-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived around the Crested Butte, CO area, said:

> Hypothetically, I guess there could be a dictator, or a king or whatever, that gave a shit and listened to the people to see what opportunities they need and made them [opportunities] a reality for everyone, but the chances of that happening are basically zero. Dictators, or any leader-type who isn't elected, don't represent anyone, so they aren't responsible for answering to anyone. So, the issue is that opportunities can be distributed how he [the dictator] sees fit, instead of how the people need them [distributed]. And, assuming that happens because, again, it's a dictatorship and not a democracy, then I just don't see how anyone would get what they need to have a successful life, even when they bust their asses working.

As illustrated by Trudy and Grace, the relevance of democracy cannot be understated for the interviewees' 'great' America. Respondents regularly highlighted the importance of democracy through its direct link to the accessibility of opportunity, and the importance of voting as part of a democracy. Here, democracy was understood as a condition that enabled the American Dream because elected leadership who represented, and who was held accountable for representing and addressing, "our needs, wants, and interests," was the key to unlocking the American Dream via fair access to opportunities, and the freedom it afforded, for everyone. Indeed, a democratically elected government was observed as *the way* through which opportunities, and fair access to them, could be ensured for everyone.

Further addressing the importance of democracy for the American Dream, Tammy, a 40-year-old, self-identified independent who lived in the Raleigh-Durham area stated:

> The U.S. is a democracy; *we* elect *our* government so that *it* serves *us* [her emphasis]. And, as far as the American Dream goes, it has to be this way. How else would they [the

> government] be able to make sure that equal opportunities are, in fact, there for everyone? How else would they be held responsible for making sure that's the case? If they don't do their job, then we can vote them out and bring someone in who will. So, you know if I've done what I'm expected to do to have the life that I want, and that's life that I've been told that I can have when I work for it, then I expect to be able to get it when I've worked for it. The government plays a big role in that by staying out of our way or, when needed, by making laws that make sure opportunities are there so that I, or whoever, can get the life we've spent the energy and time working for. The government sees to it that that's the case and protects the American Dream by enforcing those principles.

Tammy, much like Trudy and Grace, reflected the interviewees understanding that in a "great" America the American Dream, as an end, was attainable and not limited because democracy, and only democracy, allowed the American Dream to operate as a means to an end. In other words, democracy provided the negative freedom everyone needed to experience positive freedom. Democratically elected representatives, unlike dictators, for example, were compelled to represent and serve their constituents by ensuring the accessibility of opportunities for all of them, and they were compelled to do so via voting. If elected representatives failed to "do their job," then they could be voted out of office and replaced with someone who would fulfill those responsibilities. In addition, Tammy brought to light another important point commonly addressed in the interviews when she addressed the government's protection of fair access to opportunity, and of the American Dream more broadly, via law enforcement.

In a 'great' America, democracy allows the American Dream to operate as an end for everyone who works hard because it operates as a means to that end for everyone. Indeed, everyone has access to the same opportunities that, in conjunction with hard work, lead to one's success. The government via democracy, however, does not only ensure fair access to opportunity, it also protects those opportunities and the American Dream through enforcement. Addressing the protection of fair access to opportunity, Laura said:

> It's not enough for the government to tell us that we can achieve whatever we want, they also have to make sure that that can happen. We talked about the importance of equal opportunities, and, related to that, they [the government] makes sure those are there by fixing situations where they aren't. If you're trying to get a job, one that you deserve to get by the way, and no one will hire you because you're a woman, then the people who won't hire you have to be dealt with. They have to be held responsible for denying you your right to the American Dream as an American. And, as a representation of *all of us* [her emphasis], the government has to rectify those situations by enforcing the law they say exists. If they don't enforce it, or if they don't enforce it in all situations, then they can't claim that the American Dream is true for all of us.

Similarly, Joan, a 42-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Colorado Springs, CO metro area said:

> A big part of making opportunities available for everyone is making sure people fall in line with that so no one ends up in a situation where they can't secure work, or education, or whatever, because of someone's prejudices. And, that's the government's role in this equation. They made that policy on behalf of us, they said the American Dream is a thing for all of us, and Americans are Black, white, Latinx, men, women, gay, straight, Christians, non-Christians, etcetera, etcetera, so they have to also make sure that their policy applies to all of us by enforcing it accordingly. If someone isn't letting Blacks into Harvard, then they need to be held accountable for that and face the consequences. Likewise, if someone scams you out of your life savings, then they need to be held accountable so you're protected against that. And that's the government's role, too, because they represent you and your right to the success you've earned.

As both Laura and Joan illustrated, the democratically elected government, as a representation of Americans, made sure opportunities were accessible to all Americans and protected that accessibility by enforcing the principles of the American Dream when one denied another access to opportunities that person should have otherwise had. Indeed, as Laura said, fair access to opportunities was just not the government saying such opportunities existed for everyone; rather, those opportunities had to actually exist. As such, when hard-working Americans were denied access to the opportunities they should have had access to, such as work or education, the government had to step in and rectify those situations by holding the opportunity deniers accountable. Similarly, as Joan pointed out, the same protections apply to

situations where one's success was threatened via theft. In other words, the government had to protect fair access to opportunities and the American Dream more broadly via the enforcement of those principles on behalf of the Americans it represents.

The Social Contract

For the interviewees, the American Dream, or the story that anyone could achieve success in America when one worked hard, was about an end – success – and a means to an end – hard work. As discussed above, the conditions in a great America that allowed the American Dream to operate as an end for all hard-working Americans were fair access to opportunity, democracy, and the freedom they afforded. Connected to this America, and therefore the American Dream, was a morally laden social contract (Rawls 1996; Freeman 2007), commonly referred to as a "deal," "agreement," by participants, that existed between individuals, society, and democratically elected government. Specifically, the fulfillment of the social contract was connected to one's experience of the American Dream as an end in a 'great' America.

In general, a social contract (Rawls 1996; Freeman 2007) is defined as an implicit or explicit agreement among members of a given society and social institutions to cooperate with one another by complying with social norms and expectations. Here, members of society and social institutions are understood as having moral and/or political obligations to one another that compose of a contract or agreement between them that help form the society of which they are a part (Gauthier 1986; Rousseau 2012). Concerning the social contract connected to the experience of American Dream as an end, and the conditions of a great America that allowed for it, the interviewees discussed individuals fulfilling their "duties," "responsibilities," "obligations," or "expectations" to society, while the democratically elected government fulfilled their

responsibilities to society. Together, these sides composed of the social contract that both individuals and elected representatives, or the government, would fulfill because they *should. This was* where morality became relevant. Focusing on the side of the social contract that involved individuals fulfilling their responsibilities to society, the following section discusses what those responsibilities were and how morality was tied to them.

Individuals and society

The participants agreed that individuals would work hard and perform their civic duties because doing so was what made a one a "good," and/or "decent," member of society to fulfill part of their end of the social contract with society, and thereby experience success in a great America; Bertie illustrated the importance of hard work in the following excerpt:

> Noel: You said people should work hard. Can you explain why one should work hard?
>
> Bertie: Well now there's a morality to it, isn't there? You're expected to earn your own success, and if you don't earn it by working hard, then you don't deserve to have it [success]. Let me put it this way: a handout isn't earned; it's a handout. It's swindling. There's a dignity in earning what you get through your own efforts, and it's there because you're doing what you ought to be doing; you're doing right by society. In a great America we're all of us provided with the same chances to succeed. The opportunities are there for all of us, and we're obligated, as members of society, to work for what we get because success is *earned*; it's not given by society and it's not taken from society by those who don't work. That's the agreement, and there isn't a person who's ignorant to it. We all of us know what we're supposed to be doing. Some choose to honor it – the good, decent people – and some don't, and that's on them. That's a reflection of what kind of person they are.
>
> Noel: And what kind of person would you say they are? Those who don't honor the agreement?
>
> Bertie: They're all deadbeats, the lot of them. They're just trying to swindle society. They're no good cheats, every last one of them.

As Bertie indicated, individuals have the choice to work hard or not and earn their own success, and this choice was what made an individual a "good" and "decent" person. Indeed, simply choosing to work hard was not just a meaningless option people had in a great America. Instead, it was a choice people should make, and "follow through," because it was an "obligation" in terms of the "agreement" with society we all know about and have as "members of society." In other words, choosing to work hard, and actually working hard, to earn success was "doing right by society" because doing so was how individuals, fulfilled, or honored, their obligation to their end of the social contract with society. In contrast, members of society who chose to not work hard failed to fulfill their obligations to society, and were characterized as "deadbeats," and "no good cheats" who "swindle society."

In a similar vein, Joan addressed the morality of hard work and its connection to the social contract involving individuals and society by saying:

> Earning what you get in life is a huge part of what makes a person a good person. It's hard to respect someone, including yourself, when they just expect things in life and don't do anything to earn those things. It's a matter of right and wrong. You can make the decision to work hard or not, I mean, that's up to the person, the individual, but if they don't do their part, then they're kind of shit people. Like, you can't just expect your bills to get paid when you refuse to work. Who the fuck is going to pay your bills? Everyone else, like society is going to get stuck with that one way or the other, and that's a shit thing to do because it's taking advantage of society. And it's not like people don't know what they're supposed to do. We all know the arrangement, like we all know we're supposed to earn, like work, for our own success, but whether people do it or not is an issue. And, it's an issue for society as a whole because we end up picking up their slack, and that's not right. It's the individual's responsibility to pull their weight by working for what they want, and the same thing goes for following the law, which includes paying your share of taxes.

Much like Bertie, Joan emphasized the morality tied to fulfilling one's end of the social contract with society. As Joan put it, making the decision to work hard or not was "a matter of right and wrong." If people refused to work hard, even though "we all know the arrangement," including

our responsibility to "pull our own weight," then they were "kind of shit people" who took advantage of society because society would "end up picking up their slack," which was not society's responsibility. People who worked hard to earn what they got in life, on the other hand, were respectable because fulfilling one's responsibility to work hard was "a huge part of what makes a person a good person." Joan also addressed following the law, including paying one's taxes, which was another responsibility participants regularly said individuals should fulfill in relation to their end of the social contract.

Like working hard, engaging in one's civic duties were also important to the interviewees because fulfilling those responsibilities was what made one a "good" person, or member of society. Illustrating the importance engaging with one's civic duties, Daisy, a 48-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural Eastern NC discussed the ethics of working hard and civic duties, when she said:

> Following the law's an important part of our duties to everyone else. It's wrong to get what you get out of the system if you're not putting your fair share into it. Like, I don't think it's right to expect federal funding for college when you haven't contributed to that funding by paying your share of taxes. It's like choosing not to work when you have to have money to live. It just ends up being a burden on everyone else, which is wrong. It's about morals and being an ethical person. And I think the same goes for breaking other laws. If someone steals another person's money to get what they want instead of working for it, then that's wrong and incredibly selfish and disrespectful to the person they stole from on one level. And, on another [level], it's wrong because it's a burden on all of us. The government then has to turn around and deal with that by spending our [tax] money that could be used for other things, like funding for college, to deal with those people who don't do what they're supposed to.

Echoing these points, Heather, a 45-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Eastern Plains of Colorado said:

> I think we are all obligated to abide by the law. I know a lot of people hate taxes and paying them, but without them where would we be? There would be no public schools,

> for example. And so, when people whine about taxes, it annoys me because I'm like, 'Where would you be without the opportunities taxes provide?" And when people dodge paying their portion, that makes me really angry because they're exploiting the opportunities taxes provide without contributing to the pot, and that is just such an egregious thing to do. If you're a part of our society, then you're responsible for contributing your part to society whether you like it or not, and the same can be said about people who take things that aren't theirs. I don't care what the crime is, whether it's dodging taxes or theft, we all need to do what we're supposed to. People need to contribute because they, like everyone else, have access to opportunities our taxes pay for, and they need to work hard to earn their own success instead of stealing their way to it and harming people along the way.

Much like having the responsibility to work hard, individuals had the responsibility of obeying the law, including paying one's taxes, or "contributing to the pot," to fulfill their end of the "deal." Paying taxes, was a responsibility individuals had because taxes funded the government, and therefore the opportunities, the government facilitates. . As such, individuals who "dodged paying their portion" of taxes were a burden to society, and "unethical" people, because they had access to opportunities without financially contributing to those opportunities. Tax dodgers were seen as taking advantage of, or exploiting, society, which was an "egregious" thing to do. People who broke other laws, such as those who tried to "steal their way" to success instead of working for it, were also characterized as "selfish," "disrespectful," and "unethical" people because they went "against what's right" – earning one's own success via hard work. In addition, law breakers, in general, were seen as burdens to society because tax payer money had to be spent "deal with people who don't do what they're supposed to do," as opposed to being spent on opportunities that would further ensure the functioning of the American Dream, such as federal funding for college.

In addition to working hard and obeying laws, voting was an important responsibility individuals had to fulfill to meet their end of the social contract, which was tied to morality as well. As a responsibility individuals had to society, voting was said to be important because of its

connection to democracy and representation. In turn, democracy facilitated the American Dream as a means to an end via the fair availability of and accessibility to opportunity it enabled. In terms of morality, fulfilling this responsibility of the social contract, like the others, indicated one was a "decent" person. Expressing this idea, Deb, a 59-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural Kansas said:

> Deb: It goes back to fair opportunities. In order for the government to be able to represent us and our interests, you know, having what we need to be successful people, we have to vote. So, voting isn't just something we can do, we need to do it and we should [vote]; I think it's a responsibility we all have. If people just aren't voting, then there's a problem, and I don't understand why people wouldn't vote other than that they just don't care about their responsibilities, and I think they know they're expected to do them, but it's just like they don't care and, to me, that just says they don't take their responsibilities, and democracy, seriously, which is just a slap in the face. That's a particular flavor of apathy I find very distasteful. Well, not just distasteful, but loathsome. What kind of person just ignores all that? It's not a decent person, that's for sure.

Similarly, Ellie said:

> So, the U.S. is supposed be a democracy, so I think individuals here also, like I guess what I am saying is that yeah, we're supposed to work hard to earn success, and like abide by the law and contribute to society [via taxes], but we also have to be involved with politics or the government because we're a democracy. So, we're supposed vote—it's an expectation we all have because our government is supposed to represent us, the collective, and provide equal opportunities so our work counts. And, that's the expectation on that side – the government should fulfill equal opportunities for us, and the way they do that is because we vote, like we fulfill our side in that way. And not everyone who should vote does, yet they'll bitch about the government, which I'm just like [waves middle finger in the air] 'fuck you' to those people [people who should vote, but do not vote]. They're hypocrites.

As the interviewees articulated, hard work and performing civic duties were understood as being the "right thing to do" because each was a part of a morally grounded set of obligations and expectations that were seen as being a part of the "deal," "arrangement," or "agreement" that existed between the individual and society. When individuals fulfilled these sets of responsibilities to society, they were characterized as being "good," and "decent" people, or

members of society who would experience the American Dream as an end in a great America. As both Ellie and Deb illustrated, voting, in particular, was a significant responsibility people should fulfill because doing so was how the democratically elected representative government could ensure the American Dream worked as a means to an end for everyone. If one did not fulfill one's responsibility to vote, then that individual was viewed as apathetic, which was "distasteful" and "loathsome," and as a hypocrite.

The government and society

Aside from individuals' obligations to society, the social contract involved the democratically elected government's obligations to the society it represents, which included ensuring fair access to opportunities and protecting the American Dream, especially when individuals did not uphold their end of the social contract by working hard and/or abiding by the law. Discussing this end of the social contract in the following excerpt, Bertie said:

> Bertie: The other end of the deal is not about the individual; it's about all of us, the group of us, society, I guess we'd call it, and the government. And, so on that side, the government has an obligation to voters, to society, to uphold opportunities for all of us. When we're telling the government what we need because we vote, then they have to address that. And this isn't providing some with more opportunities than others, and it isn't ignoring people who just swindle society and break the law and take what isn't theirs and hurt the good folk along the way. The government is supposed to represent us and ensure our hard work can get us where we need to go, and we can't do that if the government doesn't uphold the integrity of the American Dream by letting people take advantage and swindle us. When the government is doing what it ought to do, democracy is working and the Dream is, too, because there's nothing in the way of anyone's success except for their own self.

Similar to other interviewees, Bertie highlighted the government's obligations to society. Here, the government should fulfill its end of the social contract by upholding, "the integrity of the American Dream." According to Bertie, this entailed the government ensuring fair access to

opportunities for the society it represented via voting and by protecting individuals who fulfill the end of the social contract, or the "good folk," from those who do not. Indeed, when these obligations were fulfilled, democracy worked, as did the American Dream as an end for those who worked hard. Echoing these ideas, Susan, a 51-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Longmont, CO metro area, said:

> Susan: The government should make equal opportunities towards us because that's its role as a representation of us, the collective, so they owe society that. They also owe us insulation from those in society who create problems with the Dream in others' lives. And, this agreement isn't notarized or anything like that, but it's an agreement we have nonetheless. It's an agreement about the workings America and the American Dream for Americans – we do our part and you guys [the government] do yours because that's what a democracy is; you have to represent us.

Much like Bertie and other interviewees, Susan illustrated the government's obligations to society in the social contract, which revolved around fair access to opportunity and "insulation," or protection, from those among us who do not meet their obligations and threaten others' experience of the American Dream.

In a great America, both sides of the social contract discussed above were adequately fulfilled. On the one hand, individual Americans upheld their end of the "arrangement" to society by fulfilling their civic duties and working hard. On the other hand, the democratically elected representative government fulfilled its end of the social contract by ensuring the American Dream worked as an end and as a means to an end via fair access to opportunity and protection of the American Dream. If the government did not uphold its obligations deemed necessary by the people it was supposed to reflect, then the composition of the government should change so that it did reflect those people.

Understanding the great America

In this chapter findings demonstrated that "great" America was fundamentally about the American Dream, which was facilitated by fair access to opportunity, democracy, and the freedom they afforded. These conditions, in turn, were connected to the morally laden social contract that was used by the interviewees to make sense of the American Dream in terms of individuals' responsibilities to society and the government's responsibilities to society. The American Dream functioned in this America because: 1) individual Americans met their obligations or expectations on their side of the deal with society, which included hard work and engagement with their civic duties, and 2) the democratically elected representative government ensured fair access opportunities for all Americans and insulated them from situations that would compromise the American Dream.

This expression of a "great" America was common throughout the interviews and by itself it was not a politicized understanding. The participants, regardless of age, political party, and geographic location shared and articulated this understanding, as well as its moral dimensions in terms of fulfilling the social contract. While this understanding was not politicized, it got politicized as the interview questions shifted from the "what" [America should be] to the "who" [are Americans] — the "us" and "we. In the following chapter, I delve into the interviewees' understandings of who Americans are and these understandings' relationship to the 'great' America discussed in this chapter. The interviewees' constructions of Americans, unlike that of a 'great' America, varied by participants' political ideologies and, to some extent, their ages, regardless of whether participants lived in a rural or metropolitan areas.

CHAPTER 5: WHO WE TRULY ARE

In the previous chapter, I discussed that the "great" America among participants was fundamentally about the American Dream and the ability of individual Americans had to realize success through hard work. The Dream, moreover, was facilitated by democracy and was based on a morally laden social contract between individual Americans, American society, and the U.S. government. When individual Americans fulfilled the moral obligations of the social contract to American society through hard work and performing their civic duties, in a great America, they should be able to experience success so long as the democratically elected representative government fulfilled their part of the contract by ensuring fair access to opportunity and protecting the American Dream for Americans. This was how a great America operated, and this was what made that America great according to the interviewees.

This understanding was common throughout the interviews, and by itself it was not a politicized one. The interviewees, regardless of political party affiliation, as well as age and geographic location, including rural or urban dwelling, communicated this understanding. While this construction of a great America was not politicized, it soon became politicized as the interview questions shifted from *what* a great America looks like to *who* is Americans – the "us" and the "we" respondents regularly referred to when they discussed the American Dream. This chapter pivots away from the interviewees' construction of a great America to focus on the patterned definitions of who is a "true" Americans, or American national membership. These patterns emerged in the interviews in relation to the participants' discussions of the social contract. Throughout the chapter I discuss the ways cultural, ethnic, and/or civic nationalisms

were used by interviewees, albeit in different ways, to justify one's inclusion into, or exclusion from, American national membership (Shulman 2002).

This chapter contributes to the existing literature on nationalism in several ways. The findings demonstrate multiple subjective definitions of what it meant to be a "true" American among respondents. Rather than assuming definitions of national membership were largely homogeneous (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Shulman 2002; Brubaker et al. 2007; Miller-Idriss 2006; Skey 2011), and based either on civic or ethnic nationalism (Shulman 2002; Kaufman 2000; Smith 1997; Yack 1999; Brubaker 2004), this dissertation builds on the limited research which shows how ethnic, civic, and cultural nationalisms coexist in many countries (i.e. Shulman 2002) and, further, that a given population's constructions of national membership contain considerable heterogeneity (Miller-Idriss 2006; Bail 2008; Skey 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016).

Building on existing work, this chapter examines the diverse yet patterned ways interviewees defined what it meant to be a "true" American, or American national membership. Thematic analyses led to identification of two distinct, yet related, facets involved in these subjective definitions of American national membership. The first facet, *social contract membership criteria*, refers to individuals who were understood by the interviewees to be a part of the American social contract in the first place. The second facet, *action-based membership criteria*, refers to one's fulfillment of the social contract of which they were a part. Individuals who met both facets of membership criteria were defined as "true" Americans by all interviewees, but distinct patterns emerged in their subjective definitions of American national membership, or who met each criterion and why. These groupings are called: assimilationist,

Christian assimilationist, Christian restrictionist, politically restrictive inclusionist, and Christian-political restrictionist.

While each of these patterned definitions included both facets of American membership criteria, there was considerable variability between them. Consequently, there was considerable variability regarding who interviewees included into the category "true" American. In addition to involving both facets of membership criteria, each patterned definition of a "true" American incorporated components of cultural, civic, political, and/or ethnic nationalisms. These were used by interviewees to justify why one did or did not meet each facet of American national membership criteria.

The chapter contributes to existing literature by examining heterogeneity among definitions of "true" Americans. It addresses why such heterogeneity was present by exploring how forms of nationalism, including civic, cultural, and ethnic, were used by interviewees to justify their definitions. Further, it identifies patterns in these subjective definitions of American national membership, or who met each criterion and why. in distinct, yet patterned, ways. In other words, this chapter discusses what definitions of "true" American consisted of as well as why "true" American was defined in those ways by respondents, both of which are understudied in the context of the U.S. (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Bonikowski 2016).

Scholars have problematized the conflation of nationalisms in existing research (Kymlicka 1999; Nieguth 1999) because forms of nationalism "differ according to their openness to outsiders" (Shulman 2002:558), for example, when membership criterion is defined by race or ethnicity. Similarly, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to include those whose ancestry is not tied to the nation in which they live, regardless of citizenship status, into a given national

membership when its membership is defined by one's ancestral ties to that nation. People can and do adopt practices and traits, such as dress, values, morals, language, religion, customs, and traditions, that are deemed culturally relevant for national membership, regardless of one's race, ancestry, or even citizenship status, however (i.e. Shulman 2002); because of this, scholars assert that civic, ethnic, and cultural nationalisms are analytically distinct and should be treated as such (Kymlicka 1999; Nieguth 1999).

In this chapter, I do not challenge this assertion; rather, findings demonstrate that while the analytical distinction between forms of nationalism is important to make, in practice civic, ethnic, and/or cultural nationalisms are intertwined and inseparable in many people's justification of American national membership. In addition, while status, such as race and ancestry, did matter for some definitions of American national membership in relation to action-based American membership criteria, so too did statuses unrelated to ethnic nationalism including Christian identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, English speaker, and even political ideology among some interviewees. Moreover, the ways cultural nationalism itself was used to justify American membership criteria in relation to action-based American membership criteria varied greatly among interviewees. While some attached great significance to Christian identity for being a "true" American because being a Christian made one culturally, and therefore morally, American, others asserted that Christian identity had nothing to do with one's cultural and moral American-ness. As such, in addition to discussing the ways civic, ethnic, and cultural nationalisms are intertwined with each other in practice, the findings also demonstrate that cultural nationalism, and Christian nationalisms in particular, need greater analytical distinction.

Finally, the findings discussed in this chapter contribute to existing research by demonstrating the relevance of political ideology for American national membership, which remains largely absent in the nationalism literature. This novel finding highlights the importance of "far right," or "alt-right," and "far left" political statuses and how they were, in some cases, connected to cultural nationalism to justify two patterned definitions of "true" Americans in relation to action-based American membership criteria. While research has examined the relationship between expressions of nationalisms and political affiliation (i.e. Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016), findings in this chapter demonstrate that political ideology, as a status, was used in conjunction with cultural nationalism for some definitions of American national membership.

This chapter largely relies on responses to the following interview questions (including probe questions):

- "Americans have come up throughout the interview. Can you describe who Americans are?"
- "Can you describe the ideal American?"
- "Are some Americans more American than others?" "Can a person (or American) become more/less American?"
- "Whose responsibility is it to make America great (again)?"
- "Is there a difference between being an American and being a U.S. citizen?"
- "Are there certain rights citizens have?" "Do all Americans have these rights (or should they)?"

- "Are there certain responsibilities citizens have?" "Do all Americans have these responsibilities?"
- "Who can make America great (again) and why?"

It is important to note that I did not ask any of the interviewees about their religious identity or their personal religious beliefs or practices. If religion came up, it was brought up by the interviewee herself, and religion, and, in particular, Christianity, is discussed in this chapter in terms of the patterned ways cultural nationalism or cultural and ethnic nationalism were used to construct American national membership. As such, I discuss how and why Christianity mattered for some patterned constructions of American national membership, but this chapter neither includes a discussion about the religious affiliation of interviewees nor one about their personal religious beliefs or practices. Because of this, the patterned constructions of Americans, which are labeled Christian assimilationist, Christian restrictionist, and Christian-political restrictionist, should not be understood as a label for any respondent's personal religious affiliation, beliefs, or identification. In fact, interviewees who disclosed they identified as Christian are represented in all five patterned definitions of American national membership.

In the following sections, I first provide a general overview of the various definitions of "true" American, including each facet of American national membership criteria. Next, I delve into each patterned definition of "true" American and I discuss ways civic, cultural, and/or ethnic nationalism came into play when interviewees articulated who "true" Americans, were. I also discuss how and why statuses not associated with ethnic nationalism, such as sexual orientation, were relevant for some definitions. I start with the assimilationist definition of "true" American. I then discuss Christian assimilationist, Christian restrictionist, politically restrictive inclusionist, and Christian-political restrictionist definitions of "true" American.

Who are "True" Americans?

All definitions of "true" Americans discussed in the following sections involved two facets of American national membership: social contract membership criteria – those who interviewees perceived to be a part of the social contract – and action-based membership criteria – those who were a part of the social contract and who fulfilled it. While each patterned definition of "true" Americans involved each facet, they differed in important ways in terms of how civic, cultural, and ethnic nationalisms, as well as and the way status, and which statuses, were used to justify inclusion into American national membership.

In addition, most interviewees, regardless of how they defined American national membership, conceived of American-ness as a continuum, that is, one could be more or less American than others, which is why I refer to definitions of "true" American as American national membership. For example, those who were viewed as being involved in the social contract who also fulfilled their end of the social contract, were often said to be "more American," than those who were a part of the social contract but failed fulfill it. For other interviewees, however, eligibility was more categorical; one had to meet both criteria to be "American" at all. In the following sections, I address this difference among interviewees as well as the different ways statuses, including citizenship and in some cases Christian identity, race, ancestry, political ideology, sexual orientation, speaking English, and/or gender identity, were used to articulate who was a "true" American and why. Doing so, sheds light on the ways various forms of nationalism were used, individually or simultaneously, by interviewees. Table 5.1 below provides an overview of the statuses that were relevant for each construction of Americans.

Table 5.1. Statuses Relevant for Constructions of Americans

	Assimilationist	Christian assimilationist	Christian restrictionist	Christian-political restictionist	Politically restrictive inclusionist
American National Membership Facets					
Social contract membership criteria	Citizenship status	Citizenship status	Citizenship status	Citizenship status	No relevant status
Action-based membership criteria	No relevant status	No relevant status	Christian identity Sexual orientation and gender identity English speaker (for some)	Christian identity Sexual orientation and gender identity Race Ancestry Political ideology English speaker	Political ideology

Assimilationist Construction of Americans

The assimilationist construction of Americans was the largest (n = 16) thematic grouping and included interviewees who lived in rural and urban areas in North Carolina, Colorado, and Kansas, as well as respondents who self-identified as Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Interviewees in this grouping were from all generational age groups and lived in both rural and urban areas in North Carolina, Colorado, and Kansas. First, I discuss the facet of American national membership called social contract membership criteria. I then discuss action-based

membership criteria. The assimilationist definition of American social contract membership revolved around civic nationalism, rather than cultural or ethnic nationalism. Specifically, this facet of American national membership concerned citizenship status, and the rights and freedoms attached to it.

Assimilationist social contract membership criteria

Among those who expressed assimilationist American national membership, "citizens" was the most common answer to the interview question, "Can you describe who Americans are?" These interviewees agreed that American social contract membership criteria, or who was understood to be a part of the social contract, is a function of citizenship due the rights shared by citizens, both of which are hallmarks of civic nationalism (Shulman 2002). Danielle, for example, a 28-year-old, self-identified Republican living in the Kansas City, addressed the relevance of citizenship by saying:

> Americans are citizens because citizens have the right to vote, which is what allows for our full involvement in society and democracy. We [citizens] have a say in what goes on, and what we say matters because the government has to answer to us *because we can vote* [her emphasis]. Non-citizens don't have that right, so what they say doesn't carry the same weight. They [non-citizens] can talk about opportunities they need, like what's accessible to them, what isn't, and what they need that's not there, just like citizens can, but the government doesn't really have to answer to them *because they can't vote* [her emphasis]. And, that's the difference, and it's a big one.

As Danielle observed, Americans are those who have the right to vote via citizenship, which was what allowed their "full involvement in society and democracy." In this sense, one had to be a U.S. citizen to be American. The idea of full participation, or involvement, in American society and democracy via citizenship, and the right to vote it afforded, was common to the assimilationist understanding of Americans, and it was synonymous with one's

involvement in the social contract. As Danielle pointed out, citizens had "a say in what goes on," and their say mattered because they could vote. Indeed, the right to vote meant that the U.S. government had to answer to citizens' needs, including opportunities they needed for success. Non-citizens, by contrast, could communicate their needs to the government but what they said did not "carry the same weight." The government did not have to answer non-citizens because they did not have the right to vote. As such, non-citizens could not experience the "full involvement in society and democracy," that citizens did, which was why citizens, and only citizens, were legitimately involved in the social contract.

Further illustrating the importance of citizenship, and the right to vote it afforded, for American social contract membership criteria, Amber, a 36-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in Greenville, NC metro-area, stated:

> In my opinion, it [citizenship] is important [for being American] because voting is. Those who aren't citizens can't vote, so they can't be American in the same way as people who can [vote] are. I'm not saying citizens are better than anyone else, it's just that that's the way it is because of the rights that come with citizenship. It's our [citizens'] society; our government. Our participation in it is it – they are one and the same, really, because we make it so by voting. So, citizens, and other people who live here, too, have the opportunities they do because of citizens who vote.

Much like Danielle, Amber addressed the relevance of citizenship and the right to vote for American membership criteria. For Amber, non-citizens could not be "American in the same ways people who can vote" were because American society and the U.S. government were "one and the same" with citizens via voting. In other words, through the right to vote, citizens not only fully participated in society and democracy they made society and the government, which included opportunities for citizens and non-citizens. Non-citizens, because they lacked the right to vote, could not fully participate in, and therefore make, American society and the U.S.

government, including opportunities. In relation to American membership criteria, one had to have the ability to vote, which was tied to citizenship, for full inclusion into the category American.

While Danielle asserted Americans were citizens because they had the right to vote, Amber indicated that citizens were American in different ways than non-citizens could be because citizens had the right to vote. Indeed, for some respondents, the social contact membership criteria had to be met for one to be a "true" American. For others, however, this criterion had to be met for one's inclusion into the category "American" at all. In this sense, non-citizens could be American if they worked hard, for example, but without citizenship they were not a part of social contract and were therefore not "true" Americans. Regardless of this distinction, however, respondents agreed that all true Americans were citizens, but not all citizens were true Americans. This leads to the action-based criteria for American membership, which relates to the fulfillment of one's end of the social contract.

Assimilationist action-based membership criteria

For the assimilationist construction of "true" Americans, citizenship meant that one was legally able to vote, which was important for inclusion, or full inclusion, into the category "American." However, just because one was able to vote did not mean every citizen performed that action and fulfilling the social contract in which one was a part of was also necessary for inclusion, or "full" inclusion, into the category "true" American. Indeed, interviewees in the assimilationist thematic categorization highlighted the relevance of fulfilling one's civic duties as citizens of the U.S., which, in part, comprised the action-based American membership criteria they expressed. Illustrating, once again, the importance of citizenship for American membership

criteria, as well as that of voting for action based American membership criteria, Sam, a 51-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Charlotte, North Carolina metro area, stated:

> Following through is what we do; we don't take our obligations lightly, and voting is one [obligation] we have as citizens of the United States. I mean, any citizen of any democracy has the obligation to vote because they're citizens, and there's a lot of citizens here who just can't be bothered to vote, and, to me, that says that they're voluntarily and intentionally removing themselves from the society they're a part of, so they're disrespecting their obligations to society and democracy as a whole, and that's not particularly American in my mind. So, when I was talking about citizenship, yeah, it's important for being an American because citizens can be a part of America in that way – they can vote. But just as important [for being an American] is committing to our obligations as citizens. So, in short, what I'm saying is that *American*-Americans [her emphasis] are citizens who follow through with their obligations to the best of their ability.

While interviewees in the assimilationist thematic grouping used different wording to articulate action-based criteria for American membership, they nonetheless indicated that fulfilling the social contract mattered for inclusion, or full inclusion, into the category American. Sam's language, like many others in this categorization, depicted action-based American membership criteria as "obligations," such as voting, that all citizens had as citizens. For others in the assimilationist thematic grouping, action-based criteria similarly were depicted by the words "duties" and "responsibilities" all citizens had, but only "*American*-Americans," and "really great Americans" fulfilled their responsibilities because they believed in, treasured, and/or valued democracy and their role in it.

Illustrating these points, Melody, a 60-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural Western Colorado, said:

> …going back to the American Dream and America being this great land of opportunity, voting is what makes America that great land where any hard-working American can have the American Dream, because the government has to be responsive to voters, right? We're a democracy. We have the right to vote and it's up to us to exercise that right so

> we can have our Dream. So, when a citizen is exercising their right [to vote], they're doing that because they know in their hearts that democracy is important. They treasure democracy and their role as citizens in it. Citizens all have the same responsibility to vote because they're citizens, and true Americans are citizens that execute that because they know and value the role they play in our democratic society.

As Sam and Melody both pointed out, "*American*-Americans," or "true Americans" were citizens who followed through with their obligations, or responsibilities as citizens. Indeed, true Americans were "committed to" their obligations and responsibilities as citizens because they believed in and valued democracy, which was another hallmark of civic nationalism discussed in the literature (Shulman 2002; see also Tamir 2019). Here, the argument was that citizens had the right to vote because they were citizens. This, as discussed, was what interviewees in the assimilationist categorization used to define one's involvement in the social contract, or how they defined American membership criteria.

Indeed, citizenship was one symbolic boundary, or a line that was used to include and define one as American, or a "true" American (Lamont, Pendergrass, and Pachucki 2015), in terms of the right to vote and complete involvement and participation in American society and democracy. However, that citizens had the right to vote, and therefore were eligible for complete involvement and participation in American society and democracy, did not mean citizens executed, or followed through with, their obligations as citizens. Fulfilling one's end of the social contract in which one was involved also mattered for inclusion, or full inclusion, into the category "Americans" because Americans, and "really great Americans" were citizens who "committed to" their obligation to vote because they believed in and valued democracy and their role in it, which is characteristic to civic nationalist constructions of national membership.

Fulfilling one's end of the social contract often involved more than voting, however. One's inclusion, or full inclusion, into the category "American" was also contingent on citizens' fulfillment of other obligations they had to society, which included following the law and working hard. These obligations, unlike that of voting, were explicitly connected to American culture, and the assimilation into American culture impelled (hence the label assimilationists). As such, inclusion, or full inclusion, into the category "American" involved cultural nationalism in addition to civic nationalism among the assimilationist construction of Americans. Discussing the importance of working hard and following the law for full inclusion into the category American, Edith, a 74-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in a rural area near Eden, NC said:

> Hard work and being lawful are duties we have like any other, and these are just as central to being American as citizenship and voting are. So, it's like I said, Americans are citizens, but we're citizens who go about doing our duties, and not all citizens do that. Those of us who're lawful and who work hard have an ethnic that is quintessentially American: we recognize that we're responsible for our own success and we understand ourselves as being responsible for it. We accept that society isn't going to hand us success because we know we have to earn it for ourselves. We don't take advantage of society and harm other people to get what we want because we know that's unacceptable. All of that's American culture right there, and anyone – I mean literally anyone – can assimilate that and make it a part of themselves, but that's not enough to be American as I was saying.

As Edith illustrated, Americans were citizens who voted, worked hard, and obeyed the law. Indeed, working hard and "being lawful" were "just as central to being an American as citizenship and voting" were. Working hard and obeying the law, however, were connected to American culture, as opposed to citizenship, because, as Edith pointed out, "anyone" could "assimilate" American culture and have "an ethic" that was "quintessentially American." This was an important point because it reflected the distinction and separation of cultural nationalism from ethnic nationalism. This distinction was a pattern common to the assimilationist

construction of "true" American. While American culture was essentialized in this construction as a morality and way of doing things that was "a part" of one via assimilation (Bohan 1993), assimilating into and internalizing American culture was not determined by one's race, ancestry, or any other status. Indeed, anyone could assimilate into "American culture."

Further illustrating this use of cultural nationalism that was common to assimilationist constructions of Americans, Vicki, a 26-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Dodge City, KS metro area said:

> Americans are all kinds of people from all over the world, so there's too much diversity for any particular type of person or culture to matter [for being American]. It doesn't matter if someone was born here, or if they celebrate Christmas, or the 4th [of July], or if they're Christian, atheist, or whatever religion they are. Those types of culture describe different kinds of Americans, but that's different from being an American. I'm not a Christian, and I actually think Christianity, and religion more broadly, is fucking stupid, but I'm still American, so that's what I mean because Americans are citizens who take their rights seriously, but in a larger cultural way, Americans also respect law and order because we know and value the fact that it's on us to secure the life we want and we don't keep others from securing theirs. It's really about knowing and valuing right from wrong. That sense of right and wrong is our sense of right and wrong, regardless of any American's particular culture, and I think that's true a lot of the time for people who aren't citizens, too.

As Vicki, much like Edith, illustrated, any citizen who fulfilled their expectations, or responsibilities, to the social contract in terms of hard work and abiding by the law were American because American culture was "a part" of them. For Vicki, American culture, or the "cultural thing" common to Americans included knowing "right from wrong." Further, American culture was not connected to any particular political ideology, religion, type of citizen (i.e. birthright or naturalized), racial group, gender identity, or sexual orientation. As Vicki put it, "Americans are all kinds of different people, so there's too much diversity for any particular type of person or culture to matter." In this sense, ethnic nationalism, or symbolic boundaries defined

by ancestry and/or race, were not connected to inclusion into, or exclusion from, the category "true" American (Shulman 2002; Kymlicka 1999; Nieguth 1999).

In sum, among assimilationists, American social contract membership criteria, or who was understood as a part of the social contract, was connected to one's status as a citizen and the right to vote that afforded. This was coupled with action-based criteria based on who fulfilled their end of the social contract among those who were a part of it. This fulfilment included voting, working hard, and following the law. These actions were not tied to any status nor even citizenship; rather working hard and following the law were cultural characteristics anyone could assimilate.

Christian Assimilationist Construction of Americans

A second thematic grouping identified in the study are Christian assimilationists. This was the second largest group (n = 15). Interviewees in this grouping were from all generational age groups, except for The Greatest Generation and Generation Z, and lived in both rural and urban areas in North Carolina, Colorado, and Kansas.

The Christian assimilationist thematic grouping was very similar to the assimilationist grouping, with one important difference: Christian assimilationists, unlike the assimilationists, attached religion, and specifically Christianity, to American culture. This had implications for understanding the foundations of American morality which impelled assimilated citizens to fulfill their end of the social contract, namely by working hard and following the law. In other words, in addition to utilizing civic nationalism to define symbolic boundaries around inclusion into, and exclusion from, the category "true" American, members of this thematic grouping

incorporated religion as a facet of cultural nationalism in their definition of "true" American. In the following sections, I first discuss social contract membership criteria among these interviewees, which was similar as that constructed by assimilationists. I then discuss action-based membership criteria among interviewees categorized as Christian assimilationists.

Christian assimilationist social contract membership criteria

Much like assimilationists, interviewees thematically categorized as Christian assimilationists tended to answer the interview question, "Can you describe who Americans are?" with "citizens." As such, interviewees in the Christian assimilationist and assimilationist groupings agreed that who they saw as a part of social contract was based on civic nationalism, defined by citizenship and the rights common to citizens (Shulman 2002). Cara, a 43-year-old, self-identified Republican living near the Grand Junction, CO metro area said, for example:

> Citizens have the right to vote, which is why I say citizenship matters for being an American. But, and this is obvious, but people, or citizens rather, don't always vote, and some don't vote at all. But, not to stray from your question too much, the right to vote that citizenship comes with, is what's important about what I'm saying. Being a citizen is a necessary part for being American because being able to vote means that you are able to participate in the government's decisions. You get to pick representatives and you have a voice in what they do and what you want them to do. So, you have to be a citizen to be an American because that's the only way anyone can have that kind of participation in our society.

As highlighted by Cara, Americans "have the right to vote," via citizenship; this allowed one to "participate in the government's decisions." In this sense, one had to be a U.S. citizen for inclusion into the category "American." The idea of being able to participate in American society and democracy was common among Christian assimilationists, as it was for assimilationists, and it was synonymous with one being a part of the social contract because, as Cara pointed out, non-

citizens did not "get to pick representatives" or "have a voice" in American democracy. Indeed, only citizens had such a voice via voting.

Further illustrating the importance of citizenship for membership criteria for inclusion, Lana, a 29-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived outside of Liberal Kansas, said:

> Americans are citizens because there's literally no other way for people to give their input to the government as individuals. Well, non-citizens, and citizens alike, can write [to] politicians and express their concerns or whatever, but politicians aren't compelled to take anything people who aren't citizens have to say seriously, or do anything to address their concerns, because they can't vote. Politicians aren't really even there for them [non-citizens] because they're not citizens, so citizens are the only ones who can really get involved in America in that way because the government is there only for us [citizens] in many ways.

Much like Cara, Lana addressed the relevance of citizenship and the right to vote for membership into the category "American." Christian assimilationists, like Cara and Lana, indicated that citizenship, and the right to vote it afforded, made the U.S. government accountable to that individual. In contrast, non-citizens experienced no such accountability because they did not have the right to vote. Without citizenship and the right to vote it granted, moreover, one could not be American because citizens were "the only ones who can really get involved in America in that way." Citizenship mattered, in other words, because the right to vote was the means through which the U.S. government was accountable to one's concerns. For the Christian assimilationist definition of "true" American, like assimilationists, focused on citizenship and the right to vote. However, like those in the assimilationist thematic category, just because one was able vote did not mean they fulfilled the social contract which was also important for American national membership.

Christian assimilationist action-based membership criteria

Christian assimilationists highlighted the relevance of fulfilling one's duty to vote as citizens of the U.S. This action-based criterion was common to this thematic grouping, as it was for assimilationists. Illustrating, this idea, Kylie, a 24-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Castle Rock, CO metro area, said:

> As citizens, we all have the duty to vote because we have that right as citizens of a democracy, which comes back to the American Dream, too, and having a government whose duty it is to reflect our needs. And, as far as Americans go, in my opinion Americans are firstly citizens and they're citizens who vote because it's their duty in a democracy and we get [understand] the importance of it. And, it doesn't matter how, or which way any citizen is voting, like if they're Democrats or Republicans; what matters is that they're voting because we get to vote for who represents us, and that can be different for different Americans.

"Americans" are "citizens who vote." As with the assimilationists, it did not matter to Christian assimilationists "how," or "which way any citizen" voted in terms of political party; what mattered was the citizens fulfilled their duty to vote. Americans fulfilled their duty to vote as citizens because "we get," or understood, "the importance of it," which is another hallmark of civic nationalism discussed in the literature (Shulman 2002; see also Tamir 2019). Here, the argument was that citizens had the right to vote because they were citizens. This, as discussed, was what assimilationists and Christian assimilationists used to define one's involvement in the social contract, or how they defined membership criteria for inclusion into the category "American."

Citizenship was one symbolic boundary, or a line that was used to include and define one as American (Lamont, Pendergrass, and Pachucki 2015), in terms of the right to vote and the involvement and participation in American society and democracy it afforded. However, because citizens had the right to vote, and were therefore eligible for complete involvement and participation in American society and democracy, did not mean citizens executed, or followed

through with, their obligations as citizens. Fulfilling one's end of the social contract in which one was involved also mattered for inclusion, or full inclusion, into the category "Americans" because Americans were citizens who voted and fulfilled their duty as citizens in a democracy, which is characteristic to civic nationalism (Shulman 2002).

Fulfilling one's end of the social contract involved more than voting, however. One's inclusion into the category "American" was also contingent on citizens' fulfillment of other obligations to society they had, namely following the law and working hard. These obligations were explicitly connected to American culture and, moreover, Christian morality. In other words, inclusion into the category "American" among Christian Assimilationists involved civic nationalism as well as cultural nationalism. Illustrating these ideas, Claire, a 46-year-old self-identified Republican who lived in a small town outside of New Bern, NC said:

> Working hard and respecting the laws are principles of Christianity. You have to help yourself to help others, and so many of our laws follow the Ten Commandments. So, Christianity teaches us all, whether we're Christians or not. I mean really, it's about us embodying these principles – living them. That's assimilation, right? And so, for me, any discussion about American culture is one about Christianity. Christianity teaches us to embody those values, and those values are American culture. And, like I said, any citizen who embodies that is embodying Christianity, and so I say they're American. I don't care if citizens say, "I'm not a Christian," they can walk the walk if they're not talking the talk.

As discussed by Claire, American culture is rooted in Christianity and any citizen who worked hard and followed the law, regardless of their personal religious beliefs or practices, was American because they were assimilated into American/Christian culture. Citizens who fulfilled their end of the social contract and 'walked the walk' of Christianity, even if they were not "talking the talk" or identified as Christians, were included into the category American because they embodied Christian values in their acts. In this sense, cultural nationalism reflected by

culturally relevant practices and traits was seen to be distinct from ethnic nationalism since assimilating into American culture and morality was not contingent on one's race, ancestry, or any other status, including identifying as a Christian. Illustrating this idea, Sonya, a 50-year-old self-identified independent who lived in rural Kansas said:

> I know that a lot of people come from the viewpoint that colored people and migrants, or immigrants, gays, a lot of different people, don't do what they're supposed to do. But, I always say, well, take the Obama's, for example. You can say whatever you want to about their politics, but no one can say that they don't work hard or value hard work. No one can say they're abusing the system or breaking the law or that they're not upright citizens. And, mind you, I am a Republican saying this. And, from that viewpoint, it's impossible to say colored people are bad people or that they're all bad citizens. And the same goes for immigrants who became citizens. If someone goes through all of that [the naturalization process], then I think it's pretty safe to say that they're pretty dang serious about doing what's right because they, and the rest of us who do what we're supposed to, have an understanding that correlates to the Christian values that steer our behavior whether we recognize them as such or not.

Common to Christian assimilationists was the idea that any citizen could be American insofar as they adopted values and practices reflective of American Christian culture and fulfilled their end of the social contract. Like the assimilationists, there was no use of ethnic nationalism to refine membership into the category "American" based upon race or ancestry. Similarly, other statuses, such as religious identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or whether one was a natural born or naturalized citizen did not factor into one's ability to assimilate American Christian culture. In relation to Christian nationalism, which is often understood to involve the conflation of national membership and Christianity (Gorski & Perry 2022; Whitehead & Perry 2020), the Christian assimilationist construction of Americans is an interesting case. American culture was conflated with Christianity, but anyone, whether they identified as Christian or not, could assimilate this culture and be American. Because of this, the analytical distinction between Christianity as a status and cultural nationalism is apt just as it is with other statuses, such as race

and ancestry. However, this distinction was not always present as with the next definition of "true" American discussed below.

Christian Restrictionist Construction of Americans

A third thematic grouping, Christian restrictionist, emerged from the data. This grouping was tied for the third largest (n = 13), and included interviewees who self-identified as Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Interviewees in this grouping were from all generational age groups, except for The Greatest Generation and Generation Z, and lived in both rural and urban areas in North Carolina, Colorado, and Kansas.

Christian restrictionist social contract membership criteria

Much like interviewees in the assimilationist and Christian assimilationist thematic groupings, those in the Christian restrictionist one tended to answer the interview question, "Americans have come up throughout the interview. Can you describe who Americans are?" with "citizens." As such, interviewees across all three thematic groupings emphasized civic nationalism (Shulman 2002), revolving largely around citizenship and the right to vote. Illustrating this, Tammy, a 40-year-old, self-identified independent who lived in the Raleigh-Durham metro area said:

> I say Americans are citizens because voting [*sic*], and that's really what it comes down to because America is a democracy, so if you can't vote, you're shit out of luck in most ways. What non-citizens want and need doesn't matter in a practical sense because they don't have any direct involvement with our democratic process, or any laws or legislation that come out of that process. Any involvement they have, if you want to call it that, is indirect because our government doesn't represent them. What citizens want and need does matter in a practical way, and some [citizens] may want to recognize those [wants and needs] of non-citizens. When that happens then those can be addressed. And, that's

> the way it's supposed to be. Elected officials are beholden to citizens because we are the only ones who put them into office and take them out of it.

As Tammy discussed, one's involvement in the social contract involved citizenship because the right to vote was what allowed for one's "direct involvement with our democratic process." Without this involvement, non-citizens' needs and wants would not be directly recognized by the government as governments are not "beholden" to non-citizens. Indeed, only citizens were the "one's who put them [elected officials] into office" and who could "take them out of it." Further addressing these points, Vanessa, a 32-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in outside of Nederland, CO said:

> Only citizens can vote, so our Dreams are the most important, or like our Dreams are the ones that the government is responsible for. Not being a citizen doesn't mean your Dream isn't important, I didn't mean that, I just meant that they [non-citizens] don't have the ability, or a real way, to get what they need to live a decent life because they can't vote; the government just isn't responsible for them in the ways that they are for citizens.

Much like Tammy, Vanessa discussed the importance of citizenship and the right to vote for American membership criteria. For Vanessa, without citizenship and the right to vote, one did not have the ability, or "a real way," to get what one needed "to live a decent life" because one was not involved in the social contract between citizens and the government. Indeed, the U.S. government was not "responsible for" non-citizens in the same ways they were for citizens.

The Christian restrictionist thematic categorization, like the others discussed so far, addressed the significance of citizenship and the right to vote for social contract membership criteria, which was indicative of civic nationalism. This construction of "American," like the others, also involved fulfilling one's end of the social contract to which one was involved. In terms of action-based membership criteria, however, their construction of "true" American diverged from the others because one's identity as a Christian, or one's Christian status was

inseparable from cultural nationalism. Indeed, only Christians can assimilate to American culture and wholly fulfill their end of the social contract.

Christian restrictionist action-based membership criteria

Like others, Christian restrictionists highlighted the relevance of fulfilling one's duty to vote as citizens of the U.S. Illustrating, this idea, Ruth, a 71-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Pueblo, CO metro area, said:

> Voting is our [U.S. citizens'] right and responsibility because we live in a democratic nation. It isn't enough for one to be able to vote, one has to vote to be American in my opinion, and that's the way it is for any citizen of any democratic nation because they're *citizens* [her emphasis] of that nation. That's non-negotiable. All citizens of all democracies have that responsibility and all should do it; all should vote.

Christian restrictionists emphasized civic nationalism in terms of membership criteria as well as fulfilling one's responsibility as a citizen to vote. It did not matter which way a citizen voted; what mattered was that they fulfilled their responsibility to vote. Indeed, "true" Americans fulfilled their duty to vote as citizens because it was "our right and responsibility because we live in a democratic nation," which is another hallmark of civic nationalism discussed in the literature (Shulman 2002; see also Tamir 2019).

Citizenship was one symbolic boundary, or a line that was used to include and define one as American (Lamont, Pendergrass, and Pachucki 2015) and this was linked to practice in terms of exercising one's right to vote and to participate in American democracy. Fulfilling one's end of the social contract in which one was involved mattered for inclusion into the category "Americans" because Americans were citizens who voted and fulfilled their duty as citizens in a democracy. These attributes reflect their civic nationalism.

However, different from the Christian assimilationist understanding, the Christian restrictionist understanding asserted that only Christian citizens reliably fulfilled these responsibilities of the social contract because only Christians could assimilate Christian American culture and morality. As such, inclusion into the category "American" also involved cultural nationalism, but a form of cultural nationalism that was inseparable from the status of being Christian. Illustrating the relevance of civic nationalism as well cultural nationalism and its connection to the status Christian, Tilly, a 60-year-old, self-identified Republican living in the Winston-Salem metro area said:

> Voting is a right and a responsibility that's particular to citizens, so only voting citizens can be American in my opinion. But, and this is an important but, but I think that being a Christian is important, too. I have nothing against people who aren't Christians, citizens or otherwise, but, and this is an important but, but how I think about it is that the Christian faith, meaning you accept Jesus into your heart – you're a Christian – that is trustworthiness. Any U.S. citizen who is saved and lives that kind of life means that they have the wherewithal to endure their responsibilities as members of society, American society. So, to be American is to be a Christian citizen because we understand our responsibilities as Americans to work and obey the law. America doesn't work without these convictions and I think we [Christian citizens] are the only ones who reliably have them and do them because those convictions are our Christian moral compass.

Christian restrictionists attached a "Christian moral compass" to American culture; working hard and obeying the law as part of being American was rooted in Christianity and America did not "work without these convictions." Further, Christian citizens were the only citizens who could "reliably" understand and fulfill their responsibilities to the social contract in which they were involved because these responsibilities were inherent in their Christian convictions. Whereas interviewees in the Christian assimilationist grouping said many citizens, regardless of their religion, fulfilled their end of the social contract, interviewees in the Christian restrictionist grouping narrowed membership of who is American to only Christian citizens since

Christians are the only ones who have "the wherewithal to endure their responsibilities as members of society" and "reliably" fulfill these responsibilities.

For the Christian restrictionist thematic group, any citizen could be American, or "fully American," if they were Christians. Here, Christian faith and the "moral compass" it provides did not rely on race, ancestry, or type of citizenship (naturalized or natural born). However, they expressed reservations about sexual orientation and gender identity in observing that Americans are straight and cis-gender because one "couldn't be Christian and gay" or "be Christian and confused about their womanhood and manhood." Illustrating these points, Ingrid, a 67-year-old, self-identified independent who lived in the Denver, CO metro area, said:

> I know lots of people who've converted to Christianity, I know a lot of born-again Christians, so I know that people who weren't Christian took that step. Some are black, some are white, whatever color, some moved here from other countries, and they're citizens now, so that's important, but Christians are all sorts of people from all over the world, and so Americans are too, given that they're citizens. It's like I said, any citizen who's a Christian is American because they're good people – they do what needs to be done I think because of their Christian faith. One reservation I have about this is about sexual orientation and people who're confused about their womanhood or manhood. I'm sorry, but any sort of gay and those gender, or whatever, sorts of people [transgender people] aren't Christians. They can't be Christians and have that sort of confusion because Christians are born men and women and they know they're men and women. Christians know that they're meant to be with someone of the other sex because that's what marriage is. That's what's right in God's eyes, so if that's not right in their eyes, then they're going against God.

As indicated by Ingrid, the big thematic picture with Christian restrictionist constructions of Americans was the use of both civic and cultural nationalism. Culturally, Christian restrictionists utilized Christianity like the Christian assimilationists because they collapsed American culture with Christianity. Americans were Christian citizens who fulfilled their obligations to the social contract in which they were legitimately involved because Christianity gave those citizens the morality needed to work hard and obey the law. Further, as Ingrid

illustrated, the ways cultural nationalism was attached to the status Christian included only heterosexuals and cis-gender people since others are "going against God." Because of this, their cultural nationalism was inseparable from a form of ethnic nationalism base on the statuses of Christian, heterosexual, and cis-gender.

In relation to Christian nationalism, which is often understood to involve the conflation of national membership and Christianity (Gorski & Perry 2022, Whitehead & Perry 2020), the Christian restrictionist construction of Americans conflates both American culture and Christian identity with cultural nationalism. Here, citizens who did not "accept Jesus into their hearts," or those who identified as Christian, could not be American because they were incapable of reliably assimilating American Christian culture. Because of this, the analytical distinction between Christianity as a status and cultural nationalism was not applicable here. It was, however, among Christian-political restrictionists discussed below.

Christian-Political Restrictionist Construction of Americans

Here, I use the term 'restrictionist' for this definition of "true" American because of the restrictive action-based membership criteria interviewees in this thematic grouping expressed. This categorization was the smallest (n = 12), and it is entirely composed of self-identified Republicans. Interviewees in this grouping were from all generational age groups, except for The Greatest Generation and Generation Z, and lived in both rural and urban areas in North Carolina, Colorado, and Kansas. This thematic grouping is distinct from the others in several ways.

First, ethnic nationalism was, in practice, inseparable from cultural nationalism among interviewees in this grouping as was political nationalism. Here, statuses such as race and

ancestry were understood to make one incapable of fully assimilating into Christian American culture. Regarding political party, "liberals" were also understood as being incapable of respecting and valuing Christian American culture. Similar to interviewees in the Christian restrictionist grouping, however, those in the Christian-political restrictionist grouping asserted that non-heterosexuals and transgender people could not assimilate American Christian culture, as well. I first discuss American membership criteria, which mirrors the use of civic nationalism common to the other thematic groupings before addressing their action-based criteria below.

Christian-political restrictionist social contract membership criteria

Like the other thematic constructions of Americans discussed so far, the Christian restrictionist construction of American social contract membership criteria revolved around civic nationalism in its emphasis on citizenship and the right to vote. Expressing these ideas Kim, a 44-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Denver, CO metro area, said:

> It [citizenship] is important because that's why we get to vote. I think in some places, non-citizens can vote in some small, local elections, but I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about congressional, presidential, gubernatorial, those kinds of elections, because that's complete participation, or being eligible for complete participation in our democracy. And, so if one doesn't have citizenship, then no, there's no way they're American. Citizenship is crucial. It's an absolutely necessary part of it [being American].

As Kim discussed, American membership criteria was based upon citizenship and the right to vote because only citizens were eligible for "complete participation" in American democracy. Indeed, citizenship and the right to vote it afforded, were "an absolutely necessary part of" inclusion into the category "American."

Christian-political restrictionist action-based membership criteria

Further illustrating the relevance of civic nationalism for American membership criteria as well as voting, Trish, a 54-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Kansas City, KS metro area said:

> All citizens have the right to vote, and they should vote because it's their constitutional right as well as their duty to their country. Voting is how any citizen is able to express their opinions and their needs and get those acknowledged and addressed by the government. I mean, voting is how we're a part of the larger system at work, society and how it's run, and how our lives are run, and it's what should make them [the government] responsive to us.

Kim and Trish illustrated the relevance of civic nationalism for the Christian restrictionist construction of American membership criteria. As Kim discussed, civic nationalism was not just relevant for American membership criteria; it was also used to discuss one's fulfillment of the social contract in terms of voting. Indeed, citizens had the right to vote and needed to vote because they were citizens. Regarding hard work and obeying the law, the other components of action-based membership criteria raised, this group, like Christian restrictionists, attached it to the statuses of Christian, heterosexual, and cis-gender. However, they also attached cultural nationalism to ethnic nationalism (based on ancestry and race) and to political nationalism, or political ideology, to further articulate who "had" the Christian morality needed to fulfill the social contract. In this case, non-whites, non-heterosexuals, transgender people, liberals, including white liberals, naturalized citizens, and even birthright citizens who have foreign born parents (regardless of the parents' citizenship status) were not considered to be American. Expressing a Christian-political restrictionist perspective connecting cultural nationalism with ethnic and political nationalism, Kelly, a 51-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural Kansas said:

> It's infuriating that so many white Liberals – I call them libtards – but all of them just throw their support behind a bunch of fucking [N] who haven't done an honest day's work in their lives. And, what gets me is that slavery is dead and has been for at least 100 years, right? Probably a bit more than that. But, whatever, it's been over a century and they're still whining about discrimination and how that makes them poor and useless. They blame everything on us when the issue is with them, and those who aren't white – not just the Blacks – and that's not American or Christian. I don't know if it's more nature than nurture or what. I don't know if they're [non-whites] are born stupid or if they learn it from each other. I guess it doesn't really matter though because the result is the same either way: they're poor and useless whether it's because they learn to refuse to work or because they're too stupid to work. They can't assimilate and they don't have Christian values, and now they got a bunch of whites on that discrimination bandwagon, and that burns me up because they [white liberals] are choosing to go against what's right, too.

Kelly, like other interviewees who expressed the Christian-political restrictionist definition of "true" American maintained many were not "American" because they lacked the Christian values that were necessary for fulfilling the social contract. Additionally, white liberals chose "to go against what's right," or undermine the American cultural norm of working hard while Non-whites were understood as being incapable of fulfilling the social contract whether based on biological racism (nature) or cultural racism (nurture/socialization) (see Golash-Boza 2015). Their definition of who is American provides an example of the inseparability of cultural nationalism and ethnic nationalism for some interviewees.

In addition, this construction of Americans made political nationalism, or political ideology, inseparable from cultural nationalism. For these interviewees, it was not only non-whites who were unable to fulfill the social contract, it was also white liberals because they are "going against what's right" and getting on the "discrimination bandwagon," which, for Christian-political restrictionists meant they undermined American Christian culture by not valuing the individual's responsibility to work hard. The inseparability, in practice, between cultural and ethnic nationalism also applied to ancestry in terms of citizenship type. Here, naturalized citizens, and birthright citizens whose parents were foreign born were also said to be

incapable of assimilating Christian American culture in terms of fulfilling the social contract. Expressing this connection, that to political and ethnic (ancestry-based) nationalism, Bertie a 77-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural North Carolina, said:

> It pisses me off that they [liberals] let all kinds of people into the country when they damn well know they're not going to do what's expected. That's a telltale sign they [liberals] don't respect America or actual Americans, and that's no different from all the people they let in. A lot of liberals, and the rest of them [people liberals let into the country], say they're Christian, but they don't have a lick of Christian in them because they don't respect American values, which are the same damn thing as Christian values. And, time has told us that Blacks aren't going to work and that most of them can't follow the law to save their lives. That whole Black Lives Matters [*sic*] nonsense. And they [Blacks] were here already. They've had the most time to assimilate, but evidently they can't. And, so many of them say they're Christian, but I don't see it in them. They talk about discrimination all the time, and so do the gays and them all trans, whatever, folk when the issue is that they just don't want to work. If they [gays and transgender people] would get right with the Lord, maybe they'd be okay, but most of them say they can't change, so I guess that means they won't [get right with the Lord]...Time has also told us that immigrants, even citizens, try to milk the system, too, because they don't want to work. We say that people who are born here are citizens, but the one's whose parents aren't born here teach them all kinds of crap from where they [the foreign-born parents] came from, and none of it involves following the law and working hard.

As illustrated by Bertie, the Christian-political restrictionist construction of action-based membership criteria, or who fulfills the social contract in which one is involved, is restricted in a variety of ways. Much like Kelly, Bertie asserted that liberals, including white liberals, undermined American culture by letting "all kinds of people into the country when they damn well know they're not going to do what's expected" in terms of following the law and working hard. Liberals, including white liberals, did not fulfill their obligations to the social contract. Similarly, "gays," "Blacks," and "trans" people were understood as not wanting to work hard and used discrimination as an excuse for any lack of success they experienced. Bertie, like others in this thematic grouping, also indicated that naturalized citizens, or immigrants, were understood as being incapable of working hard and/or following the law, as were birthright

citizens whose parents were foreign born because, it was argued, their parents taught their children, “all kinds of crap from where they came from,” and none of it involved the American Christian values of hard work and following the law. In effect, inclusion into the category American was restricted among interviewees in this thematic category. Indeed, non-liberal, Christian, white, cis-gender, heterosexuals who were birthright citizens whose parents were not immigrants, met action-based American membership criteria because these were the only citizens fully capable of fulfilling the social contract.

Politically Restrictive Inclusionist Construction of Americans

The politically restrictive inclusionist thematic grouping is the last patterned grouping which emerged from the data. They are labeled this way because of the general lack of criteria for American national membership they expressed. For these participants, there was no status necessary for American social contract membership; the only status necessary for action-based membership criteria was political liberalism. This is why “politically restrictive” is used. This categorization of “true” American was tied for third largest (n = 13), and among interviewees who expressed this construction of American were self-identified Democrats and one self-identified “very liberal” independent. Interviewees in this grouping were from all generational age groups, except for The Greatest Generation, and lived in both rural and urban areas in North Carolina, Colorado, and Kansas.

Politically restrictive inclusionist social contract membership criteria

While citizenship and the right to vote defined American social contract membership criteria for most participants, its relevance among those categorized as politically restrictive

inclusionists was contested. Indeed, citizenship in and of itself did not matter for these interviewees. Illustrating this idea, Lucy a 29-year-old self-identified Democrat who lived in a small town near New Bern, NC said:

> I don't care about citizenship or anything like that. Actually, I think anyone who is here, for whatever reason, like they just want to live here, or work here, or even if they just need to live here even if they don't necessarily want that, they're here out of necessity, or whatever the situation is, I think they have the same responsibilities as citizens in terms of the American Dream because we're all a part of the same society. So, citizenship isn't relevant for me whatsoever in terms of being an American. I think that non-citizens who are living here should be able to vote and that they should work hard and follow the law because we're all a part of the same society. Citizen or not, we have the same responsibilities, including, in my opinion, voting because we're all the same society.

As Lucy indicated, citizenship as a status did not define membership criteria for inclusion. In fact, American social contract membership criteria among those categorized as politically restrictive inclusionists lacked any sort of clear criteria because these interviewees agreed that anyone living in the U.S. had the same responsibilities. Obviously, citizenship is legally tied to voting, but these interviewees asserted that non-citizens who lived here should be able to vote. In other words, anyone who "was here," citizen or not, were viewed as being part of the social contract and therefore as being responsible for valuing and fulfilling their end of the social contract. As such, potentially anyone could be viewed as American insofar as they valued and fulfilled their responsibilities to the social contract of which they were a part. Regarding civic nationalism, the only tie this definition of American social contract membership criteria utilized was in relation to one physically being in U.S. territory. But even then, citizens who were expats were nonetheless a part of the social contract. Illustrating these ideas, Carla, a 36-year-old, self-identified "very liberal" independent who lived in the Wichita metro area said:

> Constitutionally, or legally, citizenship is tied to voting, but I don't think it's important for being American or not. I mean, it's important because of voting, but I think that

> anyone who lives here, citizen or not, should be able to have a say in the government because they're subject to its laws and policies and all that, so anyone who lives here is a part of the bigger picture. People who aren't citizens are living alongside citizens, and some citizens live abroad, but we're all entitled to the American Dream if we've done what we need to do with work and all that. Anyway, I don't think that anyone has to be a citizen to be an American, and honestly, I don't think a lot of citizens are all that American because they don't act like it. So, for me, the two [citizenship and American] aren't connected.

Both Carla and Lucy illustrated an important point that was particular to the politically restrictive inclusionist definition of "true" American: citizenship as a status was, in practice, distinct from the right to vote that is commonly understood to be a hallmark of civic nationalism in existing literature (i.e. Shulman 2002). Indeed, for interviewees in this thematic grouping, the right to vote in the U.S. was the right of anyone who lived in the U.S., as well as citizens who lived abroad, because they were "subject to" U.S. "laws and policies" just as citizens who lived in the U.S. were. If one was subject to U.S. law and policy, regardless of citizenship, then one was a part of the social contract and should be able to vote because they had the "same responsibilities as citizens."

Politically restrictive inclusionist action-based membership criteria

Because anyone who lived in the U.S. was involved in the social contract for interviewees in the politically restrictive inclusionist thematic grouping, anyone who lived here and should have the responsibility to vote because they were subject to U.S. law and policy. Non-citizens, however, could not fulfill this requirement of the social contract because they could not legally vote. In relation to hard work and obeying the law, everyone who lived here and citizens who lived abroad needed to engage in these actions to fulfill their end of the social contract. Citizenship was not an exception here as Lucy pointed out. Moreover, interviewees in this thematic grouping argued that people, as a part of human nature, worked hard. In this sense,

people generally fulfilled this requirement of the social contract. Obeying the law, however, was where issues emerged concerning one's Americanness. Indeed, if one experienced discrimination and broke the law because one's hard work could not earn one success, then one was not necessarily un-American because one did not have "much of a choice in the matter." In circumstances where one discriminated against, or supported discriminating against, other people, and thus broke the law or encouraged breaking the law, then one was un-American. Expressing these ideas, McKayla, a 25-year-old self-identified Democrat who lived in a small mountain town in Colorado said:

> Some people discriminate against other people, like it's illegal to not hire someone just because they're Black, but people do that here [in the U.S.]. I think that's un-American and I think that that kind of behavior is the result of far-right politics a lot of times. Not all conservatives do this, or support it, but far-right ones do. But, for some people, too, I think they break the law, like steal, or commit fraud, or embezzle money or whatever, because they can't get ahead by working hard – these people, I think, tend to experience discrimination that prevents their hard work from getting them success in one way or another. So, that's a problem. With the first example, I don't think those people are very American because they do break the law for no other reason than because they're racists or whatever. For the second example, I wouldn't say those who face discrimination and break the law to get what they need in life are un-American because they don't have much of a choice in the matter.

As McKayla illustrated, Americans broke the law in different circumstances, which mattered for one's Americanness in terms of fulfilling the social contract of which one was a part. If one broke the law because they did not "have much of a choice in the matter" in terms of "getting what they need in life," then that did not make one un-American. On the other hand, if one broke the law, or supported breaking the law, in terms of discriminating against people, for example, in hiring, then one was un-American. As McKayla discussed, which was common among interviewees in this thematic grouping, far-right conservatives were generally understood as those who discriminated, or supported discrimination, against other Americans. Because of

this, far-right conservatives were understood by many as being un-American. In this sense, political ideology as a status was utilized to articulate action-based American membership criteria among those in the grouping politically restrictive inclusionist whereby "far-right" conservatives were not "true" Americans.

The politically restrictive inclusionist definition of "true" American was quite different from the other constructions because the former did not rely on civic nationalism for American social contract membership criteria and did not utilize cultural nationalism, independent of, or in conjunction with, ethnic nationalism, as did the other definitions. Like the Christian-political restrictionist grouping, the politically restrictive inclusionist one utilized political nationalism, but in the opposite way. While Christian-political restrictionists asserted liberals undermined Christian American culture and were therefore not American, politically restrictive inclusionists asserted "far right conservatives" broke the law, or supported breaking the law, and were relatively un-American.

Understanding Americans

In this chapter, I discussed the interviewees' constructions of American national membership, or who they understood to be American and "true" Americans. Their constructions of national membership revolved around two facets: 1) who they understood to be involved in the social contract in the first place, or Americans, and 2) among those involved, who they understood to fulfill their individual end of the social contract, or "true" Americans. Unlike their understanding of a great America, the interviewees' understandings of Americans and "true" Americans diverged albeit in patterned ways. The following chapter builds onto both Chapter 4, and it focuses on the interviewees' understandings of America's actual greatness, or lack thereof

for “true” Americans, or those who were viewed to be a part of the social contract and who also fulfilled their end of it.

CHAPTER 6: THE LIVED AMERICA

The previous two empirical chapters examined interviewees' understanding of a great America and the ways they constructed Americans and why. In relation to a great America, Chapter 4 discussed the significance of the American Dream, which was facilitated by democracy, fair access to opportunities, the fulfillment of a morally laden social contract between individual Americans, the U.S. government, and American society. Chapter 5, in turn, discussed the various ways interviewees constructed American national membership, which was fundamentally about: 1) who was involved in the social contract in the first place (Americans), and 2) among those involved, who fulfilled their end of the social contract ("true" Americans). These constructions of American national membership demonstrated how ethnic, political, cultural, and/or civic nationalisms coexisted among interviewees, albeit in different ways and based on different reasons, some of which relied on biological and cultural racism as well as heterosexism and cissexism.

This chapter examines the interviewees' expressions of national sentiment, which is a facet of nationalism that refers to the feelings and emotions one associates with the nation and/or one's national identity (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). Like national membership, expressions of national sentiment are embedded and (re)formulated within socio-political contexts (i.e. Anderson 1991; Brubaker 1996; Calhoun 1996), which is how nationalism can vary over time and space and even within the same time and space (Brubaker 1996; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). Accordingly, this chapter discusses the ways the interviewees contextualized their evaluations of America's actual greatness for true Americans (however constructed). In doing so, this chapter focuses on how interviewees' understandings of the accessibility of the

American Dream for true Americans as well as (un)fairness related to the accessibility of opportunities were used to justify their expressions national hubris, shame, embarrassment, and/or resentment towards America and being American. These expressions were sometimes ambivalent, and I discuss the role the hope that America could become great for true Americans played in this ambivalence.

This chapter contributes to existing research on nationalism in a few important ways. First, scholars argue that gender relations need to be incorporated into research that seeks to understand nationalism because nationalism, as a process, is gendered (McClintock 1996). Historically, gendered nationalism has been ignored (Walby 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997; Enloe 1998), but it is a growing body of research (i.e. Cohen 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997; Rosamond, and Kinnvall 2020; Deckman and Cassese 2021; Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2021; Eroukhmanoff 2025). In the U.S., examinations of gendered nationalism are largely confined to constructions of national membership (i.e. Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2021) and beliefs about the feminization of the U.S. (i.e. Deckman and Cassese 2021). Such research certainly yields insight into U.S. nationalism, but the various ways women (re)construct and experience the nation as well as how gender relations are used to make sense of the U.S. remain understudied.

Addressing this gap in the literature, this chapter examines how gender relations were used by interviewees to contextualize the U.S., which had consequences for the national sentiment they expressed. Indeed, findings demonstrate perceptions of inequality, including that related to gender, played an important role in shaping national sentiment. Second, findings discussed in this chapter demonstrate perceptions of what America was for "true" Americans

were consequential for expressions of national sentiment, as did hope, or optimism, that America could become great for "true" Americans expressions of national sentiment. Finally, this chapter supports evidence that expressions of national sentiment are often ambivalent (i.e. Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012). Further findings in this chapter further provide insight into the conditions that induce ambivalent expressions of national sentiment.

This chapter largely relies on responses to the following interview questions (including probe questions):

- Is America great?
- How do you feel about that?
- Has America changed over time?
- What do you think needs to change to make America great again?
- What was different then, relative to today? What changed?
- What changed for your or others' lives?
- What do you think is behind this change (or lack of change)?
- Who makes it greater (or the same, or less great) today?
- Are there policy changes that need to be made [to make America great again]? Why and what are they?
- Are there specific practices that contributed to this change (or lack of change)?

I begin this chapter with an overview of the interviewees who indicated that America was great for true Americans. I then address the context of their perceptions of America's actual greatness for true Americans, which includes a discussion about the accessibility of the American Dream for true Americans and (un)fair access to opportunities. I then discuss the

national sentiment these interviewees expressed and how their expressions were inseparable from their perception of America's greatness for true Americans. Next, I provide an overview of interviewees who agreed that America was not great for true Americans. I then discuss the national sentiment these interviewees expressed and how their expressions were inseparable from their perceptions of America's lack of greatness for true Americans. Finally, I address ambivalence in expressions of national sentiment among interviewees who were hopeful, or optimistic, that America could become great for true Americans.

America's Greatness for True Americans

A total of seven interviewees (3 assimilationists, 2 Christian assimilationists, and 2 Christian restrictionists) agreed that America was great for true Americans. This view was contextualized through their understanding that all Americans, regardless of gender, race, or sexuality, had fair enough access to opportunities. While these interviewees indicated that America was not "flawless," or "perfect," they nonetheless all believed the American Dream operated "well enough" for many, if not most, true Americans, and they used their own experiences to ground this assertion. Demonstrating these ideas, assimilationist Jessica, a 21-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Denver, CO metro area said:

> I know all my work is paying off. I didn't get any more or less opportunities than anyone else, and that's the way it is for all of us so long as we keep the government in check, so I vote and all [of] that, and I know my friends do too, so it [the government] is checked as far as I'm concerned. And, that's how it should be, so I have no reason to think that America isn't great…I have friends who work hard, and I have friends who don't. Those who do [work hard] have lives like mine. Those who don't work all that hard in my opinion don't have terrible lives or anything, but they're not success stories either and that's on them. They have the same opportunities as the rest of us, so the issue is with them.

In Jessica's view, her and her friends' experiences with the American Dream demonstrated America's greatness for true Americans, or citizens who fulfilled their end of the social contract. Erica knew her hard work was "paying off" in terms of success, and this was the case for her friends who also worked hard. Indeed, in her view, there was fair access to opportunities because the government was "in check," via democracy and voting. Jessica did not "get any more or less opportunities than anyone else," and neither did her friends, including those who were not successful. Their lack of success was "on them," because they failed to work hard, which why she said, "the issue," or their lack of success, was "with them." As such, the America in which Jessica understood herself and other Americans to be living was a "great America" because the American Dream panned out for those who worked hard – true Americans.

Echoing this idea assimilationist Patty, a 91-year-old, self-identified Democrat, who lived in rural Eastern NC, said:

> My and my family's lives are testament to America's greatness for all of us…My husband and I came from nothing – I mean *nothing* [her emphasis] – and [we] still made a good life for ourselves. Our children – they didn't grow up poor like we did – but they're hard workers, and they're making good lives for themselves, too. And that's the possibilities here [in America]; all it [success] takes is hard work because we all have equal opportunities to make ourselves and our lives into something good. *All of us* [her emphasis] have that, I don't care who you are...The government makes damn sure of that in my opinion because we vote.

For Patty, much like Jessica and others who agreed that America was great, their own experiences with the American Dream, as well as those of other true Americans in their lives, were used to ground their assertions of "America's greatness for all of us." As Patty discussed, she and her husband "came from nothing," yet made a good life for themselves through their hard work. Their children, although they did not grow up poor like her and her husband, were similarly able to succeed because they, too, worked hard and fulfilled the social contract and thus

were true Americans; this, was "testament" to America's greatness. Indeed, opportunities to succeed were equally available to every citizen, something the government made "damn sure of that" because true Americans voted. In other words, in Patty's America, Americans *could* earn their success when they fulfilled their end of the social contract because the government fulfilled its end to society.

Christian assimilationist Nicky, a 47-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Fort Collins, CO metro area, echoed these points, observing that:

> A colleague of mine – she's Black – but we're both software engineers. We're the only two women in our department, *but we're there* [her emphasis]. And there's no way either one of us would be doing what we do without the feminist movement, and for my colleague without the civil rights movement, too. So, yes, we work hard, and it got us where we are – we're both pretty successful women – but it [their hard work] only did [earn them success] because the government made anti-discrimination legislation that equalized opportunities those voters demanded. I still think it's somewhat difficult for women to do what my colleague and I do because it [the field of engineering] is so male-dominated, but obviously we [women] can, so America is pretty great, and that does make me proud of it.

Much like Patty and the other interviewees who agreed that America was great for true Americans, Nicky relied on her own direct and indirect experiences with the American Dream to ground that perception. Nicky and her colleague were able to achieve success via hard work because the government fulfilled its end of the social contract by making "anti-discrimination legislation that equalized opportunities," voters demanded, which allowed her and her colleague to enter and be successful in a "male-dominated" field of work. While Nicky indicated that it was still "somewhat difficult" for women to be engineers, she nonetheless discussed that women could be engineers because opportunities were equalized, which made America "pretty great."

All of the interviewees who indicated America was great, or "great enough," for true Americans agreed that voting, and therefore citizenship, was a part of what made one a true American. For these interviewees, it did not matter how citizens voted in relation to political party. Instead, what mattered was that one voted because voting was how: 1) the government could represent citizens and their interests, and 2) citizens held the government accountable, or kept the government "in check," for ensuring the fair access to opportunities Americans needed for their hard work to earn them success. When this happened, the American Dream operated well enough for true Americans, regardless of "who they are," all of which made America great, or "pretty great."

Gender and race, for example, did not prevent women's and non-whites' ability to achieve success because they had access to the same opportunities as men and whites. In this sense, America was a meritocracy characterized by abstract liberalism whereby an individual's success hinged on one's choice fulfill one's end of the social contract or not (Bonilla-Silva 2013). Choice was, by and large, the determining factor of one's success among these interviewees because Americans had fair, or fair enough, access to opportunities, which is indicative of both color-blindness and gender-blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Risman and Ferree 1995). Further, as Nicky illustrated, America's greatness for true Americans made her proud of America, and this connection is discussed in detail below.

National sentiment and America's greatness for true Americans

Among interviewees who agreed that America was great for true Americans, America's relative greatness was a source of their expressed national sentiment, including national hubris, which describes pride in the U.S. in general, and/or a "preference for the United States compared

to other nations (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016: 8), and pride in being an American. These findings lend support to the hypothesis proposed by Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016), which suggested one's experience with the American Dream may impact the national sentiment one expressed. While many interviewees drew upon their own experiences with the American Dream to talk about America's greatness, true Americans' experiences with the American Dream more broadly mattered as well. In addition, the idea that any American, true or not, had fair access to opportunities and could therefore succeed when they worked for it was important. As such, their expressions of national sentiment were not just about their own experiences with the American Dream.

Addressing the connection between national sentiment and true Americans' experiences with the American Dream, as well as the idea that any American could experience it, Christian restrictionist Selma, a 68-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Kansas City, KS metro area said:

> All of us [Americans] are free to have our own Dream, as long as it's legal, and all we have to do is work for it because there's nothing there holding us back. We can all have because we have the same opportunities, and that's a very fair life I, and other hard workers, have had the pleasure of living, and that any American can have the pleasure of living...And, I find pride in that; I'm proud of America and I'm proud to be American because doggonit I've seen it. I've lived it, so I know we all can have a good life [success] if we work for it.

Like Nicky, Selma discussed her own and other true Americans' experiences with the American Dream, or the life she and other "hard workers have had the pleasure of living." Additionally, she asserted that any American could have "the pleasure of living" the American Dream. Together, these circumstances made her proud of America and of being American. Feeling pride in America, or national hubris, along with pride in being American, were commonly expressed

among interviewees who indicated that America was great for true Americans. This was because the opportunities Americans needed for success were fair – there was "nothing holding us back." As such, hard work earned true Americans success, and any American could achieve success. Further addressing these points, Jessica said:

> We [Americans] get stereotyped as a bunch of fat, ignorant, tacky, like entitled brats who live to work, and I don't fully disagree with that, but our hard work gets us somewhere, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud of America. I'm proud to be a part of America, and honestly, I think that's what makes America the greatest country in the world. We may be fat and ugly, but we can be successful, too, and that's what matters more to me.

Similar to the other interviewees, Jessica pointed out that "our hard work gets us somewhere," and she was proud of that. Indeed, she was proud of America and proud to be "a part of America," or American, because "we," or any American, could be successful when we worked for it. In addition to discussing the connection between the American Dream and her pride in America and being American, Jessica also brought to light the connection between the Dream and the sentiment that America was, "the greatest country in the world," which composes of national hubris along with national pride (see Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). While all interviewees who agreed that America was great for true Americans did not express this side of national hubris, they all expressed pride in America and being American because, for them, the American Dream was reality.

I asked Jessica to explain why she thought America was the best country in the world, and she said, "I think that being held responsible to earn your own way is the best way for any country to run because it's absolutely fair to everyone else --[American] society." While this relatively individualistic understanding of success was shared among interviewees, it is important to remember that Americans could earn their own success because they had fair access

to opportunities that were ensured by the democratically elected, representative government. And, as Jessica discussed, she thought this was, "the best way for any country to run" because it was "absolutely fair" to American society. Indeed, this was not only the way the U.S. should operate, it was also the gold standard for any country according to Jessica, which differentiated her, along with Selma, from the other interviewees discussed in this section.

Selma was the only other interviewee who agreed that America was great, stating "It's up to us to secure our dream, and I wouldn't have it any other way. There is no other fair way, so America is the best country by far." Selma, much like Erica, expressed national hubris and connected it to the individuals' role in securing their own success. Again, individual Americans could secure their own success because American had fair access to opportunities, which made America "the best country by far."

The other interviewees who agreed that America was great, did not connect its greatness for Americans to it being the best country. For these interviewees, the American Dream was strictly American, and it was not applied to other countries as the gold standard. Demonstrating this understanding, Patty said:

> I think that America is a wonderful country and I'm thankful that I live here. With that said though, I don't think America is better than other countries. I think it's better than dictatorships and things like that because democracy is so important for people and their livelihoods, but other democracies do their own thing, and as long as that's working for those people and their society, then good on them. Who am I to say America is the best? I like the way we do things, but I'm pretty sure I'd get on just fine in another country, another democracy, once I got the hang of it.

Patty indicated that she thought America was "a wonderful country" and she was thankful that she lived in America, however, she did not think America was "better" than other democracies because they did "their own thing," meaning they had their own sets of expectations and culture regarding the relationship between individuals, society, and the democratically elected government. As long as these expectations worked for that country, then "good on them." Indeed, who was she to say that America was the best country? America had its own way of operating, as did other democracies, but one way was not better than another – they were simply different ways of doing things.

While expressions of America's superiority to other countries were tied to the American Dream among some interviewees, all interviewees' expressions of national pride and pride in being American were tied to it. Here, true Americans, or those who fulfilled their end of the social contract, lived and experienced the American Dream. In addition, any American could experience the American Dream because Americans had fair access to opportunities. However, all interviewees neither agreed that America was great for true Americans nor that opportunities were fairly accessible to all Americans. In the next sections, I focus on interviewees who agreed that America was not great, and I discuss how this was contextualized via gender relations, as well as relations concerning race and sexuality, which had consequences for the national sentiment these interviewees expressed.

America Is Not Great for True Americans

The vast majority of interviewees (n = 62), representing all constructions of Americans, believed that the America was not great for true Americans, regardless of the ways they constructed who "true" Americans are. America's lack of greatness was fundamentally attributed

to the American Dream not working as it should for true Americans because opportunities were not fairly accessible to them. While there was agreement about these points, important distinctions emerged in the interviews concerning how and why the American Dream did not work for Americans, and these distinctions were patterned by the ways they defined who true Americans are. I address these distinctions below in relation to these different constructions.

Among interviewees categorized as politically inclusive restrictionist and Christian-political restrictionist, the America Dream largely operated inadequately because individuals "voted the wrong way," so the government *could not* fulfill its end of the social contract. Here, interviewees discussed inequalities in relation to unfair access to opportunities albeit in different ways. Among interviewees categorized as assimilationist, Christian assimilationist, and Christian restrictionist, on the other hand, the American Dream did not adequately operate because the government *did not* fulfill its end of the social contract. This failure was not attributed to individuals voting a particular way; rather, it was attributed to political divisiveness among Americans, which translated to divisiveness in the government, creating a situation whereby the government *would not* "work together" to adequately address Americans' needs. Inequalities were discussed in relation to unfair access to opportunities albeit in different ways by these interviewees. I discuss America's lack of greatness according to these groupings below, and I begin with the assimilationist and Christian assimilationist, and Christian restrictionist groupings.

Assimilationist, Christian assimilationist, and Christian restrictionists

Unlike interviewees who indicated that America was great for true Americans, interviewees discussed in this section indicated America lacked greatness for true Americans because opportunities were not fairly accessible to all Americans, or citizens who were involved

in the social contract. Discussing America's lack of greatness, assimilationist Jenny, a 21-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the Colorado Springs, CO metro area said:

> So many Americans can't afford college, can't afford to buy homes, and don't have access to stable, well-paying jobs. I went to college, even though I couldn't afford it, and now I'm suffering the consequences of that especially because I got laid off from a shit job, and now I'm looking for another shit job. I've worked hard. I vote. I'm not a felon. I have literally done everything that's asked of us, but none of it matters. And this is the case for so many Americans because many of us, and especially minorities, don't have access to the same opportunities wealthy white men have. The opportunities just aren't there for us, and nothing gets done about it, so no, America is definitely not great.

As Jenny said, she and other Americans, particularly American minorities, did not "have access to the same opportunities wealthy white men" did and "nothing gets done about it." Indeed, Jenny did "everything" she was supposed to do – she voted, obeyed they law, and worked hard – yet it did not matter because she and other true Americans could not experience success. This is why America was not great in her view.

In a similar vein, Christian assimilationist Sue, a 53-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Whiteville, NC metro area, said:

> Some people are successful, but a lot of good Americans aren't, and many of them are women. Hard working women don't make as much as men, which is unfair. College costs the same for men and women, housing costs are same [for men and women], so why don't we [women] make as much [as men]? The opportunities aren't equal, and the kicker is that the government won't fix stuff like that. I swear, if the government spent half the time it did bickering on doing what we need done to have a good living, this nation would be the greatest America it every could [be].

As Sue indicated, America was not "the greatest America" for true Americans because "a lot of good Americans" did not experience success although they worked hard. This was seen to be particularly true for hardworking women. Women made less than men, but they had same level of expenses as men did, which reflected "unfair" gender relations in the U.S. Further, the

government did not "fix," gender inequality in access to opportunities, such as unequal pay. In other words, the government did not fulfill its end of the social contract. Indeed, according to Sue, the government spent most of their time "bickering," instead of doing what "good Americans," needed to be done to have a "good living," or success. Because of this, the American Dream was not readily attainable for many true Americans, and especially women, which was why America lacked greatness according to Sue.

Discussing the ways inequality, including gender and race relation, impacted fair access to resources, was a common theme among interviewees. For a subset, however, opportunities were seen to be unfairly distributed among true Americans because of reverse discrimination (Borgatta 1976), Christian restrictionist Lenny, a 61-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in a small town outside of Denver, CO said:

> I think women and minorities get a lot of attention in the U.S. It's like we're focused on giving them more and more and more opportunities and I think that that damages America's greatness in a big way. Many women, and minorities, too, work hard and earn what they get, but a lot of white men work hard, too. And, I think a lot of deserving [white] men are now having issues having the Dream because they get passed over for jobs in favor of minorities and stuff and that's not fair. I'm not saying that minorities and stuff don't deserve jobs or anything, the issue is that they get automatic preference over others who also deserve that job, and anyone getting that kind of preference is discrimination even if it goes the other way.

According to Lenny women and minorities were given "more and more and more opportunities." While "many women and minorities" worked hard, so did a lot of white men, and the hard-working white men were "passed over" for employment "in favor of hard-working minorities." This created a situation where "a lot of deserving," or hard-working, white men were experiencing issues attaining success. Because of this, America's greatness was damaged "in a big way."

Echoing this understanding, Christian inclusionist Ruby, a 52-year-old, self-identified independent who lived in the Lawrence, KS metro area said:

> America's not great anymore because everything's just gotten so, 'You got to let this many Black people into college, you got to have this many women working for you.' There's a lot of Black people and women who earn those spots – I'm not debating that – but I don't think it's right that anyone is given things because of who they are over others who've also earned those things. You can't just tell someone, "We're not letting you into college because we got to give the spot to a Black person." We have to think about how doing that hurts white people just as much as letting white people in over Black people hurts them [Black people]. It's the same thing, and it's not fair.

Like Lenny, Ruby discussed unfair access to opportunities in relation to reverse discrimination. Ruby agreed that "a lot of Black people and women," for example, earned jobs and admittance into college just as many white people, and presumably men, did. In this case, discrimination was seen work both ways: hard-working Blacks, for example, experienced discrimination when whites were unfairly given opportunities, and hard-working whites experienced discrimination when Blacks were unfairly given opportunities. Either way, true Americans – those who involved in the social contract and fulfilled it – were hurt in terms of their ability to achieve success.

Across interviewees categorized as assimilationist, Christian assimilationist, and Christian restrictionist, the American Dream did not adequately operate because government did not fulfill its end of the social contract. Discussing this, assimilationist Becky, a 70-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in rural eastern CO said:

> The problem comes down to this: the government will not work together to address the concerns of its constituents. Yes, Democrats and Republicans [voters and representatives they elect] disagree about what needs to be done [by the government] to help us get the lives we're all promised and deserve because we work hard. And, voters get to disagree – they get to vote however they want to – and yes, individual representatives need to represent their constituents, and I think they do. But the problem is that they fail to do

> their overarching job, which is to come together and work together to address voters' needs. A lot of these Democrats and Republicans [representatives] won't budge. If they don't get everything they want, then nothing gets done and no one's interests are really served, and that's what's happening. There is no compromise, there is no working across partisan lines, and so nothing changes.

Marsha, a 46-year-old, self-identified "conservative" Republican who lived in a small town in central North Carolina, for example, similarly observed:

> Citizens get to vote how they see fit – that's what a democracy is. The government, however, does not get to do whatever it wants; it has to represent the voters, which means it has to function as a body of interests and work together as one to represent the people. This doesn't mean that any particular group of representatives, whether they're Democrats or Republicans or whatever, gets to refuse to do anything, or let anything happen, because they don't like it or because the other [political] party proposed it. All representatives have people they represent who aren't just like them, like with politics, and they forget that, and the group of them [Republican and Democratic representatives, for example], as a whole, seem to forget that they work as one body to do what the American voters need with opportunities and such. Their [the government's] obligations are not to any single [political] party, they're [obligations are] to the people they represent.

Much like Becky, Marsha attributed America's downfall to the government not fulfilling its end of the social contract because it does work in ways that advanced opportunities for true Americans. Citizens vote, and the government does not get to do "whatever" it wants once in office. The government had to represent *the people,* not the political party to which its representatives belonged.

Politically restrictive inclusionists

Politically restrictive inclusionist interviewees similarly indicated that America was not great for true Americans because all Americans did not have fair access to opportunities. However, their reasoning differed. They discussed a lack of opportunities coupled with unfair access to opportunities in relation to America's lack of greatness, 2) did not incorporate reverse

discrimination to contextualize America's lack of greatness, and 3) indicated that America's lack of greatness was due to individual Americans not fulfilling their end of the social contract.

Illustrating the first point, politically restrictionist inclusionist Ellie, a 28-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in suburban Kansas, for example said:

> I don't think my life would look that different if America was great because I've worked hard and I have a lot of success to show for it, but I do think that other hard working Americans' lives would look a lot different [if America was great]...So, America is definitely not great because it's all kinds of messed up and I resent that, but that's the situation here – the American Dream just doesn't do for a lot of Americans. A couple of aunts of mine who've worked hard basically their entire lives have very little success, if any, to show for it. I have friends in this situation, too. And none of them are irresponsible people who just don't vote and blow their money on stupid stuff. The problem is that there's so few opportunities in general, and many never get the same opportunities as others, and women and people of color experience this a lot more than whites and men.

Central to Kelly's views on America were its perceived general lack of opportunities coupled with unfair access to opportunities. While she experienced the American Dream, "many hard-working Americans," including some of her aunts and friends, did not achieve success even though their worked hard. Because of this, America was "all kinds of messed up." Indeed, for Kelly the American Dream did not function as it should because there are "so few opportunities in general, and many [people] never got "the same opportunities as other," and this was particularly true for women and people of color. Here, race and gender relations were used to contextualize America's lack of greatness.

Further discussing these points, Grace, a 28-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived near Crested Butte, CO said:

> America has never been great...Everything about the America Dream doesn't work like it's supposed to. Basically, anyone other than straight white men don't have many of

> opportunities they're supposed to have and there's just not enough opportunities to begin with. Even some straight white men will never be successful because there's not enough opportunities, but everyone else doesn't even have the few opportunities they [straight white men] do, so most other people are even more worse off [than straight white men]. The U.S. is just a deeply unequal society, so the whole American Dream thing isn't even real for most Americans.

Like other politically restrictive inclusionists, Grace indicated that America's lack of greatness was rooted in its lack of opportunities particularly for people of color and women. Indeed, America had never been great and the American Dream was not "real for most Americans," because it only functioned for straight white men. Gender and race relations, in other words, were a part of the "deep" inequality that she used to characterize the U.S.

For politically restrictive inclusionists, the American Dream could not be realized by many true Americans because the opportunities that do exist are not fairly accessible to all... They diverged from the previous group in both the ways the perceived of the accessibility of opportunities and chances for people to realize success through hard work. In this case, however, the absence of opportunities was attributed to Americans not voting or voting in the "right ways." Expressing these points in the following excerpt, Eve, a 27-year-old, self-identified Democrat who lived in the New Bern, NC metro area said:

> Unfortunately, we have a bunch of idiots voting for and putting into office other idiots knowing damn well they're either going to take away some of the too few opportunities we have and make those [remaining opportunities] more unequal, or that nothing is going to be done to expand opportunities and make the ones that are there more equal [fairly accessible for Americans]. They support all of this, which is so fucked up...The government can't do its fucking job because it's filled with idiots that other idiots elect.
>
> Noel: Who are the idiots you referred to?

> Basically, anyone who isn't progressive – representatives and voters. There's a lot of Republicans and moderates, like Democrat moderates, who don't vote for progressive liberals, who would get all Americans the opportunities they need. I realize some voters may not have progressive candidates to vote for, but if they're voting for a Republican instead of the Democrat, they're idiots, too, because any Republican is going take opportunities away and make them more unequal; at least more moderate Democrats wouldn't do that. They're not making enough opportunities or making the opportunities we do have much more equal, but they're not gutting them either. So, a little improvement is still significantly better than moving backwards.

For politically restrictive inclusionists, America's lack of greatness was due to voters who voted the "wrong way" by not voting for progressives and thus kept the government from being able to expand opportunities and to ensure opportunities were fairly accessible to all, something they believed was the government's "job." Aside from voters voting the "wrong way," they also attributed America's lack of greatness to the government's inability to fulfill their end of the social contract. Discussing this point, McKayla, a 25-year-old self-identified Democrat who lived in a small mountain town in Colorado said:

> ...a lot of people, especially young people, who would vote for progressives just don't vote a lot of the time, which is just as bad as voting for Republicans [for opportunities], because progressives, and Democrats [Democratic candidates] when they're the only option, are losing those votes, and so it basically puts Republicans in place who are definitely going to dismantle opportunities we have and they're going to make what's left more inaccessible to minorities, including poor people. So when people who would vote for progressives don't vote – even if that's because there's not a progressive running [for office] and they don't support the Democrat by voting for them, that just makes it so the government can't represent us, even if that's in a limited way like with more moderate Democrats [elected representatives who are moderate Democrats], which is at least something. Those Democrats know, especially in tight races, that we [progressives] help put them there, so they are beholden to us. They're not going to do everything we want them to do, but they have to do some things, or at least try to, because they can't risk burning us – we may not be there for them next time.

Like others in this grouping, McKayla observed that not voting for progressives, or for a Democrat if a progressive candidate was not available, helped put Republicans in office who would "dismantle" existing opportunities and make remaining opportunities more "inaccessible

to minorities," which made the government unable to do fulfill its end of the social contract. More than voting the "right way;" however, she also discussed the importance of progressives actually voting. This is a precondition of voting the "right way," which was, in part, how individuals fulfilled their end of the social contract among politically restrictive inclusionists. In other words, just like voting in the wrong way kept the government from fulfilling its end of the social contract, so did progressives' failure to vote because failing to do so also "helped put Republicans in place," or in elected positions in the government.

McKayla further pointed out that progressives' representation in the government mattered even if a more moderate Democrat was the one who represented them. If progressives failed to vote, then progressive representation, in the government, even if that representation was through a moderate Democrat, took a hit. While moderate Democratic elected representatives would not "do everything" progressives wanted them to do, or try to do, they had "to do some things," or at least try to, because those representatives were "beholden" to progressives who voted for them, especially when those representatives needed progressive votes to win their election. The logic here was that moderate Democratic representatives could not risk losing progressive support, so they had to represent, to some extent, progressive voters, which was better than no representation in the government. However, while moderate Democratic representation was better than the alternative – no representation in the government – politically restrictive inclusionists agreed that the government could not fulfill its end of the social contract unless people voted in the right ways and elected to office liberal progressive representatives. Until that happened, we would "have a bunch of idiots voting for and putting into office other idiots."

Christian-political restrictionists

Similar to the other groupings discussed above, Christian-political restrictionists attributed America's lack of greatness to a lack of opportunities, and like some assimilationists, Christian assimilationists, and Christian restrictionists, some interviewees in this grouping contextualized this lack of greatness with reverse discrimination. However, unlike those groupings, true Americans were very narrowly defined by Christian-political restrictionists to only include birthright citizens of the U.S. who were white, Christian, straight, cisgender men and women who voted for conservative Republicans. For Christian-political restrictionists, non-whites, for example, did not work hard, so college admittance or jobs were generally understood as unearned by non-whites. Other groupings, in contrast, did not define true American membership based upon race. For Christian political restrictionists, then, reverse discrimination was responsible for making America 'not great' and, moreover, perceived to be zero-sum as advancements made by those who are not 'true' were seen to come at a direct cost to true Americans. Illustrating these points, Melba, a 75-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural eastern North Carolina said:

> The America Dream existed once upon a time, but it's not like that now because the things [opportunities] we once had have shifted, and the problem isn't us. The government shifted opportunities [we had], so we're left barely able to make ends meet. We're the ones who're discriminated against at every turn, and it's not fair, but they [the government] just can't do what they used to [do] either...

For Melba, the American Dream no longer existed as it once had because opportunities shifted. This shift resulted in a lack of opportunities for true Americans, leaving them "barely able to make ends meet." This shift was understood to be a direct consequence of discrimination against true Americans which, Melba observed, happens "at every turn." This view was common among these interviewees. Further discussing these points, Renee, a 54-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural Kansas said:

> Our livelihood has been stolen. Everything we had has been taken away and given to people who have no business having it. My kids have lost out on jobs because employers had to hire a Black. What is that? I know my kids deserved to get those jobs, but they just get handed over to whoever, and where does that leave us? It leaves us with nothing, so no America is far from great...

Like Melba, Renee discussed shifting opportunities and how that shift left "us," or true Americans, with "nothing," which was why America was "far from great." Indeed, opportunities were "taken away" from true Americans and were given to those who had "no business having" them. In other words, true Americans' ability to achieve success was "stolen."

Christian-political restrictionists, like the politically restrictive inclusionist category, discussed the relevance of voters voting in the wrong ways. Consequently, the government could not ensure true Americans had fair access to opportunities and thereby fulfill their end of the social contract. For Christian-political restrictionists, however, voting the "right way," meant voting for "real" or "conservative," Republicans, as opposed to progressive liberals. Addressing these points, JoAnne a 58-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in the Broomfield, CO metro area said:

> There's a lot of people who want handouts because they don't want to work. Some of them are white, but a lot of them are minorities and they [minorities] say things are unequal and blame their lack of success on that, when the reason for it is that they don't work for anything. And, mind you, they [minorities] get more opportunities than anyone, and they're [opportunities are] taken them away from us. They get hired over whites who earned it, mind you, and they're still complaining about inequality; it just doesn't make any sense, but there's all these Liberal whites who just go along with that narrative. So, there's all these people who're voting for liberals [Democratic candidates], and they get into office and just throw our money away and give jobs and college and things like that to people who didn't earn it over those who did. That's unequal, but when we [conservative Republicans] call it what it is, we get called 'racists.' The only think we want, and support, is fairness, so that's what we vote for and that's what conservative Republicans [elected representatives] try to do, but they can't because all of the Liberals [Democratic voters and the Democratic representatives they subsequently elect].

As JoAnne discussed, voters who voted the 'wrong' way, and elected Democratic representatives kept the government from creating opportunities necessary to make the American Dream function. Indeed, for Christian-political restrictionists, Democratic representatives made it difficult for hard-working Americans to "get the Dream," and prevented the government from fulfilling its end of the social contract by ensuring true Americans had fair access to opportunities. Compounding this was the election of moderate Republicans, often called "establishment Republicans." Julianna, a 56-year-old, self-identified Republican and "Trump supporter" who lived near the Outer Banks in NC, for example, spoke of Liberals and "establishment Republicans" taking away the American Dream:

> As soon as Democrats step into the government, everything becomes about "Blacks need this, immigrants need that," and nothing is about actual Americans because the government just ends up increasing taxes, when we need our damn money to pay for our lives, and it makes it so minorities get more opportunities than we do. It's ridiculous. The American Dream essentially gets taken away from us and handed to other people because they get all the opportunities. And, establishment Republicans in the government aren't much better. I feel like they just enable the Democratic agenda because they don't want to be called names. They may not vote for Democratic bills, but they often don't vote for, or they make big changes to, more conservative bills because they'll get called names, and their voters seem fine with this because they don't vote them out of office. And, I do think that those voters don't vote for real Republicans; it's wrongfully voting, too, because they don't want to be called racists, but it's not racist to shutdown handouts and unfair opportunities.

For Julianna and others in this grouping, the election of liberals and "establishment" Republicans meant the government focused on a 'Democratic agenda,' one characterized as increasing taxes to provide opportunities for people who were not "actual Americans." Furthermore, moderate Republican representatives, did not support "real Republican bills that would make opportunities function as they need to for "real Americans' to succeed. Such moderate Republicans changed "real Republican" bills, or did not vote for them in Congress, for example. In this sense, the representation, albeit not full representation, discussed by politically restrictive inclusionists did

not apply for Christian-political restrictionists. This was because more moderate Republican representatives were not addressing these voters' interests because they would "get called names," such as "racists," and did not adequately address opportunities, which their voters seemed to support because they did not vote them out of office.

The un-Great America and National Sentiment

America's lack of greatness for true Americans had consequences for the national sentiment these interviewees expressed. Interestingly, however, the national sentiment these interviewees expressed, regardless of the ways they constructed Americans, was not always completely different from the national sentiment expressed by those who agreed that America was great. Some of these interviewees were hopeful that America could become great, which impacted expressions of national sentiment that resembled that expressed by interviewees who said America was great. Below, I first discuss the national sentiment expressed by interviewees who lacked hope that America could become great. I then discuss the national sentiment expressed by those who were hopeful that America could become great.

National sentiment and the lack of hope

Among interviewees who were not hopeful, their expressions of national sentiment looked very different from interviewees who either believed that America was great or were hopeful that America could become great. Interviewees who believed that America was not great and who lacked hope that it would become great, expressed resentment, shame, and/or embarrassment towards America and being American. Illustrating these points, Christian

restrictionist Dana, a 31-year-old self-identified Republican who lived in the Trinidad, CO metro area said:

> I want to be proud of America, but America is not at all great, and it's never been [great], and so that makes it hard to [be proud of America]. I feel like it's good to work hard and everything and I feel like Americans are hard workers, which is a good thing, but that doesn't get many people very far and I that's not something I'm proud of. America isn't the place it's supposed to be for many Americans and that's disappointing, and really, it's infuriating. And, more than that even, it makes me feel kind of foolish, like Americans are fools. We're working hard, but we don't get very far because the government won't get its shit together so that that [the American Dream] can happen, and I don't see that changing. I'm not sure that it will [change].

As Dana discussed, she wanted to feel proud of America, but instead felt disappointment because even though Americans worked hard, they did not succeed. She further expressed she felt foolish and thought Americans were fools because Americans worked hard, but did not "get very far." Indeed, for Dana, the government could not "get its shit together," and she neither saw this situation improving nor did she anticipate that it would improve in the future. In other words, Dana, like the other interviewees discussed here, expressed little hope that America could ever become great again.

In a similar vein, politically restrictive inclusionist Ellie said:

> Most of what I feel about America and being an American is embarrassment. We all get told, 'All you have to do is work hard to be successful, but where is it [success]? I feel like most people who are successful didn't earn it – they most likely inherited it or got it because of privilege, or because they exploit people – and that's not the American Dream. So, no, I'm not proud of America and I'm not proud to be American because it's [the American Dream] all a lie. That makes me really angry and resentful, actually. I worked hard throughout college, and I doubt I'm much closer to success than I would have been without doing all that. And, I'm not the only one in this situation – it's widespread. So, it's difficult to not think of Americans as chumps who just keep saying, 'We only need to work harder,' when we know it's a fucking lie...And there's nothing there to show that any of this is going get better.

Much like Dana, Ellie articulated that Americans were "chumps" because they did what they were supposed to do (i.e. work hard, pay taxes), but most did not see that hard work earn them success. The American Dream for Mandy was a "lie," one, moreover, we keep telling ourselves. This was a source of the embarrassment, resent, and anger she and Dana felt towards America. Echoing this national sentiment, Christian-political restrictionist Renee said:

> Americans are one-of-a-kind in terms of work ethic and all that, but I'm ashamed that we do what we do and have very little that reflects our effort. I know lots of Americans who work hard, but you couldn't tell that from looking at the way they live, and that's not right. America isn't this great country where people are equal; good people struggle, and not so good people don't [struggle]. That's not something I take pride in. I respect work ethic, and I'm proud that Americans have it, but we're all getting duped, and as much as we ["true" Americans who vote the right way] try to correct things, the government just can't because liberals and moderates and even a lot of Republicans are voting against the American Dream, and that's a very sad and hurtful situation to be in, and I just don't see how America can become great in this situation.

Among these interviewees, nation and nationality were sources of shame. While Renee did say she respected and felt pride in the work ethic Americans had, she also said Americans were duped, which was, "a sad and hurtful situation to be in." Americans were seen to be fools because they worked hard, yet did not experience success and, further, the government could not remedy the situation because of the ways people voted. This made Renee and others unable to see how America could change and become great again.

National Sentiment and hope that America could become great

Unlike the interviewees discussed above, interviewees discussed in this section were far more hopeful that America could become great again. This impacted the national sentiment they expressed. For these interviewees, expressions of pride towards America and being American were similar to the expressions of those who believed that America was great, yet these

interviewees nonetheless also expressed national sentiments similar to those who agreed that America lacked greatness. This, I argue, was because national sentiment was shaped by conflicting contexts. In this way, the sentiment expressed by hopeful interviewees was ambivalent, which is documented in existing research (i.e. Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012). Illustrating this ambivalence, Christian assimilationist Judy, a 70-year-old, self-identified Republican who lived in rural Kansas said:

> America isn't great, but I'm hopeful that it can be...So many of us are sick and tired of the government's bullshit – they accomplish so little and the whole American Dream thing is kind of non-existent at this point, and that's the source of my embarrassment and resentment that I feel about the U.S. But I also, like I talk with my friends about the issues we see with just having the Dream and my frustration with it and all that, and I see all of that in them, too, and we're all demanding better, so all of that's a dose of desperately needed optimism. It's like a light at the end of dark, ominous tunnel...So, no, it's [America is] not great, but I'm hopeful [that America can become great], and that's a source of pride for like America and being American, I think, because there's lots of us who feel like I do and who're keen to see and help make changes.

For Judy, America's lack of greatness was "the source" of her embarrassment of and resentment for America. Nonetheless, she also expressed pride in America and being American, which were connected to her hopefulness that America could become great. Judy, like other interviewees who expressed hope, relied on the context that fostered hope. For Judy, the hope she felt was contextualized by people "demanding better," or demanding that the government fulfill its end of the social contract. Others similarly expressed ambivalence. On the one hand, America was not great, which impacted Judy's expressions of national sentiment. On the other hand, she was hopeful that America could become great, and this impacted her expressions of national sentiment in a conflicting way.

Echoing these points, assimilationist Laura, a 37-year-old, self-identified independent who lived in the Research Triangle, NC metro-area said:

> There is a sliver of hope [that America can become great], I think. And, for me, I latch onto what gives me that [hope] and hold onto it as tight as I can because that's how I can say, 'I'm proud to be an American and I'm proud of America."...If I didn't have that [hope], then all I would be is ashamed and embarrassed by America and as an American, and those feelings are very real as is my pride, so it's a confusing situation...My sliver of hope is mainly news stories that talk about our problems in addition to talking about what we're are doing about them.

Laura discussed the context of her hope that America could become great. She consumed news stories that gave her hope through a discussion about the problems in the U.S. as well as what was being done about them. Laura, like Kate, expressed national sentiment that was ambivalent, which was due to the conflicting contexts in which her national sentiment was induced. Indeed, her hope that America could become great, which was shaped by experiences with news stories that discussed America's issues as well as what was being done to address them, allowed her to say, "I'm proud to be an American and I'm proud of America," while she also felt the shame and embarrassment due to America's lack of greatness. This situation of ambivalence was "confusing," but all of her feelings were "real."

Understanding National Sentiment and the Contextualization of It

Chapter 6 focused on the interviewees' understandings of America's actual greatness, or lack thereof for "true" Americans and the experiences with the American Dream they drew upon to contextualize their perceptions. In addition, this chapter examined the interviewees' expressions of national sentiment their understandings of America's greatness induced relating to nation and nationality-oriented feelings. Findings discussed in this chapter contribute to existing literature in two main ways. First, perceptions of gender inequality, as well as that related to race, played a significant role in shaping national sentiment because they were used to contextualize America's greatness, or lack thereof. Some interviewees discussed such relations as reverse

discrimination; nonetheless this perception of inequality had consequences for their expressions of national sentiment. Second, findings highlighted how national sentiment is not only induced from "what is" but "what could be." Indeed, I argue that expressions of hubris oriented towards America and being American were shaped by experiences with the American Dream as well as experiences which fostered hope that America could become great for "true" Americans. Among interviewees who were more optimistic about America's greatness, ambivalent expressions of national sentiment were also expressed. This, I argue, was because of the perceived conflict between America's lack of greatness in relation to optimism about America's potential to become great. While a few studies engage with ambivalent expressions of national sentiment (i.e. Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012), most studies, including those examining the U.S., do not examine it (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016).

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined the nationalisms expressed by college educated white women who voted in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and it revolved around two main objectives. Its first objective was to examine the subjective content of the nationalisms expressed by women in this group. These expressions revolved around: 1) the meanings with which interviewees imbued Americans and America, the latter of which included what America should be for "true" Americans – the "great" America – as well as what America actually was for "true" Americans, and 2) the sentiments they expressed towards America and being American, which included hubris, shame, embarrassment, resentment, and/or ambivalence.

The second objective was to examine the ways interviewees subjectively contextualized their expressions of nationalism. Here, America's greatness, or lack thereof, was contingent on the interviewees' perceptions of the ability of "true" Americans, however constructed, to live the American Dream, as well as whether they were hopeful, or optimistic, that "true" Americans could eventually be able to live the American Dream. The interviewees grounded their perceptions of America's greatness and hope in their own direct and indirect experiences with America, or the lived America.

The two objectives of this dissertation contribute to the scholarly work on nationalism in three important ways. First, much research examining U.S nationalism focuses on the content of subjective expressions of nationalism while the subjective contextualization of nationalism is understudied (i.e., Citrin et al. 1994; Smith 1997; Schildkraut 2002, 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Hanson and O'Dwyer 2019; Rosemond and Kinnvall 2020; Whitehead and

Perry 2020; Deckman and Cassese 2021). This dissertation provides the much-needed insight into the America in which people live, experience, and (re)formulate the nationalisms they express. Indeed, it is in these subjective contexts that nationalisms are induced, so examining them is necessary for understanding nationalisms (Brubaker 1996; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016).

Second, nationalism is gendered, yet gendered nationalism is often ignored in research on nationalism (McClintock 1996; Walby 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997; Enloe 1998). The relatively few studies that examine gendered nationalism focus on gendered aspects of nationalism, such as perceptions about the feminization of nations (i.e. Deckman and Cassese 2021), understandings of women's role in the nation as mothers and the reproducers of nationals and national culture (i.e. Yuval-Davis 1997), and the emphasis of nationalism as male and masculine projects (Enloe 1989; Bracewell 2000; Huysseune 2000; Puri 2004). This dissertation contributes to the few studies that examine gendered nationalism by highlighting the ways gender relations, as well as those concerning other statuses, were used to contextualize and justify expressions of U.S. nationalism. Further, this research specifically examines how women, themselves, understand America through their experiences with it. In other words, in addition to examining how gender relations were used to contextualize America, this dissertation understands women as active creators of nation and examined nationalism as situated knowledge (Haraway 1988), which is a historically neglected point of study (McClintock 1996) that remains underexamined.

In what follows, I summarize the findings of each empirical chapter. Chapter 4 focused on the interviewees' construction of the "great" America while Chapter 5 focused on the interviewees' constructions of Americans and "true" Americans. Chapter 6 focused on

expressions of national sentiment and the lived America that was used to contextualize America's greatness, or lack thereof, for "true" Americans as well as the optimism that America would become great for "true" Americans.

The "Great" America

Findings in Chapter 4 highlighted the significance of the American Dream for the interviewees' understanding of the "great" America, or what America should be for Americans. Indeed, *all interviewees* agreed that a "great" America was an America in which the American Dream was attainable for all Americans, however constructed, because one's hard work earned them success. Hard work meant obtaining the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to do what one wanted to do to earn one success, which included both financial security and a personal sense of fulfillment with the work, or occupation, one did.

The American Dream, in turn, hinged on a perceived social contract between individual Americans, American society, and the U.S. government. Individual Americans were understood to be obligated to fulfill their end of the social contract to American society by working hard and engaging with their civic duties, including voting and obeying the law. A "good," "decent," or moral person fulfills their obligations to society because doing so was the "right thing to do." The U.S. government, in turn, was seen to be obligated to fulfill its end of the social contract to American society by providing the opportunities Americans needed for their hard work to earn them success and by ensuring those opportunities were fairly accessible to all Americans. The American Dream was therefore facilitated by democracy for two main reasons. First, voting enabled individual Americans to communicate the opportunities they needed for success to the U.S. government. Second, only through voting were individual Americans able to hold the

representatives they elected into the government accountable for providing those opportunities and ensuring they were fairly accessible to all Americans.

Who We Truly Are

Building on Chapter 4, Chapter 5 specifically discussed the various ways the interviewees constructed American national membership, or who were understood as Americans and "true" Americans. Their constructions of national membership revolved around two facets: 1) who they understood to be involved in the social contract in the first place, and 2) among those involved, who they understood to fulfill their individual end of the social contract, or "true" Americans. Those involved in the social contract were obligated to fulfill it because working hard and performing civic duties were responsibilities all individual Americans had to society. However, not all Americans fulfilled their responsibilities to society. Those who did were deemed "true" Americans because doing so demonstrated their internalization of American culture whereby one was a "moral" person. Unlike their understanding of a great America, the interviewees' understandings of Americans and "true" Americans diverged albeit in patterned ways. These patterned constructions of American national membership were called: politically restrictive inclusionist, assimilationist, Christian assimilationist, Christian restrictionist, and Christian-political restrictionist.

Among the politically restrictive inclusionists, interviewees agreed that one's involvement in the social contract did not hinge on citizenship although citizens of the U.S. were deemed to be American. Indeed, for these interviewees "anyone here," regardless of citizenship, should be able to vote and experience the American Dream when they worked hard. In relation to civic nationalism, citizenship made one American, but non-citizens who had a sustained

presence in the territory of the U.S. were also American since they are involved in the social contract.

While being part of the social contract made one American, "true" Americans were defined as those who fulfilled its obligations. These interviewees maintained that any status other than "far-right" political affiliation, had no bearing on whether one fulfilled their end of the social contract. Far-right political affiliation mattered for inclusion into the category "true" Americans because Americans who adopted this political affiliation undermined the accessibility of the American Dream for Americans by voting the "wrong way" and, therefore, undermined American culture because they undermined the idea that one had to work hard to earn one's success. For this reason, this categorization of American national membership was called politically restrictive inclusionist.

In contrast, citizenship was crucial for inclusion into the category American every other categorization of American national membership. This was because one had to be a citizen to vote, so one's involvement in the social contract hinged on citizenship and rights it afforded, which are components of civic nationalism. Nevertheless, while they agreed on this point, they diverged in the ways they constructed "true" Americans. Here, uses of American culture, or cultural nationalism, were deployed albeit in different ways by interviewees to construct "true" Americans.

The Christian-political restrictionist categorization of "true" Americans was the most exclusive in terms of status relations. For these interviewees, non-white citizens, naturalized citizens, LGBTQ+ citizens, non-Christian citizens, as well as citizens who politically affiliated as "far-left" and voted for "very liberal" representatives, were not "true" Americans. Indeed,

interviewees in this grouping asserted citizens with any of these statuses did not, or could not, fulfill their end of the social contract because they were not "culturally American." Here, American culture was defined by Christian morality, and Americans who had internalized this American culture were impelled to work hard and perform their civic duties and were therefore "true" Americans.

While cultural nationalism was important here, ethnocultural nationalism was also used in terms of non-white citizens' inability to be culturally American due to their race. Here, it did not matter whether non-white citizens identified as Christians or not because their non-white status prevented their ability to work hard and/or uphold the moral imperative of working hard to earn one's success. This logic also applied to LGBTQ+ citizens in relation to the statuses of non-heterosexual and gender queer as well as naturalized citizens and those with leftist political affiliation. Operating much like race does in ethnocultural nationalism, an array of statuses were used by interviewees in this grouping to indicate citizens' exclusion from the category "true" Americans because such statuses prevented one's cultural Americanness. For this reason, this categorization of American national membership is called Christian-political restrictionist.

Other groupings including assimilationists, Christian assimilationists, and Christian restrictionists similarly relied on components of civic nationalism – citizenship and the rights it afforded, in particular – for inclusion into the category American. Again, this was because citizenship was the means through which one could vote, so one's involvement in the social contract hinged on citizenship. For the Christian restrictionist and Christian assimilationist groupings, similar to the Christian-political restrictive grouping, interviewees used Christianity to define American culture in terms of the morality one needed to fulfill the social contract.

However, among the Christian restrictionist categorization of "true" Americans, any Christian citizen who was not LGBTQ+ was a "true" Americans. LGBTQ+ statuses prevented one's Christianity and internalization of the Christian morality that defined American culture, so citizens with any of those statuses, whether they identified as Christians or not, were excluded from the category "true" Americans, yet Christian citizens with any other statuses were "true" Americans. For this reason, this categorization was called Christian restrictionist.

Among the Christian assimilationist categorization of "true" Americans, in contrast, anyone could assimilate American culture, and any citizens who did were "true" Americans regardless of any status including the status of Christian. This is why this categorization was called Christian assimilationists. In this way, only civic and cultural nationalism were deployed in this construction of "true" Americans, and among these interviewees no status was used to discuss one's lack of Christian morality.

Among interviewees who expressed the assimilationist categorization of American national membership, like those in the Christian assimilationist grouping, anyone could become culturally American. However, among the assimilationist grouping American culture had nothing to do with Christianity. American culture was loosely defined as understanding and accepting one's obligations to fulfill one's end of the social contract. While morality was tied to American culture, morality was not contingent upon Christianity. For this grouping, anyone could assimilate American culture, but only citizens were "true" Americans because only they could both recognize and accept their obligations and fulfill all of them because of the right to vote citizenship granted citizens. In this way, civic and cultural nationalism were deployed among

these interviewees in the same ways that they were among those in Christian assimilationist grouping. The only difference was Christianity's detachment from American culture.

The Lived America

The last empirical chapter focused on expressions of national sentiment, including hubris, shame, and embarrassment expressed towards America and being American, as well as the contexts from which these expressions were induced. Among a handful of interviewees, America was understood as relatively great because "true" Americans generally experienced the American Dream. Here, the social contract was fulfilled by the U.S. government, so individuals who fulfilled their end of the contract did experience the Dream. For most interviewees, however, "true" Americans did not experience the American Dream, which was why America lacked greatness for most interviewees. While some interviewees indicated the problem with the America Dream was about the U.S. government being unable fulfill its end of the social contract, others indicated the problem was with individual Americans not fulfilling their end of the contract.

This chapter also addressed the significance gender relations, as well as relations of other statuses, for subjective contextualization's of America's greatness or lack thereof for "true" Americans, however constructed. Indeed, I argue that inequality related to gender and race, in particular, were used, albeit in different ways, to explain why "true" Americans' lack of opportunities and/or unfair access to opportunities. For some interviewees, reverse discrimination described America while for other discrimination against minorities, including women, described America. Regardless of the ways inequality was understood by interviewees,

it was used to justify expressions of national sentiment related to the dysfunction of the American Dream.

Finally, this chapter engaged with/addressed national sentiment related to optimism that America could become great. Indeed, national sentiment was not only induced by the contextualization of America's greatness or lack thereof, but by experiences that fostered hope among interviewees. These interviewees, in particular, expressed ambivalent expressions of national sentiment, which I argue were ambivalent because national sentiment was induced from two conflicting contexts – America's lack of greatness as well as America's potential for greatness.

Discussion

The findings of this dissertation contribute to the literature on U.S. nationalism in several ways. First, Bonikowski and DiMaggio (2016) hypothesized that one's experience with the American Dream is related to expressions of nationalism, and the findings discussed in this dissertation support this hypothesis. Indeed, findings from this study demonstrate the importance of the American Dream as a meaning with which America was consistently imbued. Because of this, I argue the interviewees' experiences with the American Dream were related to their expressions of nationalism. The American Dream was *the way* the interviewees made sense of what America should be for Americans, and, because it was the expectation, their experiences with it mattered for their evaluations of America's greatness, which were used to contextualize, or justify, their expressions of national sentiment. This finding highlights the significance of the American Dream as a meaning and as an experience for expressions of U.S. nationalism.

Further, its findings demonstrate how constructions of who is American were entwined with evaluations of America's greatness. America's greatness, or lack thereof, in other words was not just about their own personal experiences with the American Dream; it was about whether "true" Americans more broadly were understood to experience the Dream. While interviewees drew on their direct and indirect experiences with the American Dream to contextualize their expressions of national sentiment, these experiences were inseparable from their constructions of "true" Americans, which varied in patterned ways. Here, I argue that different facets of nationalism are connected to one another. Indeed, expressions of American national membership were inseparable from expressions of national sentiment because the latter existed in relation to the former. While constructions of American national membership are shown to be related to expressions of national hubris (i.e. Hjerm 1998; Ariely 2011, Bonikowski 2013), findings in this dissertation, I argue, offer insight into how and why they are related.

These findings contribute to existing research on U.S. nationalism in a few important ways. First, they demonstrate a variety of ways American national membership was constructed and how civic and cultural nationalism as well as political and/or ethnocultural nationalism in some cases were incorporated into these constructions. While much research examines the content of American national membership (i.e. Citrin et al. 1994; Smith 1997; Schildkraut 2002, 2011; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Hanson and O'Dwyer 2019; Whitehead and Perry 2020), the ways that people use civic, cultural, ethnocultural, and/or political nationalism and how they are intertwined is understudied in the U.S. despite research demonstrating that such nationalisms co-exist in most countries (i.e., Shulman 2002). Further, I argue, to understand why variation in constructions of American and "true" Americans exists, one has to examine the ways forms or nationalism are simultaneously used.

In addition, findings indicate the relevance of cultural morality for inclusion into the category "true" Americans, which is a facet of culture that is commonly missing from definitions of cultural nationalism (i.e. Shulman 2002; Yuval-Davis 1997; Smith 1991). While religion is a part of cultural nationalism and has moral implications, morality was not always tied to Christianity by interviewees, yet it remained important for understanding one's "true" Americanness. As such, I argue engagement with morality and, notably the ways it is attached to American culture, are important facets of nationalism to explore especially when constructions American membership criteria that are not related to Christian nationalism.

Further, findings discussed in Chapter 5 that related to the different ways Christianity was used to articulate "true" Americans based on Christian morality and who "had it," contributes to scholarly work examining Christian nationalism in the U.S. Indeed, findings discussed here indicate that although many interviewees defined American culture based on Christian morality, who "had" and who could "have" such morality differed based on social location (i.e. race and ethnicity, gender, and sexuality). While research on nationalism in the U.S. finds that Christianity is used to make sense of America and Americans, it is often discussed as a "type" of nationalism (i.e. Brubaker 2012; Whitehead and Perry 2020), this research demonstrates considerable variability in the ways Christian morality is applied to statuses to justify inclusion into and exclusion from the category "true" Americans. In this sense, I argue that there is no singular way Christian nationalism was used to define "true" Americans based on who (status) had the Christian morality needed to fulfill the social contract.

Finally, findings discussed in this dissertation contribute to existing scholarly work on U.S. nationalism by illuminating how national sentiment is not only induced from "what is" but

"what could be." Indeed, I argue that expressions of hubris oriented towards America and being American were shaped by experiences with the American Dream as well as experiences which fostered hope that America could become great for "true" Americans. Among interviewees who were more optimistic about America's greatness, ambivalent expressions of national sentiment were also expressed. This, I argue, was because of the perceived conflict between America's lack of greatness in relation to optimism about America's potential to become great. While a few studies engage with ambivalent expressions of national sentiment and demonstrate that it is relatively common (i.e. Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012), most studies, including those examining the U.S., do not examine it (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016).

Limitations

This dissertation provides insight into the nationalisms expressed by women who were white, college educated, and voted in the 2016 U.S. presidential election by examining the context of said nationalisms as well as the contexts from which those nationalisms were induced. However, the findings discussed in this dissertation can neither be applied to all women nor all white college educated women who voted in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Indeed, the findings discussed in this dissertation only reflect those who were interviewed because my sample was not representative of the larger population, nor was it intended to be. Arguably, the study was limited by the sites it used (Colorado, Kansas, and North Carolina) as it is reasonable to suspect expressions of nationalism may vary regionally or in other ways unaccounted for in this research given the importance of context for nationalism (see Brubaker 1996; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). Further, research focused on addressing nationalism from a more intersectional frame is needed to better understand how social locations based upon race, gender, and class relate to

expressions of nationalism as well as how such social locations interact and reinforce one another is patterned, yet distinct ways. Doing so will provide much needed insight into the ways nationalisms vary across social location and the relevant contexts from which such variation is shaped.

There is clearly a need for more comprehensive and generalizable examinations of nationalisms experienced and expressed by women. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, examinations of the ways women actively engage with nationalism and the contexts from which their nationalisms are induced remain understudied although women, just as men, (re)create the nation (McClintock 1997). While this study provides insight into this understudied topic, it cannot account for all women, nor can it speak to potential patterns among women based on region, race, and other social locations which likely impinge upon the experiences women have.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The goal of this research is to gain an understanding of how you, personally, make sense of America. It seems like people are just kind of lumped into boxes and stereotyped sometimes – whether it's by the media or by other people – and instead of trying to really understand people's perceptions and their lives, some just seem to make assumptions. This entire interview, however, is about how you make sense of America, so there are no "wrong" answers. No one is a better expert on, or has more knowledge about, your own perceptions and your own life than you, which is why I asked to talk with you today.

- "Make America Great Again" became popular in this most recent presidential election. When you read or hear the statement what does it mean to you?

- I know this may sound silly, but when you think of America being great, what does that mean to you?
    - What does America look like?
    - What do your or others' lives look like?

- In your opinion, has America ever been great?

If America was great:

- What made America great then?
    - Can you explain why you think it was great then?
    - If anything, what was different then relative to today? What changed if anything?
    - What do you think is behind this change?
    - Who made it great back then?
    - Are there specific practices that contributed to this change?
    - Why do you think that made America less great?

If America was not (or was relatively less) great:

- Has America has changed over time?
    - Do you think America is greater today than it was in the past?
    - What was different then relative to today? What changed?
        - What changed for your or others' lives?
    - What do you think is behind this change (or lack of change)?
    - Who makes it greater (or the same) today?
    - Are there specific practices that contributed to this change (or lack of change)?

- What do you think needs to change to make America great (again)?

- Whose responsibility to make it great (again)?
    - Are there specific policy changes that need to be made? If so, what are they?

- Do you see yourself as having role in making it great (again)?
    - What do you think you need to do to make it great (again)?
    - What about other people around you—people you hang out with, go to church with, your neighbors? What do you think they can do to make America great (again)?

- Imagine a future America that was great (again), can you describe that to me?
    - What would have changed? How would it differ from what we see today?
    - Why do you think it's important that America looks like this?
    - What would your life look like if America was this way?
    - How would that be different from your life today?

- Pride? Why proud (or not)?
- Do you feel connected to America? Why or why not?

- "Make America Great Again" refers to a country of people. Who are Americans?
    - Can you describe the ideal American?
    - Are there some people who are more American than others?
    - What makes them so?
    - Can a person become more American?
    - How does one do this?
    - Can a person become less American?
    - How does one do this?

- Now I'd like to shift to citizenship—do you think there's a difference between being an American and being an U.S. citizen?
    - Are there certain rights citizens have? Do all Americans have those rights?
    - Are there certain responsibilities or obligations citizens have? Do all Americans have these responsibilities or obligations?
    - Who can make America great (again)? Why them?

- Now I'd like to ask you a few short questions and then we'll be done.
- What race would you say you are?
- In what decade were you born/how old are you?
- What is your political party affiliation? If independent, to which party do the candidates you for whom you most often vote belong?
- What is your highest degree earned?

I’ve asked you a bunch of questions, is there anything you’d like to ask me?

APPENDIX B: IRB CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Understandings and practices that (re)create America: examining the role of experience

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Lynn Hempel, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, at lynn.hempel@colostate.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Noel Strapko, M.A, Ph.D. Student, Department of Sociology, at noel.strapko@colostate.edu

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being asked to take part in a research study on practices and understandings concerning the nation and nationality. We are asking you to participate in this study based on your knowledge and experience as a college educated, white woman living in Kansas, Colorado, or North Carolina who voted in the 2016 presidential election. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to learn about understandings and practices that construct America, and to examine how experiences shape this process.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to participate in this study, I will conduct an interview with you, in person or by telephone. The interview will include questions about America and Americans and your experiences as an American. The interview will take about an hour. If you allow, we would like to record the interview on a digital recorder in order to clarify details afterward.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

We do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

There are no direct benefits to you participating in this study. However, we hope the opportunity to share your experiences and thoughts on the nation and nationality will be useful to you. The data gained from these interviews and observations will be used to add to the current conversation on the topic. We will share the results of the study with you upon request.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?
Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?
We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we digitally record the interview, we will delete the file after it has been transcribed and analyzed. Your data may be reviewed by the CSU IRB for auditing purposes.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might have come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the co-principal investigator, Noel Strapko at noel.strapko@colostate.edu or the principal investigator Lynn Hempel at lynn.hempel@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

Statement of Consent: Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

-

Do you agree to be audio taped for this study:

☐ Yes _____ (initials)

☐ No _____ (initials)

_____ _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____ _____

Name of person providing information to participant Date

_____

Signature of Research Staff