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This dissertation contributes to the recent resurgence of scholarship devoted to the American presidency by arguing that the role of the presidential body works as a singularly significant crucial point for notions of citizenship and national identity. Addressing presidential bodies as texts shows that the singularity of the presidential body positions it as a dense site of affect and identification that allows for leadership and the organization of politics to work through the management of emotions. In particular, the emergence of television allows presidents to embody sovereign power in ways that both sentimentalize it and separate the performance of singular, model citizenship from populations more or less abandoned as not-quite-national subjects. By exploring how media imagine the chief executive and how presidents represent themselves on television, in speeches, and in campaign documentaries, I identify national scripts that constitute *executive citizenship*, a concept I develop and see as crucial to the management of public and private life. By highlighting the fundamental role executive performances play in constructing an image of national citizenship and shaping feelings of belonging, I challenge traditional narratives that figure citizenship in the U.S. as natural rather than deliberately constructed through rhetoric and language.

BODIES OF EXECUTIVE CITIZENSHIP: EMBODIED RHETORICAL  
PERFORMANCES OF THE PRESIDENCY  
FROM REAGAN TO OBAMA

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THEORIZING EXECUTIVE CITIZENSHIP

On the Tuesday before St. Patrick's Day in 2012, President Barack Obama spoke in the Oval Office alongside the Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny expressing confidence that Ireland's economy would get moving again, claiming that Ireland's growth would have a positive impact on the U.S. economy. After thanking the Irish people for the warm welcome he received when he visited Ireland the previous year, in a response that would have been uncharacteristic of Obama a year before, he quips, "This will have a special place of honor alongside my birth certificate."<sup>1</sup> The crowd erupted into laughter.

Obama's joke reflects somewhat ironically on the singularly significant role the president plays in the construction of citizenship and national belonging insofar as the president's physical self symbolizes a cohesive national identity. That Obama's U.S. citizenship was ever questioned by so many Americans suggests how his being the first black U.S. president disrupted—even interrupted—many dominant cultural narratives and icons that define the U.S. presidency, narratives and images that have historically been coded as white, male, and middle class.<sup>2</sup> Since Obama can joke about these accusations and receive a positive response reflects how Obama's presidency challenges the scripts of the executive.

Equally important to the rhetorical message of the moment with the Irish prime minister is the subject of the meeting. Obama's visit to Ireland was primarily to discuss

ways of improving the global economy, and the scene reinforced what has become an important symbolic dimension of the presidency to the public: the president as economic functionary, the CEO to the large corporation of the United States.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the rise of executive power coordinates with the ascendancy of corporatism in government. Obama's joke with the Irish prime minister suggests the importance of the president as both a physical representation of American citizenry and as chief officer for economic advancement.

According to Andrew Rosenthal, an editorial editor for *The New York Times*, although many 2008 supporters believed that President Obama would single-handedly transform American politics and bring together a divided nation, "the country is more divided than it was four years ago, the parties and their supporters more polarized..." ("Campaigning Beyond Inspiration"). If it is true—as so many political pundits, academics, and media darlings have declared—that the country is more divided than ever before, what have been the causes of this rift?<sup>4</sup> Certainly, there is a range of answers to this question; no one person or set of ideologies can be solely to blame. However, Obama's presidency itself could be seen as one of the causes, since his very presence in the Oval Office alters the image of the privileged U.S. citizen. During the campaign and first term as president, some of President Obama's critics, mostly those leading the Birther movement, claimed that they were not convinced he was a U.S. citizen and was thus unfit to hold office. Political groups, individuals, and several lawmakers persistently demanded that Obama present his birth certificate to prove he was in fact a legal U.S. citizen. Initially, Obama refused to play along and present his birth certificate to his

accusers, but finally on Wednesday, April 27, 2011, Obama released his long-form birth certificate and at a press conference stated that he had grown tired with the “sideshowes and carnival barkers” of the Birther movement (“Obama Releases Detailed”). Evidently for some, it was still not sufficient proof to put the issue to rest. As recently as March 20, 2012, some lawmakers were still stoking the Birther debate. According to an article on abcnews.com, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Representative Cliff Stearns, a senior Florida Republican, told reporters that he is still not convinced that Obama’s birth certificate is valid, stating, “I am, shall we say, looking at all the evidence” (Parkinson). We can only speculate about why so many Americans still refuse to believe he is a U.S. citizen.<sup>5</sup>

Once Obama seriously entered the presidential race, racialized rhetoric resurfaced in political discourse, and while the racist Birther canard hit the mainstream through movements such as the Tea Party and by presidential hopefuls such as Donald Trump, several Republican leaders allowed it to simmer.<sup>6</sup> When Obama ended up feeling obliged to present his birth certificate was, according to a *New York Times* editorial, “a profoundly low and debasing moment in American political life” (“A Certificate of Embarrassment”). Why Obama would choose (initially not) to bow to pressure from Birthers is as uncertain as why some Americans exerted that pressure. Perhaps why Obama refused to show his birth certificate for so long is he did not want to appear weak, since no other president in recent memory who held office prior to becoming or during his presidency was asked to publicly release a birth certificate.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps another answer lies in what some commentators have suggested: he wanted the media to get serious or



he wanted to choose the right political moment in order to release the documents. Or we can listen to Obama himself. In April 2011, Oprah Winfrey asked President Obama why he took so long to release his birth certificate, and Obama answered that America needed to move on and focus on a “more serious conversation” about solving the nation’s problems (Memoli).

This spectacle, exacerbated by a vitriolic media, only deepened the racist undertones that have marked Obama’s presidency since people were demanding he present his birth certificate because he is mixed ancestry. Regardless of Obama’s reasons for his refusal to present a birth certificate, the Birther movement reflects a national belief that the president is the most important, iconic American citizen, invested with the power of the people and representing. The president is “...in an instance of official multivocality, the nation, the government, the executive branch, and...the triumphant party” (Norton 88). Because the president *represents* the citizens, the unstated assumption is that the president’s flesh and personal history must align with and embody the dominant national imaginary, which has always coded the nation as white and male.<sup>8</sup>

This project investigates and elaborates how important the presidency is as both office and physical body in shaping those shared feelings by creating a sense of what it looks like to be a citizen, a sense of national belonging or, depending on the individual, a national dislocation. These and other movements grew out of the public’s fearful response to Obama’s possible presidency, including the significations his body registers as a black man with mixed ancestry, exacerbated by his birth in Hawaii, a state figuratively outside national borders. Obama’s presidency—and interpretations of his

material body—continue to create the conditions for these social movements to persist and even gain momentum in their attacks. But in return and increasingly, Obama combats these accusations and criticisms with his body and speech acts.

People have organized and mobilized based on their shared feelings to a black family currently residing in the White House. Stories surface on the body of the president, as groups use them to reclaim power, sometimes “Othering” the Obamas by configuring his presidency as a threat to white superiority or fetishizing the black body.<sup>9</sup> Although the terms of the threat or the fetishization of the black body are often vague, the rhetoric implies a fear of loss or a celebration of exclusionary inclusion. What I mean by “exclusionary inclusion” is the mechanism of inclusion that takes place wherein citizens who have traditionally held positions of privilege can feel good about including members who have historically experienced partial membership. In this process, new memberships are still managed and disciplined by the privileged groups. Mitt Romney’s accusation of “entitlements,” a veiled reference to the right wing stereotype of the black “welfare queen” suggests that threat. The false inclusion, or tokenism, associated with letting one member of a minority group into the dominant group, creates a fetish of difference. Although Obama rarely addressed race in the campaign, race was all too obvious a subtext as his body became a text onto which people mapped their own racialized fantasies, giving momentum to the campaign’s narrative of hope and change or mobilizing social groups who saw his presidency as a threat to white privilege. Recently, Obama has been accused of lacking the emotion he demonstrated and called on during the campaign, perhaps suggesting that not all citizens have the same privileges, and

making visible the distinction between citizens who might use emotion freely because their physical selves go unmarked and those whose physical selves constrain their actions.<sup>10</sup>

In her discussion of the organization of hate, Sara Ahmed elaborates on the effects of emotions such as hate as a way to secure and consolidate collectives through their readings of the bodies of others. According to Ahmed, “hate is not simply present as the emotion that explains the story...but as that which is affected by the story, and as that which enables to story to be affective” (*Cultural Politics of Emotion* 43). These kinds of narratives that involve hate “work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject” (*Cultural Politics of Emotion* 43). While hate is distributed across various icons as Ahmed suggests, this particular icon, a black man in the White House, is especially powerful, representing danger to those who fear the kind of change a black body in the White House represents. Obama’s body threatens to violate the imagined purity that has been perpetuated through racist and stereotypical readings of other black bodies. Groups have organized in response to Birther groups to combat what they perceive as a racist reaction to Obama’s presidency. Regardless of the motive for these ideological groups, the focus on what Ahmed characterizes as “the perpetual restaging of [a] fantasy of violation” suggests how Obama’s presidency has changed people’s feelings and attachments to the nation. Ultimately, Obama’s presidency, alongside Hillary Clinton’s campaign for the presidential nomination, has provoked Americans to redefine what a president looks like,

forcing some “formerly iconic citizens” to reimagine images of privileged citizenship, which in turn has forced them to confront and justify their own privileged status. Lauren Berlant reminds us that “today many formerly iconic citizens who used to feel undefensive and unfettered feel truly exposed and vulnerable. They feel anxious about their value to themselves, their families, their publics, and their nation. They sense that they now have identities, when it used to be just other people who had them” (*The Queen* 2).

Expressions of these anxieties in public life have been evident since the emergence of television, a technology that has overdetermined political identity. While many presidents were learning to use this new media to their advantage, Ronald Reagan, the first Hollywood actor to become president, was the first modern president who already knew how to use technology to his advantage. Although this anxiety about having an identity has caused a multiplicity of expressions and stagings—and those have been exacerbated since the 2008 democratic nomination campaign and Obama’s presidency—Reagan, in response to a growing national malaise about government, reconsolidates the United States by invoking national narratives that evoke a nostalgia for a past vision of America, even if it is fictional—that repositions the nation’s privileged group as white, typically male, and middle class.<sup>11</sup>

In order to clarify the president’s relationship to citizenship, I have developed a concept I argue is crucial to understanding the American presidency. Executive citizenship is a concept that defines the rhetorical performances of the president and the presidency and the effect of the presidency on national life including individuals’/groups’

constructions of the presidency. Through the processes of executive citizenship, the “executive” becomes the object of national feeling.<sup>12</sup> As Sara Ahmed observes, nations become “...a shared ‘object of feeling’ through the ‘orientation’ that is taken towards it. As such, emotions are performative...they involve speech acts...which depend on past histories, at the same time as they generate effects” (*The Cultural Politics* 13). Since the presidency is a citational discourse that has both symbolic and material content, thinking the president through the processes of executive citizenship provides a theoretical framework to historicize and analyze how presidents, both through their bodies and their speech acts, constitute a national ethos that allows for the emergence and sustainability of different social spaces, groups, and movements.<sup>13</sup> Presidential discourse is a site to explore how presidents imagine and manage their publics. Of course, publics also imagine their presidents, and it is these processes of interaction that constitute executive citizenship and give it persuasive power. I argue in this dissertation that these collaborative imaginings of national identity and belonging allow for new understandings of how citizenship is modeled and taught.

Executive citizens wield symbolic power because we the people invest a great deal of energy and time attempting to access the real and authentic character. Presidents and the people invent and reinvent the presidency that in turn reproduces and/or rewrites how the public interacts and relates to the nation-state. In other words, the presidency is a rhetorical act, a staging that communicates the language and body of citizenship to the public and global community. Or as Jeffrey Tulis asserts, the rhetorical power of the office constitutes a vision of U.S. national identity (*The Rhetorical Presidency* 203).

Executive citizenship coordinates with Lauren Berlant's notion of "National Symbolic," for it-- "a cluster of juridical, territorial, genetic, linguistic, and experiential life that configures the political space of the nation"--regulates desire, entangling emotion and political life through the production of what she calls a "national fantasy" (*The Anatomy of National Fantasy* 5). Out of this "national fantasy" citizens are constituted, and if "[l]aw dominates the field of citizenship, constructing technical definitions of citizen's rights, duties, and obligations," the president as the symbolic authority of the laws participates in the (re)production and sustainability of a national fantasy by enacting the scripts of an ideal form of citizenship, *executive citizenship*, and (re)produce legible texts that circulate and attach to other bodies living in and outside of the nation's boundaries.

The term *executive* itself suggests certain performances. The definitions that get closer to what we now understand our Executive Branch emerge in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, where it is defined as one who is apt or skillful in execution. According to these principles, America's President must be skilled at execution (death) and performance. Indeed, as the Presidency both is invented and invents itself, we see the conflation of these two being consolidated. Presidents must symbolically execute the laws as well as make sure foreign threats—or any threat for that matter—are executed as the commander-in-chief. As the term evolved, it increasingly became understood as having roots in U.S. and English political history. Initially, executive power in the government was supposed to be subordinate to the legislative. Most scholars agree that Andrew Jackson's and Abraham Lincoln's presidencies opened the door for presidents in the twentieth century transform it and increase its political and symbolic power. The term

also refers to the “higher-order” aspects of cognition dealing with memory, attention, problem solving, verbal reasoning, mental flexing, and multitasking. Today, the term signifies corporate bodies and policies as “executives” who are in charge of an institution’s financial success.

As long as I can remember, I have been preoccupied with the intersections of identity, politics, and pedagogy. My project grew out of these interests and my feelings during the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primary. Like many liberal voters, I was excited by the opportunity to elect the first female or African American president of the United States. As the drama of the campaign unfolded and captured the public’s imagination, the energy and momentum also quickly started to create different social groups among my friends in graduate school. The division, although many of my friends at the time argued otherwise, ended up being about shared feelings rather than differences in policies. Probably because we were not being critical enough, our shared feelings surfaced and stuck to other individuals and organized us into two camps: either you wanted to see the first woman or the first African American in the Oval Office.

Initially, I supported Hillary Clinton for a variety of reasons. She had political capital, experience, and she articulated clear policies. Ironically, however, and I am embarrassed to now admit this, I stopped supporting Clinton once when she started “acting” like a politician (read male). In effect, I placed her in a double-bind she could not possibly escape. On the one hand, I wanted her to demonstrate she could hold her own against her opponents, while simultaneously enact a different performance, one that she could not possibly offer and remain legible in contemporary political life. I think my

response and later withdrawal of support for her candidacy highlights the importance of how the body constructs a national ethos.

Since 2004, texts and images of Obama have circulated widely, giving particular social groups in the U.S. public hope in believing that our vote could break the homogenous, fixed, unchanging image of what leadership in the U.S. looked like. For centuries, national institutions such as schools and the government have been responsible for perpetuating hegemonic stories that position the U.S. as exceptional while other stories and histories that challenge or contradict American hegemony are subordinated, hidden, or erased. After Obama won the democratic primary, my admiration and respect for him grew. The feelings I experienced caused me to get involved, design writing courses around political rhetoric, and campaign for him. After Obama won the presidential election, I started to think more critically about why I was so excited about the Obama/Hillary political moment. What did their entry into presidential race mean for the country and my relationship to it? Of course I did not want to believe that I was only interested in each candidate because one was a woman and one was African American since that would suggest a problematic gender and racial logic buried deep within my own expression of liberal ideology. I worried that if that was the only reason, my enactment of political citizenship might be reducible to an expression of liberal white guilt. My feelings of wanting to see a woman or a black man as president were tied to the bodies as well as the significations those bodies register. In this political moment, the potential leader of the “Free World” could not efface the body in ways that white, male leaders have succeeded at doing for so long.



Consider the public's fascination with Obama's love for sports. In particular, Obama's love for basketball and golf has caused some critics to claim he has a woman problem. According to Amy Sullivan from *Time Magazine*, President Obama plays a lot of sports such as golf and basketball usually only with other male West Wing staffers. ("The White House Boys' Club: President Obama Has a Woman Problem"). Or more famously, consider the image of the usually stoic senator Clinton tearing up in a New Hampshire coffee shop during the 2008 primaries. The reactions to this scene varied. One Obama supporter wondered out loud, "If she is breaking down now, before winning her party's nomination, then how would she act under pressure as president?" (Kantor). Katha Pollitt had a different reaction, writing in *The Nation*, that the uproar over Clinton's emotional expression is "the oldest, dumbest canard about women: they're too emotional to hold power" (Pollitt). These polarized reactions expose the public's conflicting views about emotions and their attachments to particular subjects who embody specific histories. Regardless, even though Hillary Clinton was criticized for crying, she still won the New Hampshire primary. These two examples demonstrate the ways in which the histories and stories attached to Clinton's and Obama's bodies affected how people felt. While the physical and psychical images worked to their disadvantages among some groups, it certainly worked in their favor with others.

The institution of the presidency and the president's body construct, limit, naturalize, enable, write, and alter the public's ways of knowing and our approaches to meaning making in democratic communities. As Russ Castronovo and Dana Nelson articulate in their "Introduction" from *Materializing Democracy*, democracy has become

“thoroughly naturalized as ‘common sense’—democracy in official as well as popular usage seems beyond contest or historical nuance,” a process which often forecloses critique (1). This project responds in part to the call Castronovo and Nelson make for a critical vocabulary to explore the various sites and bodies where democracy materially manifests. “Bodies of Executive Citizenship” analyzes the president’s body as one material manifestation of democratic fantasies and beliefs. My analysis of how presidential bodies have become an important locus for historicizing and redefining the stories and institutional operations and practices of democracy in the U.S opens up new ways to consider how people relate to the nation. My project makes visible how the executive mediates political and civic life in the United States.

Since the president’s body is an iconic materialization of national fantasies, what practices and operations does the presidency enact in order to naturalize democracy, as Castronovo and Nelson suggest? If “democracy is America’s default reflex, its parameters and properties rarely subjected to a critical view that could suggest that political forms and rhetoric are other than the result of a natural course of events,” how does the presidency and the presidential body preserve and perpetuate these experiences (*Materializing* 4)? In order to naturalize democracy, presidents must persuade the public to accept socioeconomic requirements, immigration policies, sexuality, and class. This project analyzes the presidential practices and processes that create the social conditions to encourage neighborly conversations about democracy and the democratic process and discourage critique and dissent.

Presidents constitute these “neighborly conversations” by mediating political and civic life by becoming the object of shared national feelings. Of course I do not wish to suggest that emotions are something one has and can simply pass on. We should not assume that while we are being told how to feel, others are feeling what we are feeling. Shared feelings, according to Sara Ahmed, not only heighten tension they are also in tension:

Emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don’t necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling. Given that shared feelings are not about feeling the same feeling, or feeling-in-common, [she suggests] that it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such. My argument still explores how emotions can move through the movement or circulation of objects. Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension. (*The Cultural Politics*, 11)

In return, the public attaches feelings to the presidency and those feelings impress upon citizens’ bodies. These conversations are constituted by the ways the emotions surface on the body of the president, circulate, attach to individual bodies, and create social spaces that organize individuals into particular social groups.

Because my analytic focus is on bodies, I investigate the role of emotion and how emotions are mediated by presidents to collect, organize, disable, enable, couple, uncouple, and mobilize people. “Bodies of Executive Citizenship: Embodied Rhetorical Performances of the Presidency from Reagan to Obama” demonstrates how executive citizenship works to govern, simultaneously regulating citizens’ lives and opening up the possibility of resistance and new forms of participation in national identity. Finally, this

project argues that the executive and the scripts of executive citizenship increasingly affect public and civic life by regulating desire and feelings of belonging.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Studies on the Presidency***

The rhetorical role of the president has received increased attention in the past thirty years.<sup>15</sup> In his study of the qualities that explain a president's success or failure, Fred Greenstein claimed that it depended on the president's "proficiency as a public communicator" which pertains to the "the outer face of leadership" (*The Presidential Difference* 5). Hargrove's *The President as Leader* identifies the most important task of the president as being "to 'teach reality' to publics and their fellow politicians through rhetoric" (vii). This task includes the ability to successfully explain "...contemporary problems and issues" and relate them to "the perennial ideals of the American experience" (viii). In perhaps the most well-known formulation, Jeffrey Tulis argues that the twentieth century transformed the presidency and made it largely a rhetoric institution. According to Tulis, the president's job is to lead the country, not manage the government (Tulis 1989).<sup>16</sup> Mary Stuckey adds to the conversation by identifying a pedagogical function of the president's role as being our "interpreter-in-chief" who helps the public understand what things mean (Stuckey 1991).<sup>17</sup> What each of these studies takes for granted and therefore omits is the role the presidential body plays in the executive's rhetorical acts. The focus, therefore, tends to be on texts and the ability to communicate the words from those texts, rarely discussing the power that the body of the

president plays as a text in and of its own that both compliments and contradicts the words being spoken.

My argument builds on the foundational work of Dana Nelson, who has argued that white, male fraternal brotherhoods and organizations participate in the construction and preservation of a stable national identity. According to Nelson, white male leadership depends on the erasure of the body in order to produce the narrative of the stable, unchanging, limitless future where democratic participation could be written. Since the U.S. was imagined as a “fraternal, homogenous space,” the leadership needed to reflect that concept:

The Federalists’ explicit call for a reinvigorated, unified manhood exemplified in the body of a national executive—the president—promised relief for the “crisis” of household and civic order in a newly conceptualized, nationally unified fraternity. In the transition from Confederation to Constitution, U.S. democratic possibility became conditioned by presidentialism’s powerfully homogenizing masculine ideal, one loaded up with unnecessarily rigid longings for self-sameness and self-subordination in the name of “unity.” (*National Manhood* xi)

The white male body, which was a useful category for inventing national unity because it abstracted men’s interests out of local issues and identities in an appeal to a nationally shared nature, became a symbol of stability and continuity. But it does so at a cost. The identification with national unity “has worked historically to restrict others from achieving full entitlement in the United States” and “has worked powerfully to naturalize ‘white’ men as essentially unified subjects” (*National Manhood* 7, 27). The U.S. presidency has been a singularly important site for the reproduction of such a concept. In many ways, the presidency was a—if not *the*—symbol for U.S. citizenship; as long as a

white, heterosexual male remained in the office, the public could imagine the nation-state as unchanging and eternal. In other words, the presidency worked to replicate the national fantasy from its beginnings. This gave, at least in appearance, the image of uninterrupted continuity.

Most recently, the appearance of a number of new critical studies (Nelson, Rubenstein, McCann, Smith) focusing on the American presidency reflect the growing need for scholarship that develops a critical vocabulary about presidential performances and presidential rhetoric in order to offer ways to rethink and intervene in the public's relationship to the American presidency.<sup>18</sup> Each of these books provide a different, insightful analysis of the role of the American presidency in American life—most persuasively and comprehensively by Nelson who argues in *Bad for Democracy* that the rise of executive power undermines the power of the people. According to Nelson, since the president has come to symbolize both the democratic process and national power, “...we tend to see him simultaneously as democracy's heart (he will unify the citizenry) and its avenging sword (he will protect us from all external threats)” (*Bad for Democracy* 1-2). As these beliefs are inculcated in us from a young age by our schooling, reinforced by the media and popular culture, Nelson argues that this process makes us want to give the president more power, ironically, of the “checks and balances we also learned to treasure as schoolchildren” (*Bad for Democracy* 1-2). While Nelson and I are both investigate how the presidency “became attached to a powerful logic that works to condition how citizens feel toward the president,” a logic she calls *presidentialism*, my project explores how stories that contain emotional content surface on the president's

body and how the rhetoric of the body and performance affects the citizens who see and hear it (*Bad for Democracy* 5).<sup>19</sup>

My project adds to this conversation by focusing on how presidential performances constitute executive citizenship, a concept that is crucial to new understandings of how the institution of the presidency and the president's body become an object of shared national feelings. Executive citizenship provides a theoretical framework for understanding how the body of the president acts as a text that has both symbolic and pedagogical import. In other words, presidential performances mediate civic and political life by showing the public how to feel. The processes of executive citizenship get reinforced by the media and popular culture. Various institutions and media transmit a vision of presidency which contribute to the development of executive citizenship. Since "the people" gets constituted in direct relation to the executive, in fact often relies on the executive citizen to give it meaning, average citizens are often complicit in giving more of their power away to the presidency. According to Dana Nelson, the presidency "depoliticizes citizens," teaches us to see "negotiation and compromise as the weakness, not the strength, of democracy," and "...makes people fundamentally uncomfortable with the...motors for political freedom" by overemphasizing "democracy as unity, instead of helping us remember that a decently functioning disunity can provide better solutions and make an even stronger nation" (*Bad for Democracy* 18-19). In my reformulation of this relationship, I investigate how citizens both give and take away presidential power. In public and political discourse, democracy rarely gets historicized or discussed as a human design because to do so

would inevitably expose the possible inherent structural problems with a system that invests power in the majority of a heterogeneous nation-state.

Although my study is certainly not comprehensive in its scope, I will develop a critical lexicon for reading and understanding the technologies of executive citizenship, which is a much needed contribution to the scholarly conversation, by investigating how presidents write, embody, and enact the scripts of executive leadership, how the people imagine the presidency and participate in the shaping of executive citizenship, and lastly how the body and language of executive citizenship proliferates in university life. What my project offers then is a new understanding of how people understand their relationship to the nation through a variety of fictional and real interactions with the president and the presidential body.

### *Theorizing the Processes of Executive Citizenship*

We're here to speak for millions in our inner cities who long for real jobs, safe neighborhoods, and schools that truly teach. We're here to speak for the American farmer, the entrepreneur, and every worker in industries fighting to modernize and compete. And, yes, we're here to stand, and proudly so, for all who struggle to break free from totalitarianism, for all who know in their hearts that freedom is the one true path to peace and human happiness.

Ronald Reagan, "State of the Union Address" 1985

Picture Ronald Reagan, seasoned actor and powerful rhetor, delivering the following address to the members of Congress and the American public who watched his performance on television. As moving as these speech acts may be, when Reagan claims the work of government is unfinished and charges the members with creating new



conditions for underprivileged social groups to succeed, he also consciously or unconsciously reinscribes the white, middle class body as the privileged group. Reagan's language—a concealed rhetoric of paternalism—implies that those who live in inner cities (read people of color and women) and totalitarianism (read “foreigners”) endanger the body of the nation, which has been historically configured, as Dana Nelson traces in *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*, as white, male, and middle class. The televisual image of the performance reaffirms that the symbolic face of the nation is white, male, and middle class since the bodies in the congressional chamber reflect that social group. While acknowledging that certain social groups do not have access to the privileges and rights of full citizenship, Reagan fails to include in his speech the conditions and discursive processes that are responsible for producing inner cities; on the contrary, his rhetoric simultaneously constructs and others the inner city, constituting it as an embodied social space.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Reagan's speech uses space(s) to teach citizenship corporeally. In effect then, the “we” whom Reagan charges with protecting America secures the image of the white subject as sovereign in the nation, while those living in inner cities are marginalized and need to be disciplined and/or protected. Put another way, when Reagan interpellates members of Congress—who hold direct political power—as the nation, his speech acts magnify the discursive violence done to bodies that are not represented in the room, highlights their partial citizenship, presents them as a threat, and further displaces them from the nation.

I start with this example to demonstrate executive citizenship because Reagan reorganized the presidency into an executive model of leadership in response to an

increasing visibility of government, a visibility made possible by television and other media. The mythography of the presidency has been altered by the rise of television and media. Almost everything the president does can be filmed—everything: travel, speeches, dress, a trip to a fast food restaurant.<sup>21</sup> And certainly what was not captured on film can be recreated by talking heads on television. The public’s desire to find the “real” president, however futile that might be, suggests that “the symbolism of the man as office no longer satisfies the public because we can see its constructedness” (Hayton 65).<sup>22</sup> How do presidents embody and perform national scripts that construct embodied spaces?<sup>23</sup> Since presidents perform citizenship and since citizenship is not organic and must be acquired through public and psychic participation and is determined alongside history, *executive citizenship* exposes the state’s need to contain and invent its subjects. By examining the public’s relationship to the presidency, I reveal the role that imagined communities and practices of citizenship assign the president’s body as the singularly important site for the construction of a national. In the chapters that follow this introduction, I analyze how a series of performances by the executive develop a framework to rethink key concepts such as national identity, citizenship, and belonging.

Although one might think it germane to start an analysis of the presidential body with the first televised presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon, I intentionally start my analysis with Ronald Reagan.<sup>24</sup> I argue Reagan transformed the executive office by reorganizing the ways the public relates to the presidency because he understood how important *acting* presidential would be in the age where media increasingly controls the public’s consumption of the nation’s leaders. As Diane Rubenstein argues, Reagan raised

“...the scripted or televisual Kennedy communicational legacies to the new art form of the photo op” (*This Is Not 11*). Consider Reagan’s performances following the assassination attempt on his life. When the bullet entered Reagan’s chest, under his left arm, requiring immediate surgery to repair a collapsed lung and stop bleeding, many worried he would not survive. Once Reagan survived the surgery and was able to move around, he immediately took advantage of the media to curb the public’s fears about his health and strength as president. The iconic image of Reagan leaving the hospital, waving to the public, and giving everyone a thumbs up challenging any doubts that he was still strong, reflects just how skillful Reagan was at using the media to his advantage by portraying an image of strong presidentiality to the public.<sup>25</sup> This performance is one of many examples of Reagan’s ability to write, embody, and enact a good story that the American public finds persuasive. Because Reagan was masterful at both invoking and rewriting a national ethos on a newly media literate stage, he effectively made presidential power relevant by renewing the public’s faith in the image of the executive.

Additionally, Reagan’s presidency is apropos to my inquiry into the development of executive citizenship because his administration ran the country like a corporation. Promising to set the private sector free and dismantle big government, Reagan’s administration focused on corporate, industrial, and economic deregulation, which he aimed to accomplish unilaterally. Specifically, using the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), Reagan’s administration mobilized deregulation, using it as a counterattack on costly consumer protections, and early on in his presidency, lawmakers and political pundits began to claim that only a strong president could accomplish the

project of limiting government, giving Reagan's administration license to develop a unitary approach to the Executive. According to Dana Nelson, by

[d]rawing on a model for "unitary" *corporate* leadership that gained particular prominence in the United States, where the CEO also served the company as the chair of the board (advocates insist that unitary corporations outperform those with divided board and company leadership), the unitary executive offered an aggressive brief for strong and undivided presidential control of the executive branch, expanded unilateral powers, and avowedly adversarial relations with Congress. (*Bad for Democracy* 155)

This model of leadership would later become a trademark script of executive citizenship as the government and the public increasingly positioned the president as the nation's economic functionary. As Reagan's "administration and fiscal policies supported the economic theories elaborated in corporate-funded conservative think tanks that had been formed in the 1970s to promote the principles of economists like Milton Friedman," his administration was able to start claiming success for the practices of market fundamentalism as it cut taxes, crushed unions, enforced antitrust legislation—combined with the termination of oil price controls and the loosening restrictions on railroad transportation and the oil and gas industries (*Bad for Democracy* 159-60). These policies, however, created a privileged group of corporate citizens by producing tens of thousands of mergers and acquisitions, increasing the divide between the wealthiest Americans and middle class citizens. In fact, during the 1980s, "white-collar unemployment rates more than doubled as the middle class's effective tax rate edged up" (*Bad for Democracy* 161). In effect, what Reagan's presidency created was a script for leaders to follow, embody and enact as the wealthiest citizens garner more power and

control of politics through lobbying and campaign financing. Although all presidents create their own economic policies that they must own, Reagan's enactment of corporatist discourse becomes an important characteristic of executive citizenship. Since Reagan, the presidency itself has become a kind of corporation as U.S. corporations have more power to control the executive performance.<sup>26</sup>

If individuals are entrenched in the mythologies of their culture, which normalize certain realities and allow people to take them for granted, how do presidents work with those myths and/or create new ones? One answer is that political leaders gain power by telling stories that the public finds persuasive. Cherished for its signifying power, the term *community* marks the moment when people feel less isolated and feelings of belonging are restored. The moment when "I" becomes "we" is an empowering experience. As Eve Wiederhold observes in "The Face of Mourning: Deploying Grief to Construct a Nation," when community is aligned with the words *democracy* and *citizenship*, "the term *community* also connotes membership within specific public spaces," and these are the moments when we identify the territories we inhabit and form attachments to "...signifiers of place—the local church or school, a neighborhood, the nation" (Wiederhold 847). Signifiers of place then are political tropes that "depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions" (Brennan 49). Therefore how these stories—or more appropriately fictions—are embodied discursively create, sustain, and manage national communities.

Accordingly, communities are themselves collections of stories and myths. As Benedict Anderson described them, nations are "imagined communities," for they come

into existence when diverse, sometimes unrelated groups of people from different classes, ethnicities, and tribes join together to make one.<sup>27</sup> Nations are also imagined because it is not possible for every member to physically know every other member, so they imagine the ties that pull them together as a collective. The instruments for such collective imagining, observes Anderson, are the novel and the newspaper. While the novel and the newspaper played a crucial role in creating the U.S., fierce attachments to patriotic sentiments help bond the national community. Benjamin R. Barber extends Anderson's work by describing how national identities are cemented through the public's affective identification with what he calls tribal documents. Focusing his analysis on America's founding documents, Barber writes,

Our "tribal" sources from which we derive our sense of national identity are the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the inaugural addresses of our presidents, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Martin Luther King's "free at last" sermon at the 1963 March on Washington—not so much the documents themselves as the felt sentiments tying us to them, sentiments that are rehearsed at Independence Day parades and in Memorial Day speeches. ("Constitutional Faith" 32-33)

Barber is right to claim it is not the documents themselves but the felt sentiments that create a sense of belonging. In speeches, presidents embody the mythology and emotional sentiment attached to America's national documents in an effort to create patriotic attachments to his body. Both Barber's and Anderson's work raise further questions, allowing for a reconsideration of national identity in the U.S and the way that American presidents embody and perform a national identity for its citizens. In effect, the president's body, like the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, becomes a tribal

document from which the public derives a sense of national identity and belonging through their affective attachments to what his body symbolizes.

In the last sixty years, mass and new media have increasingly replaced the novel's—and in part the newspaper's—role in imagining the U.S. nation. For that reason, presidents and the public use media to imagine the nation and define citizenship. During the enactment of executive citizenship, the president becomes the receptacle of the nation's history and character; at the same time, citizens, those who experience partial citizenship, and those who reject the executive model use media to level a critique, open up sites of resistance, and rethink national identity and U.S. nationalism, by relying on the emotionality of texts and speech acts.<sup>28</sup> Media has become increasingly pervasive and important in marking the president's body as a text: his body becomes a text that acts, speaks, and writes. In this way, executive citizens narrate who fully, partially, or does not belong to the community. In effect, the emergence of television has overdetermined the dynamics of executive citizenship.

Other terms reappear throughout this project that require definition. I am using the terms *affect*, *emotion*, and *feeling* relate to the operations of the specific operations of the U.S. presidency, for the purpose of this introduction, I am using *affect* to denote the somatic sensations that tend to be experienced by the subject that carry a particular content. I use *emotion* to denote the interpretation and naming of that sensation in a particular context or moment, and *feeling* as the articulation of the combination of affect and emotion. National feelings, therefore, are constructed, expressed, and managed by presidents, state, and non-state citizens as a way to imagine, orient, and mobilize citizens.

The articulation and embodiment of national feelings are crucial to my formulation of how executive citizens constitute what Lauren Berlant in *The Female Complaint* calls intimate publics. More than any other president before, Reagan understood,

Mass-mediated popular culture is always generating more opportunities for fomenting a sense of focused belonging to an evolving world in this intensely connected yet mediated way. But the market frames belonging to an intimate public as a condition of possibility mainly for those who can pass as conventional within its limited terms. Belonging to an intimate public is therefore a condition of feeling general within a set of porous constraints, and of feeling held or sustained by an evolving sense of experience that confirms some homogeneity and elaborates social distinctions. (13)

Since presidents are actors in this mass-mediated popular culture, the ways they foment a sense of belonging by telling the public how to feel, what is appropriate to feel, and what to do with those feelings open up new readings of national identity and illuminate new definitions of citizenship and civic engagement. The use and repetition of speech acts that contain emotional content by the president therefore constitute social bodies, which are imagined communities produced in relation to feeling.

Although citizenship can be broken down into a variety of subparts, from legal, social, and political content, I want to consider executive citizenship as a performed site of personhood, shaped by national images and stories, and enacted by individuals. State leaders embody executive citizenship and during this performance invent and recreate what they believe is an ideal form of civic action.<sup>29</sup> For good political reasons, presidents try to present the best image of the nation sometimes at the expense of repressing political struggles from the past, present, or future. When Reagan imagines the government's responsibility to the nation's subjects above, he reinvents the national



community to coalesce around former histories—even if they are fictional histories—that configure the U.S. as pure and needing to be protected from outside threats. As the symbol and material representative of the nation-state, presidents create a “bond of identification” through the stories they attach to their bodies.<sup>30</sup> In turn, this gives those stories legitimacy and authority as official documents of the nation-state. Presidents use these affective bonds to mobilize citizens to contribute to the nation-state; however, these kinds of identifications typically depend on certain exclusions for their survival, creating a civic caste system where political power and representation is unequally distributed, portioning off privileged and partial citizens. The presidency, as an ideological mechanism of the nation-state, therefore persuades citizens to be governed by the individual’s relationship to the president and thus repositions our responsibility to each other according to his instructions. Presidents use their symbolic power to tell citizens what we can and cannot feel as a way to mobilize certain civic performances while regulating or constraining others.

Lauren Berlant offers alternative ways to theorize and read citizenship in the U.S. For one, she acknowledges that democratic polity is hypocritical and contradictory. Berlant suggests democracy’s promises have yet to be realized for many who experience partial citizenship. These promises, however, are what continue to organize and manage certain citizens, or as she argues, in *The Queen of America*,

From the beginning, entire populations of persons were excluded from the national promise which, because it was a promise, was held out paradoxically: falsely, as a democratic reality, and legitimately, as a promise, the promise that democratic citizenship form makes people caught in history. The populations who were and are managed by the discipline of the promise—women, African

Americans, Native Americans, immigrants, and homosexuals—have long experienced simultaneously the wish to be full citizens and the violence of their partial citizenship. (18-19)

The violence associated with the promise manifests in a variety of ways, Reagan's "inner city" being one example: subjects experience the violence of partial citizenship in the "inner city" while simultaneously wishing to reside in Reagan's shining city on the hill. Although Obama's presidency seems as if it would complicate Berlant's point, the fact that people continue to question his citizenship reveals how he is both caught inside of and outside of a particular history because his black body and mixed-racial heritage align with dominant narratives of black masculinity. As the son of a white American mother and a black "foreigner," Obama's story does not neatly fit the criteria for a male African American citizen. Remapping narratives of U.S. blackness onto Obama's body is a way for individuals to relocate him in a decontextualized history where the African American experience is contained within borders of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Performances of citizenship are in part shaped by feelings and emotions as well as reason. More and more, a president's success with the public depends on his ability to "act" presidential rather than the policies he enacts, and acting presidential works through the construction and management of the public's emotions. As representatives of the U.S., often symbols of the nation itself, presidents give us a text to rediscover new ways to think about the relationship between power, the nation, and the public. When the body of the president is seen as a material manifestation of democracy, the histories presidents select to map onto their bodies becomes a powerful way to construct the public, because those histories are engendered with emotions that organize people based on shared

feelings.<sup>32</sup> As Ahmed reminds us, emotions circulate between bodies and signs; in other words, emotions are not “simply ‘within’ or ‘without’ but that they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds” (“Affective Economies” 117).

Emotions materialize onto bodies and therefore have the power to alter the terrain of embodied social spaces. Apropos to a study of this kind, emotions work as a form of capital for the presidency; emotions register not only psychically but also materially. They are not simply used to discipline and contain people but also collect and mobilize them. Within presidential performances, emotions operate as another rhetorical appeal to symbolize the nation in order for people to see itself as a collective group in spite of our differences, and equally important are the ways a presidential failure to act presidential open us sites for resistance. How do leaders transmit and provoke emotion? In a speech, for example, the president’s speech acts, how he moves, uses tone, and dresses, are the ways he transmits emotion and constructs feelings. Presidents are bodies of “symbolic transformation,” so their speech acts manifest in the flesh, arranging meaning, knowledge, and experience which transform bodies or constitute new ones according to the feelings engendered in their narratives.<sup>33</sup>

### *Nodes of Executive Citizenship*

The texts that surface and are enacted by presidential bodies contain political, economic, and cultural content. Political citizenship gives people the right to vote, to be represented by the government, and to enjoy security as long as they cede violence to the state. In order to normalize political citizenship, nineteenth and twentieth-century

philosophers claimed that it was the “outcome of ‘fixed identities, unproblematic nationhood, indivisible sovereignty, ethnic homogeneity, and exclusive citizenship,’” ignoring that citizenship was forged in relation to “bellicose encounters of West and East” (Miller 36). In the U.S., normalizing political citizenship becomes increasingly difficult because of its heterogeneous population and the fact that it is the home to a number of sub-national constituencies. Regardless, continuous attempts are made by political actors, especially in the media and governmental institutions, to construct a coherent political citizen.

Executive citizenship articulates what political citizenship looks like, manifestly through presidential performances, which write scripts of an ideal register of political citizenship. Ideal political citizenship is always in a state of becoming, a becoming and unbecoming that is defined through certain exclusions and inclusions, which is also a characteristic of democracy. What does an ideal political citizen look like as articulated through the presidency? Although Obama’s presidency promised to make significant alterations, those alterations are not easy to make. Take, for example, the use of the symbol of Joe the Plumber in the 2009 presidential election. Presidential and Vice-Presidential hopefuls John McCain and Sara Palin deployed this image to interpellate all America, and in doing so, provided a face of America. Representations of and by the executive provide a legible narrative of an ideal political citizenship, even though it consistently fails when put to the test.

One of the major roles of the executive citizen increasingly is as the head of corporate power. In 1884, President Rutherford Hayes despondently declared, “[The

United States] is a government of the people, by the people and for the people *no longer*. It is a government of corporations, by corporations, and for corporations” (*my emphasis*). Even though Hayes mourns a type of governing he no longer sees, the effects of incorporating the U.S. took several decades to root itself in the American consciousness. It was not until Calvin Coolidge observed that “the chief business of the American people is business” that government, especially the executive branch, started to re-imagine America as a corporation, whereby the president would stand in as the nation’s economic functionary. According to Toby Miller,

The United States’ great early achievement was establishing the state as an abstraction beyond its embodiment in a monarch or group. But this move that made rights available to citizens also made rights available to other non-human actors, such as corporations. U.S. corporations began life as the creatures of state governments, to conduct business in the public interest, such as building canals. (46)

Or as Charles Derber declares in *Corporation Nation*, “[c]orporate ascendancy is emerging as the universal order of the post-communist world...our social landscape is now dominated by corporations that are bigger and more powerful than most countries...our end of the century and the next century loom as the triumphal age of corporations” (3). In a darker tone, Henry A. Giroux argues that at the close of the Cold War, “the language of democracy seemed to lose its vitality and purpose as an organizing principle for society. As corporations have gained more and more power in American society, democratic culture becomes corporate culture, the rightful ideological heir to the victory over socialism” (“Vocationalizing” 30). According to Giroux, *corporate culture* refers to the “ensemble of ideological and institutional forces that function politically and

pedagogically both to govern organizational life through senior managerial control and to produce compliant workers, depoliticized consumers, and passive citizens” (30).

Therefore citizenship, within the language of corporate culture, is portrayed “as an utterly privatized affair whose aim is to produce competitive self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain” (“Vocationalizing” 30). As the symbolic economic functionary, presidents rely on the logic of corporatism to consolidate power, define national interests, and create a citizenry of consumers.

Presidents, at least symbolically, represent the country’s economy—so much so that now getting reelected for a second term depends, in part at least, on the success of the nation’s economy. As Barbara Hinkley points out, “Presidents, factually speaking, do not manage the economy, but it is part of the symbolism of the office that they are singularly responsible for the nation’s well-being. We speak of the president’s foreign policy or economic policy, collapsing a long and complex policy-making process into the work of a single individual” (*The Symbolic Presidency* 2). In “Society, Economy, and the State Effect,” Timothy Mitchell historicizes the phenomena that the economy was invented as a way to reconstruct the “effect” of the state. In the aftermath of World War I,

[t]he abandoning of gold as the measure of the value of money, unprecedented levels of debt, unemployment and overproduction, rapid swings from economic boom to complete collapse, the ending of the European territorial expansion and population growth, the beginning of the disintegration of empire, and the very fear of capitalism’s collapse all created the need to reimagine the process of government and construct new objects and methods of political power. (Mitchell 183)

During this period terms like “economic system” and “economic structure” and finally “the economy” came into political circulation. Furthermore, when the gold standard collapsed and central banks and reserve systems were consolidated, “money came to acquire its value as part of a ‘political’ as much as an ‘economic’ process” (Mitchell 183). The rise of “quasipublic corporations” and the transnational corporation all worked in tandem to blur the distinction “between the private and public spheres or state and economy” (Mitchell 184). All of these processes were carried out by new institutional practices, “so the relationship between state and economy appeared to take the form of the relation between representor and the object of representation” (Mitchell 184). One of the institutions to take the form of the representor has been the presidency, symbolized in the president’s body. During Reagan’s administration, the shift to representing the economy through the president who stands in as the nation’s economic functionary or CEO is reinforced, leading to new definitions of cultural citizenship. At an accelerated rate, corporations are seen as the nation’s privileged economic citizens, and average citizens are “increasingly conceived of as self-governing consumers” (Miller 45). Like corporations who have a responsibility to a select few, the nation is responsible to the rich and wealthy, while everyone else is encouraged to consume in order to maintain the hierarchy. When presidents create partnerships with corporations and charge them with the task of innovation, they in effect reconfigure civic engagement. If one definition of civic engagement means promoting equality, working to make a difference in our communities and combining knowledge and skills to make that difference, then corporate citizenship, embodied in presidential performances, diverts average citizens’ attention

away from contributing to the nation through creativity and innovation and refocuses civic action to acts of consumerism.

When individual citizens are conceived as consumers, individual labor matters less and less. What matters more, instead, is their ability to consume wastefully as a way of helping out the nation's economy. Attention is diverted from the individual, and the government no longer is responsible for protecting its workforce; instead its responsibility shifts to multinational corporate entities and financial institutions. Therefore, the nation's reliance on the free market to solve its financial problems relocates responsibility from the government and the presidency to these corporations that typically are not interested helping individual citizens; rather, corporations are beholden only to their shareholders. Never has this been made clearer than in the recent economic recession where multinational financial firms have sunk the world into debt, and after receiving bailout money from the government, these same firms rewarded many of its key stakeholders with outrageous bonuses, leaving many Americans jobless and homeless.

Without a doubt, there have been presidents who have wanted to protect individual citizens and who have claimed to promote welfarist programs.<sup>34</sup> By and large, however, presidents have depended on corporate culture and corporate ideology to manage the nation's economy, which redefined the national identity that was constructed on the legacies of many Progressive Era reforms. As presidents depend on media, a cultural product that casts the presidential body as an object of consumption, to help circulate their economic policies, media--how presidents use it and how it represents the



presidency—participates in the production of corporate citizenship. When presidents act as the nation's economic functionary, which since Reagan's administration has been ensconced and elaborated in the logic of corporate culture, the body politic is transformed into corporate citizenship.

In the cultural node of executive citizenship, I argue that presidents construct a national imaginary through the texts that sentimentalize the nation and present it as a coherent body politic who share the same desires and systems of belief. These narratives cohere on the president's body and cast that body as the site for national belonging and identification. There are of course limitations to this node since these histories also couple and uncouple individuals who are not experiencing the same feelings about those narratives. An effective president must be invested with the power by the people to write, embody, and reflect an image of national culture in order to create a sense unity and belonging. Presidential rhetoric and images of the presidency also constitute and teach national character by sentimentalizing the presidential body. Reading presidential performances offers a new lens through which to read historical and social shifts, and his body can be read as an indicator about how the nation is feeling or should be feeling.

### **Project Overview**

In Chapter 2, I examine presidential Inaugural Addresses to explore how American presidents embody national stories the public finds persuasive to construct their image of the executive citizen. During the ceremony of the Inaugural Address, the public creates a symbolic response that allows presidents to become a representative of

the nation's identity. While the scripts of the executive citizen are epideictic, invested with the language and the tropes of the occasion and thus always comfortingly the same in many ways, each president does revise the identity as a way to respond to the context in which they govern. In each case since Reagan, the president positions himself as the nation's economic functionary as well as the citizen in chief in order to situate himself as a representative of a growing corporatism that dominates American life.

Chapter 3 looks at the ways the public intervenes or reproduces the scripts of executive citizenship through an analysis of two popular television series, *The West Wing* and *24*. I move to fictional representations of the presidency as a way to understand more fully the role of the presidential as the public and the media envision them. In doing so, I trace the ways that a show like *The West Wing* affectively orients its audience around an individual's love for the president. In *The West Wing*, we are asked to love our president and our government, in spite of its fallibility, because the president embodies stories that position the executive as the national father. Whereas in *24*, viewers' affection is reoriented to the hero, Jack Bauer, by depicting the government as either corrupt or unable to protect the nation's borders from outside threats alone and presenting the president as weak or unscrupulous.

In chapter 4, I analyze president Obama's 2012 campaign documentary "The Road We've Traveled" to show how Obama embodies the scripts of the executive citizen to combat his political rivals and opponents who claim he is not the right man for the job of the presidency because he is either ineligible, does not have enough executive experience, and/or is too soft and cannot make the "tough" decisions. The documentary

illustrates that Obama has the right experience and the right body for the job by attaching the legible images and narratives of executive leadership onto his person. By examining the emotional attachments publics have with their leaders, I suggest that individuals can work through the knee jerk reactions and bodily sensations to their own beliefs or the beliefs of others that cause them to act or not act without thinking critically what the consequences of the action or inaction. This ability to think alongside our feelings will give us necessary critical distance from some of the many cherished national stories that abstract citizenship from material bodies where we can reimagine more inclusive communities that allow for new definitions and performances of citizenship and new models that privilege mutuality rather than opposition. Publics are constantly interacting with presidents. Therefore, we can start to rethink our relationship to the executive, allow for different kinds of performances, so that we can come to understand that in these rhetorical constructions and acts one can represent the many and this person does not have to look like us, believe everything we believe, or be the single author of our stories. When we think in and outside of our feelings and understand our bodies as enacting their own stories, we learn our individual acts of citizenship have the power to dissolve hierarchies that create inequalities in political and civic life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the Constitution of the United States, “No Person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President...” Because Obama was born in and has a mixed ancestry gives the birther accusations traction since Hawaii geographically does not fit neatly into the cohesive image of the United States and his father is from a different country.

<sup>2</sup> In *National Manhood*, Dana Nelson discusses how important the emergence of the “middle class” was to managing and perpetuating fantasies of national manhood that was coded as white and male.

<sup>3</sup> With Reagan’s 1981 busting of PATCO, the air traffic controllers’ union, which came to symbolize a union-free era, it also revealed how the government would be increasingly unresponsive to popular opinion. Policies like this one gave corporations new public powers to act as unelected partners with governments and thereby encourage presidents to treat the nation as a corporation and act as its CEO. See Charles Derber’s *Corporation Nation* for an insightful discussion on the relationship between corporate ascendancy and American democracy.

<sup>4</sup> A June 4, 2012, Pew Research poll shows that partisan polarization has surged in the Bush/Obama years: “Republican and Democrats are divided by an average of 18 percentage points across 48 values questions, nearly double the divide of 10 points in 1987” (“2012 American Values Survey”).

<sup>5</sup> Obama's silence and refusal to respond to the accusations are rhetorical acts. As Cheryl Glenn argues in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, although silence has been neglected in rhetorical studies, we should not assume that the silence is the absence of a voice or text. Instead, silence becomes an avenue for marginalized groups such as women to engage in rhetorical acts of persuasion. Glenn also notes that silence is typically gendered as feminine, and since discourses of blackness in the U.S. has been also cast as feminine, Obama's silence is amplified in political discourse and seen as both powerful and as weak. Or as Glenn observes, "[t]he delivery of silence can be a way of taking responsibility all the while refusing to be compliant...[as well as] a way of refusing to take responsibility all the while appearing to be compliant" (155). Additionally, "breaking silence" can be powerful and transformative in the right kairotic moment.

<sup>6</sup> Obama's skin color, ancestry, and some of the public's uncertainty about his U.S. citizenship are interrelated. In addition to the accusations about his citizenship, political leaders and pundits opined about his race. During the 2008 campaign, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid stated that Obama might win because he was "light-skinned" and had "no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one" (Berger and Zeleny n. pg). While pundits on the right and left criticized Reid for racism, many others agreed that even though Reid put it crudely, he was in fact right. Reid's comments pointed out that America was not ready for a black leader who is "too black." As long as Obama keeps his cool, is articulate and eloquent, and "presentable" to a white audience, he might be able to gain entry into the arena of dominant discourses of the nation-state.

<sup>7</sup> In his “Epilogue” from the third edition of *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel explores and elaborates on emerging codes and discourses of masculinity in the age of Obama. Specifically, Kimmel notices that while President Clinton might have enjoyed the benefits of being called the first African-American president, Obama is the first feminist president. For Kimmel, Obama’s presidency reflects both a “softening *and* hardening of [racial] stereotypes” about black men (286). While a black man holds one of the most powerful leadership positions in Washington, he must remain not “too black” so as to be presentable to a white audience.

<sup>8</sup> I define national imaginary as the stories and social bodies that make up a national fantasy that sentimentalize the U.S. and cast it as stable and coherent. See Lauren Berlant’s *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*.

<sup>9</sup> Earlier this year in 2012 in an attempt to protect his father from the onslaught of attacks directed at his personal finances, Mitt Romney’s son, Matt, declared his father might release his tax returns “as soon as President Obama releases his grades and birth certificate and sort of a long list of things” (“Nobody Likes to Talk About It”). Romney’s son later backtracked from such a statement probably because he realized how this kind of statement, which has racial undertones, would hurt his father. Mitt Romney strikes as similar cord when he claims that Obama wants to create an “entitlement society.” Obama has said nothing of the sort, but Romney’s accusation evokes an old Republican position that blacks receive the greatest share of welfare dollars.

<sup>10</sup> As president Obama's second presidential campaign approaches, he has noticeably used emotional appeals to mobilize his base.

<sup>11</sup> See Robinson's *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* for an extended discussion of wounded masculinity in post-sixties American culture. Specifically, Robinson argues that the rhetoric of victimization coincides with a rhetoric of crisis that has marked white masculinity in specific ways.

<sup>12</sup> See Ahmed's "Introduction" to *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

<sup>13</sup> See the insightful collection *The Ethos of Rhetoric* for a number of insightful articles about the role ethos plays in constituting a national imaginary. When I refer to the presidency as a "citational discourse," I am drawing from Judith Butler's insightful work on performativity. For a fuller discussion of performativity and gender, see Butler's *Bodies that Matter* and *Gender Trouble*.

<sup>14</sup> We can see the metaphor of the "king's two bodies" shape our own notions of political life. Many American's views of the presidency are no less complex since "the king's two bodies" has a special meaning to Americans precisely because the public chooses to have a placeholder for the king, the president.

<sup>15</sup> According to Zarefsky in "George W. Bush Discovers Rhetoric," this attention is due in part because of in times of crisis and uncertainty, the public insists on rhetoric to find meaning in the face of "unexpected or threatening events" by calling on our leaders to "articulate a vision to which we can subscribe" (137).

<sup>16</sup> See Tulis' *The Rhetorical Presidency*.

<sup>17</sup> See Stuckey's *The President as Interpreter-in-Chief*.

<sup>18</sup> To fully discuss the many analyses and critiques of the presidency is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. To read more about the importance of the presidency to writers in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, see McCann's *A Pinnacle of Feeling*. In it, he argues that writers, starting with Walt Whitman, were preoccupied with democracy, nationality, and executive power. Jeff Smith's *The Presidents We Imagine* argues that imaginings of presidents are not only artifacts of American cultural history or reflections of conflicting fears, hopes, desires, and beliefs of the people but that they also participate in the ongoing fiction that is America. In other words, the stories Americans tell about the presidency are in part what makes America a nation. Diane Rubenstein's insightful *The Is Not a President* examines the postmodern presidency to elucidate the ways that applying Lacanian theory to the American presidency shows how American presidents function both representatively and semiotically as well as a site for an existential or experiential form of knowledge. In other words, she claims that "the *dialogue* between president and citizen is an *operational* as well as a *representational* form of knowledge" (6).

<sup>19</sup> According to Nelson, *presidentialism* refers to a process which "shapes how citizens unconsciously feel about both the president and democratic practice" (5).

<sup>20</sup> I define *embodied space* as the site where individuals are aligned with communities. I draw from Sara Ahmed who claims that emotions constitute these spaces because "emotions *do things*," aligning bodily space with social space ("Affective Economies 119).



<sup>21</sup> See Rochelle's "The Literary Presidency."

<sup>22</sup> In his discussion of Nixon's and Reagan's legacy, Sanford Schram argues: "when the real cannot be identified, that which is reliably and consistently reproduced, like a pat performance, is taken to be credible...while [political] models may have always created reality rather than reflected it, we are now encouraged to more self-consciously trade on this assumption" (214). How Americans understand private and public space, the real and artificial converge on the president's body and his office.

<sup>23</sup> Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* informs how I understand and use the term *national scripts*. Like gendered scripts, presidents perform and embody our nation's histories and myths, making the artificial conventions which construct the nation and citizenship appear natural and necessary. Also like Butler, I am interested in how these performances alter the material changes in one's existence and even in one's bodily self.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the American public's reaction to the Kennedy/Nixon debate and the public's reaction to Carter as a "soft" president underscores the growing emphasis on the president's body and performance in shaping public opinion, Reagan knew how important it was to appear and act presidential to create the image of a strong leader.

<sup>25</sup> I draw upon Parry-Giles' term "presidentiality," which refers to "an ideological rhetoric that helps shape and order the cultural meaning of the institution of the presidency" (*The West Wings Prime-Time* 209). Presidentiality is an amalgam of different voices and divergent texts that use as a referent the office of the President of the United States and the individual who hold that office.

<sup>26</sup> See Nelson's *Bad for Democracy and National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Fraternity of White Men*.

<sup>27</sup> See Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>28</sup> Sara Ahmed claims emotions are not only "being 'in' texts, but as effects of the very naming of emotions: "the different words for emotion do different things precisely because they involve specific orientations towards objects that are identified as their cause" (*The Cultural Politics* 13).

<sup>29</sup> I am indebted to May Josephs for my understanding of citizenship as a performance. In her book *Nomadic Identities*, Josephs reads stagings of citizenship by new immigrants as an expression of the need to reinvent community for the purposes of political visibility.

<sup>30</sup> Ariella Azoulay reminds us that we cannot understand citizenship without understanding it in relation to noncitizens. For that reason, in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Azoulay awakens two dormant dimensions of citizenship that begins a new discussion of the concept:

The first of these dimensions consists in the fact that citizens are, first and foremost, *governed*. The nation-state creates a bond of identification between citizens and the state through a variety of ideological mechanisms, causing this fact to be forgotten. This, then, allows the state to divide the governed – portioning off noncitizens from citizens – and to mobilize the privileged citizens against other groups of ruled subjects. An emphasis on the dimension of being governed allows a rethinking of the political sphere as a space of relations between the governed, whose political duty is first and foremost a duty toward one another, rather than toward the ruling power. (17)

<sup>31</sup> *In The Space of Theory*, Matthew Sparke insists we must rethink geography as written: "By reconceiving of geography as *written*, as a conventional part of the general *social text*, it affords a means of subsequently monitoring how aspects of that *contextuality* are disavowed but yet used in the interests of writing and consolidating particular geographies" (xxxii). I argue that this response to Obama's citizenship illuminates how certain subjects in the U.S. try to consolidate and reproduce a certain vision of U.S. geography.

<sup>32</sup> There is a long history extending from Aristotle to William James that define emotion as a sensation together with a meaningful commentary. In other words, when we feel something, we must label our feelings using our knowledge of the situation. However, physical sensations by themselves are not enough to define emotion. We must attribute some cause and context. Ahmed extends this definition to include the material affects of this process.

<sup>33</sup> See Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect* and Protevi's *Political Affect*.

<sup>34</sup> President Clinton who capitalized off of his "I feel your pain" ethos with the poor signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Many liberals considered the legislation too harsh because of the work requirements. In an op-ed piece in 2006, Clinton defends his decision claiming it ended welfare as we know it.

## CHAPTER II

### WRITING AND ENACTING BODIES OF THE EXECUTIVE CITIZEN

As we discuss these issues, let each of us do so with a good dose of humility. Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let us use this occasion to expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy, and remind ourselves of all the ways our hopes and dreams are bound together.

Barack Obama, “Tucson Memorial Speech” January 8, 2011

In the wake of the Tucson shootings on January 8, 2011, where U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords and eighteen other people were shot during a public meeting held in a supermarket parking lot, President Obama delivered a speech that recalled the Obama people had seen during the campaign and challenged pundits and citizens alike who had been claiming since the election that he was too cold and stoic.<sup>1</sup> In response to a national tragedy that had been exacerbated by media’s vitriolic rhetoric, in which pundits were blaming the tragedy on public personalities such as Sarah Palin for using violent imagery on her website, Obama’s careful rhetoric employs the tropes and gestures that remind his hearers of the healing power of democracy and of the continuing experiment in collaboration that is the enterprise of citizenship.

As Obama speaks, he instructs. Acting as the national pedagogue, Obama’s words and recast the nation as a collective body that together make true the ideal of a nation where violence and hatred are unacceptable. Conflating metaphors of the family and love,

his speech discursively brings the nation together by focusing on what we share rather than how we are different. As he declares,

That process of reflection, of making sure we align our values with our actions - that, I believe, is what a tragedy like this requires. For those who were harmed, those who were killed - they are part of our family, an American family 300 million strong. We may not have known them personally, but we surely see ourselves in them. In George and Dot, in Dorwan and Mavy, we sense the abiding love we have for our own husbands, our own wives, our own life partners. Phyllis - she's our mom or grandma; Gabe our brother or son. In Judge Roll, we recognize not only a man who prized his family and doing his job well, but also a man who embodied America's fidelity to the law. In Gabby, we see a reflection of our public spiritedness that desire to participate in that sometimes frustrating, sometimes contentious, but always necessary and never-ending process to form a more perfect union. ("Tucson Memorial Speech")

Obama uses this occasion to help reunite an increasingly divided American public by employing a trope familiar to Americans from many presidential speeches, that of the nation as family. In the speech, Gabby Giffords herself becomes a metaphor for both the messiness of democracy and the need for people to look beyond their differences and align themselves with each other based on *our shared* American values. Those values, Obama reminds us, cross borders, bodies, and individual ideologies and thus constitute images of an American citizenship whose race, gender, and class status are irrelevant. In this commonplace formulation of American democracy, Obama constructs a national pathos by focusing the audience's attention on a shared object—a shared concern—that is abstracted from our differences. What underlies his performance is the message that democracy in America works best when we work together to strengthen our national family, implying that, like a family, while we may not always like each other we always need to love each other.

This speech constructs and enacts emotions such as love to align the body politic with the values of kinship and family; after all, even if we are a family of 300 million strong, we have a responsibility to each other, and those “forces that divide us are not as strong as those that unite us;” that is, all the ties of family (“Tucson Memorial Speech”). Those family ties are made explicit as Obama describes the child who lost her life in the tragedy:

That's what I believe, in part because that's what a child like Christina Taylor Green believed. Imagine: here was a young girl who was just becoming aware of our democracy; just beginning to understand the obligations of citizenship; just starting to glimpse the fact that someday she too might play a part in shaping her nation's future. She had been elected to her student council; she saw public service as something exciting, something hopeful. She was off to meet her congresswoman, someone she was sure was good and important and might be a role model. She saw all this through the eyes of a child, undimmed by the cynicism or vitriol that we adults all too often just take for granted.

The image of a child typically evokes images of innocence and belief, and in this case, it attempts to create in the audience a sense of renewed commitment and unity. Obama’s rhetoric also repositions the audience, in this case the voting public, as misbehaving adults who have a lot to learn from the hope and imagination of a child.

Although this speech is ostensibly about the Tucson tragedy, and thus an epideictic performance, Obama uses the occasion to do more than recognize the moment and honor the victims. As presidents have often done as they have delivered speeches that offer praise and blame and memorialize occasions, Obama asserts his concept of national belonging through his enactment and incorporation of the scripts of executive citizenship. As several national polls revealed, after the speech Obama’s popularity

increased, maybe in part because of its attempt to heal by asserting nationhood as natural and strong rather than constructed and fragile and figuring the president as strong father and healer to a troubled nation family.<sup>2</sup>

I begin this chapter with Obama's speech because it reveals the complexities of executive power and how important the office and the body of the executive have become to the articulation, embodiment, and enactment of a national identity.

As I argued in the previous chapter, civic identification is often attached to the executive's rhetoric as audiences understand those performances through the speech, body, and manner of the executive performer. As the modern presidency has developed, the public has asked presidents to stand in as the symbolic center of the body politic.<sup>3</sup> While one goal of presidential speeches is to imagine and write a national identity, presidential rhetoric can also expose divisions and competing narratives about the nation and citizenship. The words and physical presence of the executive has the power to enable and simultaneously limit civic performances by drawing some individuals into the national circle and leaving some outside of it by suggesting that those who put the nation's family at risk by their own words and actions are blameworthy. Obama makes that blame a part of the Tucson speech: "[b]ut at a time when our discourse has become so sharply polarized—at a time when we are far too eager to lay the blame for all the ills of the world at the feet of those who think differently than we do—it is important for us to pause for a moment and make sure that we are talking to each other in a way that heals, not a way that wounds" ("Tucson Memorial Speech"). During this speech act, Obama disciplines those who would talk in "ways that wound," media pundits for example,

casting that behavior as a threat to the national ethos Obama argues for and embodies during this occasion.

The persistent use of the same, legible rhetorical tropes in many presidential performances throughout the past twenty-five years normalize metaphors such as the nation as a family to advance a particular national image / ideal and American hegemony: America is exceptional, a place where citizens experience individual liberty, justice, protection, and economic sovereignty. Because this vision is so powerfully inculcated in American consciousness, rarely does presidential communication offer radical alternative versions of the nation or its citizenry. Presidents use these tropes because the public finds them persuasive which preserves their symbolic power.

This chapter explores the rhetorical choices the executive makes in inaugural addresses, illustrating how presidents construct images of executive citizenship. During inaugural addresses, presidents restage national fantasies and teach lessons about civic behavior. On stage as the symbolic whole of the people, presidents use the inaugural ceremony to construct a national imaginary, an ideal of citizenship and civic action, which promises to guide the presidency for the next four years. While some messages recur again and again in inaugural language, other messages are responses to current crises or change and therefore open up possible sites for new articulations of citizenship, national belonging, and national identity.

An examination of presidential inaugural addresses—or more precisely, how presidents use the ceremony to imagine the nation and its citizenry—shows how the president contributes to the scripts of executive citizenship and how executive



performances create a national fantasy through the construction and management of a national pathos. Specifically, presidents produce a body of knowledge that attempts to create a coherent nation and body politic out of a heterogeneous public. These readings of presidential performances illuminate a pedagogy of citizenship at work in the inaugural speeches.

I have broken down the following sections that analyze inaugural speeches by party affiliation rather than chronologically to highlight how enactments of executive citizenship link with partisan beliefs. I start with Reagan because he is the first to redefine the language and body of executive citizenship. Following Reagan, I put George Bush Sr. and Jr. together since they both advance Reagan's image of executive citizenship and consolidate it through their own religious rhetoric. Finally, I look at Clinton and Obama, who, unlike the other presidents, had their bodies become the subject of national debate.

### ***Symbolic Presidential Bodies***

The modern presidency is the most symbolically meaningful institution in the U.S. system of government. No other branch—legislative or judicial—is the focal point for so much discussion, debate, cultural angst, and political hope as the presidency. According to Fred Greenstein, one of the foremost presidential historians, following the entrepreneurial leadership of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and vast expansion of federal power, “[t]he president became the most visible landmark of the political landscape, virtually standing for the federal government in the minds of many Americans” (3).

American presidents have become the expression and receptacle of communal identity and ideology and represent the U.S. internationally. Most political scientists take for granted the cultural force the body of the executive has, instead choosing to focus on abstract concepts such as presidential strength and weakness as a barometer of an executive's political power and greatness.<sup>4</sup> To add to the body of scholarship on the presidency, I investigate the way the presidential body operates as its own text as the histories and stories attached the white and black male body help constitute an image of executive citizenship.

As the executive becomes the spokesperson for the nation, the president has become a singularly important site for symbolic meaning making. As Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Language and Symbolic Power*,

In politics, 'to say is to do', that is, it is to get people to believe that you can do what you say and, in particular, to get them to know and recognize the principles of di-vision of the social world, the *slogans*, which produce their own verification by producing groups and, thereby, social order. Political speech – and this is what defines its specificity – commits its author completely because it constitutes a commitment to action which is truly political only if it is the commitment of an agent or group of agents who are *politically responsible*, that is, capable of carrying out the action: it is only on this condition that it is equivalent to an act. The truth of a promise or a prognosis depends not only on the truthfulness but also on the authority of the person who utters it – that is, on his capacity to make people believe in his truthfulness and his authority. When it is acknowledged that the future under discussion depends on collective will and action, the mobilizing ideas of the spokesperson who is capable of giving rise to this action are unfalsifiable because they have power to ensure that the future they are announcing will come about. (190-91)

Political capital is a form of symbolic capital, so when the president speaks, there are material consequences. During the inaugural address, the person who takes the oath of

office is invested with symbolic capital because of the power of the office and the role. Political capital works through belief and recognition of the powers agents--in this case citizens--confer on a person or object (*Language and Symbolic* 192). Presidents, therefore, are important because of what the American public invests in the person as the representative of the nation. The American political system maintains checks and balances to attempt to distribute political power more or less equally, but over time—dating back to Andrew Jackson—executive authority has increased and consolidated (even while it is also curtailed by the Supreme Court and Congress).<sup>5</sup> As more and more Americans attach their hopes and dreams to the body of the president, what the president says, how he says it, and how he embodies policy and legislation shape the relationship between the public and the executive as well as between the public and a conception of the nation itself.<sup>6</sup>

Symbolic communication is a crucially important instrument in presidential leadership. As David Zarefsky puts it, since “the president is the principal source of symbols about public issues the function of presidential definition is primarily to shape the context in which events or proposals are viewed...” (*qtd. in* Ryfe 9). Since presidential symbolic communication is social and intertextual, through the embodied performance, presidents construct a social space that configures and circulates power. In other words, presidents actively construct the office of the presidency through recurring scripts of executive citizenship.<sup>7</sup>

If what the president says has political capital, then it is not a stretch to claim that presidential rhetoric shapes an executive’s identity. To explain, in *The Symbolic*

*Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves*, Barbara Hinckley presents a convincing analysis of the relationship between how the presidency has been constructed by people and history and rewritten through symbolic action. Drawing on the work of other important political theorists, Hinckley argues that how people view the presidency and how they share it with others creates certain expectations for the person serving as the chief executive, and these expectations in part govern how presidents portray themselves. Citing Fred Greenstein, her study argues that what the president means to Americans can be broken up into parts, which sometimes run counter to the many rhetorical strategies presidents deploy to remain legibly coherent and whole. In Hinckley's formulation, the president serves as a multidimensional symbol for the nation; an outlet for emotion and national sentiment; a cognitive aid; and a means of "vicarious participation through which people identify with the president and feel more a part of events occurring around them" (Hinckley 11). Not only do the presidents allow citizens to experience vicarious participation, but these leaders also have become one of the most important sites for a citizen's engagement in the political process, which frankly is one explanation why more and more weight has been placed on presidential elections than any other political election. Moreover, with the rise of the information culture, the public appears to place more and more weight on what the media reports. Presidential bodies both act as receptacle and contributor to the nation's narratives as they serve as the embodiment of American nationalism. Through the scripts of executive citizenship, the president positions himself as the symbolic and material manifestation of the nation's history, identity, and feelings.<sup>8</sup>

Because the president—a single human—symbolizes the nation and government, oftentimes he is regarded by the public as an individual acting alone, oddly viewed ahistorically and acontextually, existing apart from any recent predecessor or recent past events. Although many presidents are associated with figures in American history and want to be associated with leaders such as Washington and Lincoln and so make their functional positions symbolic by association, rarely do presidents want to be directly associated with their recent predecessors. For example, George W. Bush de-identified with his predecessor, Bill Clinton, associating himself with Ronald Reagan by imitating and resuscitating Reagan’s broncobuster personality. Presidents contribute to this rhetorical process of association through their speeches, making certain rhetorical associations legible while foreclosing others.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson argued over a decade ago that individual presidential acts invent the presidency. In *Presidents Creating the Presidency*, the co-authors claim their contribution “...is about the kinds of rhetoric that have come to typify the presidency from the nation’s beginnings to the present...[their book] looks at the presidency as it has emerged through the rhetorical practices of our presidents” (6). Their book traces the development of the American presidency since its inception. My own analysis begins with Ronald Reagan because he deliberately used his stage presence in ways earlier presidents had not done, and so provides a model of how the rhetoric of the executive proceeds from both word and gesture, idea and physical image.

I focus on the rhetoric of inaugural addresses from Ronald Reagan (1981) through Barack Obama (2009) to demonstrate how presidents use the beginning moments of their presidencies to produce and revise the scripts of the executive and so organize the body politic by constructing and managing national feelings about the nation. The inaugural address as a genre is a discourse with a lot of significance but very little praise, an “inferior art form”, according to historian Arthur Schlesinger, maligned because its symbolic and functional purposes seem both standard and dull. Schlesinger observes that while people listen to the man they elected for the highest office in the land, “...the inaugural address is an inferior art form. It is rarely an occasion for original thought or stimulating reflection. The platitude quotient tends to be high, the rhetoric stately and self-serving, the ritual obsessive, and the surprises few” (*The Chief Executive* vi, vii). Although there are recurring themes in each presidential inaugural address, presidents add their own voice and body to the script and thus inevitably alter it. Presidential inaugurals are a subspecies of rhetoric that Aristotle called *epideictic*, a form of rhetoric that praises or blames at ceremonial occasions, invites the audience to evaluate the speaker’s performance, and recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present. Unlike forensic or deliberative speeches that typically deal with more immediate issues, the ceremonial nature of epideictic seems to prohibit its persuasive function; rather it is seen as reaffirming audience’s expectations rather than requiring them to change or agree.<sup>9</sup> Typically, then, these addresses give presidents the platform to celebrate democratic change and continuity, to demonstrate a capacity for leadership, to express an appreciation for the nation’s values, a sensitivity to key issues

facing the nation, and to unify the citizenry in support of a new administration. Presidential inaugurals also unify the audience as “the people,” rehearse communal values drawn from the past, set principles that will guide the new administration, and demonstrate through performance that the president appreciates both the requirements and limitations of executive functions. I argue these epideictic moments are both ceremonial and *persuasive* because they instruct the citizenry how to perceive the executive and imagine their relationship to the nation.

Presidential inaugurals, in other words, have effects on individuals and the body politic, consequences that are either reinforced or changed according to reiteration of presidential practices. Understanding a community as both a group and a group of individuals helps illuminate—even provides a lens—to understand how the performances of the executive citizen affect the beliefs and emotions of the citizens who observe the performance.<sup>10</sup> That is, the executive citizen, who represents the nation, reshapes the national image by aligning and realigning individuals into social groups by symbolizing the presidency.

In inaugural addresses, metaphors of hope, strength, resilience, and health abound through the restaging of national stories and images. Talal Asad describes this process as prophetic language. According to Asad,

an important language in the United States that overlaps in varying measure with rights language (not to be directly equated with human rights language) is its prophetic language. Unlike human rights discourse, which assumes a universalist formula, American prophetic language not only draws its vocabulary and imagery from a particular scripture (the Old Testament), it is also deeply rooted in narratives of the founding of a particular nation (the American). Famously, there are two narratives -- one anticipating the other supplementing: First, the story of

the seventeenth-century Puritan escape to religious freedom from persecution in England; and second, the story of the constitution of thirteen American colonies into a new sovereign state, signifying a repudiation of English despotism. In both cases freedom -- including the freedom to re-create oneself as an individual and one's nation as a community of liberated individuals -- comes from a rejection of tradition. The power of prophetic language derives not only from its religious origins but also from a series of moral separations -- English tyranny, Amerindian paganism, and the sub-humanity of African slaves. The class of humans remains intact when the tyrant, the pagan, and the slave are excluded from it. (26)

Presidents use prophetic language in the inaugural address to normalize national stories and construct a model of citizenship that the public finds persuasive, and “[h]owever distasteful it might be to us today, the definition on which that initial concept of citizen was based is in a sense no less universal than others that succeeded it in the sense that it defines the class to which all who are properly human, and only they, belong to it” (Asad 26).

In addition to using prophetic language, the inaugural ceremony is an important site symbolically because so many Americans make the pilgrimage to Washington to witness the peaceful transference of power that inaugural speeches symbolize. As a location, Washington, D.C., becomes the totality of the nation at the moment of a new presidency just as the president becomes the representative of all citizens. According to Lauren Berlant, Washington, D.C., “tests the capacities of all who visit it: this test is a test of citizenship competence” and although the visits are usually made with classmates or families, “the trip to the capital makes pedagogy a patriotic performance, one in which the tourist ‘playing at being American’ is called on to coordinate the multiple domains of time, space, sensation, exchange, knowledge, and power that represent the scene of what



we might call ‘total’ citizenship” (*Queen of America* 25). In this way, inaugural ceremonies function pedagogically, so as the public watches a presidential inaugural address, they are learning and enacting a “patriotic performance” by witnessing the performance of what Berlant calls “total citizenship” by the executive.

### ***Ronald Reagan: Redefining Executive Citizenship (1981-89)***

Although President Carter was the fresh face in the 1976 election, the public’s confidence in Carter waned as a result of a deteriorating economy, an oil shortage, and the resultant increase in gas prices, an eighteen percent inflation rate, and the 1979 Iran crisis, where Iranian students, protesting the entry of the deposed Shah in to the United States, stormed the U.S. Embassy and held fifty-three American hostages. Making matters worse for Carter, this national nightmare was magnified by the media’s constant attention and surveillance of the president’s response. These factors as well as Carter’s gentle affect made many believe he was a weak leader.<sup>11</sup> His campaign for a second term proved unsuccessful, and who better to handle the media and strengthen the public’s confidence in the government than the former Hollywood star and Washington outsider, Ronald Reagan.<sup>12</sup>

In his presidential campaign, Reagan played to an aging population that was growing more conservative and capitalized on the public’s eroding confidence in Carter as a strong leader by casting Carter as “soft” and depicting himself as the embodiment of an American hero—even regularly citing lines from movies such as the *Terminator*.<sup>13</sup> In several of Reagan’s campaign videos, most notably “Peace,” Reagan attacks Carter’s

weakness as a leader, subtly suggesting he is not “man” enough for the position by implying that his weakness as president caused the international and economic crisis facing the U.S. Take any one of Reagan’s campaign videos and you will see Reagan exuding confidence, strength.<sup>14</sup> He draws his codes of masculinity, which goes unmarked as whiteness, from Westerns and action-adventure films and series—for example, he works on his ranch while wearing a cowboy hat in one campaign ad. He presents himself as a man’s man and manages to persuasively emasculate Carter by labeling him a man whose brand of compassion prevents him from making tough decisions. Reagan, possibly more than any other modern president, knew how important the image of the president was to political power, represented clearly by the way his campaign videos were edited--showing that how Reagan appeared on-screen was just as important to him as what he said. Ultimately, Reagan turned political theater into political reality and consolidated a model of leadership that presidents continue to follow today: unitary executive leadership. Defeating Carter in 1980, Reagan became the first Republican opponent to defeat a Democratic presidential incumbent since Grover Cleveland in 1889.

As legions of others have noted, especially in subaltern and post-colonial studies, one way to bring people together, create a sense of national unity, and advance national fantasies is through capitalism and the economy.<sup>15</sup> Reagan is not the first to promote this desire as an executive agenda (recall Calvin Coolidge’s dictum, “The business of America is business”), but Reagan undeniably built his legacy on it. His administration’s economic policies are named after him by the media: Reaganomics. Ironically, of course,

no president sets the economic agenda, but as the symbol of government, he is the face of it, and the executive's body must reflect values of strength and progress in order to remain relevant and persuasive. After all, a strong body reflects a strong nation. Since Nixon's Watergate scandal, the American public had become increasingly suspicious of and cynical about the presidency. Without a doubt, Ronald Reagan transformed the executive office, increased executive power, and brought celebrity culture to the position to help make the body of the president an advertisement for the public to consume. He consolidated the image of the presidency as an object onto which the public could map their desires and fantasies.

Elected during one of the country's most devastating economic crises, Ronald Reagan, backed by powerful corporate conglomerates, promised to rescue the nation from its economic suffering while remaining committed to preventing the spread of communism. Reagan's first inaugural address frames government intervention to the logic of the free market and emphasizes the binary of good versus evil in the U.S. political lexicon. One of the ways Reagan restructures the discourse is through his cowboy persona, a character he perfected as a "B film" star in such movies as *Santa Fe Trail*, *Cattle Queen of Montana*, and *Tennessee's Partner*. Enacting a performance of the icon of the lone, self-reliant cowboy, he conveys the need for smaller federal government. Embodying the ideals of the American West and expansionism and associating this iconic image with the current economic crisis allowed Reagan to draw upon a national mythology to justify corporate deregulation and to persuade Congress to enact other economic policies such as tax cuts. This broncobuster act symbolically showcased to the

American public how he wanted the public to imagine the role of the presidency and relationship to the nation: “government is not the solution to our problem: government is the problem” (“1981 Inaugural Address”). Ironically, as he espoused this dictum, Reagan increased government and the national debt more than any of his predecessors.<sup>16</sup> As Ralph Nader chided, “Reaganites say that Reagan has lifted our ‘spirits’—correct if they mean he led the nation in a drunken world-record spending binge while leaving millions of American workers, consumers, and pollution victims defenseless.”<sup>17</sup>

On January 20, 1981, President Reagan delivered his first inaugural address to a disillusioned, skeptical American public. Considered by many to be the Great Communicator, Reagan opened his address by acknowledging how powerful and unique the inaugural ceremony is, a peaceful transition of power and a hallmark of American democracy, and positions himself as the rightful candidate who the public has elected.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, as his speech suggests, Reagan’s body represents not only the American democratic process at work but also the political body of the nation.<sup>19</sup>

In inaugural addresses, presidents invoke a handful of predecessors as a way to situate themselves in a national lineage. Presidents use this rhetorical strategy to sentimentalize the presidency and construct a hegemonic national identity. Typically, presidents construct national feelings by embodying a cultural narrative that foregrounds the positive, national myths as a way to construct an image of citizenship. Put another way, a president’s embodiment and reenactment of unquestioned, dominant national stories establish an executive ethos and position his body as the site to which citizens attach their dreams and desires. At the same time, presidential performances substitute

historical realities—such as slavery, Civil Rights, the unequal distribution of power, immigration laws—with a national fantasy to construct a purified, idealized and homogenous vision of the United States and its citizenry. Reagan’s first inaugural address as president was on the West Front of the Capitol, allowing him to make use of presidential memorials ranged behind him, a visual rhetorical strategy that underscores the important discursive function of national symbolism and Reagan’s savvy approach to helping construct national feeling and belonging.<sup>20</sup>

After deploying the recurring tropes and metaphors that are fixtures of all inaugural addresses, such as the elder statement and bravery, Reagan launches into his vision of a new nation by positioning it as a corporation. He observes that

the business of our nation goes forward. These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions. We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history. It distorts our economic decisions, penalizes thrift, and crushes the struggling young and the fixed-income elderly alike. It threatens to shatter the lives of millions of our people (1).

Although the term “business” in another context does not necessarily figure the nation as a corporation, in this context Reagan immediately relates it to the economy makes the connotation specific. “Business” followed by the “economy” employs language couched in the logic of capitalism, figuring the nation as a corporation and Reagan as its CEO. This rhetorical strategy should come as no surprise, given his role as a former spokesperson for General Electric (where he advocated free enterprise and mass consumption), which gave him the skills and the language to run for Governor of California.<sup>21</sup> As the incoming executive, Reagan uses the inaugural ceremony to offer

himself as the steward of the nation's economy, the corporate CEO, promising to institute policies that will create new jobs and increase the nation's productivity—ostensibly so others can consume: “Well, this administration's objective will be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy” (1). Reagan often spoke in a soft, though clear, well-modulated voice developed during his years as a radio broadcaster, and the folksy quality of the “well” in the sentence established a facet of Reagan's personality and his presidency: the executive citizen as practical, commonsensical, and unpretentious. A successful president, unlike Carter, will depend on the president's ability to be pragmatic: balance the budget and manage the country's labor and production. In his ideal nation, citizens work to improve the nation and their own lives, and they should depend less on the government to improve their lives: “it is no coincidence that our present [economic] troubles parallel and are proportionate to the intervention and intrusion in our lives that result from unnecessary and excessive growth of government” (2). Calling forth an “era of national renewal,” Reagan instructs the audience to dream big, since no place on earth are individual “dignity” and “freedom” so available (2). In developing his new era of “renewal,” Reagan appeals to the public's shared democratic fantasies, and he suggests that in order to turn the fantasy into material reality, America must rely less on government and more on themselves and each other. Rehearsing and remaking the scripts of executive citizenship allows Reagan simultaneously to talk about smaller government and use his physical presence where he embodies symbols of American individualism as the symbol for the government.

In order to assuage feelings of anxiety about the economy, Reagan connects images of heroism, patriotism, freedom, economic recovery, and national security. Turning individual civic acts into acts of heroism, Reagan elides differences to orient the public's identification with one another. When he turns the "they" and "their" into the "you" and "your," the body politic becomes singular, and Reagan's body becomes the symbolic body of all the citizens of "this blessed land" as he declares that "Your dreams, your hopes, your goals are going to be the dreams, the hopes, and the goals of this administration, so help me God" (2). In turn, citizens' identification with each other turns into an identification with Reagan and his administration.

As Reagan develops the scripts and images of his brand of executive citizenship, constituting a new performance imbued with the language and body of corporate culture, he evokes and embodies important icons from the nation's past to return the public's attention to the power and body of the executive. From his podium, Reagan invokes three important national symbols, and he uses a number of telling rhetorical tropes in order to construct a feeling of belonging. Building on the emotional momentum of the moment, Reagan declares

Directly in front of me, the monument to a monumental man, George Washington, father of our country. A man of humility who came to greatness reluctantly. He led America out of revolutionary victory into infant nationhood. Off to one side, the stately memorial to Thomas Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence flames with his eloquence. And then, beyond the Reflecting Pool, the dignified columns of the Lincoln Memorial. Whoever would understand in his heart the meaning of America will find it in the life of Abraham Lincoln. (3)

Indeed, this passage recalls important actors from our national heritage, national history, and national fantasy, and it uses tropes that give America a clear historical legacy.

Drawing upon the mythos of America's founding fathers and the commander in chief who many consider saved the Union, Reagan places himself as heir and latest example in a lineage of great American leaders. Reagan employs the rhetorical trope of nation-as-family first, by invoking Washington as the father of the nation and characterizing the nation as his infant. His reference to the nation's father creates an intimate space between himself, the rhetor and Washington's proxy, and the audience, the nation's subjects. The identification Reagan creates between the executive and the public as a national family persuades by its association with a stable and storied historical past. The rhetoric here also illustrates that a persuasive method in executive citizenship involves resurrecting national icons whose fictions work to construct a stable nation for people to belong to.<sup>22</sup>

Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln embody some of the nation's most cherished cultural and political virtues, so when Reagan discursively reenacts stories about these American leaders, he implies that he too embodies the same qualities, qualities that establish the nation as coherent and stable rather than socially constructed and therefore subject to change. If Washington is America's archetypal father, as his address suggests, Reagan will now stand in his absence and put into place by word and deed the same noble qualities and virtues the public assigns to Washington. As the nation's elected patriarch, Reagan indicates that he has accepted this greatness with humility, and he will lead America out of its economic crisis into a more powerful, richer nation, much like



Washington led during the Revolutionary War. Like Jefferson, Reagan will “flame” with “eloquence,” asserting the power of our national language and the importance of America’s founding documents. Like Lincoln, Reagan will be the heart of the nation, since “[w]hoever would understand in his heart the meaning of America will find it in the life of Abraham Lincoln” and lead with compassion and integrity. Reagan, therefore, creates a cultural and political genealogy to stage a pedagogy of citizenship where his body, unmarked as male and white because it mirrors the bodies of those former leaders, will continue to tell America’s story without any interruptions. The public is also reminded that the executive citizen is the only one invested with the symbolic capital to continue this legacy. The public’s longings for a powerful president and wholeness urge citizens to vest power and trust in a singular individual who can symbolically make coherent and whole a divided, heterogeneous nation.<sup>23</sup>

Reagan ends his first address to the American public with the story of Martin Treptow, a man who left his barbershop in 1917 to go to France to fight with the famous Rainbow Division. He was killed trying to carry a message between battalions and legend has it that

...on his body was found a diary. On the flyleaf under the heading, “My Pledge,” he had written these words: “America, must win this way. Therefore, I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone.” (1)

Reagan’s message to the American public is clear: he expects the public to be like Martin Treptow, to sacrifice, to work, to save, and happily fight on behalf of the nation that he now leads and embodies. In this story, Reagan asks his citizenry to mimic this strength

and resolve. Alone we must act because we cannot—and should not—depend on government to improve the nation; we can only depend on ourselves. Creating this emotional construct of the nation as united and self-sacrificing romanticizes the presidency and allows Reagan to recast the nation as a family, where Reagan sits at the head of the table, mediating the public's relationship to civic and political life. In turn, Reagan feels empowered to conflate patriotism and economic liberty. In performing the language and body of a corporate executive, Reagan provides a new image of presidential leadership that focuses the public's attention away from domestic and international issues that do not revolve around the economy and economic liberty.

Reagan's performance of executive citizenship exposes a number of competing ideologies about American democracy. Washington and Jefferson managed successful careers as two of the nation's first leaders; however, their stewardships were also fraught with competing policies that threatened the dominant myths about democracy. Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence, which contains one of the most famous lines in the American lexicon, "All Men Are Created Equal," while Jefferson himself was a slaveholder. Executive citizens, such as Reagan, contribute to the ongoing cultural fiction that ignores and elides historical realities by mapping grand narratives on to their bodies in order to normalize citizenship and create a bond of identification with national ideals and with ideal citizens. These grand narratives that normalize cultural fictions as historical realities and secure power in the image of a singular subject (the president), who is often male, heterosexual, white (until recently), and wealthy, continually reinscribe as "everyman" what is in fact a privileged social group.

In 1984, the economy was in an upswing and oil prices were falling, causing many to ignore the mounting federal deficit; and Reagan, the Teflon president, was wildly popular despite several international debacles.<sup>24</sup> Walter Mondale, Reagan's electoral opponent, made two campaign choices which ultimately backfired: selecting a woman, Geraldine Ferraro, as his running mate and claiming in a speech that he would raise taxes in order to cut down the federal deficit. Finally, the media's scrutiny of Ferraro's husband's finances put her on the defensive, which confirmed the public's stereotypes about women being unsuited to politics, and Mondale's failure to point out that Reagan quietly signed a bill raising taxes led to the campaign's demise. In response, Reagan succeeded in characterizing his opponent as a typical, free-spending Democrat, winning the election in one of the most lopsided electoral victories since 1936.

While Reagan further advances his economic agenda and reemphasizes the nation-as-family metaphor, one crucial addition appears even more dramatically in this speech: his rhetoric insists that the way to bridge our differences is through economic success, leading Reagan to consolidate the image of the executive citizen as moral CEO. Good citizens work hard, pay taxes, expect little from the government, and are a God-fearing people. Accordingly, *power* is an important rhetorical trope, for power, he insists, comes from the people. Recalling his metaphor of a New Beginning, Reagan proclaims

When I took this oath four years ago, I did so in a time of economic stress. Voices were raised saying that we had to look to our past for the greatness and glory. But we, the present-day Americans, are not given to looking backward. In this blessed land, there is always a better tomorrow. Four years ago, I spoke to you of a New Beginning, and we have accomplished that. But in another sense, our New Beginning is a continuation of that beginning created two centuries ago when, for

the first time in history, government, the people said, was not our master, it is our servant; its only power that which we the people allow it to have.

Dismissing the ways his presidential performances often look backward, Reagan stages what would become a hallmark of his presidency: the image of a self-reliant America where the privileged help the underprivileged out and where the people depend less and less on the government and rely on the help of each other. He frames this ideal in religious tropes, describing the land as “blessed,” as it was in the Beginning. As with any stereotypical patriarch where “father knows best,” Reagan’s performance is pedagogical, and his lesson is clear: citizens cannot blame government for all the nation’s problems since it is the public’s responsibility to control government’s power in a democracy. Therefore, he appeals to a national ideology that claims that in a working democracy citizens are agents of political power. Grounding his ethos as the executive who wants smaller government, Reagan imagines the nation as a collection of individual political agents, working together, who are dedicated to economic progress. However, in arguing for a smaller government, Reagan positions his body as the site of political change, so while he helps dismantle big government, the executive acquires more and more power.

Freedom, every American citizen’s birthright, will create a robust nation once again. How does Reagan define freedom in this speech? His definitions are purposefully ambiguous, but there are clues located in his discussion of the economy. Here Reagan justifies policies that encourage free enterprise and fewer government regulations, since according to him the U.S. will only remain exceptional if its economy is robust. Reagan makes one of the country’s widespread social problems a solely economic issue. Using a

term that makes his connection between race and the economy explicit, Reagan declares that “[t]he time has come for a new American emancipation—a great national drive to tear down economic barriers and liberate the spirit of enterprise in the most distressed areas of our country” (2). Reagan asserts that it is time to create the conditions for everyone to experience economic sovereignty, for this will solve racial, gender, and class (although Reagan would not use this word) discrimination. As his administration focuses on the economy and he acts as the manager of the nation’s economy, Reagan will reunite the American republic. Reagan’s rhetoric urges that because of its ability to solve social ills, the economy therefore is the most crucial issue for the nation to address and the most pressing responsibility of the executive. Like Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, Reagan will liberate the American public from economic suffering by instituting economic policies he claims will create jobs and economic sovereignty for all citizens. And this liberation will come through deregulation and union busting, the economic policies Reagan embraces.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, of course, these policies remove protections from the worker. Through invoking the bodies and images of former U.S. leaders such as Lincoln and Washington, Reagan constructs a model of executive citizenship that continues to forward his agenda as leader and protector of those who want to work and prosper, where “[a] dynamic economy, with more citizens working and paying taxes, will be our strongest tool to bring down budget deficits” (2).

As he closes his speech, Reagan summons four stories from our nation’s past to teach a civic lesson. Reagan returns to our nation’s father, Washington, our nation’s healer, Lincoln, soldiers from the Alamo, and settlers who pushed westward. These

seemingly disparate stories all share an image of the American individual laboring to make a difference and build an exceptional America. He compares these stories to a journey, an adventure, and casts the American people as its characters. Even though Reagan deliberately omits contradictions and corrections that might compromise and complicate the myths about America and its citizens, in doing so, he creates feelings that require love of country before anything else. Therefore, citizenship is not about dissent and disagreement. Reagan's good citizens are consumers and laborers for free market capitalism. In the end, Reagan produces and enacts the body of the executive citizen in hopes of creating conditions to encourage consumerism and speculation.<sup>26</sup>

In the end in both addresses, Reagan appeals to citizens' feelings of fear and hope in order to create a bond of identification with his audience for "America must remain freedom's staunchest friend, for freedom is our best ally and it is the world's only hope to conquer poverty and preserve peace. Every blow we inflict against poverty will be a blow against its dark allies of oppression and war. Every victory for human freedom will be a victory for world peace" (3). He creates a threat, a swollen government that blunts people's abilities to prosper individually, and he establishes himself and his policies as the means of combating that threat.

### ***George H. Bush (1989-1992)***

Although Reagan's terms as chief executive renewed national optimism, the national deficit was soaring out of control, the Iran Contra Affair created a major scandal, and Wall Street was in trouble following several insider-trading scandals and the 1987

crash. Marked by what many claimed to have been one of the most bitter campaigns in recent history, Vice President George Bush, portraying himself as the rightful heir to the Reagan revolution, used brutal television advertising to paint Michael Dukakis--who offered a traditionally Democratic vision of the government by promising to increase spending on health care, child care, education, and housing--as a weak liberal who would put the nation at risk by gutting the defense system and letting convicted criminals out of jail. Dukakis's campaign appeared to assume that voters would dismiss the attacks as unfair and tasteless portrayals, and Dukakis refused to counterattack until it was too late. Most political pundits agree the "Harbor" campaign video served the final blow. In it, the Bush campaign attacked Dukakis's character by exposing a contradiction in his position on the environment by revealing how dirty the Boston Harbor was, which resurrected interest in the Standell's hit, "Dirty Water."<sup>27</sup>

Despite playing dirty politics in the 1988 presidential bid, by making the economy a moral issue, George Herbert Bush reclaimed the position as the nation's moral patriarch in his first and only inaugural address. George H. Bush uses this occasion to redirect the public's attention from the previous administration's scandals and provides a vision of American national character as virtuous and noble. His speech resurrects and heightens the language of morality and repositions the president as the symbol of the nation's moral character. The aim is clear: Bush wants the public to see him as the natural heir to Reagan, but he wants as well to distance himself from the scandals that marred Reagan's presidency. His religious rhetoric provides that distance.

As the new executive citizen, George H. Bush retains much of Reagan's language, focusing like Reagan on labor and consumption, family, and the economy, but now using a language of morality to direct his leadership and manage public feelings. Like Reagan, Bush figures his audience as both products and agents of history. Like Reagan, Bush sees himself as the manager of the nation's economy. Like Reagan, Bush sees hard work as the cornerstone of the American spirit. When Bush enters office, he makes a point of addressing poverty and drug abuse. If America returns to its moral origins, the people can write a new chapter of America's story. And they will do it with a new moral compass. The language of morality then provides the language to reconstruct a purified national imaginary and teach the lessons of morality that citizens need.

Acting symbolically as the nation's moral patriarch, Bush frames his address with the metaphor of a home, locating himself at the head of the nation's table. His tone is stiff, much like his gestures and demeanor. Clearly, Bush is not as comfortable on the stage as Reagan, but this works in his favor to figure himself as a moral patriarch. As Bush declares, "[w]e meet on democracy's front porch. A good place to talk as neighbors and as friends" (1). Using the occasion and the physical space to reproduce the nation-as-a-family trope positions George H. Bush as the nation's father. In doing so, he creates an intimacy between himself and his audience. Like Reagan and presidents before him, Bush makes this connection through the invocation of America's founding father, Washington. On this day, the bicentennial inauguration, Bush narrates the famous story of the country's first inauguration, and with rhetorical nuance, Bush draws a connection between his first inauguration and Washington's. Bush draws a connection to



Washington by using the ceremony to say he took the oath, word for word, the same oath that Washington and all following presidents take: "...I place my hand...one which [Washington] placed his. It is right that the memory of Washington be with us today not only because this is our bicentennial inauguration but because Washington remains the Father of our Country" (1). The repetition of this scene in the inauguration of every president normalizes the body of the executive as a symbol of national belonging. Bush's speech, which hails Washington as the "Father of our Country" and reenacts the exact ritual all presidents perform, suggests that he will fulfill a similar role to the American public as its father. Bush uses the trope of Sunday dinner to set his audience in an intimate, domestic space, where he, like a strong, moral patriarch, will lead the family (the audience) in prayer before dinner. This ceremony signals how he imagines his role and connection to his public: as the moral executive. I intentionally use the word "executive" because he equates moral health and economic fitness later in his speech. By suggesting a close connection between economic and moral health, he presents himself as both moral leader and economic provider to the citizenry. He sounds the same notes as Reagan in his first inaugural speech in order to make himself legible as the rightful successor, the next executive citizen. Standing on democracy's porch, Bush posits "...this day...our nation is made whole...[and]...our differences, for a moment, are suspended" (1). In the prayer he offers, Bush invokes some of the same tropes traditionally attached to American democracy: the nation is a family and the president is its patriarch who embodies our shared values, values that are intended to unite individuals into a body politic. Like others before him, by presenting the body politic as a family,

Bush suspends our differences in order to create the feeling of unity. Configuring the people as a coherent union through the commencement of a prayer exposes one of the processes of executive citizenship, the religious and moral rhetoric that serves as a guide for citizens' behavior and a message about the moral leadership of the executive.

Bush couches American democracy in another very familiar executive trope: freedom. *America* knows what works: "Freedom works. We know what's right: Freedom is right. We know how to secure a more just and prosperous life for man on Earth: through free markets, free speech, free elections, and the exercise of free will unhampered by the state" (1). The use of anaphora, repetition of words in phrases, heightens the effect and the message of the word "free." Breaking the speech down by phrases, questions are posed and answered, giving a sense of urgency and momentum to this section of the speech: what provides this freedom? Democracy. What sustains democracy? The American Spirit. What is the American Spirit? Morality, work, and progress. On its face, none of these images is unusual or new; all presidents enact a similar narrative in their inaugural addresses. However, a closer examination of this image of the nation reveals how Bush suggests that feelings about freedom must coordinate with other feelings attached to culture and the economy. Drawing a relationship between the Almighty and democracy, which underscores democracy's moral superiority to other forms of government, Bush creates an image of America and its people as exceptional. By appealing to an American work ethic, H. Bush orients the public to see their contributions to the nation as God's right. Although H. Bush appeals to

constituents who want smaller government, he acknowledges that the American public has invested power and authority in the office of the executive to fulfill its desires.

Advancing corporeal metaphors, Bush argues we must create a “kinder” face of the Nation, thereby constructing a “gentler” face to the world, a face he had tried to embody in his campaign videos featuring his family.<sup>28</sup> But this begs the question: whose face is the new face of the Nation? As a condensed site for the enactment of political belonging, Bush’s body does not reflect change and neither does his political rhetoric. The repetition of these dominant national tropes reinscribes a national embodied community that perpetuates images of the white male executive body as the rightful heir to executive citizenship.

Despite acknowledging that people are suffering, H. Bush departs from the language of Christian charity and instead imposes the language of the economic functionary. Indeed, he says, although there are those who are “homeless” and “children who have nothing” and people “who cannot free themselves from enslavement to whatever addiction—drugs, welfare, the demoralization that rules the slums” the old way where public money could end these problems will not work (2). While those who are suffering “need our care, our guidance, and our education” Bush claims the government cannot be the solution:

We have a deficit to bring down. We have more will than wallet, but will is what we need. We will make hard choices, looking at what we have and perhaps allocating it differently, making our decisions based on honest need and prudent safety. And then we will do the wisest thing of all. We will turn to the only resource we have that in times of need always grows: the goodness and the courage of the American people. (2)

Through his metaphor of a “Thousand Points of Light,” Bush asks that we work together with the Executive Branch and the Congress to help out our fellow Americans who are disenfranchised. He uses this prophetic language to emphasize the religious, moral character he presents since “[t]he old ideas are new again because they’re not old, they are timeless: duty, sacrifice, commitment, and a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching it” (2). In drawing out these connections, George H. Bush reinvents the relationship between Christianity and capitalism, where the values of Christianity can inform the value-free culture of the free-market and where free markets are seen as both economically and morally healthy.<sup>29</sup>

In the 2000 presidential campaign, Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush sparred over domestic concerns. Because of a healthy economy, each campaign focused on a relatively small group of key issues, including prescription drugs, social security, education, and the economy, and each side claimed that the other’s economic plan would result in an increase in the national deficit. While Gore claimed Bush’s planned tax cuts were irresponsible, Bush maintained that a Gore administration would squander the budget surplus on big spending. Since the public seemed disinterested in foreign affairs and the budget was in good shape, each side attempted to appeal to the center, offering in their campaign videos warm images accompanied by soft music in the background ([thelivingroomcandidate.com](http://thelivingroomcandidate.com)). Conspicuously absent from the commercials was reference to the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the resulting impeachment that marred the last two years of the Clinton presidency. The election was one of the closest in American history, determined by a margin of 537 votes in Florida,

and the slim margin led to an intense legal battle, not resolved until the Supreme Court intervened in a 5-4 decision, declaring W. Bush the victor. As a highly divided nation watched the first inauguration of George W. Bush on January 20, 2001, an election stained by the scandal of election fraud, Bush's presidential career began. His administration has been considered to be by many one of the worst in the twentieth century, with Bush himself even more reviled than Nixon, but in his inaugural address W. Bush took the stage confidently and declared his vision for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century America.<sup>30</sup>

Like Reagan and his father before him, W. Bush equates freedom and the economy in both his inaugural addresses. For Bush, the American philosophy of freedom accomplishes a goal similar to that of his predecessors: to unite a divided national public, a public whose majority did not vote for him. A second important rhetorical theme in W. Bush's rhetoric is his faith, with religious images and stories emphasized even more than in his father's address. His narrative of faith is couched in America's earlier colonial narratives and sermons.<sup>31</sup>

W. Bush's first address in fact reads like a sermon, a sermon to instruct the public about how change must be reimagined with a focus on morality as a guiding force. Specifically, Bush's rhetoric in his 2001 Address recalls narratives about America such as the "city on the hill," a reference to the words of fiery Puritan minister John Winthrop. Accordingly, Bush calls for a unity to be achieved not only through serious labor by government and citizens but also from a power "larger than ourselves, who creates us equal, in His image" (1). While all presidents invoke a higher power especially in their inaugural speeches, as a born again Christian, W. Bush places its rhetoric at the center of

his leadership.<sup>32</sup> His emphasis on positioning the executive body as a moral symbol reflects a number of changing social issues such as family values. For one, it is likely a response to Clinton's last two years as president where many believed Clinton stained the office of the presidency because his affair with Monica Lewinsky. As he follows a long line of Republican leaders who include Reagan and his father, George W. Bush casts the U.S. and its national character in terms of Christian rhetoric, so he can claim that what unites us, comes not only from progress engineered by the American people, but also by God. A shared belief in the principles of Christianity unites the nation since we are not all bound by blood, birth, or soil. These principles, Bush urges, must be taught and embraced because these are the characteristics that make our country "more, not less, American" (3). This script based on a set of imagined shared beliefs makes Christianity the norm and connect Christianity to morality and economic responsibility.

Bush suggests in his speech that he will lead by the principles of charity and compassion, rhetorical tropes used to trace a deep historical connection between Christian values and the American spirit (much like his predecessors but with a greater emphasis on the connection between Christ and himself). In his configuration, the nation is made in the image of God. Whereas Clinton's performance of citizenship-focused on change, George W. Bush reclaims dominant—perhaps perceived to be more stable—narratives from America's national archive by resurrecting the images of the founding fathers as coherent, stable, and unchanging to create stability and unity despite speaking to a very divided voting public. Whereas most candidates from the Democratic Party claim to return to progressive values—even though many of their economic policies do not align

with progressive principles—George W. Bush reclaims older tropes to reestablish the values of neoliberalism and individualism as natural properties in American democracy.

In the spirit of Christian idealism, Bush pictures a citizenry that takes care of one another. Emphasizing a citizen's activity as the cornerstone of democracy, Bush declares,

What you do is as important as anything Government does. I ask you to seek a common good beyond your comfort, to defend needed reforms against easy attacks, to serve your Nation, beginning with your neighbor. I ask you to be citizens: Citizens, not spectators; citizens, not subjects; responsible citizens building communities of service and a nation of character. (2)

As with his predecessors', Bush's pedagogy of executive citizenship portrays citizens as actors, not spectators. The circuitry follows this route: citizens are agents, not vassals; citizens are engineers, architects, entrepreneurs, not dependents; citizens labor for the common good of all. George W. Bush circulates this message by appealing to the public's fantasies about Americans' inherent goodness and love for our fellow citizens. The threat to the nation is not ourselves then, but in those who threaten our borders and our values.

When George W. Bush invokes the Founding Fathers, he writes the religious topography he already sees as part of our common history, implying that God is on George W. Bush's side. Indirectly, W. Bush connects Jefferson to these values, citing a letter by John Page written after the Declaration of Independence was signed, where he asks Jefferson "Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?," the storm referring to the Revolutionary War (2). Relating the "storm" of the election

with the “storm” of the Revolutionary War, W. Bush attempts to quell his dissenters. Rejecting his presidency would not be dignified or courageous. The public must accept this transition of power since it not only is part of our shared national beliefs, beliefs that are written in the Constitution, but also because a higher power is always at play: “we are not this story’s author, who fills the time and eternity with his purpose. Yet his purpose is achieved in our duty” (3). In this way, W. Bush implies that an individual citizen’s behavior is not only a reflection of himself but is also reflection of his national identity. The subtext is clear: those who continue to resist his presidency are positioned as un-American. W. Bush’s charity and compassion will not extend to others who are enemies of the state. In his second inaugural address, W. Bush’s rhetoric displays the justification for hygienic government by casting terrorists as a threat to the national security and Americaness.<sup>33</sup>

George W. Bush’s 2005 Inaugural Address uses the tragedy of 9/11 to reconstitute the U.S. as the leader of new world order. Calling attention to the “years of relative quiet” the U.S. had experienced after the fall of communism, he draws the public’s attention to the “day of fire” where Americans witnessed their “vulnerability” and evokes feelings of fear. Given that, he creates an affective identification with the public through an appeal to the emotions of fear and continuing sadness to justify the policies his administration will continue to administer in order to protect our borders from “whole regions of the world [who] simmer in resentment and tyranny, [who are] prone to ideologies that feed and excuse murder” (1). Through the discourse of freedom, W. Bush positions nations “who hate freedom” as evil and the U.S. as good. While his



language creates a culture of fear and anxiety around the 9/11 crisis, he counters with his own rhetoric by embodying the role of the nation's protector to create a feeling of security:

My most solemn duty is to protect this Nation and its people from further attacks and emerging threats. Some have unwisely chosen to test America's resolve and have found it firm. We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation, the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right. (1)

In this declaration, George W. Bush casts himself as the site of security and moral superiority, a leader whose real and imagined power presents the nation as strong. Because he stands in for the people as a whole, when his body is both coded and enacts discourses of patriarchy, colonialism, and whiteness, W. Bush draws new borders between citizens who are American and those who are un-American by using the emotions of fear and grief to signal to the citizenry the threat posed by others who do not share in the values his executive role symbolizes.<sup>34</sup>

George W. Bush goes on to claim that “[w]e are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world” (1). Recalling imperialist discourse through the language of spreading democracy, W. Bush repositions the nation as outside of a global network of nations. When he locates the U.S. policy in the scripts of the executive citizen, declaring that “we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master and no one deserves to be a slave” since “[i]t is the honorable achievement of our

fathers...[and] is the urgent requirement of our Nation's security and calling of our time...to support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture," George W. Bush positions the U.S. as superior to other nations and asks the American public to defend this mission because these are the ideals we inherited as Americans. By casting this national goal in the language of executive citizenship, George W. Bush is able to collect the public and organize them through their national feeling about dominant U.S. stories that liberate oppressed people around the world and protect our national borders. Moreover, his unwavering resolve, represented through his "stay the course" rhetoric, becomes representative of our hard, unmoving national borders. Therefore, the American public can feel good about the nation's practices overseas because the symbol of our identity is protecting us and saving other people from dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, George W. Bush codes it as a white man's burden his allusions and metaphors.

In order to place himself in the presidential mythos, W. Bush draws a connection between himself and Lincoln in this speech and so grounds his administration's international policies in a legible script for the American public: "[t]he rulers of outlaw regimes can know we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: 'Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves and, under the rule of the just God, cannot long retain it'" (2). If Lincoln preserved the Union and abolished slavery, W. Bush, on behalf of the U.S., "speaks anew to the peoples of the world. All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: The United States will not ignore your oppression or excuse your oppressors" (2). Aligning his own body with Lincoln's allows him to capitalize on the feelings that

surround Lincoln as the Great Emancipator. Like Lincoln, his rhetoric suggests, George W. Bush will emancipate other nations from their oppressors, even if this requires brute force.

W. Bush sends competing messages concealed through his religious rhetoric: he asks the public to be obedient by supporting his actions in the Middle East, and he makes use of colonist discourse to cast other nations as either good or evil. He asks the public to have “patience in the hard task of securing America” since “[o]ur country has accepted obligations that are difficult to fulfill and would be dishonorable to abandon” (2). Nevertheless, he asks Americans to stay the course since our nation acts “in the great liberating tradition” helping “millions” achieve their freedom. Reiterating the script that hope begets hope, he claims that the nation’s actions have “lit a fire in the minds of men. It burns those who fight its progress. And one day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world” (2). The allusion to dark corners evokes colonialism by promoting narratives of expansion in order to civilize those who hate freedom and provides a justification that is familiar and persuasive: we are doing God’s work by rescuing and civilizing these people in the name of democracy.

But at the same time he asks the public to be obedient, he also wants Americans to be “agents of their own destiny” (2). In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, citizens were instructed to “go about your daily business” and “to travel” and “spend and consume,” instead of playing victim to terror (“Affective” 129). According to Sara Ahmed,

In the United States, citizens were, in effect, asked not to fear, and the nation was represented as not being afraid, as a way of showing the failure of the terrorist attacks to destroy the nation. As George W. Bush put it, “It is natural to wonder if

America's future is one of fear. Some speak of an age of terror. I know there are struggles ahead and dangers we face. But this country will define our times, not be defined by them. As long as the United States is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror." ("Affective" 129)

As Ahmed notes, the nation prevails by refusing to "transform its vulnerability and wounds into fear, a response that would be read, in terms of this narrative, as determination by terror rather than self-determination ("Affective" 129). Fear becomes the operative instrument to organize and mobilize the public to consume. Consumerism is translated into patriotism. Therefore, George W. Bush uses television ads reconcile the rising national debt with the cost of the wars by encouraging people to spend and consume more, evidenced in his administration's advertisements to get people to travel and fly again as one example.

In an attempt to mobilize people to consume (and reconcile the rising national debt with the costs of the war), he draws the audience's attention away from the crisis overseas and refocuses the audience's attention on our freedom to "find dignity and security of economic independence" (2). Acting as the nation's economic functionary, he tells the nation that in the "broader definition of liberty that motivated the Homestead Act, the Social Security Act, and the GI bill of rights" he will extend this vision "by reforming great institutions to serve the needs of our time" (2). In this role, he claims to ensure improved education, affordable homes, reinvigorated businesses, improved health insurance, and increased retirement savings so that Americans can be prepared "for the challenges of life in a free society" (2). In accordance with these reforms, reforms he will head, every citizen will be "an agent of his or her own destiny" by giving every American

“greater freedom from want and fear and make our society more prosperous and just and equal” (2). By conflating words like *agency* and *patience*, and attaching them to feelings of security and fear, W. Bush instructs the American public to trust his leadership and asks them to imagine themselves as consumer citizens with moral agency, given to them by the executive citizen himself.

***William Jefferson Clinton (1993-2000)***

In 1992 many leading Democrats declined to run because George H. Bush enjoyed high approval ratings, somewhere near 90 percent, following the military victory in Operation Desert Storm in 1991, and the party’s nomination went to Bill Clinton, who many believed didn’t stand a chance against Bush.<sup>35</sup> However, in spite of Bush’s many promises to revitalize the nation’s economy, it continued to falter. The Clinton campaign therefore decided to focus solely on the economy, prominently placing a sign “It’s the economy, Stupid!” in a window of his campaign headquarters. Moreover, even though Republicans took credit for the fall of the Soviet Union, the Cold War was not an important issue in the campaign, allowing the Clinton campaign to return to the nation’s domestic issues. These factors, including the surprisingly strong third party candidate, Ross Perot, resulted in a Bush defeat. Like Reagan before him, Clinton was able to capitalize on a failing economy and unite the nation through his use of rhetoric and the construction and management of the public’s feelings.

If the President embodies America, becoming the material manifestation of democracy, what happens when the body of the president becomes marked as “other”?

Bill Clinton's presidency illustrates a radical shift in how the nation understands the president, his leadership, and executive agency. His rhetorical agency notwithstanding, Clinton undeniably was one of the first American presidents whose body was placed under the microscope, scrutinized, objectified for public and political consumption and pleasure.<sup>36</sup> Several factors caused the nation to focus on Clinton's body more than any other U.S. president. One factor is the transformation in media. Privacy, reality television, and other innovations further blurred the already permeable private and public spheres. Technological changes such the Internet boom also coincided with national ones where the nation was increasingly read in a global context, highlighting and exposing the permeability of the nation's borders. These dramatic changes coordinate with Clinton's personal history, his staging of the executive citizenship and how people interpreted his performances, all of which opened the possibilities for his body to be marked as something other than normative and thus vulnerable to criticism and public attack.

In an insightful—now famous—piece from 1998 entitled “Clinton as the First Black President” published in the *New Yorker*—Toni Morrison declares,

Years ago, in the middle of the Whitewater investigation, one heard the first murmurs: white skin notwithstanding, this is our first black President. Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime. After all, Clinton displays almost every trope of blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone-playing, McDonald's-and-junk-food-loving boy from Arkansas. And when virtually all the African-American Clinton appointees began, one by one, to disappear, when the President's body, his privacy, his unpoliced sexuality became the focus of the persecution, when he was metaphorically seized and body-searched, who could gainsay these black men who knew whereof they spoke? (“Talk of the Town” 32)

The "message" written upon Clinton's body was clear: "No matter how smart you are, how hard you work, how much coin you earn for us, we will put you in your place or put you out of the place you have somehow, albeit with our permission, achieved"--the "you" here, of course, refers to the black bodies Clinton's performance of the executive citizenship signifies. According to Morrison, even though his skin's epidermis is white, Clinton performs blackness as the public maps narratives of blackness onto his body. Morrison's trenchant observation marks a shift in the way that critics treat and comment on the president as a body. How does an unmistakably white body signify blackness? One answer lies in Clinton's own rhetorical performance as executive citizen as well as the tropes of race that stick to his body.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas Reagan and the Bushes invoke the image of Washington to draw an association between them and the symbolic founding father, Clinton summons the first president to signal a departure:

When George Washington first took the oath I have just sworn to uphold, news traveled slowly across the land by horseback and across the ocean by boat. Now, the sights and sounds of this ceremony are broadcast instantaneously to billions around the world. (1)

Globalization and technology was rapidly changing the face and geography of the nation, making it even harder to create a singular image of citizenship. Like Reagan did in the 1980s, Clinton's performance of the executive script had to respond to how people were feeling in order to remain relevant and persuasive. Clinton invokes Washington to signal this significant shift: "[c]ommunication and commerce are global. Investment is mobile. Technology is almost magical. And ambition for a better life is now universal,"

underscoring new national trends: no longer do we have the Cold War at the forefront of the national agenda; the nation's new competitor is globalization (1). Therefore, the executive citizen must be able to manage people's feelings about a changing economy, one based less and less on domestic productivity. When Clinton acknowledges that Washington could not possibly imagine a world like the one we live in today, a transnational global stage where war is constantly a threat to world order, he authors new scripts of executive citizenship, a performance that not only embraces change but embodies that change. His use of rhetoric marks a dramatic shift in how we must begin to think about our obligations as citizens and our responsibilities to the nation and each other. The image of Washington, while remaining important, needs to be revised; it's old and out of date. For example, Clinton's youth and vigor—since he was so relatively young when he took his first oath of office—underscore this comparison between old and new, tradition and change.

If global competition is our new challenge, Clinton insists that the American people embrace change and make change our friend, not our enemy, a trope Obama will later borrow, embody, and enact during his first presidential campaign. Clinton acknowledges that currently we have not made change our friend; we have not taken care of our own national interests. Real change requires the nation to reinvent itself and reinvest in individual Americans who are experiencing only partial citizenship because of education and the economy. What will renew our confidence in change, according to Clinton, is to “invest more in our own people, in their jobs, and in their future” in the responding to global competition (1). Clinton both looks and talks the part of this



change, marking a radical shift in how he wants people to identify with the nation. His executive performance reflects care and empathy, reflected in his slightly hoarse soft voice and southern accent, his characteristic gesture of putting his hand aside his nose, all adding to his air of reasonable down home sense and giving his audiences the impression he is honestly listening to their concerns. This performance is different from the stern father or lonely broncobuster civilizing the wilderness. He emphasizes change to persuade the American public to get on board with different policies and a different national agenda. By reclaiming a progressive philosophy of leadership, Clinton suggests that if we invest in ourselves, we will be competitive in a global market.

Clinton invokes Thomas Jefferson to legitimate his call for change by declaring, “Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our Nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time” (1). Recalling and using dominant, accepted, national scripts, Clinton figures change as part of the American character and by doing so indicates that the public should embrace it. Although Clinton is not inventing anything new by simply resurrecting a quality of the American mythology that already exists, he does something different from his predecessors. He revises Reagan’s and Bush’s national fantasy to refocus the nation’s attention according to a new vision that includes the logic of global capitalism.

Reimagining America is the goal of Clinton’s Inaugural Address because he wants to direct attention away from the policies of Reagan and Bush decades. He insists we reconstruct government according to Franklin Roosevelt’s vision, a place for “persistent experimentation, a Government for our tomorrows, not our yesterdays” (2).

Our attention to the domestic policies will in turn improve our standing and image in the international community. Movement, progress, and change are what America needs to revitalize democracy. When Clinton invokes the past in this speech, he does so only to focus on the future, on change. Clinton's rhetoric acknowledges the past as a factor that determines our future, but instead of waxing nostalgic about the past, he insists we must move forward. We must learn from it so that we can reinvent it and reshape American nationalism and democracy, we must be agents of renewal and "[t]o renew America...we must invest more in our own people, in their jobs, and in their future...we must provide for our Nation the way a family provides for its children" (1).

Clinton also deploys the nation-as-family trope in his speech, but to a very different degree than Reagan and Bush. Whereas Reagan and Bush imagined their role as the patriarch of the family, Clinton's rhetoric sees the family as more dynamic where all members share power and responsibility. Near the closing of his first address, he asks the public to participate in America's renewal. A strong nation, like any family, cannot solely depend on a few people, since "no President, no Congress, no Government can undertake this mission alone...[Americans] must play [their] part..." (2). Clinton calls the public to

...a season of service: to act on [our] idealism by helping troubled children, keeping company with those in need, reconnecting our torn communities. There is so much to be done; enough, indeed, for millions of others who are still young in spirit to give of themselves in service to. In serving, we recognize a simple but powerful truth: We need each other, and we must care for one another. (2)

Creating a culture of care reshapes the public's responsibility to each other, but it is couched in terms of competition. In the face of these global changes and postnational desires and fears, we must remind ourselves we are a family and each of us has a responsibility to one another, not only to ourselves and our own interests. Whereas Reagan and the Bushes also use the metaphor of family and caring in their executive rhetoric, for Clinton, caring for one another is not the substitute for governmental help. Clinton's vision of citizenship asks us to do more than consume: we must write a new nation based on orienting ourselves according to our feelings of care for each other.

In his second address in 1997, Clinton explicitly calls the nation's attention to the unequal distribution of access to full citizenship in order to define the role of government: "[t]he divide of race has been America's constant curse" but "[o]ur rich texture of racial, religious, and political diversity will be a godsend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Great rewards will come to those who can live together, work together, forge new ties that bind together" (2). Since "Government is not the problem, and Government is not the solution," Clinton offers what he hopes will be the defining features of "Government for a new century...Government that is smaller, lives within its means, and does more with less. Yet where it can stand up for our values and interests around the world, and where it can give Americans the power to make a real difference in their everyday lives, Government should do more, not less" (1). By aligning the role of government with the issue of race, Clinton focuses the audience's attention on the feelings that circulate around and attach to racial difference. After all, "[o]ur Founders taught us that the preservation of our liberty

and our Union depends upon responsible citizenship” (1). In the end, being a responsible citizen means acknowledging— embracing—our differences.

Clinton draws on Martin Luther King to include more social bodies as citizens in his inaugural address and use this ceremony to remake the face of the nation. He says,

Like a prophet of old, he told of his dream that one day America would rise up and treat all its citizens as equals before the law and in the heart. Martin Luther King’s dream was the American dream. His quest is our quest: the ceaseless striving to live out our true creed. Our history has been built on such dreams and labors. And by our dreams and labors, we will redeem the promise of America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (3)

In the act of embodying King’s legacy and “pledg[ing] all [his] strength and every power of [his] office,” he asks the American public to do the same (3). This cultural script is telling, for it indicates a renewed promise to give equal rights to-all citizens. When Clinton includes the legacy of black America in his speech, he creates and affirms a new national social space where multiple bodies of citizenship are included. Whereas Reagan’s and Bush’s performance of executive citizenship implies that the idea of America comes more naturally to white, heterosexual Americans, Clinton revises the old by staging a new script to include more social bodies. In its context, this rhetorical strategy makes sense. In a global economy, the only way for the U.S. to stay competitive is to conduct business with people who are different than the imagined body of the U.S. citizen. Clinton asks the public to embrace difference, in other words, to position people as both American and global citizens. The borders we once held so dear during the Cold War no longer make sense. New technologies such as the Internet and globalization as a process highlight the fragility of the very concept of borders. Clinton therefore wants to

transform the image of the nation and its people into a transnational one and highlight, rather than suppress, our heterogeneity.

So if King's dream is the American dream, what does a renewed America look like? In this first inaugural speech, Clinton does not leave us with any clear answers; suffice it to say, he does suggest where we can make the change—in our hearts—since racism is lodged there. Here is also where he implicates everyone presumably including himself, in the problem. His use of corporeal metaphors such as the heart creates unity, national coherence, and asks that we look beyond our differences. If we can just retrain the heart to feel differently, we can solve some of the most important problems plaguing the nation. Compassion and love are the affective forces that will transform the nation and the body politic, and the “greatest progress we have made and the greatest progress we have yet to make is in the human heart” (2). Clinton constructs and enacts those emotions to create an affective identification with him. Clinton, therefore, uses tropes and stories to instruct the audience how to feel; in turn, these feelings are then used to organize individuals into a body politic that fits into his national imaginary, one that is more heterogeneous and reflects the global.

Like compassionate presidents before (Carter), corporeal metaphors provide the logic for Clinton's rhetoric of care. In turn, Clinton creates a national imaginary populated by empathetic citizens. According to this logic, if Clinton can change the hearts of the public, he can change the heart of America. The relationship between the body and emotion is a persuasive tool to deploy in a speech. Clinton urges his audience to realize that to deny one citizen the same privileges as another citizen based on the

color of her skin goes against humanity; it is dehumanizing; it is un-American. Including King as a kind of founding father, Clinton uses his second inaugural to inaugurate the emergence of global citizenship.

**Barack Obama (2009-20??):**

In a heated bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, Barack Obama came out as victor against his opponent, Hillary Clinton. It goes without saying that this fight was historic since it would have placed either candidate in the position to win the presidency as the first woman or first African American. In the end, one of the reasons Obama won was because he successfully leveraged a characterization of Clinton as an old Washington politician who wouldn't end up offering up the "real" change America needed. Undeniably, Clinton's being a woman didn't help her chances; more likely than anything else, Clinton's gender hurt her chances, especially after she displayed emotion during the New Hampshire primary.<sup>38</sup>

Many Americans, who were disillusioned with W. Bush's policies and his handling of the Iraq War, felt the country was on the wrong track and moving in the wrong direction.<sup>39</sup> Although the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were important issues, foreign policy took a backseat to domestic issues, especially the economy when the credit and mortgage crisis hit full force in September. Other economic concerns facing many voters were health-care costs, energy policy, gas prices, and rising unemployment. In response to these longstanding complaints, candidates within and outside the Republican party positioned themselves as agents of change, even though normally it is only the

party out of power in the White House who calls for change. Both parties, however, claimed to offer “change,” as opposed to “more of the same.”

Whereas Reagan targeted an older generation, the Obama campaign not only talked about change, but it also embodied it, both in Obama’s person and how he used new cultural products such as Twitter, Youtube, and Facebook for the first time to target younger voters. Both Obama’s and Republican candidate John McCain’s campaign commercials focused on the need for change, which is underscored by the rapid-response fashion of the videos, timed for the fast-paced news cycle ([thelivingroomcandidate.com](http://thelivingroomcandidate.com)). Moreover, many of the commercials reflect the shift in popular culture toward the tone of the Internet and 24-hour news stations, both of which rely on bold statements and humor to persuade. In the end, the 2008 campaign commercials are characterized by more aggressive, sharper claims than in previous elections. Capitalizing off new media and celebrity culture, which is exemplified in his web ad “Yes We Can,” Obama mobilized an unprecedented number of young voters who helped put him in office.

On January 20, 2009, Obama delivered in his inaugural address one of his most progressive speeches during his first term as president. The measured, at times deliberately unemotional quality of his voice, the down pitch at the end of every sentence, the professorial explanatory sentences, and his occasional and surprising witticisms cast him as unthreatening since he physically looks differently from previous executives. Unlike his predecessors, Obama uses the occasion to revise the dominant executive script by capitalizing on the nation’s feelings about what his body as a man of color represents. Specifically, Obama—while certainly using the same legible tropes Reagan and other

previous executives had used—adds new experiences to the nation’s narratives. Indeed, his body allows him to do more with race and difference than any other president, including Clinton, and he uses this moment to take advantage of the opportunity. Because of his race, Obama is able to paint a more textured image of America’s national identity. Obama’s presidency ushers in a new kind of American citizen even more than Clinton’s global one, a transnational citizen who crosses racial, spatial, geographic, and ethnic differences.

Obama casts the nation as in a crisis in his first inaugural address because of the impending economic catastrophe that although he inherits he will have to manage. Although Americans have faced times of prosperity and peace, “every so often, the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms.” With this language of impending crisis, Obama casts himself as a kind of biblical hero, Noah or Moses, figures who lead the downtrodden and bewildered out of danger. Obama notes that this generation of Americans must endure like others because “[t]hat we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood” (1). Obama provides a laundry list of some of the ills facing Americans: job loss, failing businesses, costly health care, and a substandard education system. Instead of placing the blame on a few, Obama outright blames the American people as a whole too, saying we have not made hard choices to prepare the Nation for a new age (1). Framing the nation in crisis—even though the U.S. is always in some crisis—creates in his speech an urgency that demands the public to react.

Unlike his predecessors, Obama spends very little time connecting himself to our founding fathers in the speech. Quite the contrary, Obama’s address is very different in



its content and tone than his predecessors. Since there are different histories attached to his body, he can use the occasion to discuss change, difference, and remake the national face: he can add a new script to executive citizenship. The “We” Obama addresses are associated with the “They” who built the nation. Obama reminds the national public that it was not the founding fathers alone or the work of those of privilege who built America, so he uses this opportunity to sing the praises of those whose stories are unsung. It is because of them, who traveled across oceans with all of their possessions in search for a new life, who “toiled in the sweatshops and settled the West, endured the lash and the whip, and plowed the hard Earth. For us, they fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg, Normandy and Khe Sanh” and they also built America (1). It was these people in the end who “saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions, greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction” (1). For Obama’s vision of the nation, America was and continues to be built by individuals who work collectively to give life to an idea. Most importantly, it is American’s ability to bridge our individual differences that makes America great. In order for the nation to be prosperous, he argues, we must continue this legacy, making sacrifices, overcoming our differences, and working together. Using words and his flesh to signify change, Obama creates an intimate connection to a diverse public and one that privileges community connections over individual desire.

Even though Obama can use this occasion to remake the image of the U.S. by embodying different histories and experiences, he is still limited and must enact traditional scripts of executive citizenship to remain legible and viable to the American

public. The one script that stands out in his speech is his focus on American productivity, and the language of corporate culture in order to unify and mobilize the American public around his national ideal. We must, he says, “pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America” (2). In the end, because it is the most pressing issue facing his presidency, the economy becomes the focus of this address.

In his most aggressive use of corporatism, Obama enacts the body of the CEO to signal the necessary change the country needs in order to move forward. Recalling that the world has changed, insisting America must respond, he instructs the audience,

The question we ask today is not whether our Government is too big or too small, but whether it works; whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the public’s dollars will be held to account to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day, because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government. (2)

Literally, Obama embodies and enacts the body of a corporate CEO who will reform the government in the same manner a leader in a business increases its profit shares, reenacting the language of Reagan’s unitary executive. The language of accountability and business meshes with phrases about helping families and dignified retirements to orient his public to accepting this method of public management. Americans will accept that he will manage our funds in this way, his rhetoric suggests, because he is doing it in our interests, the nation’s shareholders. Moreover, he asks the American public to stop claiming the market economy is good or bad, for “its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched” (2). For him, the real problem is that the market cannot

favor a privileged group of citizens; it must help everyone out. It is our duty to extend this opportunity—economic prosperity—not “...out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good” (2). While Obama will enact the body of the CEO in his management of the economy, he claims that he will do it with empathy.

Obama goes on to reinvent an America that works in partnership with the international community rather than as its leader or police officer, rewriting the image the W. Bush administration created. Therefore, Obama uses this ceremony to invent a transnational America, and the invention is rational; after all, “we are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth” (2). He continues by asking the public to move beyond its tribal feelings and begin to play our roles in ushering in global peace. Obama’s executive performance asks the public to feel transnational, which is perhaps one—of many—explanations for the continuing challenges to his U.S citizenship. His mixed heritage, and his body’s literal inability to correspond to other executive performances challenge narratives about U.S. citizenship.

When Obama tells the public that reforming the economy will be costly, he is asking the public to be dutiful. In spite of all of an ever-changing world, our success in this new frontier depends on our “honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism” and all of these we must accept ungrudgingly and seize them. These are the characteristics that define our American spirit and character,

This is the source of our confidence—the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed; why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration

across this magnificent Mall, and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath. (3)

By calling forth America's ugly past and rewriting it, Obama casts the U.S. as a nation built on change and progress.

Following Reagan's reformulation of the U.S.'s national identity, each subsequent president has added to the executive script in order to reflect national changes and trends. While certain scripts persist and are reiterated and reified because of the important cultural work they do for the presidency—the processes of executive citizenship create an affective identification to the president's body which gives the leader the symbolic and functional power to tell the public what is and is not appropriate to feel. Each president enacts the scripts and body of executive citizenship by constructing and managing citizens' emotions. Therefore, as a material manifestation of democracy, presidential performances become a central apparatus for feelings of belonging and the production of citizenship norms.

In the following chapter, I will turn from actual presidents to examine two important fictional popular cultural products, *The West Wing* and *24* to explore how these they alter and affirm the executive script. To fully appreciate the ideological and rhetorical significance of the presidency requires an engagement with the vast collection of discourses that also consider the cultural and political meaning of the office and the leaders who occupy it. Like presidential speeches, fictional televisual portrayals pacify, excite, and organize their audiences around fictional accounts of the executive's body and performances.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It turns out Obama is sufficiently aware of and sensitive about his image as a cold and Mr. Spock-like. In an interview with Barbara Walters on ABC in December of 2011, Obama called it the “biggest misconception,” going on to say that it was entirely wrong for the public to think of him as “being detached, or Spock-like, or very analytical. People who know me know that I am a softie. I mean, stuff can choke me up very easily. The challenge for me is that in this job...people want you to be very demonstrative in your emotions. And if you’re not sort of showing it in a very theatrical way, then somehow it doesn’t translate over the screen.” Obama’s comment reveals a sensitivity to a kind of theatrics of emotion, an awareness we have seen him capitalize on his in 2008 campaign as well as his construction of executive citizenship.

<sup>2</sup> A number of polls conducted a month after the Tucson tragedy show Obama’s approval rating soared ten points (“Poll Show High Marks”).

<sup>3</sup> See Norton’s *Republic*.

<sup>4</sup> See Neustadt’s *Presidential Power* and Barber’s *The Presidential Character*.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Jackson significantly enlarged executive veto power by claiming that he, unlike Congress, represented the whole people. A number of studies investigate the rise of executive power, especially during the rise of the modern presidency. See Nelson’s *Bad for Democracy*, Zaretsky’s “The Culture Wars of the 1960s” from *Our Monica Ourselves*, and Campbell and Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency*.

<sup>6</sup> By “televisual presidents,” I mean how the television media presents the president and what the president does and says, both fictionally and non-fictionally.

<sup>7</sup> See Campbell's *Presidents Creating the Presidency* for a more comprehensive explanation of how presidents construct the presidency through presidential speeches.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Hinckley's *The Symbolic Presidency* also addresses the president's own activity and how he has used certain mediums such as speeches to contribute to presidential symbolism, that is, the "extent of convergence, or similarity, between presidents' and others' statements" (14-15). If there is a convergence, according to Hinckley, then presidents should portray themselves in the following ways: as a symbol of the nation; as identical to the government and its powers; as unique and alone; as the moral leader of the nation, as the barometer by which citizens understand what and who is good and evil, and what and who is a threat to the nation. Most importantly, Hinckley notes, the president must be able to depict a similarity between himself and his predecessors while standing beyond his most immediate precursor (15). The public expects presidents to present the presidency as whole and coherent despite the contradictions in an individual citizen's histories and experiences. With contradictory requirements like these, these questions arise: how do presidents materialize the symbolic? How do they negotiate the contradictions inherent in their symbolic and functional positions?

<sup>9</sup> See Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

<sup>10</sup> In *Political Affect*, John Protevi charts and elaborates on the ways bodies politic function. In it, he divides them into three useful categories: personal, group, and civic bodies politic. In the personal, the individual is learns how to navigate the physiological

and psychological dimensions in order to participate in the higher order bodies politic such as the group and civic. In the second order bodies politic, or the group, individuals are composed of at least a couple but it can be larger such as a family. In this category, individuals learn to compose themselves among its members and between himself. Protevi uses the metaphor of a family cooking in the kitchen to show how different members work together to satisfy their affective—somatic—needs. In the civic bodies politic, or a third level order of bodies, “the body of the politic of a nation is composed of multiple levels of subordinate collective (second-order and above) bodies politic, which creates resonance or dissonance at the various levels. And bodies politic can interact transversally with other bodies politic of different orders” and most importantly “...the physiological and psychological patterns of bodies politic need not be rigidly fixed: the creative development or developmental plasticity of bodies politic means that the creation of new patterns is an essential element in their life” (42).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the Carter presidency, see Moens’ *Foreign Policy Under Carter*, Gary Fink and Hugh David’s edited collection *The Carter Presidency*, and Dumbrell’s *The Carter Presidency: A Re-Evaluation*.

<sup>12</sup> For an extended discussion of the relationship between movies and Ronald Reagan’s presidency, see Rogin’s *Ronald Reagan, The Movie*. In it, Rogin analyzes the formation of President Reagan through his Hollywood roles.

<sup>13</sup> By labeling Carter as “soft,” Reagan played off a contradictory discourse associated with the presidency. According to Nelson, “The president embodies democracy as a

paradigm of national manhood's unhealthy desires for unity, wholeness, and self-sameness. But the figure of the president is also loaded up with national manhood's ambivalent longings for a more heterogeneous democratic connectedness. The contradictory desires split the president in our 'democratic' imaginary. The hard body of the president offers us a strong guarantee for national boundaries and self-identity. The soft body of the president holds out for us sensations of democratic recognition and equalitarian exchange. We can't seem to imagine having both at the same time and we can't figure out how to live without either one" (*National Manhood* 226).

<sup>14</sup> See the website "The Living Room Candidate."

<sup>15</sup> See Chaturvedi's collection *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*.

<sup>16</sup> See *The Complete Book of U.S. Presidents* for an overview of the cost of Reagonomics.

<sup>17</sup> *Washington Post*, January 18, 1989, p. A-21

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Reagan earned the name the Great Communicator for his effective use of television in presenting the administration's program. Despite being described as aloof and intensely private by Anne Edwards, a chronicler of Reagan's early years, "his aw-shucks manner and charming good looks disarm those who from a distance have thought of him as a far-right fanatic" (qtd. in DeGregorio 634).

<sup>19</sup> See Nelson's *Bad for Democracy*. In her chapter on how the president became a superhero, she notes that after Reagan recovered from Hinckley's assassination attempt, he summoned "the royal symbolism of the 'king's two bodies,' identifying the body of the leader with the political body of the nation." In doing this, Reagan harnessed the



“healing of his body” to the nation’s economic recovery and drew on “a powerful theory that legitimated the sovereignty of the monarch” to implicitly present himself “to the nation as a spiritually sanctioned leader, imperiled and resurrected...” (62).

<sup>20</sup> See Blaire’s “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality”

<sup>21</sup> According to reporter Lou Cannon, a veteran Reagan watcher, Reagan’s experience as the spokesman for General Electric more than anything else turned him into a visible advocate for big business (DeGregorio 641).

<sup>22</sup> The link between family-based morality and politics comes from one of the most common ways we have of conceptualizing what a nation is, namely, as a family. It is the common, unconscious, and automatic metaphor of the Nation-as-Family that produces contemporary conservatism from Strict Father morality and contemporary liberalism from Nurturant Parent morality<sup>22</sup>. See George Lakoff’s groundbreaking study *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don’t* for an extended analysis.

<sup>23</sup> Dana Nelson argues that the longings for a powerful president, or the-president-as-superhero myth, “promises all the democracy with none of the work...it teaches citizens to admire rule by strong individuals and to abjure the messy workings—disagreements, slow debates, compromise, bargaining—of actual democracy,” a training she believes works against “our own abilities to navigate and wield democratic sovereignty” (*Bad for Democracy* 67).

<sup>24</sup> In the 1980s, the media dubbed Reagan the “Teflon President” criticism and blame for the many scandals and policies his administration initiated never stuck to him. For more on Reagan’s presidency, see Evans’ *The Education of Ronald Reagan*, Kiron Skinner and Martin Anderson’s edited collection *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, and Berman’s edited collection *Looking Back at the Reagan Legacy*.

<sup>25</sup> See Nelson’s *Bad For Democracy* and Berman’s edited collection *Looking Back at the Reagan Legacy*.

<sup>26</sup> Ironically, although Reagan calls on the public to work, produce, and prosper, during his two terms as president more people made their fortunes by speculating on the Stock Market and enjoying the benefits of deregulation that created competing social realities. In spite of Reagan’s call for citizens to work and produce more, his economic policies gave more power to corporations and disenfranchised individual citizens. Ultimately, the feelings of patriotism and belonging to the nation are conflated with one’s ability to consume and consume a lot. See Nelson’s *Bad for Democracy*.

<sup>27</sup> For more about George H. W. Bush’s presidency, see Mervin’s *George Bush and the Guardianship Presidency*, Oberdorfer’s *From the Cold War to a New Era*, and [www.livingroomcandidate.org](http://www.livingroomcandidate.org).

<sup>28</sup> See the “Family/Children” campaign video on [www.livingroomcandidate.org](http://www.livingroomcandidate.org)

<sup>29</sup> In “Can Homosexuals End Western Civilization as We Know It,” Janet Jakobsen argues that the rhetoric of “family values” mediates “between the economy and the ‘American’ nation under contemporary market conditions by offering a discourse that can

mediate between exploitation and domination. In other words, ‘family’ (rather than the state) mediates between the economy and nation, and ‘values’ mediates between exploitation and domination” (50).

<sup>30</sup> According to CBS news poll, W. Bush’s final job approval rating was at 22 percent, leaving the office as the most unpopular president.

<sup>31</sup> For more on George W. Bush’s presidency, see Greenstein’s *The George W. Bush Presidency: An Early Assessment*, Zelizer’s *The Presidency of George W. Bush: A First Historical Assessment*, and Draper’s *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*.

<sup>32</sup> For more about Bush’s religious beliefs, see Moens’ *The Foreign Policy of George W. Bush: Values, Strategy, and Loyalty*.

<sup>33</sup> In *The Queen of America*, Berlant advances Foucault’s discussion of state power by offering the concept of hygienic governmentality, which “involves a ruling bloc’s dramatic attempt to maintain its hegemony by asserting that an abject population threatens the common good and must be rigorously governed and monitored by all sectors of society” (175).

<sup>34</sup> Sara Ahmed argues that fear does more than defend borders; it actually makes those borders, “by establishing objects from which the subject, in fearing, can flee. Through fear not only is the very border between self and other affected, but the relation between the objects that are feared (rather than simply the relation between the subject and its objects) is shaped by histories that ‘stick,’ making some objects more than others seem fearsome” (*The Cultural Politics* 67).

<sup>35</sup> For more on Clinton's presidency, see Giles' *Constructing Clinton*, Schier's *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics*, and Drew's *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency*

<sup>36</sup> Several scholars have commented on the treatment of Clinton's body in public discourse. See Berlant and Duggan's collection of essays *Our Monica Ourselves*.

<sup>37</sup> In "Trashing the Presidency," Micki McElya claims that Morrison misidentifies Clinton with blackness and elides whiteness as a racial category. Instead, McElya argues that Clinton displays almost every trope of white trash. What Morrison argues is not just physical blackness but class status—poor white trash is in fact the same as blackness when related to those white men in power and precisely the same descriptors of laziness, stupidity, sexual impropriety are ascribed to white trash as to black men. That is why "trailer trash" Clinton is the first black president.

<sup>38</sup> For more on Obama's presidency, see Kennedy's *The Persistence of the Color Line: Racial Politics and the Obama Presidency*, Crotty's *The Obama Presidency: Promise and Performance*, and Watson's *The Obama Presidency: A Preliminary Assessment*.

<sup>39</sup> According to CBS news poll, W. Bush's final job approval rating was at 22 percent, leaving the office as the most unpopular president.

### CHAPTER III

#### FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF EXECUTIVE CITIZENSHIP

I don't care about your politics, this is America. You just don't shoot the President.

Trudy Campbell from *Mad Men*

We have a new President and we're all gonna be sad for a little bit.

Don Draper from *Mad Men*

In the third season of *Mad Men*, the penultimate episode, "The Grown Ups," restages President Kennedy's assassination alongside several main characters' growing dissatisfaction and unhappiness in their personal and professional lives. While some characters like Pete Campbell stay glued to their television sets to watch the media spectacle unfold and act as if all life seemingly comes to a halt, other characters like Don Draper act as if life must go on. Pete Campbell's and Don Draper's different reactions to the assassination illustrate two different perspectives about the role of the presidency in American in the 60s and in current American culture. Using the assassination as a subplot for the increasing crisis that each character faces, the episode suggests that the relationship between the president and citizenship is an important one. Campbell, who appears most emotionally affected by the assassination, recalls his problematic relationship with his father and his father's death. For Campbell, mourning the president's death gives him an outlet for mourning his own father's death, and his

reaction implies that the president symbolizes a powerful national patriarch and the people, represented in this case by Campbell, are his children. In Draper's case, the assassination figuratively corresponds to his failing marriage. As Draper confesses to his wife, Betty, that he has reinvented his personal history and is not the man he claimed to be, the literal death of the nation's patriarch corresponds to the figurative death of Draper's invented persona, which leads eventually to the dissolution of his marriage. The relationship between Kennedy's assassination and Don's and Pete's reaction in *Mad Men* presents a nostalgic and evocative take on a national tragedy; it also illustrates how powerful the presidential body is in constructing feelings of belonging and a national identity in the highly mediated, televisual world.<sup>1</sup>

I start this chapter, "Fictional Representations of Executive Citizenship," with a reading of an episode from *Mad Men* because the scene illustrates the American public's enduring fascination with the presidency.<sup>2</sup> As Jeff Smith argues in *The Presidents We Imagine*, Americans are increasingly finding outlets for that fascination in the number of fictional representations of the presidency in literature, film, and television.<sup>3</sup> In many of these representations, fictional presidents engage in serious political issues of the nonfictional day that serve to shape and redefine the scripts of executive citizenship in powerful ways. In this chapter, I argue that two of the most popular television shows of the last decade, *The West Wing* and *24*, portray the presidential body and the script of executive citizenship in ways that serve not only to entertain, but to comment on the actual presidency. Each series shapes, through its rhetoric, the audience's relationship to the presidency depicted on the series and in the culture. Even though each show

imagines the American presidency differently, both series explore the power of the presidency and the presidential body in the construction of a national ethos. I use my analysis of these fictional depictions to illustrate my thesis that executive citizenship is both a model for presidents and a process that describes and prescribes citizenship in American public life. As I have shown in the previous chapter, real presidential performances write and restage the scripts of executive citizenship, articulating how powerful the presidential body is in authoring the nation's identity by standing in as its symbol and by organizing the public through the management of its actions and emotions. This chapter continues the conversation by showing how the body and the language of the executive proliferate in other areas of public life, particularly the cultural conversation in entertainment media, specifically television. I argue that fictional representations of the presidency provide a way for the public to participate in the democratic process since these modes of storytelling make possible new ways of imagining the executive, without completely altering older ways, and shape the way the viewer feels about the presidency and their relationship to the United States.<sup>4</sup>

In this analysis, I focus on how each show depicts the presidency and its relationship to the imagined national audience. My analysis will draw from a number of theories, including *executive citizenship*, to show how even fictional accounts of the U.S. presidency help shape and reshape the national ethos. While it is tempting to make absolute claims about characterizations of the president and the citizenry, I put narratives into conversation with each other to provide a richer, more complex reading of the

fictional and the actual American presidency and its role in nation building and in the production of the executive citizen.

### ***Visual Rhetoric and Media Studies***

Fictional representations of the presidency reproduce national narratives and construct platforms for the staging or restaging of executive citizenship. As media critics Trevor and Shawn Parry-Giles observe, the “fictionalized representations of politics are powerful and accessible rhetorical forms, increasingly influential as they improve in technological sophistication and mimetic capacity” (“*The West Wing’s Prime-Time*” 211). Popular visual culture is a powerful rhetorical form, and it is immensely influential in imitating, and as Parry and Giles point out, in influencing public life, especially political life. Critical theorists Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf remind us as well that mimesis should not be taken for granted; the mimetic process describes and creates a material reality and “designates not a passive process of reproduction but the process of creation, representation, and enactment” (*Mimesis* 118). In television, images reflect modern life, and because the television blurs private and public boundaries, it remains a popular and pervasive form of popular culture. Pierre Bourdieu argues that the power of television media is threatening in its very popularity and pervasiveness in American life dramatically declaring, “[it] poses no less of a threat to political life and to democracy itself” (*On Television* 10). Whether it is threatening to democracy or not, these critics suggest that the mainstream television media shapes audience’s attitudes and actions. David Morley’s *Television Audiences and Cultural Studies* provides a thoughtful reading



of how gender, race, and class differences affect the way audiences interpret television. Providing a rich introduction to cultural studies, Morley draws on a wide-range of theories and a rich body of empirical work to support his findings. Thus the television as a rhetorical form engulfs contemporary life and experience and thus enjoys an important role in shaping and expressing political life and ideology.

By giving the symbolic presidency material form, televisual depictions of the presidency attempt to give audiences access to an otherwise elusive figure who symbolizes the nation's cultural, social, economic, and political history. The president's body becomes an important site for rhetorical power because the fictional imitations pretend authenticity but have no requirement to actual authenticity, whereas the non-fictional representations in ads or news broadcasts claim objective, authentic reporting. In truth, both non-fictional and fictional depictions are several steps removed from reality; the presidency is performative when the actual president speaks or is analyzed, and this creates representational texts of the presidency to interpret. The non-fictional performances are interpretations and/or reactions to real presidencies. Therefore, to get a fuller picture of executive citizenship and its operations, it is important to read the non-fictional and fictional representations together.

From the time of the 1960s and especially since the first televised debate between Kennedy and Nixon where the way a president *acted* (that is, became an actor on television) assumed great importance, fictional accounts of the presidency on television and in film grew. In the 1990s alone, there were thirty-one films featuring the executive, executive staff members, or the president's family.<sup>5</sup> In addition to movies, television

dramas and situation comedies frequently reference or center on the presidency in popular shows like *The Kennedys*, *24*, *The West Wing*, *30 Rock*, *Political Animals*, *Parks and Recreation*, and *Mad Men*. The fictional accounts might coordinate or work in contrast to the non-fictional representations, which have also saturated popular culture with twenty-four hour news shows and other forms of political entertainment. Each of these instances of presidential performance constantly reminds the public the Office has a body. Because of television, in fact, more than ever presidents use their bodies to persuade.<sup>6</sup>

The range of representational texts of the executive creates significant cultural meaning for the nation and its citizens. Although the “real” may never be known, these texts do a significant amount of cultural work in offering perspectives on reality: they offer sites of resistance, open up sites for new modes of thinking, create new social formations, create a sense of belonging and national identification, become modes of critique, and instruct audiences in civic responsibility and participatory democracy. For the transaction between representation and audience to work, however, there must be some plausibility to the depiction. Many texts therefore borrow from legible cultural narratives to create a sense of authenticity. The narratives, and the variety of print, visual and audio media that define political life and meaning, create a powerful intertextual relationship that audiences are affected by, even if unconsciously. Stories of the presidency then become a form of emotional and political pedagogy for audiences, reflecting the hopes and fears of the producers and the public. They might be political critique, endorsement, or imaginations of how the present moment will become historical.

Whatever they are, fictional representations of the presidency are more than mere representations of a situation; they are participants in it, makers and transmitters of what Kathleen Stewart calls ordinary affects, which are “public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they’re also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. They give circuits and flows the forms of a life” (*Ordinary Affects* 3). These representational stories construct an intimate public that structures how people relate and identify to leaders.

Emily Nussbaum, cultural and television critic for the *New York* magazine, describes the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the best in television. Comparing past television to the sixties with music and the seventies with movies, Nussbaum writes, “[i]t was a period of exhilarating craftsmanship and formal experimentation, accompanied by spurts of anxious grandiosity (for the first half of the decade, fans compared anything good to Dickens, Shakespeare, or Scorsese, because nothing so ambitious had existed in TV history” (“When TV Became Art” 2). What Nussbaum suggests is that television is one of the most interesting, complicated, and frustrating mediums available and plays an increasingly important role in citizens’ civic and political lives and their understanding of the Commander in Chief.

Rather than casting television as a popular form that dupes its audiences, as some critics of popular television have done, television’s function is both significant and instructive.<sup>7</sup> As television critic Margaret Morse indicates, it links “the symbolic and immaterial world on the monitor with an actual and material situation of reception” (Morse 18).<sup>8</sup> As people balance their readings and experiences of the texts of television

against their personal or group lived experiences, they participate, or believe they do, in the democratic process through television by making individual decisions, weighing the various claims, and considering seriously the issues of the day. Since democracy is a process and it changes as participants engage emotionally, logically, ethically, and ideologically in its actions—it is not only governance—the ways in which television depicts the president, making him or her vulnerable or strong for example, affects the public's attitudes and beliefs. As well, television can create a social space to produce and reproduce narratives about democracy, the nation, and citizenship.

Television helps create a national community through its depictions of the executive in a number of ways. John Hartley argues that television “...*gathers populations* which may otherwise display few connections among themselves and positions them as its audience ‘indifferently,’ according to all views the same ‘rights’ and promoting among them a sense of common identity *as television audiences*” (“Democratainment” 527). Television crosses public and private boundaries; many, if not most, television shows invite the viewer into the private lives of the series’ characters. In *The West Wing*, for example, audiences are invited into the president’s home, not just the Oval Office, and the personal view creates a feeling of having access to a figure who may otherwise seem inaccessible. The presidency is made human with this focus on the private as well as the public life of the president.

As television helps construct what Lauren Berlant calls a “national fantasy” within this highly mediated, filtered system, citizenship gets reconstructed as a media citizenship that overlays the civil, political, social, and economic forms of citizenship.

Both series render a model of citizenship visible, shaping the public's relationship to the U.S.. However, as John Hartley observes this new form of citizenship is not in competition with other forms but is "a successor, covering and further embedding previous forms" ("Democratainment" 527). Television embeds and covers other civic forms, so the method of citizenship is to watch shows like *The West Wing*. In other words, television builds upon the national fantasy, since it captures beliefs on screen, packages them, and distributes them to audiences for viewers to comment and evaluate those beliefs and actions. *The West Wing* frequently levels a critique against human rights violations, both domestic and international, while simultaneously committing acts against humanity to protect America.<sup>9</sup> In "The Stormy Present," whose title references Abraham Lincoln's quote, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the story present," pro-democracy protests break out in Saudi Arabia and the protestors surround a compound containing fifty Americans. Bartlet must decide whether he will support the Saudi regime or disrupt the fragile status quo by supporting the protestors. In such instances, the series reinforces the point that America is exceptional, and often in order to preserve freedom and democracy, we must engage in acts of violence. The show succeeds in orienting the viewer to sympathize with the Bartlet who painfully deliberates and agonizes over decisions that justify the use of violence.

The conflation of the media and politics in everyday life is unavoidable. More and more citizens participate in political life through new media.<sup>10</sup> With the rise of social media, for example, the public can both follow and participate in politics by clicking the mouse button. This conflation media and civic action is important for several reasons.

For one, it further narrows the divide between public and private lives. While these identities are always under construction, the media's depiction of political life instructs individual performances by influencing how citizens feel about the nation's leaders and about their access to and participation in the democratic process. As Stuart Hall has argued about the function of the BBC, national broadcasting did not simply reflect the makeup of a preexisting nation, but was rather "an instrument, an apparatus, a 'machine' through which the nation was constituted. It produced the nation which it addressed: it constituted its audience by the ways it represented them" ("Which Public" 32). The way the media construct the president and how presidents use the media play central roles in how citizens define and express their own political rights and feelings. More than any other medium, portrayals of the government on television affect the ways viewers participate in the democratic process.

Visual culture is by nature highly intertextual, where images, sounds, and space are read onto one another, creating multiple layers of meanings and multiple subjective responses. Visual culture is not only about what is represented but also how it is represented, how it is seen, and what is available to sight. In "Visual Culture," for example, Irit Rogoff argues that

[t]o some extent the project of visual culture has been to try to repopulate space with all the obstacles and all the unknown images, which the illusion of transparency evacuated from it. Space...is always differentiated: it is always sexual or racial; it is always constituted out of circulating capital; and it is always subject to the invisible boundary lines that determine inclusions and exclusions. (390)

Since images combine so many different elements--textual, audio, verbal, visual--analysis is complex. As Scott McCloud describes it, there is a vocabulary to the image. In his *Understanding Comics*, McCloud painstakingly analyzes comics and illustrations, showing how dynamic the relationship becomes between reader and writers, how kinds of symbols—words, drawings, white space—work in concert to create meaning, and in this way, the image has its own vocabulary. An image can be a photograph, an icon, a symbol, a drawing, a painting, a word, and in television, all of these elements are combined with moving copies of actors and space. How television uses sound and constructs space, how it uses images and movement, therefore, have significant implications for the message or argument being constructed. In *24* and *The West Wing*, movement, music, and settings construct representations of the executive and of the political landscape. Reading television as a rhetorical space provides a rich source for exploring representations of the presidency and unearths the often ignored or assumed rhetorical elements of space and movement that enhance the persuasive power.

Like other cultural objects, image(s) structure our feelings and shape our private and public experiences. Since citizenship is a felt subjectivity, the ways an image constructs and circulates emotions have the power to either create a sense of belonging or a feeling of intense alienation. How then does television construct emotions and shape experiences? I borrow Raymond Williams' theory of a "structure of feeling" because it identifies the simultaneously cultural and discursive dimension of our experience, while not neglecting that these experiences are felt and embodied. According to Williams, this process is difficult to define because it requires us to go beyond "formally held and

systematic beliefs...[i]t is concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable...over a range from formal assent with private dissent to more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs acted and justified experiences” (*Marxism* 132). In many ways, television is the ideal medium to structure feelings because of its relationship to domesticity and its visual, verbal, and textual content.<sup>11</sup> The reproduction of citizenship and the presidency on television works to normalize dominant beliefs about the U.S. and reconstruct new national values. Although it is clearly one goal, fictional presidential representations on television are not only about persuasion through the management of national feelings, but these portrayals also present the executive as a commodity and redefine the role of the presidency in national life.

In *The West Wing*, the theme song in the opening credits, the still images of the presidency that open each episode, and the setting of rooms in the White House create the patriotic mood for the spectator. The camera juxtaposes intercut color film clips of the series with black and white stills of the president deep in thought, reminding viewers of the Kennedy White House. The final image of President Bartlet in the opening credits is a simulacrum of “The Loneliest Job,” a photograph of John F. Kennedy who is hunched over a desk looking out the south window of the Oval Office. These images and sounds create feelings of nostalgia about the presidency and the American idealism that Kennedy embodied.<sup>12</sup> The setting of the White House positions the audience as both voyeur and participant; people watch and assign meaning to the inner workings of the presidency’s private and public life. There are elaborate set designs such as the capitol building, the



family quarters, the Oval Office, and Bartlet's private home in New Hampshire. The show is shot in Washington with its highly symbolic buildings and spaces used frequently in the series, and authenticity is further heightened by characters' discussions of actual current political issues in the news. In addition, the show manipulates time-space dynamics visually through fast-paced dialogue and fast-paced movement to present an image of reality.<sup>13</sup> Although viewers are typically positioned as students who learn a civic lesson in each episode, *The West Wing* holds multiple perspectives (several episodes are told from a senior staff member's point of view, for example) which becomes a kind of imitation of the democratic process in action, always moving, always changing--always in process. Nevertheless, despite holding multiple points of view, the focus always returns to President Bartlet's worldview. In the end, his viewpoint trumps all other characters in the show. In one telling example from "The Women of Qumar," CJ Craig is outraged about the administration's decision to sell arms to Qumar, a fictional country in the Middle East, because of its treatment of women. The staff is surprised by her emotional outburst, treating her as though she does not understand foreign policy. In the end, during a discussion with the National Security Advisor, Craig who is unable to enact a change, leaves the viewers with a point of view that challenges the "tough" decisions the Bartlet has to make: "I don't suggest foreign policy around here...I don't know how we can tolerate this kind of suffering anymore...The point is that Apartheid was an East Hampton clambake compared to what he laughingly refer to as the 'life' these women lead and if we sold M1A1s to South Africa fifteen years ago, you'd have set this building on fire" ("The Women of Qumar"). Through the use of these visual and aural rhetorical

techniques, *The West Wing* achieves an astonishing level of mimetic verisimilitude and a clear rhetorical stance on the power of the president.

Also deliberate in its use of space, *24* moves spectators into a variety of locations that produce very different effects from the Washington and White House setting of *The West Wing*. As the audience experiences the show through hero Jack Bauer's point of view, executive authority and agency are presented as ineffective and weak, incapable of confronting and solving the problems presented by rogue nations, terrorist threats and political treachery. In many episodes, national security, in fact the very life of the country, depends on the actions of Jack Bauer. *24* suggests that it is not the president or his government who can protect the American people. Our security depends on super citizens who have the freedom and the bravery to operate outside the law. Urban landscapes such as Los Angeles and New York City become the spaces in which Bauer operates. Unlike most episodes in *The West Wing*, Bauer is not confined to an office setting—he in fact cannot effectively operate in that space. The CTU headquarters looks like a high tech prison: it is dark, there are no windows, and there is no privacy, and Bauer is constantly leaving it or is ejected from it. In the *The West Wing* viewers are taught to see the presidency as effective, though flawed whereas *24*'s viewers are taught to see it as impotent or even malevolent. *The West Wing* replicates the processes of executive citizenship by sentimentalizing the presidency and in its depiction of president Bartlet; *24* asks viewers to be suspect of the presidency and the president. *24* removes the heroic script that is attached to the executive's body and relocates them on to the body of Bauer. In effect, each show presents a very different vision of how the public should

interact with the president and the government. In *The West Wing*, viewers are led to trust Bartlet and his administration; the series implies that the country needs him and the *ethos* he provides. In *24*, viewers learn they cannot trust or depend on the president or the government to operate effectively, and that the president must solicit the help of individuals who operate outside the law to solve national problems.

As another rhetorical agenda, *The West Wing* and *24* both offer a vision of a multicultural and internationalized body politic while simultaneously normalizing unmarked whiteness despite very different depictions of the presidency. In *The West Wing*, for instance, the backdrop of all episodes is replete with representations of national heroes such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. These historical allusions promote both the individualism of Bartlet's presidency since Bartlet, like these great leaders once did, is the sitting president and will have to make tough decisions on his own *and* suggest that he is part of a historical racial tradition. As Perry-Gilles says, the country's "historical and on-going commitment to whiteness is this ultimate position of power" (*The Prime-Time* 98). In *24*, even while two of the presidents depicted in the series are African American, the power lies not only with the president, but also with the character of the white Jack Bauer, who also symbolizes a number of other powerful historical markers such as the cowboy, to nurture a common American vision of both individualism, isolated freedom, and self-made rules.

Moreover, *The West Wing* dramatizes democracy as action, as a method as well as a governmental form. Ordinary citizens—the show's spectators—are encouraged to believe that they should have access to their leaders who represent them and who should

act on the public's wishes. As it models the interaction between citizen and president, the show makes its audience into members of a "family." The idea of family is reflected in Bartlet's relationship to his senior staff, with the staff as responsible to the president as well as loving, a nostalgic ideal relationship between children and father. In one of many scenes between staff and president in the series, Josh Lyman, the deputy Chief of Staff played by Bradley Whitford, must leave his duties to attend the funeral of his father. He books a plane trip back to Connecticut, and as he is standing waiting for his plane, Bartlet makes a surprise appearance at the airport to console Josh and offer to take the trip with him. A visibly moved Josh says no. After a discussion about Josh's father, where Bartlet makes it clear that Josh's father was proud of him and to trust Bartlet because "he is a father," Bartlet refers to Josh as his own son, indicating that although his biological father has passed away, his national one is still around ("In the Shadow of Two Gunman: Part Two"). This scene also gives Bartlet the confidence he was lacking during his first presidential campaign. After Josh leaves to board the plane, Leo, Bartlet's Chief of Staff, asks the president if Josh will be okay. Bartlet responds, "he's gonna be fine. Leo, I'm ready," reinforcing the executive script that a effective president must be a strong patriarch ("In the Shadow of Two Gunman: Part Two").

In both *The West Wing* and *24*, the scripts of executive citizenship proliferate. Juxtaposing these two shows and illustrating their different depictions of the presidency and the presidential body, the varying definitions and methods of executive citizenship become vividly clear.

### *National Fantasies in The West Wing*

Because government should be a place where people come together and no one gets left behind. An instrument of good. And that's exactly what we heard in the State of the Union the next night.

Will Bailey quoting Toby Zeigler, *West Wing*

NBC debuted *The West Wing* on September 22, 1999. Created by Aaron Sorkin, the program features the activities of the staff in President Josiah Bartlet's White House. The series examines the ways in which the "message" of the West Wing is crafted and disseminated to the public. Much of the show's success resulted from its alleged "realism," with many former White House staff members commenting that the show portrays what the presidency is really like.<sup>14</sup> For many Americans, *The West Wing* in addition offered up a promise of change, a sign of hope in the midst of the public's general sense of malaise and disillusionment with the Clinton and Bush Administrations, both marred by scandal and unpopular action. *The West Wing*'s commercial success is in part due to its presentation of the ideal president, not necessarily its depiction of an authentic, or even viable, president. The series constructs Josiah Bartlet as the representative presidential character, who is as Linda Horwitz and Holly Swyers observe a "'cultural figure' invested with 'authority, legitimacy, and power' and who functions, 'as a site on which American political culture is written and exchanged'" ("Why Are All" 120). In fact, Sorkin's series reinforces the connection between the president's role and his corporeal self. It "refuses our impulse to separate the man from office—refusing, at almost every level, to allow us to divorce the character of Josiah 'Jed' Bartlet from his

job as president...[and] regularly includes moments...that highlight the *impossibility* of separating [Bartlet's body] for either political or personal gain" (Hayton 67). Perhaps the most evident example of this integration of physical and symbolic self is Bartlet's role as *patria patrii*: father of three daughters and father of the nation. In making the personal president and his family an instance of the public president and his nation, *The West Wing* positions the presidential body as the site of national activity.

As the epigraph to this section suggests, democracy is both sentimental and pragmatic in the U.S. Through its fictional depiction of "the real," this scene from the epigraph above highlights the limitations as well as the possibilities in the democratic process and structures that narrate the U.S. and constitute the country's citizens. While William Bailey's sentiment is certainly "noble" and "virtuous," a closer examination exposes troubling machinations of how *The West Wing* constructs the audience in normative, legible social groups. Even though there are plenty of characters that are women or people of color in powerful roles, these characters often stand in for the particular social group they represent. Because the series presents itself as a "realistic" portrayal of the day-to-day operations of the White House and that portrayal fulfills expectations of the president, his staff and the government itself, it ends up reifying national stereotypes instead of suggesting or even imagining alternative paths for the viewer. The government's role is to "help" marginalized social groups, help the undeveloped world develop and keep it from destroying itself—in effect, help the *world* realize "democracy's promises." Through its portrayal of the presidential body and its blurring of the lines between public and private, *The West Wing* manages the audience's

feelings about family, home and responsibility to create an intimacy between president Bartlet and the audience.

In its formulation, *The West Wing's* focus on the humanity and the role of the president calls on the audience to respond as good, responsible citizens. The series suggests how important the presidential body is to the construction of the nation in its story lines about national fears and anxieties about terrorism, immigration and race, gender, and the economy on to Bartlet's body—which audiences learn in season one is not strong but diseased. President Bartlet's multiple sclerosis (MS) highlights his own corporeal vulnerability, and, as the symbol for the nation, his individual weakness implies vulnerability and weakness in the nation as well. His illness also enhances the sympathetic personal identification between him and the viewer, reminding the television audience that the president is not some kind of abstraction of the nation but a *real* person susceptible to disease and death.

Although Bartlet's failing body suggests the nation's vulnerability, *The West Wing* reestablishes his power and relevance through a number of important plot elements. Bartlet establishes his power and masculinity in any number of ways: through his role as commander-in-chief, his role as the nation's patriarch, his love of Western knowledge, his intelligence, and other visual cues. For example, *The West Wing* is notorious for its fast-paced movement and witty dialogue. Characters are frequently on the move in conversation, reinforcing the point that the work of the White House is never finished, always acting. Whenever Bartlet's character enters a room or stands before a group of people, movement and conversation effectively stop, and everyone pays respectful

attention to what Bartlet has to say. In the pilot episode, Bartlet is absent until the very final scene. Audiences only hear about the president, who has hurt himself after a bicycle accident. Initially then, *The West Wing* appears to focus on the activities of the senior staff, where the president will serve as an ancillary character. However, in the final scene of the episode, Bartlet is introduced to the audience. He enters the Roosevelt conference room, limping from his injuries, and scolds a powerful religious organization for pulling their support for a bill. Disagreement and discussion come to a halt, and Bartlet demands that the group leaves the White House. In spite of his physical injuries, Bartlet manages to end the disagreement because he is the president, providing the audience with a moral lesson about the relationship between government and religion. Devices and scenes like these show how the president is always strong and a focal point for national action.

One of the important ways *The West Wing* sentimentalizes the presidency is by reproducing the executive script that figures the president as the nation's patriarch where citizens are figured as the nation's children. As George Lakoff observes, the nation-as-a-family is an old trope, perhaps the oldest in the country, where the father is always the head of the family.<sup>15</sup> President Bartlet functions as the father figure in the series, and in the first few seasons, Mrs. Delores Landingham plays his republican mother who has shaped his psyche. This depiction historicizes and collapses notions of family, nation, and the presidency.<sup>16</sup> Bartlet's wife, Abigail, also sometimes plays the republican mother who is repeatedly forced to negotiate between her roles as a feminist and a career woman in a more traditional role.<sup>17</sup> There are several episodes that depict the president as father who delivers a civic lesson to the nation.<sup>18</sup> By representing the president as a father, *The*



*West Wing* suggests that citizenry is learned through the presidential performance of citizenship. *The West Wing* reconstructs the narrative that the nation as a family (represented by the Bartlet and his relationship with his own family and his senior staff) reinforces a conservative understanding of family and kinship.

In the second part of the season three premiere, flashbacks show Bartlet as he refines his speech for a major re-election announcement, after disclosing to the nation and his senior staff that he has multiple sclerosis (MS), while the senior staff work uneasily with an aggressive and arrogant political strategist to decide whether the president should publicly apologize to the nation. Many staff members feel betrayed by Bartlet and are angry that he has not apologized to them. As the episode nears its close, in a small elementary school classroom, Bartlet delivers a speech to the staff who stand at attention before him:

*Bartlet sighs and casually leans against the desk. There's a portrait of Abraham Lincoln on the wall. Leo and Charlie are standing somberly behind him.*

BARTLET: Churchill and FDR: serious men using big words for big purpose.

*Bartlet stops and pauses for several moments, like he's changing his mind about what to say. The staff look at him patiently and expectantly, like they're anticipating an inspiring lecture. He sighs, then speaks with great emotion.*

BARTLET: It occurs to me, I never said "I'm sorry." (pause) I am. (pause) For the lawyers, for the press, for the mess, for the fear. Bruno, Doug, Connie: these guys are good. They want to win. So do we. The only thing we want more is to be right. I wonder if you can't do both.

BARTLET: There's a new book, and we're gonna write it. You can win if you run a smart, disciplined campaign, if you studiously say nothing -- nothing that causes you trouble, nothing that's a gaffe, nothing that shows you might think the wrong thing, nothing that shows you think. But it just isn't worthy of us, is it, Toby?

TOBY: No, sir.

BARTLET:

It isn't worthy of us, it isn't worthy of America, it isn't worthy of a great nation. We're gonna write a new book, right here, right now. This very moment. Today. (<http://www.westwingtranscripts.com/>)

This scene makes Bartlet the writer of a new national ethos and the staff and the audience as students. In the classroom, they are ready to recite, ready to help write the new story that Bartlet will be the primary author of. Although Bartlet might have been deceptive in hiding his illness, his apology reminds the audience and staff that he is human and fallible. The scene uses the portrait of Lincoln behind him deliberately to recall and relocate the story of honest Abe in the person of Bartlet. Like Abe, the portrait suggests, Bartlet is a good, honest man. Lincoln's portrait also recalls the Civil War, a period of profound disunity, metaphorically diseased, like Bartlet's physically diseased body. As his speech argues, mistakes aside, Bartlet's administration will write a new American narrative, one worthy of America and its citizens. In this scene and others like it, Bartlet reasserts his executive authority and reclaims his body as the site of national activity by admitting his wrong and simultaneously claiming authorship over the nation's book. In this book, the people who govern the body politic will be honest, transcend the limitations of campaigning, and act on behalf of the people's interests, recreating the national ethos; their words will matter and shape a new way to imagine America and its people.

The emphasis on embodied writing practices is important. *The West Wing* privileges language embodied and performed as a powerful, persuasive tool to construct

the nation and improve the people who belong to it. In the end, by presenting Bartlet as the nation's teacher and by reestablishing his power, his body becomes the site where national activity will resume. The staff, the nation and the television audience must forgive him for his failure to fully disclose his medical condition so he will be free to accomplish something that's more important: write new national narratives. That writing is presented as an embodied activity emphasizes the important role one's corporeal self plays in constructing an image of citizenship.

Perhaps the most forceful image of Bartlet as a father/leader occurs in season 4 in episodes titled "Commencement" and "Twenty Five." As the season draws to a close, Zoey Bartlet, the president's youngest daughter, is kidnapped by a group of Qumari terrorists.<sup>19</sup> In response to the kidnapping, Bartlet temporarily resigns his duties as president because he wants to be with his family, and he worries he cannot effectively execute his duties as commander-in-chief while he is in such an anxious emotional state. While some citizens on the show applaud the president's decision to yield his power under the terms of the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment, others, including many of his staff members, worry that his decision is a huge mistake because they fear it makes him appear weak and unpresidential.<sup>20</sup> Their worry underscores a cultural belief that the president must always reflect the nation's strength and security. For a few episodes, Bartlet is temporarily replaced by Republican House Speaker, Glenn Allen Walken, played by John Goodman, whose persona is drawn from action-adventure heroes and from the Western, famously presidentially embodied by Reagan and George W. Bush. Compared to Bartlet, the Speaker is big, commanding, and decisive, and this difference worries Bartlet's senior

staff, causing Josh Lyman to declare during Walken's first press conference, that he seems "presidential," underscoring how important a president looks play in constructing an image of the presidency ("Twenty-Five"). The staff's reading of Goodman's performance of the presidency reinforces the idea that presidents should appear powerful, unwavering, and decisive. In other words, the executive should be a man's man, and his family problems should not interfere with his ability to do his job, especially since his job, as its symbolic father, is to protect the nation. While Bartlet's decision to yield power should be read as manly, it is not, reinforcing the codes and public feelings about national masculinity. That is, if the president cannot protect his own family, how can the public expect him to defend the nation's borders? Even when Bartlet resumes his responsibilities, several episodes thereafter explore how ineffectual he is as the leader of the nation. It is not until he confronts Speaker of the House, Jeff Haffley, about the budget that the program demonstrates that Bartlet has reclaimed his presidential authority and power. In a one-on-one meeting set in the Oval Office, Bartlet refuses to sign Congress's proposed budget and in doing so reasserts his masculinity, claiming that he is the president and presidents do not get bullied: "I'm not going to negotiate with someone who holds a gun to my head. We had a deal. I don't care if my approval ratings drop into the single digits. I am the president of the United States, and I will leave this government shutdown until we reach an equitable agreement" ("Shutdown"). After this confrontation, following episodes make it clear that Bartlet has won back both his confidence and executive power. Interestingly, Bartlet reclaims his power by asserting

his position as the country's economic functionary, revealing the complex relationship between the assertion of masculinity norms and global capitalism.

Although Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, two foremost scholars on presidential rhetoric and *The West Wing*, claim that *The West Wing* depicts a number of female characters in positions of power, *The West Wing* consistently reinforces the notion that men engage in political activity while women remain behind the scenes, allowing men to function as their political voices. Indeed, even while there are positive depictions of the women in the series, *The West Wing* often dismisses women's issues by subordinating them to "more important" national issues, further coupling masculinity with the executive citizen. One of the most telling moments occurs during a disagreement between President Bartlet and his wife Abby. In "The White House Pro-Am," season one, Abby becomes involved in a legislative dispute over a child labor amendment. Abby's staff is leaking information that goes against presidentially-backed legislation, and her action creates a conflict between spouses. In the episode, Bartlet chastises Abby for going behind his back and ultimately forces her to concede that she made a mistake:

FIRST LADY: I concede I was wrong about the thing.

PRESIDENT: Good.

FIRST LADY: However...

PRESIDENT: No, "however." Just be wrong. Just stand there in your wrongness and be wrong. And get used to it.

Despite the humorous tone of their interaction in the scene, Abby is nonetheless reminded of her role within the masculine-centered context of the presidency. In other episodes,

Abby is very contentious, engages with the president and the senior staff in disputes and wins, and openly disagrees with many of her husband's decisions and policies.<sup>21</sup> Yet regardless of her strength, her role in politics is depicted as subordinate to her husband's and the other men on the show.<sup>22</sup>

As with gender issues where lip service is given to equal treatment, the series addresses race relationships and immigration policies as matters of equality. Yet, Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles point out, in the show “renditions of race reinforce an image of white male presidency that naturalizes the locus of power for whiteness while reifying the subordinate and, in certain cases, disempowered lives of persons of color who spend time combating violence or are themselves self-serving principal agents in political puzzles” (*The Prime-Time* 117). In the world of *The West Wing*, Bartlet usually functions as the key political actor in debates on racial issues, and his powerful status helps to stabilize whiteness as the norm for a president and highest-level citizenry. In other scenes, conversations about equality are presented as removed from history or cast as too complicated for the government to act on them, so whiteness is exempt in more of the discussion except in cases of extreme white supremacy. Throughout the first season, for example, Charlie, Bartlet's young, black personal assistant, relationship to the president's daughter is repeatedly discussed in relation to the violent white supremacists who threaten them and lead to an entire Secret Service investigation. The assassination attempt that ends the first season is hatred directed against Charlie and his status as the boyfriend of the white president's daughter. In other instances of the retreat from the message of equality for people of all ethnicities and races, Middle Eastern or Southeast

Asian people are defined by violence or aberrant behavior as Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai point out in their article “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots.” In it, Puar and Rai provide a close reading of “Isaac and Ishmael,” an episode created as a response to the 9/11 attacks. Consciously or not, the series perpetuates the image of the dominant white, male executive as the norm because of the public’s desire for sameness, for its own ideal taught to them by the scripts of executive citizenship. As Dana Nelson argues, this desire for sameness of imagined unity is “...unhealthy,” a “unity, for ‘democratic’ homogeneity” (*National Manhood* 204-05). Although the final season of *The West Wing* centers on the presidential campaign of the first Latino-American candidate, Matthew Santos, Josiah Bartlet frames the first and last episodes of the season. Bartlet’s approval of Santos in these episodes suggests that Bartlet’s presidency authorizes and sets the agenda for Santos’s own presidency.<sup>23</sup> The scripts of executive citizenship of *The West Wing* persuade audiences that presidents are inherently good, tradition will be upheld, and women and minorities might be best guided by those who know best.

### ***Redefining the Terrain of Executive Citizenship in 24***

The Fox real-time action drama *24* premiered on November 6, 2001, featuring the hourly operations of a Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU) agent Jack Bauer.<sup>24</sup> Each *24* season covers twenty-four hours in the life of Bauer, using real-time narration. The show’s technical innovation, speed, stylistic and aesthetic innovation, and real-time countdown technology make for a thrilling evening of television watching. *Boston Globe* television

critic Matthew Gilbert proclaimed it “riveting, gripping, and altogether compelling” (2001). Although critically acclaimed, the show has also been criticized for its depictions of torture as effective and its negative depictions of people from the Middle East. These critiques suggest that *24* can be described as xenophobic, patriarchal, and nationalist.<sup>25</sup> Much like *The West Wing*, this series responds to domestic and international threats to America by deploying certain imagery and reproduces certain narratives to define what patriotic citizenship looks like. But in many ways, *24* offers a counter-narrative to *The West Wing*’s portrayal of the American presidency and presidential body. Unlike *The West Wing* that romanticizes the presidency, *24* casts the president and the presidency as weak, dysfunctional, and/or corrupt.

The *West Wing* and *24* both rework traditional national narratives of the presidency in order to create coherence out of chaos, but instead of portraying the presidency as the site of the narrative, *24* relocates power in the body of Jack Bauer. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles argue that central to “realism” in *The West Wing* “is its depiction of presidentiality as the management of chaos and uncertainty, reflecting the conflict inherent in the romance narrative” (“Prime Time Presidentiality” 213). Both series manage chaos and coherence, but *24*’s plot argues that chaos is imminent and inevitable unlike *The West Wing*. *24* appears to also suggest that the president is disposable; the series featured nine presidents during its eight seasons. As a result, *24* realigns the audience’s orientation from the presidential body to the body of Jack Bauer, who is portrayed as the nation’s super citizen, suggesting that since American citizens cannot depend on the government for protection, *24* suggests that we have to depend on



powerful individuals who ignore laws in order to defeat terrorism and threats to the national body.

*24* presents Bauer as a rogue patriot, a modern-day cowboy, who operates outside of the scripts of executive citizenship.<sup>26</sup> As I suggested earlier, this national fantasy recalls Ronald Reagan, who used the cowboy image as a way to present himself to the nation as heroic and strong, and George W. Bush, who tried to invoke this broncobuster character onto his own body. It is not surprising therefore to see the cowboy trope appear in a series that coincides with W. Bush's presidency. In "24 and Post-National American Identities," Christopher Gair maintains that *24* shares similar narrative devices to traditional Westerns. Comparing *24* to the film *High Noon*, Gair explores the ways the genre works in the television program. Gair claims that although *24* shares similar tropes with other frontier mythologies, it is ultimately vastly different. Particularly, *24* does not have a straightforward national narrative, for "the LA of [24] represents a fragmented, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic space of social and cognitive conflict where class, political, national, and transnational boundaries are constantly destabilized" (204). In part, Gair argues, this change reflects American television's move from its "traditional desire for isolation...and simplistic narratives of American supremacy" to shows that deploy the tropes of Westerns and thrillers "to interrogate other spatial and cultural boundaries" (201). *24* does destabilize traditional national and cultural boundaries by presenting the United States in a transnational context, suggesting we have new frontiers to manage and secure.

As it examines these cultural and national boundaries, *24* imagines a variety of diverse executives in the Oval Office. An African American, David Palmer, and a woman, Allison Taylor, are two of the presidents in the series. But the message of the show seems to be that it does not matter who sits in the Oval Office since Palmer's and Taylor's presidencies, like all the others in the series, depend on Jack Bauer to secure the U.S. from domestic and international threats. According to Peter Morey in "Terrorvision," Jack Bauer's violence is instrumental in underwriting and allowing for the liberal rhetoric of David Palmer; specifically, "Palmer's role is to act as a father to an unruly national family and to embody a racial rapprochement through which the modern enemy, the Arab, can be more clearly identified" (251). *24* therefore suggests that the scripts of executive citizenship are restrictive: sometimes requiring leaders to behave corruptly, other times exposing a weakness in imagining the president as the supreme leader. Bauer ostensibly takes orders from his commander in chief, but *24* suggests that the executive authority is ineffective unless the president endorses the violence Bauer recommends to protect the body politic and America's national interests, especially in a transnational world. Jack Bauer is repeatedly called upon to protect America's borders from a variety of terrorist threats, and his effectiveness in providing that protection reinforces the connection between political power and the white male body.

In *The West Wing* the father figure is unambiguously the body of Josiah Bartlet, while multiple father figures appear in *24*. Perhaps because of the cowboy hero who controls the action in the series, *24* has often been read as celebrating traditional and conservative notions of masculinity. According to Joke Hermes, *24* "experiments with

the gender inscriptions of its characters. If gender is not understood as describing individuals but social subjects...a different story emerges” (168-89). Hermes claims for example that *24* casts its powerful male characters as family men, while it shows many of the female characters with professional careers. Hermes argues that Jack Bauer himself represents a “new father,” protecting his daughter by teaching her how to survive and by learning from experience, a man “...who is exemplary in his ability to shield emotion and cultivate ruthlessness rather than empathy, beholden to no one but the ‘greater cause’” (172). Although Hermes claims Bauer lacks sexism in his relationship with his daughter, the show still suggests that to have a family is a burden. Further, Jack’s “good father” role is established through a series of distinctions from the various “bad parents” in the show—who just so happen to be racialized and gendered in different ways than Jack. In fact, the family often becomes the site for national crises. In season one, Bauer’s daughter and his wife are kidnapped, and Bauer is ultimately responsible for rescuing them. In the same season, David Palmer almost loses his campaign because of his children and wife. These two subplots illustrate a strong national discourse at work through the bodies of the David Palmer and Jack Bauer. In both instances, *24* portrays both families as dysfunctional. However, in Palmer’s case, the racially marked family depends on the protection of the racially unmarked hero of the show, Jack Bauer. As in *The West Wing*, *24* configures the man in power as a father whose job is to protect his family, a symbolic representation of the nation, except that in this case and throughout the series, Bauer is the fatherly site for activity and agency instead of the man who will hold the office of president.

Especially after 9/11, both *The West Wing* and *24* indicate through their plot lines that the nation needs someone to protect it. In the case of *24*—most explicitly—the show constructs a foreign “other” as the enemy. We must be protected from our enemies, and it is up to a special elite group of men, and usually just one man, to protect us. In *24*, this dynamic works by first provoking viewers’ anxieties about terrorism, then promising to alleviate those anxieties if the president (and by extension the viewer) will consent to torture and violence required to conquer it. In *The West Wing*, Bartlet typically assuages the audience’s anxiety, also provoked in many episodes. In the same way happiness works to turn people toward objects, the audience turns to Josiah Bartlet by *The West Wing*’s use of visual and aural technologies.<sup>27</sup>

*24* relocates power away from the traditional models of government and places it in the hands of small government agencies trained to protect the nation by using any means necessary. In addition to saving his wife and daughter in the first season of the show, Bauer is charged with preventing an assassination attempt on the Presidential hopeful David Palmer. The audience learns in the first season that Palmer’s daughter has been raped and later learns that Palmer’s wife conspires against him, an allusion to a racial stereotype of disordered black femininity and motherhood.<sup>28</sup> While the show depicts America in a transnational world, it clearly wants to articulate a coherent discourse about protecting U.S. borders and the nation’s interest within those borders. If David Palmer is a trans-figure, someone crossing traditional racial boundaries in his efforts to become the first black president, Bauer’s character reinstates traditional racial messages that recast white men in the seat of “real” power.

Although in season one Palmer confesses to his family's cover up, which might position Palmer as the moral center of the show and the nation, his weakness as a leader and his familial troubles mirror a larger national crisis: corporate corruption and international espionage which threaten national security. His failure to take care of his family becomes an analogue for his failure to secure the nation, at least by himself. *24*'s depiction of the executive creates a very different national imaginary from the one presented in *The West Wing*: because of transnational markets and the erosion of borders, average citizens cannot depend on the government—represented by the presidency—for protection. The rejection of the traditional imaginary ideal allows *24* to redefine national morality, endorsing the efforts of people who work outside the law in order to secure our borders and America's national interests. If presidents are typically viewed as disembodied fantasies that idealize America and civic agency and responsibility, racial fantasies about the black body converge on to the body of president Palmer, rendering him as an ineffectual father and leader. The viewer affectively identifies with Bauer as he uses his expertise to defend the weak and to oppose those who threaten America's national security and interests.

These new depictions of fatherhood and manhood in *24* reflect the manifestation what some critics have called a new “crisis” in masculinity.<sup>29</sup> I surround *crisis* with quotation marks because it assumes that masculinity was at some point in the past stable and at this point somehow now fragile. As scholars have already shown (Robin Weigmann, R.W. Connell, Michael Kimmel, and Anthony Rotundo), manhood and masculinity have always been fragile and under construction, but a number of invisible

and visible discursive practices hide this fact, and one of the most important methods to disguise vulnerability lies in the institutional operations that construct nation-states. Still, many critics still discuss masculinity studies in terms of “periods of crisis.” In “Techno-Soap: *24*, Masculinity, and Hybrid Form,” for example, Tara McPherson argues that *24* rewrites the soap opera genre in order to re-masculinize television. She contends that this reworking of a familiar form reveals a “troubling masculinity in the era of global capitalism and national security” (174). Interweaving codes of masculinity and discourses of capitalism reconfigures strong men as those who are able to protect both the national borders and manage the economy. The message is clear: if men cannot protect their own families (which also includes the ability to provide for the family), how can we expect them to protect the nation and its citizenry? Therefore, despite their differences, the monogamous, reproductive nuclear family appears to be the site of affective orientation in both series. As *24* and *The West Wing* indicate, anyone we are *supposed* to express sympathy for is indicated through his or her relationship to family.

Palmer and Bauer’s relationship reflects *24*’s tendency not to sentimentalize the presidency. Critics have observed that the relationship, even though the two are rarely seen on the screen at the same time, is an important one for the audience. As Gair points out, “...their mutual dependency” indicates that the characters live in a world where no *man* can work entirely alone (“*24* and Post-National American Identities”207). While there is a level of mutual dependency between these men, I argue that Palmer is much more dependent on Bauer than the other way around. A good example comes in season 2, where Palmer, who is temporarily removed from office, reluctantly decides to use

torture to extract information from a political colleague. Jack Bauer shoots dead and decapitates the detainee in order to gain the trust of a key conspirator. Palmer's dependency and the new post-9/11 political realities Bauer embodies are articulated when Bauer berates a senior officer, saying "You want results but you never want to get your hands dirty. I'd start rolling up your sleeves" ("Day 2: Hour 2"). As in the episode when Bartlet also reluctantly approves the assassination of Qumari's defense minister, Palmer is torn by this moral dilemma, yet the script of executive citizenship demands that presidents exhibit not only power but also moral authority. The executive's decisions shape and influence the nation's ethos, and his activities in turn reflect the citizenry. The public's relationship to the presidency is so powerful that his actions change the way we feel about him. Therefore, the character of Jack Bauer has more freedom to enact morally gray decisions since the show frames his behavior as a necessary consequence of the need to deal with the nation's ruthless enemies. Bauer convinces the president, and because Bauer is strong, white, and morally unambiguous, the audience is tempted to believe that there is no point in negotiating with terrorists or hostile enemies, especially since the more force used, the more information is delivered. In this way, the relationship between Palmer and Bauer is more unequal than mutually supportive.

In their essay "Why Are All the Presidents Men? Televisual Presidents and Patriarchy," Linda Horwitz and Holly Swyers call attention to the power of television in mass media as they explore the question, "Is America ready for a woman president?" and use the popular media to answer it. They conclude that the answer is "no", and they ask that "producers of TV fiction. . .produce more stories in which presidents are female, in a

form that degenders the presidency just as television has successfully degendered the roles of police officer, lawyer, and doctor” (131). Horwitz and Swyers get their request answered in *24* in the body of a female president; however, the show fails to degender her.<sup>30</sup> The last two seasons of *24* feature Allison Taylor, played by Cherry Jones, as president of the United States. Inaugurated at the same time Hillary Clinton was running for president, Taylor’s character offered the audience an alternative vision of the presidency with a woman at the helm. By many accounts in popular news, Taylor’s character has been characterized as Clinton-esque; even the appearance of President Taylor suggests Hillary in both physical appearance and dress, although Jones has repeatedly denied the suggestion. In fact, Jones claims that her portrayal of Taylor is much more like Lyndon Johnson, John Wayne, and Eleanor Roosevelt (*24: The Complete Guide* 282). It may have been that Jones wanted to disassociate her character from Clinton because of Clinton’s decline after she broke down and cried on the campaign trail.<sup>31</sup> The risk for a female candidate who cries is that all the stereotypical labels for women as over emotional, weak, hysterical, ruled by their hormones come to the forefront when a women breaks down, suggesting then that they are unfit for leadership roles such as the presidency. The figures Jones associates president Taylor with help figure her as more presidential and less vulnerable. Although Taylor’s presidency is marked by idealism that in the world of *24* makes her a vulnerable leader, Taylor’s presidency is depicted as a failed femininity and like Palmer’s presidency depends on the activities of Jack Bauer.



Like Hillary Clinton's presidential bid, Taylor's presidency in *24* is met with a number of limitations that any white male would not encounter. In "Cyborgs on the World Stage: Hillary Clinton and the Rhetorical Performances of Iron Ladies," Rebecca S. Richards argues that Clinton's inability to shatter the glass ceiling of the U.S. presidency is in part due to the gendered political context of the U.S. presidency, which limits the choices available to Clinton during the campaign. In it, Richards argues that Clinton shifted in and out of the identity of the iron lady, where women link their public performances to the notably unsentimental Margaret Thatcher. Taylor's character, like Clinton's, embodies Thatcher-esque qualities, until the final episode in season eight where she shows genuine emotional vulnerability. In order for Taylor's presidency to remain legible and credible, she must embody characteristics that the American public desires in its presidents: strength, courage, strategy, and rationality. She cannot biologically become the patriarch of the nation, but she can be its powerful matriarch, a matriarch whose performance can appropriate all the important scripts of the national male body. However often Taylor tries, she fails to appropriate the gendered codes of executive citizenship because she is presented as acting on her emotions and acting on them in particular, stereotypical ways (Jack Bauer acts on his emotions, but generally emotions coded as masculine such as anger).

As with David Palmer's presidency, Taylor's administration repeatedly depends on the actions of Jack Bauer, with the audience's identification with Jack Bauer reinforced through music, ticking bomb plots, and other elements that provoke anxiety in the audience and dependence on the one who promises to restore calm. By establishing

this identification, *24* asks the audience to accept violence as justified means to protect the nation. As it does during the seasons featuring Palmer as president, *24* suggests the nation's security rests in the hands of rogue citizens who are willing to operate outside the law. In effect, the show constructs competing narratives: on the one hand, Taylor is presented as being able to administer orders and policy; on the other hand, the fact that the nation's security continues to rest in the hands of our white hero, Bauer, reinforces the ideology that national security rests in the hands of white men.

In the last few episodes of season eight, there is another terrorist plot and president Omar Hassan has been beheaded, which might stop the peace treaty. The series' treatment of Hassan's body reinforces the notion that the executive body is disposable, especially racialized and gendered bodies. Hassan has also been having an extramarital affair, indicating that he is one of the "bad" parents. There is intrigue in the White House itself, and President Taylor is forced to make tough decisions that will affect global peace. The series two-hour finale opens with Cole Ortiz, the Director of Field Operations for the New York Office, learning that Bauer has killed Mikhail Novakovich, the Russian Foreign Prime Minister and key conspirator who helped the terrorist cell kidnap and execute Omar Hassan and Novakovich's men before Bauer disappears off the grid. Though Jack has evidence of the Russian involvement in Omar Hassan's assassination, both Arlo Glass, an aerial drone expert, and Ortiz agree that Bauer, refusing to follow CTU protocol, has gone overboard. Meanwhile, the corrupt Charles Logan, who served as Vice President during the John Keeler administration and president under the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment after Keeler was injured after Air Force One

crashed, finally decides to reveal the truth to President Taylor, informing her that Yuri Suvarov, the Russian President, is implicit in all the misdeeds from Day 8. Dalia Hassan gives Taylor a gift from Omar Hassan: a pen to sign the peace treaty. This touching moment is soon diminished as Kayla Hassan describes her cryptic phone call from Meredith Reed, who pointed a finger at the Russian government in connection to Omar's death. When Dalia is unable to contact Meredith Reed, she feels it's her duty to inform Taylor of the possible Russian deceit. Though Taylor tries to brush off the allegations, Dalia insists she contact Meredith Reed or else she won't sign the peace treaty. Taylor explains that she had ordered Reed's arrest because her information was true. Now that Dalia knows the Russians killed her husband, she decides to back out of the treaty and inform the U.N. about the cover-up. Taylor goes on the offensive, declaring that she will use the full force of the United States military if she doesn't cooperate, essentially blackmailing Dalia into signing the treaty.

As Taylor begins to lose control of her presidential authority, learning the facts of the assassination at the same time Dalia does, she enacts what can be only coded as a traditional masculine response to Dalia. When Dalia refuses to sign the treaty in light of the damning new information, Taylor threatens Dalia by saying she will use the force of the United States military to make her comply. In this scene, Taylor's reaction to her female antagonist appears as both irrational and unethical; the viewer feels sympathy for Dalia because the plot has established her traditional familial relationship with her husband, a relationship destroyed by the terrorism of the Russian government. Dalia's family is cast against Taylor's presidency, which becomes an antagonist to the traditional

nuclear family, and viewers read Taylor's threat according to a stereotypical trope of femininity: women cannot control their emotions, so they are unfit to lead. Even though Bauer's use of violence should be coded as an abuse of power, audiences are asked to accept them since the rhetoric of his actions suggest that he is protecting conservative values about the family.

Before Bauer goes commando with his sniper rifle, preparing to assassinate the Russian president and anyone else involved in the terrorist plot, Bauer makes a video—likely for Kim, his daughter—that explains his motives. Chloe O'Brian, Bauer's most trusted colleague at CTU and whose character repeatedly breaks several gender stereotypes, tracks him down shortly after, though Jack disarms her quickly. She tries to explain that she needs to walk him out of there or else he'll be killed by CTU agents, but he puts her in a sleeper hold and handcuffs her to a post. The first hour closes on Jack setting up his sniper rifle, targeting Logan, who he uses to get the Russian president into Logan's office which puts the Russian president in Bauer's rifle scope. His video to his daughter, Kim, reinforces his role as a protector of family values. In the scene, he explains that although Kim will hear a lot of conflicting stories about his behavior, his actions are founded on his beliefs about protecting American values. In the video, he says, "hey...as long as I can remember, every time I've had to talk to you, it seems for some reason or another I've started out by telling you how sorry I am. I'm not going to do that to you now..." ("Season 8: 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM"). After declaring that he is the only one who can tell the *real* story of what happened today, Bauer goes on to say that a lot of good people died, "not just president Hassan, but operatives from CTU...Renee

Walker...who I was very close to” (“Season 8: 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM”). The death of Renee Walker, Jack’s love interest, further emphasizes that these deaths, Hassan’s and Walker’s, are symbolic of a decaying national identity.

In hour twenty-four of day eight, the final episode in the series, *24* opens with Russian President Suvarov discussing the peace treaty at a press conference, using the memory of Omar Hassan to push it forward. When he realizes after the conference that Dalia has learned of his involvement in the death of her husband, he commends Taylor in convincing Dalia to stay. Chloe convinces Jack not to assassinate the Russian president, claiming that his actions would start a nuclear war, and instead go with her plan to upload the evidence of the assassination so they can circulate it to media outlets. Meanwhile, Taylor sits down to watch Jack's video and during this moment she realizes her error in judgment and morality. Because Taylor learns her moral lesson from Bauer, *24*'s rhetoric implies that women cannot successfully embody codes of masculinity to protect national interests and cannot be trusted to do the right thing when presented with moral dilemmas.

When the three delegates gather to sign the treaty, Taylor declines to sign, asserting that some serious misdeeds were done in conjunction with this treaty, signaling that despite what has been done, the United States is honorable. Taylor adds that she will have a full announcement within the hour, effectively ending the treaty. As she walks out, she asks Tim, the Secretary of Homeland Security, to call CTU and have them warn Bauer's medical transport of an impending ambush. However, as with every other hour of the series, the plot is chaotic and twisted; your friends become your enemies, your enemies your friends. In the world *24* depicts, allegiances and moral codes continually

shift according to power alignments. No one can be trusted. The call did not come in time, though, as Jack has already been grabbed by whoever Logan hired. As the Secretary General announces that the peace accord did not go through, Logan's phone rings. He knows that Taylor is calling so she can cancel the hit on Bauer, but he refuses to answer.

Taylor has Tim release Chloe and Cole so they can use the CTU drones to find Jack. Using archive video, they are able to backtrack and discover the location of Jack's kidnappers. Just before the hit men can kill Jack, Taylor gets them on the phone and demands his immediate release. Taylor admits her mistakes to Bauer and apologizes profusely. She says they will both have to atone for what they have done in the last 24 hours, but her one consolation is that she will give him enough time to get out of the country. While it appears Bauer depends on Taylor's presidential authority for his life, the show relocates Jack's trust, and therefore the audience's, in the hands of Chloe--an average, albeit unusual citizen. Jack calls Chloe, who is watching him on a giant surveillance monitor. During their conversation, Jack pleads with Chloe to make sure Kim is protected, fearful that both the Russian and United States' governments might decide to use her to get at him. His worry and Chloe's agreement reinforce the ongoing theme to mistrust traditional government and Jack's role as a "good" parent. Chloe agrees, adding that she'll try to provide him with ample time to escape. As Cole and Arlo watch Jack begin his escape, Chloe orders the drone to be brought back to base, cautioning the team to remember that "none of this ever happened." As Jack's pixelated face cuts out, the timer, with the series from its beginning, counts down to zero.

*24* imagines several different kinds of presidential bodies marked by their difference from traditional norms. The show refuses to sentimentalize the presidency and instead depicts the commander in chief as a hindrance to civic engagement. Rather than positioning the presidential body as a dense site of affective response from the citizenry/audience, *24* reclaims the mythology of the cowboy as the real trope for national identification and emotional engagement, suggesting that in a post-9/11 America, we need this powerful icon to protect U.S. borders and protect America's national interests.

The scripts of executive citizenship can be found in a plentitude of examples ranging from film, books, and television. These two commercially successful examples illustrate clearly popular culture's preoccupation with the American presidency and the presidential body, as well as the executive's relationship to the production a national ethos. While some depictions offer slight variations from traditional scripts, including those in *24*, many others like *The West Wing* reproduce the scripts of the executive. Both series participate in the production of the executive body and reveal how powerful the public finds the scripts of executive citizenship.

My last chapter interprets President Obama's first-term documentary "The Road We've Traveled" to show what lessons the Obama administration has learned from the proliferation of the executive citizen from our myths and stories to persuade the American people that he is a strong executive who should not be feared but revered.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Schwarz's "Mad about *Mad Men*" and de Groot's "'Perpetually Dividing and Suturing the Past and Present': *Mad Men* and the Illusions of History."

<sup>2</sup> There are several episodes in *Mad Men* that discuss the presidency or the president directly. In season one, for example, the agency hired to craft Nixon's campaign message.

<sup>3</sup> There are a number of examples in film and television where others have authored different presidents. A few include: *Air force One*, *Battle Star Galactic*, *Independence Day*, *The American President*, *Dave*, *Primary Colors*, and *The War Room*.

<sup>4</sup> In "Following the Script: Obama, McCain, and 'The West Wing,'" Brian Stetler observers striking parallels between the final two seasons of the series and Obama's rise to the presidency. He notes that the show frequently called up politicians, former White House staff, and political pundits to help plot episodes in the series. For example, Eli Attie, a former speech writer for Al Gore, called up David Axelrod for advice about writing episodes for Jimmy Smits's character, Matthew Santos, the young, Hispanic-American congressman's unlikely presidential bid. Also see Weiner's "*West Wing Babies*" for a discussion about how the series inspired viewers to run a fictional presidential campaign in 2004 for Josiah Bartlet.

<sup>5</sup> Some films include Andrew Fleming's *Dick*, James Ivory's *Jefferson in Paris*, Oliver Stone's *Nixon* and *JFK*, and Frank Pierson's *Truman*. For more about film and the presidency, see Smith's *The Presidents We Imagine*.



<sup>6</sup> The flag lapel pin is one example where presidents use the body to persuade.

According to Stephen E. Ambrose's biography *Nixon*, Richard Nixon brought the pin to national attention. Nixon got the idea for sporting a lapel pin from his chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman, who saw it in the Robert Redford film *The Candidate*. Nixon commanded all of his aides to wear one to show their patriotism, and as the public noticed the pin, Nixon's "silent majority" began to sport them as a sign of respect for the soldiers in Vietnam. Since then, the pin surged in popularity. During Obama's candidacy for president, he was criticized for not wearing the flag lapel pin. Since then, he wears it all the time. For further discussion of how presidents use their bodies to persuade, see Rogin's *Ronald Reagan, The Movie* and Rubenstein's *This is Not a President*.

<sup>7</sup> In the past fifteen years, the content of television shows has had a paradoxical relationship with theories of aesthetics. On the one hand, shows such as *The Sopranos*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, and *The Wire* have garnered the attention of cultural critics and academics from some of the most prestigious institutions. Simultaneously, "guilty pleasures" such as *Survivor* or *American Idol* have led many commentators to pronounce the end of high culture and art, with claims that these shows appeal only to uninformed, lazy audiences. Despite the fears, advances in technology such as the DVDs, DVRs, and other similar products helped usher in a new dawn of television, where TV-makers experiment more with the medium; it is, therefore, no coincidence that such technologies parallel the rise of structural experimentation in television.

<sup>8</sup> See Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

<sup>9</sup> One example of a human rights violation occurs when Bartlet orders the assassination of Abdul ibn Shareef.

<sup>10</sup> Whether you agree with its efficacy or not, many protesters used new media to organize during the Arab Spring. For an in-depth analysis of social media, democracy, and civic engagement, see Dahlgren's *Media and Political Engagement* and Loader and Mercea's edited collection *Social Media and Democracy*.

<sup>11</sup> In his article on television and the teaching of writing and rhetoric "A Valuable Wasteland," Bronwyn Williams argues that pathos dominates television shows, claiming that most programs are more likely to reflect an emotion or attitude rather than a particular idea, point of view, or position. His point here is that broadcasting companies want to hold the audience's attention long enough to watch commercials. While I agree that pathos dominates in both *24* and *The West Wing*, both series construct emotions that ask the audience to identify with the president or identify with Bauer.

<sup>12</sup> Although the reason Kennedy is hunched over is that his back was broken during the war and he had trouble sitting for more than forty minutes, the photo took on a more symbolic meaning as the Kennedy presidency waded into difficult water during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

<sup>13</sup> Kristina Riegert argues that much of the appeal of *The West Wing* is because of its relationship to authenticity and real-life events. Audiences enjoy the show because they get the pleasure of testing their knowledge of current events while enjoying the personal relationships between the characters. Riegert claims this is not dissimilar to the ways

reality television appeals to its audiences. She concludes that looking at the program this way reveals how most episodes represent the struggle between idealism and compromise, “whereby progressive stances are ‘clawed back’ to the political center, as if these were somehow unrealistic” (“The Ideology of *The West Wing*” 232).

<sup>14</sup> Consultants for the show include former White House Press Secretaries Marlin Fitzwater and Dee Dee Myers, pollster Patrick Cadell, and U.S. Senate staffer Lawrence O’Donnell. See Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles’ *The Prime-Time Presidency*.

<sup>15</sup> The link between family-based morality and politics comes from one of the most common ways we have of conceptualizing what a nation is, namely, as a family. It is the common, unconscious, and automatic metaphor of the Nation-as-Family that produces contemporary conservatism from Strict Father morality and contemporary liberalism from Nurturant Parent morality<sup>15</sup>. Fictional and non-fictional presidential performances rely on specific configurations of U.S. nationalism and democracy, and political rhetoric has enjoyed using familial tropes to organize and mobilize citizens and legitimate the president’s leadership. How these two television series imagine the presidency and U.S. nationalism is no different; in fact, both deploy the technologies of gendered nationalist discourse to create a sense of belonging. Moreover, *24* and *The West Wing* have been charged with having clearly defined partisan agendas. However, I claim that by applying Lakoff’s theoretical insights to how these two shows depict nation as family, their political viewpoints are much more complex and often deploy the language of both parties, whether consciously or not, in its representation of the executive citizenship. In

his study, Lakoff claims that conservatives and liberals possess one fundamental disagreement: how they envision the role of the government as a “Strict Father” or “Nurturant Parent.” Lakoff argues that the “Strict Father model” mirrors the nuclear family where the father has the primary responsibility for supporting and protecting the family as well as setting rules and enforcing them. Once children are mature, according to this model, they are on their own must be self-reliant. The “Nurturant Parent model,” on the other hand, prizes love and empathy and believes children become self-reliant through being cared for, respected, and caring for others. Nurturance is crucial and support and protection are a part of nurturance. Good communication is key and questioning by children is welcome, even seen as positive. The principle goal is that children lead happy, fulfilled lives, and belonging to a community, and serving one’s community, is a hallmark feature of this model. According to Lakoff, there are different moral priorities between these two models, and these are fundamental differences between the ways conservatives and liberals think.

<sup>16</sup> There are several episodes and scenes that depict Bartlet as a father: “The Stackhouse Filibuster,” “Somebody’s Going to Emergency, Somebody’s Going to Jail,” “In the Shadow of Two Gunmen, Part 2,” and “Hartsfield Landing” just to list a few.

<sup>17</sup> Abigail Bartlet, a reference to Abigail Adams, the fiery, brilliant non-housewifely president’s wife who famously asked her husband, John Adams, to “remember the ladies,” pays the ultimate price for her husband’s medical cover-up: she gives up her

medical license for a year instead of facing medical board sanctions while her husband wins a re-election.

<sup>18</sup> In “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots,” Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai argue that shows like *The West Wing* normalizes the production of terrorists as a sexual perversion and “invites an aggressive heterosexual patriotism.” (1). In their reading of “Isaac and Ishmael,” a script written to address the 9/11 attacks, the authors argue that the episode juxtaposes a brightly lit room, invoking home and family, as the setting for a classroom, which is composed racially and gender-plural students who are visiting the White House on a field trip. They claim this is “[a] space where normal, docile, but heterogenous psyches are produced, in opposition to the terrorist-monster-fag,” a character accused of terrorism, who is racially and sexually ambiguous, and who is framed “...in a dimly lit room, an enclosed, monitored space, managed entirely by white men.” (134). According to Puar and Rai, this double frame stages the two forms of power at work: “to quarantine and to discipline” (135). I am particularly interested in their reading of how the series disciplines subjects by recreating the classroom space. There are countless episodes where the show enacts a classroom setting to discipline the nation’s subjects and thus provide an image of citizenship.

<sup>19</sup> In the end of the third season, Bartlet ordered the assassination of Qumari defense minister, Abdul ibn Shareef.

<sup>20</sup> In article Three from the Twenty-Five Amendment, the Presidential Disability and Succession, “[w]henver the President transmits to the President pro tempore of

the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives his written declaration that he is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, and until he transmits to them a written declaration to the contrary, such powers and duties shall be discharged by the Vice President as Acting President” (<http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>).

<sup>21</sup> In “Red Haven’s on Fire,” Josh’s character stiffes the First Lady on a budget request to include immunization education. Rather than sit with the defeat, Abbey hires Amy Gardner as her chief of staff. Because Amy is a professional Washington insider and knows how Josh works because of their former intimate relationship, she is able to get the immunization money back on the budget.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict Anderson explains this dynamic: “[a]ccess to nationhood and citizenship has undermined the control of individual male household heads over ‘their’ women, who are no longer excluded from the public sphere; but it has also encouraged the newer subordination of women, and the appropriation of their labour, by a male-dominated national collective” (“Mapping the Nation” 12).

<sup>23</sup> It did not hurt that the actor playing Santos’s character, Jimmy Smits, is classically good looking and is not too “latino” looking.

<sup>24</sup> In “Terrovision,” Morey observes that by coincidence, *24* first aired just two months after 9/11 and less than one month after President Bush had signed into law the Patriot Act. The Act allowed law enforcement agencies to intercept electronic communications and telephone calls, view personal records, and gave additional powers to identify and detain suspected terrorists. Morey notes that all of these powers have been invoked in *24*.

<sup>25</sup> In many ways, *24* endorses conservative politics in its treatment of government effectiveness and the use of violence to protect national borders.

<sup>26</sup> The series' use of space and setting help affirm this iconic identity for Bauer. As David Coon argues in "Putting Women in Their Place," "the sets communicate a great deal of information that is crucial to the development of the series" (232). In the pilot episode of *24*, Bauer is called into the office late at night. The CTU headquarters is nondescript from the outside, but the interior is cold. There are steel stairs and railings. The doors to the different rooms are frosted glass or metal. These cold, hard surfaces suggest functionality. In the first season, Bauer is the Director of CTU. His office is isolated and elevated, sitting above everyone else's workspace and is completely enclosed by glass. While this space establishes Bauer as the leader who always watches over his employees, we soon learn Bauer cannot function in confined spaces. He later loses the position as director.

<sup>27</sup> In "Happy Objects," Sara Ahmed considers how happiness happens, exploring the ways "happiness functions as a promise that directs us toward certain objects, which then circulate as social goods." *The West Wing* treats Bartlet as a social good that accumulates positive affective value. Emotions stick to Bartlet's body, which in turn furthers his persuasive power as the show's executive citizen.

<sup>28</sup> For more about blackness and its relationship to feminism and racism, see hooks' *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*.

<sup>29</sup> In *The Terror Dream*, Susan Faludi claims the attacks on 9/11 provoked a national summons to restore “traditional” manhood, marriage, and motherhood. She goes on to explain that the assault on feminism and women following 9/11 can be linked to a cultural history deeply buried in the American psyche that continues to haunt the nation: white men’s inability to repel invasions of non-Christian, nonwhite “barbarians” from the soil. As a way to conceal the insecurity, American culture would invent a counter myth of the cowboy that we reanimate whenever the nation feels vulnerable.

<sup>30</sup> Although I admire their suggestion, I find it impossible for television to actually degender the presidency. I also disagree that shows have degendered lawyers, police officers, and doctors. Yes, TV producers regularly create shows that feature a protagonist as female and a lawyer, but this does not necessarily translate to the process of degendering.

<sup>31</sup> See Kantor’s “A Show of Emotions that Reverberated Through the Campaign.”



**CHAPTER IV**  
**RECONSTRUCTING OBAMA**

The auto industry was literally days from collapse. The financial sector, kind of the heart that pumps blood into the economy, was frozen up in cardiac arrest.

Rahm Emanuel from *The Road We've Traveled*

As my previous chapters articulate, perceptions and images of the executive citizen are no longer tightly controlled by any one source but rather are part of a barrage of data that inundate individual citizens daily from myriad sources. To say that the president is now a bona fide celebrity is nothing new; after all, every move is documented, filmed, and scrutinized.<sup>1</sup> Media proliferation and presidential celebrity create an environment where individuals know more and more about the lives of those who occupy the White House. In this kind of celebrity culture, the variety of media create citizens' desire to learn ever more about their leaders. Knowing the public's desire and their own need to retain power, presidents and their surrogates, must actively define executive citizenship in the images that proliferate on television. An executive's use of rhetoric, then, becomes central in the construction and reproduction of the executive citizen.

As previous chapters have argued, television structures our feelings about politics, a structure that lies deeper than our individual attitudes about partisan and bi-partisan politics, political parties, social issues, or civic engagement. Television structures our

feelings about politics in ways we hardly imagine or are conscious of.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps television has made citizenship seem out of our reach, and so might be partially responsible for the alienation the American public seems to feel from its government and its own agency within that government.<sup>3</sup> In the previous chapter, I explored how fictional televisual representations of the American presidency develop and disseminate scripts of executive citizenship. Specifically, I argued that fictional presidents coordinate with the performances made by real American presidents to create another intimate public where belonging and the production of citizenship norms is managed.

After the events of 9/11, increasingly presidents have managed their images by coordinating both fear and love to establish a viewer's identification with a specific object. In other words, presidents use a combination of love and fear—love of country, fear of its vulnerability to others—to identify with the citizen. Sara Ahmed argues that “the turning away from the object of fear also involves *turning towards* the object of love, who becomes a defence against the death that is apparently threatened by the object of fear” so that “...fear is that which keeps alive the fantasy of love as the preservation of life, but paradoxically only by announcing the possibility of death” (*The Cultural Politics* 68). She goes on to say that rather than fear actually preventing the possibility of love, “...fear allows the subject to get closer to the loved object, as fear may yet pass by” (*The Cultural Politics* 68). Ahmed's analysis of fear is useful to my study of executive citizenship, since the technologies of executive citizenship construct and manage the body politic through emotions. Leaders and the media create a culture of fear by inventing crisis after crisis, usually involving an outside force that constantly threatens

the public. This threat is often framed in economic terms to conceal more complex institutional practices that are embedded in racist and sexist thinking.<sup>4</sup> Executive citizenship constructs and manages feelings by replacing feelings of fear with an object to love: the president. The television manipulates these images to make us love or hate the president. Like Josiah Bartlet, who projected the calm decisiveness that countered the public's fears about the *real* president, George W. Bush, actual citizens rely on presidents whose attributes of strength, decisiveness, humor, and love contribute to their love and thus their dependence on the executive. The scripts of the executive where symbolic and actual power is vested in some head proliferate and circulate in public discourse, in media such as television, film, political discourse and in other institutions such as education and other government posts such as the law. The power of the body and the scripts suggest how important it is to pay closer attention to these technologies that reproduce the executive citizen so we can have a sharper understanding of why we vote and make decisions the way we do.

In this chapter, I examine the rhetoric of Barack Obama's 2012 campaign documentary, *The Road We've Traveled*, from the Academy Award winning director of *An Inconvenient Truth*, Davis Guggenheim. Released months before the national party convention, *The Road We've Traveled* stages Obama's accomplishments during his first term in office, emphasizing the unrelenting challenges his administration faced from his political opponents. I have chosen to focus almost exclusively on Obama's campaign film to show how it reconstructs Obama and his presidency according to the scripts of executive citizenship to suggest that even if the president is a black man, the behavior

does not because it is structurally coded in our national stories and the technologies that sustain America's national imaginary.

From the time that television became a factor in presidential politics in 1952, its influence has steadily increased in subsequent elections, arguably gaining centrality in the election process and governance in the 1990s with the emergence of the 24-hour news cycle.<sup>5</sup> Today, it is virtually unthinkable for a presidential candidate to conduct a campaign without the use of the television.<sup>6</sup> Even though the Internet has increased its influence in presidential campaigns, the campaign film retains the same techniques used in television and cinematic productions rather than strategies of electronic media. Although the crafting of a candidate's message is nothing new in presidential campaigns, the television campaign message is an apt mediator of visual images. Indeed television gives candidates and incumbents the opportunity to teach the audience about the candidate's character, past accomplishments, and his vision for the future. In other words, campaign films are yet another cultural apparatus, and a powerful one given the need to garner votes, for the construction and reproduction of the executive citizen.

Campaign films both construct and circulate the scripts of executive citizenship by "defining the nature of presidential qualification and character and putting forth a vision of the office and the institution to justify a particular candidacy" (*Constructing Clinton* 26). As Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles argue in their research, campaign films situate presidents in a mythology of the presidency and so help legitimate their role as the executive. The executive does not only impose the scripts of executive citizenship; the scripts are produced and reproduced by other institutions and individual citizens,

governing the actions and behavior of the executive. As a result, the scripts can limit what presidents can and cannot do, what they can and cannot say. As the epigraph suggests, the job of the president is to manage and protect the economy, imposing unrealistic expectations on that person who has to pretend to act heroically, or according to Emanuel's metaphor, as the nation's cardiac surgeon. After analyzing the Obama campaign film and its implications, in the final section of this chapter I will briefly discuss how understanding the concept of presidential politics in the scripts of executive citizenship can help citizens recognize our complicity in how we perpetuate the production of executive bodies and become more conscious and aware of its inner-workings in civic, political, and cultural life.<sup>7</sup>

### ***A Brief History of the Campaign Film***

The political campaign film, a media event that usually debuts immediately prior to the candidate's acceptance speech at the national party convention, has served as a centerpiece for presidential election campaigns and has existed in some form since 1952 when television first became an essential tool in national politics.<sup>8</sup> While presidential candidates since Truman have used the television to create campaign advertisements, political campaign films are longer in length, typically fifteen to twenty minutes, and give the candidate more space to construct an his image of executive citizenship to the public.<sup>9</sup> Whereas a typical campaign video or advertisement will attack the opponent or focus on two or three sound bite issues, the campaign documentary typically gives the audience a more intimate, personal, focused look at the person seeking to occupy the White House.

Although many see John F. Kennedy's thirty-minute biography, *The New Frontier*, as emblematic of the new genre, Reagan turned the genre into a codified tool of executive citizenship with his film *A New Beginning*. According to Joanne Morreale, *A New Beginning* "...intensified the trend toward depicting a candidate, toward using images, symbols, and visual communication to create a positive climate surround the candidate...the film did not concede a separation between filmic and off-screen reality" (18). Although Obama's *The Road We've Traveled* was streamed live and released on the Internet, the visual production and narrative techniques still mimic movies and television advertisements. They are carefully crafted, elaborated staged scenes that are characteristic of advertisements as well as involving elements typically associated with documentary film production such as archival and news footage, voice-over narration, still photographs, and expert testimonials.

The majority of campaign films are biographies in the traditional sense, much like the memoirs presidential candidates release before election seasons. There are, however, other kinds of campaign films. The resume and visionary campaign film focus on the candidate's past accomplishments or future goals. While these films are biographies of a sort, they focus on role rather than identity. They establish character through the depiction of actions and purpose. For example, *The Road We've Traveled*, a resume campaign film, casts Obama's character in terms of the sum of his deeds. Although challengers are most likely to use biographical films that identify them to the voters, incumbents who wish to alter their images may do so by producing biographical films or the resume or visionary film to discuss their accomplishments and future projections.<sup>10</sup>

Presidential campaign films reproduce the scripts of executive citizenship by mapping American myth, ideology, and power onto the body of the candidate. The campaign film differs from other presidential performances such as the speech or the news performance in that it is an advertisement that treats the candidate or the incumbent as a product for the voting public to consume. These American beliefs, values, and aspirations define and unify “The People,” so the campaign film is another mechanism where the production of executive bodies circulates. The films themselves are structured warehouses of mythic images of the president, the country, and the citizenry. The genre transforms candidates into complex symbols whose projected self-image embody the scripts of the executive citizen, scripts that reproduce cultural, political, and economic myths and ideals.

In campaign films, mediated politics create the forum where the hyperreal and intimate features of political discourse operate simultaneously. As political commentator Roderick P. Hart observes, television “has become the delivery system for intimacy” (*Seducing America* 11). According to Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “the intimate medium of television requires that those who speak comfortably through it project a sense of private self, [and] unselfconsciously self-disclose” (*Eloquence in an Electronic* 81). In this way then, these campaign films are yet another important site for the production of the executive citizen and the scripts of executivity. Using this technology, the executive creates another kind of intimate public in order to both humanize the candidate and package him as a commodity for the public’s consumption.

As I have argued, although the presidency has functioned symbolically from its inception, symbolic persuasiveness has increased in the wake of the Reagan presidency. Reagan played the role of stern, paternalistic father enabling him to administer the “strong medicine” of economic reorganization in the early 1980s. The growth that occurred in the economy thereafter benefited many middle-class professionals, a fact that reinforced his popularity; he became the “feel good” president, who encouraged the public to unreflectively pursue self-gain in the opportunity society.<sup>11</sup>

Reagan’s success made the character and the personality of the president increasingly of interest to the American public. A strong image that can project “reality” in the symbols and scripts he chooses is consequently what presidential contenders look for, especially in campaign films, which energize parties and sway undecided voters. Reagan’s success as an image-maker has intensified the public’s interest in breaking through appearances. This quest for trying to find the real person behind the office tends to encourage voters to select a candidate who can serve a symbolic role. Contemporary campaign films promote mass consensus about the symbolic reality of the president by portraying leaders who can create an image that American feels comfortable with, an image handed down to them by the scripts of the executive performed for generations. Of course these images are often far away from the “reality” of any president, and they tend to deny by omission diversity and inequalities pervading American society.<sup>12</sup> Reagan’s success as a president who largely served symbolic and rhetorical functions has helped transform the office and has encouraged the American public to look for politicians who can continue to successfully perform those roles.<sup>13</sup> The campaign film



suggests to voters that they have found the politician who performs in the symbolic ways they have come to expect.

Ronald Reagan's *A New Beginning* and William Clinton's *The Man from Hope* provide some context for Barack Obama's *The Road We've Traveled*. One of the most interesting differences among Reagan's, Clinton's, and Obama's campaign films are the varying ways that each film constructs and manages the viewer's feelings. Sanford Schram argues that in America's highly mediated, over-determined information age, the public hungers for evocative stories from the past to give the nation coherence ("The Post-Modern Presidency" 212). As its title indicates, Reagan's *A New Beginning* produces a vision of a renewed patriotism, and it accomplishes this new beginning by sentimentalizing America. By the time he ran for president in 1984, Reagan held a strong standing in public opinion polls, and his professed "steadfast commitment to 'traditional family values' and 'pride in country' contributed to his popularity, especially among those hungry for the reassurances provided by nostalgic invocations of what had made the United States 'strong' and 'good' in the past" (Schram 213-14). Schram further argues that Reagan successfully manufactured the past, and "when the real cannot be identified, that which is reliably and consistently reproduced, like a pat performance, is taken to be credible" ("The Post-Modern Presidency" 214). In this way, manufacturing a sentimentalized and nostalgic image of America was thus a natural choice for the 1984 campaign film.

*A New Beginning* offers audiences images of America at work, rebuilding America, reinforcing the viewer's feelings about America's economic resolve and

resilience. The film allows the viewer to feel good again about America by capitalizing on the images of people working and earning. The film opens with clips from Reagan's 1981 oath of office juxtaposed with video clips of an old, 1950's red truck driving through a farm, a clip of Reagan on his ranch in California corralling his horses, and an video clip of an older, white laborer managing a construction site. With soft music playing in the background, the narrator announces, "[y]es it was quite a day. A new beginning" (*A New Beginning*). Reagan then proclaims, "[y]ou don't really become president. The presidency is an institution, and you have temporary custody of it" (*A New Beginning*). Toward its close, while Lee Greenwood's "I'm Proud to be an American" plays in the background, *A New Beginning* features a clip of the Statue of Liberty undergoing renovations. Taking one of the most important symbols of the country, the emblem for Americans of American liberty, *A New Beginning* suggests its own rhetorical aim with the footage of the statue surrounded by workers and construction grids. This representation is clear for the viewer: America is always a work in progress, continually renewed and remade. The viewer can take hope in such renewal, the rhetoric of the image's restoration suggests, and feel patriotic about the continual nurturing of the symbols of national pride.

Clinton's first campaign film *The Man from Hope* takes a different tack. During the campaign, scandal after scandal surfaced about Clinton's relationships with several women. In response, the film attempts to reconstruct Clinton's image as a family man by offering viewers a glimpse into his personal life, with a clear aim of creating between viewer and the president an intimate bond of shared confidence that might recreate a

public image. Using the narrative turns in the personal story of Clinton's life and visual cues, the film presents Clinton as a strong, empathetic family man who has been destined to become president. *The Man from Hope* does not discuss any of the offices held by the Clinton or any of his accomplishments like his success as a lawyer, his being a Rhodes Scholar, or his role as Governor of Arkansas. Instead, the visual production techniques invite the spectator's gaze and foster an intimate appeal with the audience. The film opens with Bill Clinton's voiceover and the shot of a black and white photo of Hope, Arkansas, the small town where Clinton was born. Clinton tells his audience he was born three months after his father's death, living in a two-story house with his grandparents. In the background, soft music plays while the film cuts back and forth between an interview with Bill and Hillary Clinton and black and white photographs from Clinton's childhood. Whereas Reagan used the rhetorical technique of pathos for civic content, Clinton's documentary uses it for personal content in order to reconstruct his image.

Both Reagan and Clinton used the campaign film to create an intimate bond with viewers and voters based on shared ideals of renewal and hope. In contrast, Obama's campaign film for his reelection campaign, *The Road We've Traveled*, provokes fear and anxiety about the economy in order to detach the feelings of fear and anxiety that the public has expressed about Obama's leadership. In doing this, the film tries to dispel those fears by presenting Obama as a leader whose strength has faced down roadblocks. The film highlights individual moments and visuals to help the viewer replace feelings of fear and anxiety with feelings of love. Through a host of rhetorical strategies, including the use of visuals, music, voice-over narration, and expert testimony, *The Road We've*

*Traveled* offers its evidence to turn narratives of fear about Obama's presidency into narratives of love. While Reagan's *A New Beginning* paints a picture of a renewed patriotic America, and Clinton's *The Man from Hope* uses biography to attempt to reinvent Clinton as a family man, the limitations of scripts of executive citizenship, which define the executive's race and ethnicity so forcefully, provoke Obama to focus on his accomplishments, listing them off like items on a resume, in a logical, rather than emotional appeal.

***Reconstructing Obama: The Road We've Traveled***

As in other campaign films, *The Road We've Traveled* is gendered, reproducing dominant scripts of masculinity onto the body of Obama. Narrated by Tom Hanks, respected and popular actor known for his roles in *Forrest Gump*, *Apollo 13*, and *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Road We've Traveled* follows the first four years of Obama's administration.<sup>14</sup> A resume-style campaign film, it focuses almost exclusively on Obama's record in his first term. Rarely does the film cover Obama's childhood, his work as a grassroots organizer, or his job as an Illinois Senator. In fact, whenever *The Road We've Traveled* covers biographical elements from Obama's life, they correspond directly to a policy or legislation that his administration has spearheaded. Specifically, the film uses his mother's death and his grandparents' personal narrative to support healthcare legislation and his auto industry economic bailout. In each scene that expresses Obama's record, he is presented as strong, decisive, and unwavering in his dedication to protecting the American people and preserving American values. The

camera shoots him from a low angle to make him seem taller. His jaw is set. We see him sign legislation in several scenes. In each of these portrayals, he is depicted as heroic in his handling of the problems he inherited (the film goes into great detail to underscore that he *inherited* many of the issues he is currently blamed for mismanaging) from the previous administration as well as his ability to enact new legislation and in his role as commander-in-chief.

Part of the film's rhetorical power comes from the highly managed, masculine-based institutional affiliations and themes of executive citizenship: a strong national patriarch responsible for protecting the nation's values and borders and serving as the nation's economic functionary. Where women, specifically Michelle Obama, Obama's mother, and Elizabeth Warren, are featured in the film, they usually perform stereotypical roles such as the mother or are there to show that Obama is caring and empathetic. One indication that script is a bit different is in the film's depiction of Hillary Clinton. While she does not act as a specialist or provide an expert testimony, present only in image, she does appear in several shots and photographs from *The Road We've Traveled* casting her as a strong leader who has helped Obama change the way other world leaders see the United States. If anything, Hillary Clinton is gendered as masculine violating the traditional roles women have performed in campaign films.

At the outset, the campaign film engenders two feelings working simultaneously: patriotism and fear. It opens with a shot of the American flag followed by the image of Obama with his family who walk across the stage to address an adoring public on election night 2008. The family is all dressed in red, white, and blue. This first scene,

with its juxtaposition of the new first family and the national symbol of the flag, reinforces the idea that Obama is a patriotic American and suited to hold the office of the presidency. As the film surveys the crowd waving their American flags from his election night speech, the narrator Tom Hanks asks, “[w]hat do we remember in November of 2008?...was it this moment?” He pauses briefly to follow it up with, “...or this....” The film cuts to fast-paced images from news reports discussing the 2008 economic crisis. In this segment, viewers hear Brian Williams, the NBC nightly news anchorman, compare the economic crisis to the Great Depression, declaring in a dramatic metaphorical conclusion, “[w]atching the Dow Industrial average has been like watching a heart monitor of a critically ill patient.” The film uses this metaphor to suggest that Obama will be the doctor for the patient/nation.

Framing the first minute of the film in terms of a crisis borrows the trope of siege and action developed and consolidated from the popular media, especially the television series *24*, which reinforce the idea that every minute is important, there is little time to celebrate, and good, strong leaders act quickly in order to protect national interests and preserve American values. Since the film goes on at length to say the economic problems were inherited by the previous administration, Obama had to act quickly, reinforcing the associations to other former heroic leaders. In *The Road We've Traveled* the economy is in crisis and in need of protection. Much like the depictions of the executive in fictional accounts on television like *The West Wing* and films like *Air force One*, the campaign film depicts Obama as acting quickly and heroically to rescue the economy from utter collapse.

After the opening exordium with Hanks and the newscasters, the film begins in earnest with Obama as president elect. As he meets with his team in Chicago, the camera frames the scene with a snowstorm that is blanketing the city. The metaphor is clear: Obama can see the crisis, weather it, and overcome it. By framing Obama's first four years as a crisis, *The Road We've Traveled* is able to position Obama as a heroic leader. We later are reminded that his actions have improved the economy, saved the automobile industry; he passed a healthcare act, a fair pay act; he killed Osama bin Laden; in the face of a vitriolic Republican Congress, he has accomplished a lot. *The Road We've Traveled* has a montage of images portraying Obama as contemplative but decisive, a leader who was ready to start working on the behalf of the nation.

Additionally, the film places Obama in America's heritage through a number of plot devices. For example, Hanks describes the problems Obama inherited by saying, "[n]ot since the days of Franklin Roosevelt, had so much fallen on the shoulders of one president." By comparing the current crisis to The Great Depression, like Brian Williams' assertion, which gives the kind of evidence for Hanks' and the film's contention, the film situates Obama in the mythology of great American presidents by drawing a relationship to F.D.R. who is the metonym for the Great Depression.

The film reiterates the "tough decisions" Obama's administration faces by placing the focus on him and his staff. Following a scene from his Inauguration, the film cuts to Rahm Emanuel, Obama's Chief of Staff, who is reminiscing about their first days in office. He remembers asking Obama "what should they do first: should we start with one, two, three, or four." Emanuel says to the camera, "[w]hat I love about the guy he

says we're going to do them all because we got to do them all, because we don't have a choice to pick." As in *The West Wing*, the campaign film presents the president's staff as models for how people should relate to the president, and Emanuel's comment suggests how the citizenry should relate to their leader: they should love him for his determination.

Video clips of Americans getting back to work follow this scene, and Hanks notes that Obama's bailout of the failing automobile industry kept people working. This segment from *The Road We've Traveled* presents Obama as the protector of the interests of "ordinary" Americans: teachers, police officers, and first responders. The film shows scenes of teachers in the classrooms surrounded by students, police on the streets, EMT personnel ministering to injured people. The choice to emphasize these professions constructs Obama as a man of the people and underscores a love for the service professions, furthermore revealing key administration policies: education, security, and health care. Additionally, the film lists several important accomplishments made under Obama's leadership: creating small business incentives, building bridges and highways, cutting taxes for the middle class, training Americans for jobs. The choices about what to highlight is an important one. The campaign film wants the viewer to see and feel that Obama has middle America as a priority, and that his tough economic decisions are not about helping out the rich but restoring prosperity to the middle class, the group who embody the American myth of hard work and achievement. Since the film repeatedly claims that the economic bailout is Obama's decision—and Obama's decision alone—the rhetoric suggests that Obama is the CEO, the head of the giant corporation of America, but unlike others, the CEO with the employee as first priority.



The film also depicts Obama as a husband and father, using photos of Obama to cast him as a compassionate patriarch: a leader deep in contemplation, concerned, and congenial. For example, the film reproduces the “Loneliest Job” while Joe Biden’s voiceover explains it was Obama’s decision alone to order the assassination of Osama bin Laden. In every photo, the film emphasizes that Obama has thought through the tough decisions he has had to make instead of acting brashly. Many of the photos portray scenes of Obama sitting in a room listening to advisors, shaking hands with staffers, or sitting alone appearing concerned with his hand on his chin. Typically, the photographs are accompanied by Hanks’ voice-over narration or by some expert testimony such as Bill Clinton to give a more authentic feeling and to narrate the photo’s story. Where Reagan’s campaign film attempts to create a feeling of a renewed America filled with patriotic citizens, *The Road We’ve Traveled* works to detach feelings of fear and anxiety from Obama’s presidency to the actual issues and replace those feelings of fear with feelings of love and hope. In addition to the more obvious reasons for people’s anger such as a staggering economy, one explanation for the film’s production and management of emotions might be because Obama’s blackness carries with it stereotypes about black Americans, particularly males: black men are violent, prone to over-emotionalism, and are led by others.<sup>15</sup> Because Obama must work against those typically unvoiced prejudices, the campaign film attempts to do that. Although during the 2008 campaign, Obama was able to use his body and rhetoric as a symbol of change and hope to capitalize off of the country’s feelings of disillusionment about Bush and his administration, the context has changed. He has to emphasize what he has accomplished

while simultaneously not bragging too much. The economy is still suffering, after all. Additionally, he has to frame what his administration has accomplished as an economic issue, knowing that during elections, the economy usually dictates whether a president will see a second term or not.

As Obama performs his rescue of the American auto industry, the voiceover details the lives of his grandparents, who were children of the Great Depression. This frame around Obama's grandparents serves to emphasize Obama's proud middle class heritage and deemphasize his African ancestry. After the story about his grandparents, the film moves to an interview with Elizabeth Warren, a former advisor for consumer concerns. In her interview, Warren casts Obama's decision to bail out the auto industry as a possible lose, lose scenario. She claims, if he fails to "invest" in the auto industry, then "blood is on his hands." If he invests, and the auto industry fails to succeed, then she claims that he will be held responsible. Warren's choice of the word *invest* casts Obama's decision as a business decision for the benefit of America. By having Warren, who is an expert in bankruptcy law and an advocate for consumers, discuss Obama's bailout policy strengthens the image of Obama as fearless and selfless, willing to take risks that might injure his own political chances if he can improve the condition of the American economy and the American people. When the film later shares a clip from an MSNBC news program claiming that GM has begun to sell more cars than any car company in the world, the message is clear that Obama is a leader who makes good business decisions, whose investments are both sound and honorable.

By pitching health care reform as an economic issue in the film, *The Road We've Traveled* reframes the conversation about health care from the charge of socialized medicine to the claim of improved economic conditions for all. Two important scenes emphasize health care reform as economic reform. Former president Bill Clinton, whose attempt at health care reform failed in his first term of office, claims that health care is a "huge economic issue." Tom Hanks's voice follows Clinton: "[Obama] knew he couldn't fix the economy if he couldn't fix healthcare." Transforming the health care issue into an economic issue illustrates that Obama's reform bill all along was a bill to improve the economy. Conflating economic security and health security, the film attempts to turn feelings of fear about the bill into feelings of hope for a renewed, stronger America.

*The Road We've Traveled* uses the health care reform debate to portray Obama as someone willing to work cooperatively with his political opponents, and Hanks reminds the viewer that Obama faced "fierce opposition" in his decision to pursue health care reform. In several photos, Obama has a smile on his face, he has his hand on someone's shoulder, he is bent down to them, and he is reading a document someone has handed him. In each image, his body language reflects a willingness to work together with others. Several videos follow that feature protesters who repeatedly chant, "[k]ill the bill" and one during a town hall meeting where an older white man with a Southern accent angrily declares, "[i]t will be a cold day in hell before he socializes my country" emphasize that his opposition came not from politicians alone but from ordinary citizens. Following these scenes is a black and white photograph of Obama sitting in his chair in

the Oval Office in a contemplative position. The comparison between the visuals is clear: the mob is unthinking and Obama is reasonable.

As the film explains, Obama's ultimate decision to tackle healthcare reform, despite advisors such as Emanuel who advised him not to spill so much "political blood" had to do with his mother who drained all of her resources because she never had good consistent insurance (*The Road We've Traveled*). Emanuel's choice of phrase adds to the tenor of the film, and portrays healthcare reform in war terms. That the film immediately chooses to move to Obama's biography is indicative of its appeals to pathos. Through these images, the viewer learns that Obama's decision to tackle healthcare was not only an economic issue but also a personal one. In particular, Obama watched his mother die, and Michelle Obama says on camera that he does not want to see anyone go through what his mother went through. The film's portrayal of Obama as a family man as well as powerful leader reinforces the traditional connection between nation and family. Although the decision might have been informed by the personal, the film suggests that some tough decisions made by good leaders have to be personal. Showing that the bill passed, the film focuses on several images of a happy Obama administration, celebrating its success. Since the nation is a family, we must treat others like we would our biological family.

Near the end, the campaign film focuses on Obama's career as commander-in-chief. Obama returned the troops home from Iraq. Returning once again to the metaphor of home, "The Road We've Traveled" shows a scene from a speech where Obama repeats, "Welcome home." Home—or the nation—becomes the object of love and

Obama embodies this home through his reiteration of the word, reminding his audience that his decisions were the reason the troops have come home. As Sara Ahmed explains, feared objects become loved ones as the powerful reorganize the emotions of the citizens and the state. In the case of the Iraq War and terrorism, both objects of fear, are displaced by the powerful lure of the love of home and country. Ahmed calls this process “passing” fear in order to move closer to the object of love by forming a home or enclosure. (*The Cultural Politics* 68). Another national object of fear, Osama Bin Laden, is the next accomplishment the campaign film focuses its attention on. Moving back from scenes from the Situation Room to Joe Biden, with Biden emphasizing Obama is the object of the focus without Obama being the central focus when he says, “as he walked out the room, it dawned on me: he’s all alone. This is his decision. If he was wrong, his presidency was done. Over.” Following this scene, Bill Clinton claims Obama took the “honorable path” and wonders if he were in the same situation, Clinton says, “I hope that’s a call I would have made.” As the film closes, the momentum picks up, and Hanks runs through a list of Obama’s accomplishments while in office. The final scene returns the viewer to election night 2008, as we watch an American flag flying in the air, with soft music playing in the background and the sounds of Obama’s adoring fans, all work to persuade the viewer that our fears can be put aside as we move closer to an object of love: America.

The scripts and body of the executive citizen proliferate and are pervasive in American culture. As a model of leadership that functions pedagogically teaching citizens how to feel and behave, executive citizenship tells us a lot about American

politics and American democracy. If people really want to see real changes in the way the government behaves, we have to expect—even produce—alternative narratives about the president that allow for different iterations to emerge. Otherwise, our complicity in the reproduction of the scripts of executive citizenship will only serve to perpetuate stories that consolidate tropes of white masculinity in the name of national global security.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For an insightful discussion of the celebritized presidency, see Gabler's *Life, the Movie* and Marshall's *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*.

<sup>2</sup> See Bourdieu's *On Television* and Williams's *Television*.

<sup>3</sup> For more on media and citizenship, see Dahlgren's *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, and Democracy* and the edited collection *Social Media and Democracy: Innovations in Participatory Politics*.

<sup>4</sup> Immigration policies, for example, are often framed in economic terms rather than racial ones. The "threat" is the Other is going to take "my" (read white American) job.

<sup>5</sup> Before the ascendancy and popularity of television, political campaign films were shown in movie theatres. Calvin Coolidge and Harry Truman are two of the most notable examples. See Jamieson's *Packaging the Presidency* for a more full account of these films.

<sup>6</sup> See Hart's *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Viewer*.

<sup>7</sup> Although I sometimes use the terms *civic* and *political* interchangeably, political scientists tend to make some distinctions. The term *civic* derives from *civitas* indicating citizen. *Civic* resonates with the notion of public and accessible to many people in the public domain. *Civic* therefore carries the implication of engagement in public life. It also carries the implication of service such as doing good for others. Political engagement typically refers to activity oriented toward influencing the government and governmental actions. For more about these distinctions, see Adler's

“What Do We Mean by ‘Civic Engagement’” and Zukin’s collection *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and The Changing American Citizen*.

<sup>8</sup> For more about campaign films, see Morreale’s *The Presidential Campaign Film* and Timmerman’s “1992 Presidential Candidate Films.” For more on televisual advertising techniques used by presidential candidates, see McGinnis’s *The Selling of the President 1968*, Jamieson’s *Packaging The Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Campaign Advertising*, Diamond and Stephen Bates’ *The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising of Television*, Boorstin’s *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, Giles’ *Constructing Clinton: Hyperreality & Presidential Image-Making in Postmodern Politics*, and Morreale’s *A New Beginning: A Textual Frame Analysis of the Political Campaign Film*.

<sup>9</sup> For more about the history of the campaign film, see Lang’s *Television and Politics* and Morreale’s *The Presidential Campaign Film*.

<sup>10</sup> According to Morreale in *The Presidential Campaign Film*, incumbent Richard Nixon used *Portrait of a President* to combat perceptions that he was cold and detached by presenting him as warm, humorous, and compassionate. It is generally understood that incumbents have an advantage over challengers since they can associate themselves with the aura of power and authority that surrounds the office. They run as “president” rather than candidate, which allows them to appear busy running the country.



<sup>11</sup> See Blumenthal's "Reaganism and the Neokitsch Aesthetic" in the collection *The Reagan Legacy* for an in-depth look at how the Reagan Revolution encouraged unreflective political and civic action.

<sup>12</sup> See Baudrillard's *Simulation and Simulacra*, Norton's *This is Not a President*, Rogin's *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, and Luke's "Televisual Democracy and the Politics of Charisma" and *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination and Resistance in Informational Society* for more about the post-modern presidency.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the rhetorical and symbolic function of the presidency, see Tulis's *The Rhetorical Presidency*, White's *The New Politics of Old Values*, and Hinkley's *The Symbolic Presidency*.

<sup>14</sup> Since presidential campaign films are rooted in the documentary film tradition, they are typically narrated by an off-screen, reassuring and authoritative male voice who explains and renders the images coherently. The narrator takes the point of view of the camera, and appears to objectively report the scenes rather than represent a single character's point of view. Usually, the narrator uses phrases as words such as "you" or "we" to create identification with the viewer. The choice to use Tom Hanks as the film's narrator is an important one. Hanks is iconic in American film; he is wildly popular, charismatic, and untarnished of scandal. He speaks softly and is articulate, coming across as unthreatening. Lastly, he has starred in films that are responsible for producing and perpetuating an American mythology: *Philadelphia*, *Forrest Gump*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Apollo 13*, and *Charlie Wilson's War*.

<sup>15</sup> For more about black masculinity, see Kimmel's *Manhood in America*, Rotundo's *American Manhood*, hooks's *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, and Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization*.

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