

TOMORROW'S GODLY AMERICANS: CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION  
AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CONSERVATIVE  
CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOLS

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines citizenship discourse and national identity in conservative evangelical homeschools in the U.S. Using the Christian Home-Educators of Colorado (CHEC) as an ethnographic case study, it elucidates the role of evangelical homeschoolers in the managed construction of their children's political identities, putting forward an account of citizenship discourses that shows how they are produced, managed, taken up and contested through CHEC activities and homeschool teaching and learning. The dissertation illuminates the role of civic discourses in the lives of homeschool parents endeavouring to shape their children into "Christian-Americans".

Analyzing four data sources: interviews with CHEC homeschoolers and leaders (N=34), ethnographic observation of the 2009 CHEC conference, speeches delivered at the annual CHEC convention between 2004 and 2010 (N=22), and texts and materials from several organizations for conservative Christian youth geared towards civic education, the dissertation hones in on the concept of "worldview", an important category that CHEC homeschoolers actively construct. The two components of the "conservative Christian nationalist worldview" – one backward-looking and the other forward-facing – unite in the present. The dissertation explores how Christian homeschool parents pass this worldview on and build civic identity in their children through the social organization of citizenship education. It contends that evangelical home-educators draw on particular interpretations of history to establish membership and belonging. This national identity is constituted by responding to "others" who lie outside homeschoolers' political imaginary with discourses of "contamination vs. purity" and "discernment". Accomplished through meticulous social organization that combines deliberate role modeling, participation in certain activities, and the mobilization of specific discursive resources, homeschool parents shape their children into passionate citizens. Finally, the dissertation demonstrates how patriarchal discourses of gender tie into nationalist ideology, guiding gendered socialization and civic learning.

## Dedication

To my eldest sister, her husband, and their wonderful family. The finest homeschoolers I know.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation would never have been completed without the help of some truly special people.

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I cannot express how immensely grateful I am to my parents. They continue to be my greatest role models in all things. Their love and counsel have been more helpful than I can put into words.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

As we ride through the sun-splashed Colorado Mountains, my niece arranges her stuffed animals carefully on her arm to give them the best of views. The toy puppies, each with its own name and elaborate biography, will be Abigail's solace amidst the excitement, noise, and crowds that lie ahead. Now that she is 14, it is the first time she can attend the Christian Home Educators of Colorado (CHEC) conference as a full participant, not just as a babe-in-arms. For Abigail, diagnosed with sensory integration autism – a condition that my sister fears will attract state intervention by unsolicited “experts” – the day promises to be both stimulating and disconcerting. Abigail smiles at me sleepily and rubs the back of my head, as she is wont to do. She says that it's warm and fuzzy, like Jesus.

I smile back. Ordinarily I would be captivated by the ancient boulders and unexpected outcroppings that dot the terrain. Today, all I can think about is how my unfamiliar suit is pinching at my waist and at my nerves, how unprepared I feel. Will I make a good first impression on the CHEC communications officer, the gatekeeper to participants in my project?

We keep wending our way down the curving highway in a 16-seat Ford Econoline van that still faintly shows the logo of the Christian camp from which it was purchased. It's the smallest size vehicle that can accommodate my sister, Esther, her husband, Benjamin, and their ten children when they travel *en masse* to church or make the one-hour trip to Denver. Esther and Benjamin converted to Evangelical Christianity 14 years

ago. Deeply involved in their Christian community, they would say that they embrace Jesus in all aspects of their lives.

Their politics are very conservative. They oppose abortion, gun control, and social services for illegal immigrants. They crave a Christian government and pray for the day that the U.S. Constitution will be amended to integrate religion into the legal system in the form of what they call “Christian law.” All ten of their children are homeschooled and my sister and brother-in-law are members of the Christian Home Educators of Colorado. It is this context and my desire to understand my sister and her family better that first motivated my research.

I thumb through some well-worn printouts from CHEC’s website, pausing at the “About Us” section. CHEC is a non-profit organization that “provides information and resources on the legal status of home-education in Colorado, curriculum requirements and materials, and special events”. In addition to the conference we are attending, CHEC organizes an annual *Day at the Capitol* every April to further secure the legal rights of home-educators and help teach students about the U.S. Constitution and legislature. As part of this event, CHEC youth are “trained in principles of Godly citizenship, leadership, and the U.S. Constitution, and learn how to make a difference for America’s future” (CHEC, n.d.a). Participants in the *Day at the Capitol* can “learn about the proper function of authority and, in turn, of civil government – its responsibilities and limits” (CHEC, n.d.a). CHEC also provides a *Citizen Lobbyist Workshop* that tutors students in the practices of lobbyists at the state Capitol and a *Future Statesman Program* that uses on-line assignments and activities to teach Christian heritage and the biblical and

constitutional roles of civil government. As a researcher seeking to learn about Christian homeschooling and citizenship, I couldn't ask for a more suitable case study.

Held every year in Denver in late June, CHEC's three-day conference brings together a diverse group of guest speakers, workshop facilitators, product and resource vendors, parents and children. It is no small-time affair; there are over 4000 attendees. Seven concurrent hourly sessions run from 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. over three days, with dedicated shopping periods scheduled before, between, and after the formal sessions. There is no way I can attend everything. Prior to arrival, I scan the titles of the various talks and workshops. They are listed under five separate "tracks": 1) General (i.e., the keynote speeches in the largest auditorium), 2) Homeschooling for Excellence, 3) Nuts & Bolts for Elementary, 4) Nuts & Bolts for High School, and 5) The Biblical Family.

A number of the workshop titles leap off the page because they seem so extreme: "Passionate Housewives Desperate for God", "A Crown For Him: Teaching Our Daughters the Importance of Biblical Beauty and Etiquette" and "WWJD - What Would Jesus Drive?" Other sessions are concerned with appropriate gender roles, e.g., "Passing the Scepter: What We Should Really Teach Our Sons" or "Guarding the Gate: A Father's Role in Modesty". Several sessions focus on transitions to post-secondary education, e.g., "High School Transcript Clinic: Practical Help and Tips" and "The College Admissions Process: The Homeschooled Student's Guide". Many other workshops are actually blatant product promotions, e.g., "Fractions Fuss Free with Right Start Math!" and "The Best Science for Homeschoolers, Now at the Best Price!" The ones that I identify as "must-sees" are related to citizenship, e.g., "Raising World Changers" and "The Making or Breaking of a Leader".

I am scheduled to meet CHEC's Communications Director, Michael, at 8:30 a.m. – but we are running late. We arrive at 8:25 a.m. and the parking lot is packed. By the time we make our way to the Convention Center, it's almost 8:40 a.m. Everything is hustle and bustle. At the registration desk, volunteers give out conference programs, name badges, and directions. We reach the main lobby by 8:45 a.m. and, much to my relief, Michael seems unconcerned about our tardiness. I have spoken on the phone with him once before – an informal “interview” in response to my request for assistance from CHEC to help facilitate my recruitment of respondents. In response to his questions, I made clear to him that a teachers' union was not funding my research project and that I did not have an anti-homeschool agenda. These assurances seemed to do the trick; from that point on, the CHEC organizers were more than willing to accommodate and support my data collection.

Michael tells me that he has lined up a series of interviews, some of which I could conduct at the conference in an unused seminar room. I hurriedly write down the names and times he rhymes off, and thank him profusely. We then speed-walk to the main auditorium, entering to the final strains of a classical piano composition and the polite clapping of 400 people. The performer, a girl about Abigail's age, is in a frilly dress and appears tiny in comparison to the large stage and screen that surround her. A moderator in a somber suit thanks her for the performance, and introduces, to much applause, State Representative, Corey Gardner. Gardner is one of many politicians across the country who aligns himself with Christian homeschoolers in an effort to channel the conservative Republican vote. “Faith in God must be our first principles in government”, he asserts from the podium. “It is about you and your rights.”

Getting my first real chance to “people watch”, I scan the room while Gardner speaks. Attendees appear economically diverse, at least judging by their clothes, but fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity; there are few people of colour. A girl in her mid-teens walks past me wearing a “Got Socialization?” T-shirt and carrying a canvas purse with a patch sewn into it that reads: “When it Comes to Education, There’s No Place Like Home!” Another woman wears a sweatshirt that reads “We’re Teaching Our Kids to be Great Leaders...At Home!” I have seen such shirts before – my brother-in-law, Benjamin, an engineer and statistician, who sees God in science, has a penchant for shirts that poke fun at atheists or evolutionary theory. Everyone is conservatively dressed, in compliance with CHEC’s request that conference attendees come in “church attire”, but we still see a variety of styles, ranging from sporty workout outfits, to jeans and a sweater, to full suits. Per the conference rules, there are no toddlers or young children. Signs in the back rows of the lecture halls indicate seating for nursing women whose babies may make noise.

Gardner steps off-stage, and the moderator introduces Kevin Swanson, CHEC’s Executive Director. Thin and smallish, with a sharp part in his hair, Swanson is a practiced and gregarious presenter. In addition to running CHEC, he hosts a weekly Christian radio show from his basement. Swanson (2009a) begins his talk by describing his experience as a cloistered, homeschooled child in the 1960’s on a small, Japanese island with his missionary parents. His father would black out profanity in their books, he said, and once turned off the rarely watched family TV because *The Sound of Music* was too racy. At first, his narrative is dotted with humorous anecdotes, but before long, Swanson turns serious. He points to a host of signs of the “decline of Western



civilization”: “the serial murder of 75 million babies since 1975”, the “assault on traditional family values”, and the “implosion of Christian birthrates” that is eroding “generational leverage” to the point that Christianity is at risk of being “bred out”.

By the time he’s in full swing, Swanson’s central message, preached dramatically into his headset, is unmistakable: “This country is in a big mess, and we’re going to have to work hard to get out of it”. For Swanson, the two primary causes of this decline are easy to pinpoint: “the education system, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau”. He blames Rousseau, described as a child abandoner, who did not bother to check the gender of his five children before leaving them in Parisian orphanages, for the development of the public education system. This, according to Swanson, undermined the family and entrenched a humanist emphasis on corporate, state-managed communities. He ends his speech by reminding the audience that “we’re in a massive, unbelievable, socialist, Rousseauian, Marxist tyranny...I will do everything in my power to reverse Rousseau, as I am committed to seeing the Rousseauian vision die! Why? Because I like the family! [Applause from audience] We must do everything in our power to restore the family in the 21st century”. This is food for thought for many in the audience, judging by their pensive mood as they exit the talk. The crowd disperses and conference participants make their way to various workshops crammed into spaces throughout the Convention Center.

After lunch, the vendor hall opens with hundreds of expensive-looking booths peddling a vast array of products related to Christian Education, a seemingly limitless sea of books, CD’s, DVD’s, toys, clothing and so on. Many of the speakers also have tables or booths: thus, while they bill themselves as ministers, pastors, or experts, many have also based home businesses on their authority and credibility. There are also recruiting

booths for Christian universities, camps and missionary organizations. For homeschool students and parents, this is an opportunity to purchase resources and curricula that would otherwise incur shipping costs. And home schooling is now big business: by 2001, over 500 conferences were being held every year around the country offering a bewildering proliferation of curricula and specialty items. Of these conferences, 75 of them routinely attract more than 3000 people each (Gaither, 2008, p. 205). The conference is the main access point to homeschool customers. In 2003, the market research of the evangelical publishing company, Zondervan, found that 49 percent of homeschoolers bought their materials at conferences (p. 207). This speaks to a pro-capitalist orientation that runs through the speeches and the larger process of the conference.

For Esther and Mariah, my sister and eldest niece, this is one of the most important parts of the conference. They spend hours combing through the products, strategizing about how many copies of each are required, not just for my sister's kids and their multiplicity of academic levels as they develop, but also for other homeschoolers with whom she collaborates. Esther purchases many products for curriculum or as gifts.

After the last speech of the day, there is a lengthy discussion of the Biblical lessons to be learned from the perseverance of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Arctic explorers. I drift back to the main entrance of the Convention Center, to my family's agreed-upon meeting spot. By the time the last straggler shows up, everyone is sharing impressions of the speakers and speeches. We walk back to the van in the midst of a spirited debate, but I'm distracted. My first interview is scheduled for tomorrow and I'm eager to go over my interview protocol. In the back of the van, I can hear Mariah on the bench behind me, discussing with Abigail one of the many new books she acquired at the conference. This

one is about ancient Egypt, and Mariah explains the text in the same encouraging, gentle way she does when teaching her other younger siblings at home.

### **Research Problematic and Contribution**

The observations above, which are drawn from my fieldnotes, capture my impressions on the first day of the CHEC conference in June, 2009. They touch on some of the common motivations for evangelical home-education: a distrust of non-Christian influences, dissatisfaction with the moral foundation of public schooling, insufficient resources in government schools for students with disabilities, and a desire for strong sibling and family bonds. More than that, however, my narrative points to a faith-based “discourse of citizenship” that is articulated by many conservative Christians around the U.S. This discourse insists that America’s heritage has been perverted by secular humanism. It adopts a conception of political liberty and economic prosperity rooted in free-markets and individual rights. Flowing from conservative thought, this discourse blames America’s cultural erosion and moral decay on compulsory, state-run schools.

In response, an increasing number of conservative Christian parents are opting out of institutional education to school their children at home<sup>1</sup>. Many of them desire to insulate and protect their children from negative influences and opposing viewpoints, but they should not be seen as passive or isolationist. On the contrary, many homeschool parents underscore the cultivation of informed and vigorous political participation in their children’s upbringing. By many accounts, they are succeeding. Over the last 15 years,

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<sup>1</sup> According to the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics, collected in 2007, somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million students are currently home-educated in the U.S. (Kunzman, 2012), a tremendous increase from the 10,000 to 15,000 who were homeschooled in the early 1970s (Lines, 1999, p. 4).

calls for a return to the way America “once was” produced a motivated and empowered “restoration generation” that is only now coming of age – a determined wave of homeschool graduates hungry to reclaim the faith and morality of Christian-American culture.

### **Research Context**

Conservative Christian homeschoolers are not alone in their emphasis on citizenship. Since the early 1990s, civic identity has re-emerged as a central concern in a wide range of social scientific fields, especially political science, sociology and social theory. This renewal of interest, “the return of the citizen” (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994, p. 352), is intimately tied to the view that citizenship is in crisis (Cairns et al., 1999, p. 22). Pivoting on concerns around heightened large-scale migration and the twin poles of globalization and balkanization, the perception that trans-national and sub-national threats to civic identity are growing has served as a frame for a sense of urgency surrounding citizenship (Scobey, 2001; Beiner, 2003). Academics have debated the resilience and utility of citizenship in society, with some arguing that it has grown moribund, and others defending its ongoing significance. These disputes have highlighted the existence of a variety of discourses and languages of “citizenship”.

In the U.S., with its long tradition of citizenship education, overt and hidden curricula in public schools have been underscored as salient in shaping how students come to understand and exercise citizenship. Recently, however, the institutional influence of public schools – often assumed to provide social cohesion through shared knowledge, skills, and social development – has been increasingly challenged by parents eager to gain greater sway over the education of their children. Conservative Christian

parents have done so by pushing for the incorporation of Christian beliefs into public-school curricula, by couching learning in Scripture, and by creating alternative pedagogies, curricula and school environments that reflect their worldview.

The most debated, though least studied, of these alternative methods is homeschooling. The proliferation of home-based education in many U.S. states over the last three decades, though difficult to chart precisely, reflects how homeschooling has been adopted by a diverse group of parents and students, how it has become socially accepted, and how regulatory environments have become increasingly permissive<sup>2</sup>. More than 2 million students are estimated to be being educated partially or entirely at home (Kunzman, 2012), representing roughly three percent of the K-12 school-aged population<sup>3</sup> (Bielick, 2008, p. 2).

### **Homeschool Critics and Proponents**

There are many claims about the benefits, and dangers, of home-education. Advocates of Christian homeschooling dismiss charges of parochialism and insist that school choice and robust civic responsibility are entirely compatible. They maintain that the average public school day can be compressed into an afternoon when distractions and time-consuming classroom management are taken out of the equation, leaving homeschool students more time for special interests and civic involvement (Mur, 2003, p. 23). Moreover, homeschool children benefit from interactions with people of all ages,

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<sup>2</sup> In 1989, homeschooling was still illegal in 3 states, but was legalized in all 50 states by 1993 (Somerville, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> The incidence of homeschooling is generally underrepresented in extant surveys for several reasons. These include a predominance of voluntaristic samples, lax regulations that allow homeschooling to go unnoticed, as well as a distrust of researchers among many homeschool families that prefer not to advertise their status (Kunzman, 2009, p. 2).

rather than a rigid cohort. This, the argument goes, provides a far more realistic training ground for civic virtue than the contrived age-groupings of institutional schools (p. 27).

Negative influences in public schools – the “wrong kind” of socialization – are also a concern (p. 11). Schools are viewed as rife with temptation, Godlessness and physical dangers, while home is a safe haven. Many homeschoolers underline that, although government schooling is currently accepted as the best way to learn, it is a recent development, one that did not emerge as an idea, much less as a reality, until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. Accordingly, homeschool parents dismiss the position that common schools are the *only* place where children can share the experience necessary to cultivate meaningful civic responsibility and social cohesion. In their view, the conviction that public schools act as the “glue” of society is naïve and historically short-sighted (Hardenbergh, 2005, p. 98).

In the colonial era, when civic virtue was nominally in abundance, Americans adopted an amazing variety of educational arrangements including homeschooling, town schools, dame schools, and missionary schools (Erickson, 2005, p. 26). For many centuries, most children grew up in extensive contact with adults and adult affairs, and learned by participating in adult labour (p. 35). Home-educators thus insist that school attendance is no guarantee of social responsibility. They maintain that school promoters ignore the fact that while the majority of the adult population attended public schools, America is currently witnessing some of the lowest levels of civic involvement and

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<sup>4</sup> In the U.S., the first compulsory attendance laws were enacted in Massachusetts in 1852, requiring every child 8 to 14 to attend a public school (Glenn: 2005, p. 53). As late as 1894-1895, there were 19 states without laws requiring schooling, but by 1917-1918, all 50 had mandatory attendance laws (p. 54).

political engagement in its history. For homeschoolers, the 1966 Coleman Report<sup>5</sup> represents not a progressive turning point, but the relinquishment of education to scientific “experts” which has resulted in the depersonalization, alienation and estrangement of youth from their parents (p. 30). All of these changes, they suggest, coalesce to break whatever superficial civic bonds public schools manage to construct.

John Taylor Gatto, a former New York City public school teacher, is a vocal public school critic who is frequently referenced by Christian home-educators. In *Dumbing U.S. Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (1991), Gatto argues that schools erode self-teaching, apprenticeship, practical learning and extinguish any possibility of active community life (p. 13). They undermine communities and work against democracy by relegating the training of children to certified “professionals” (p. 13). For Gatto, attempting to artificially concoct national unity institutionally responds to the problem of solidarity by crowding diverse students and families into centralized, standardized citizen-factories (p. 71). Like the Greek mythological figure Procrustes, who cut or stretched his unfortunate visitors to fit his bed, public schools are one-size-fits-all (p. 79). Accordingly, for Gatto, scooping youth from large districts and dumping them together for many hours a day may generate homogeneity, but this is no guarantee of meaningful citizenship.

On the flip side, detractors of homeschooling, epitomized by the National Education Association (NEA), argue that the home cannot possibly replicate the varied, “real-world” socialization and experiences provided by formal schools. Such critics fear that homeschoolers will be cut off from interaction with diverse ethnic and cultural

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<sup>5</sup> The 1966 Coleman Report, a landmark study on equality of educational opportunity overseen by James S. Coleman, presented a report to the U.S. Congress which found that poor children of colour performed better academically in integrated, middle-class schools.

groups, and consequently develop narrow, intolerant conceptions of difference and diversity. Rob Reich is deeply concerned about the “civic hazards” of home-education (Hardenbergh, 2005, p. 97). He notes that liberal democracy is designed, above all, to secure the rights and freedoms of individuals (Reich, 2005, pp. 112-113). In theory this can safeguard diversity, but it also raises important questions about whether, when, and how freedom should be limited. The classical liberal answer to these issues is the “harm principle”; that “your right to swing your fist ends at the tip of my nose”. In other words, states have a duty to ensure that children can become autonomous adults, but this autonomy should not come at the expense of others. As Reich maintains, “parents can limit opportunities for social interaction, control the curriculum, and create a learning environment in which the values of the parents are replicated and reinforced in every possible way” (p. 114). Without exposure to competing ideas and different convictions, a total environment may hinder homeschool students’ capacity to challenge their parents’ worldview and the worldviews of others.

Many conservative Christian home-educators believe raising politically informed, engaged citizens is of great importance. This challenges the Enlightenment thinking of Durkheim, Rousseau and others who maintained that only compulsory, universal, and prolonged “moral” education could create good citizens. The Enlightenment’s longstanding “citizenship argument” (p. 112) emphasizes that democratic states have an interest in ensuring that children receive the civic education needed for informed political participation in a democratic state.

*In Educating the “Right Way”: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality* (2001),



Michael W. Apple laments the proliferation of policies and practices associated with “conservative modernization”<sup>6</sup>, understood as ultra-conservative and religious definitions of common culture in the curriculum (p. x). Holding to the Enlightenment ideal of forging social cohesion through compulsory education, Apple stresses four major concerns about homeschooling based on three lines of thought. First, he recognizes that the practice may be beneficial for homeschool families and children in numerous ways, but worries that “the movement is connected to the far-reaching withering of public responsibility” (p. 186). Second, he criticizes homeschooling’s defensive posture – “cocooning” to avoid the “other” – as exclusionary and isolationist (p. 189). Third, Apple is similarly concerned about homeschooling’s potential to breed intolerance. His fear is that withdrawal from the public sphere will limit children’s contact with diverse social and cultural groups and, as a result, reproduce narrow worldviews rooted in stereotypes. He contends this is connected to anti-statist impulses that accuse “big government” of no longer acting as a neutral upholder of the public good (p. 194).

Fourth, Apple has qualms with the latent effects of homeschooling, such as the flourishing anti-tax movement, which he fears may erode the financial base for national education. For Apple, the evidence is mounting that “the emergence of educational markets has consistently benefited the most-advantaged parents and students and has consistently disadvantaged both economically poor parents and students, and parents and

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<sup>6</sup> Apple highlights four groups that he considers to be part of a “conservative alliance”: 1) neoliberals who are guided by a vision of the weak state and assume the “invisible hand” of consumer choice and market pressures is the best guarantor of democracy; 2) neo-conservatives who push for ever-increasing national standards, curricula, and testing; 3) “authoritarian populists”, a.k.a. conservative evangelicals who seek to revive “morality”; and, 4) the professional and managerial new middle class that aligns itself with these other groups not for ideological reasons, but to maximize upward mobility (p. 31).

students of colour” (p. 198). If wealthy home-educating families can simply opt out of paying taxes to support the schooling of others, then dangerous patterns of cumulative advantage/disadvantage are likely to proliferate (p. 198). Apple thus lambastes home-educators whom he believes manipulate bureaucratic loopholes for their own benefit. He contends that:

religiously motivated homeschoolers are currently engaged in exploiting public funding not only in ways that are hidden, but also in ways that raise serious questions about the drain on economic resources during a time of severe budget crises in all too many school districts. (p. 199)

Apple points to California charter schools, arguing that public money not legally available for overtly religious material is frequently used to purchase faith-based curricula (p. 199).

This dissertation examines the discursive construction of citizenship education amongst conservative evangelical home-educators in Colorado. My project involves interview research with homeschoolers and CHEC leaders, ethnographic observation of a CHEC conference and discourse analysis of CHEC speeches and curriculum documents. I explore what “discourse of citizenship” informs the thought and teaching of CHEC members by examining their understandings and use of pedagogy and learning materials and by observing and participating in their home lives and at their annual conference.

### **Research Questions:**

My study centers on the ideologies, discourses, texts and social practices that CHEC homeschoolers use to shape their children’s national identities. I am concerned with the type of citizen they aspire to raise and the ways that they go about training them.

Are CHEC homeschoolers working to produce engaged, cosmopolitan citizens, or grooming single-minded devotees? Is “citizenship” being defined and enacted in new, creative ways, or is it being used to eclipse dissent?

To address these issues, my research examines three sets of questions:

- 1) What, in the view of my respondents, does it mean to be a “good American”? What characteristics and behaviors are understood to represent virtuous citizenship in theory and in practice?
- 2) How is citizenship discourse communicated and taught by CHEC members? How is it manifested in the curricula, educational materials, and teaching strategies that parents employ?
- 3) What are the political and pedagogical implications of these conceptions and practices? What is the significance of home-education for the production of community and its associated notions of good citizenship?

In a post-national landscape, where national identities and conceptions of the good citizen are increasingly contested and divided, the production of an informed and engaged citizenry is of immense political and social significance. To theorize and empirically study citizenship in any polity, it is important to examine both the dominant mechanisms by which citizenship is taught and practiced, and to determine how new social phenomena – such as the growth of evangelical home-based education – may destabilize or enhance notions of civic responsibility. Accordingly, my research explores alternative understandings of and approaches to citizenship education, and how these may concretize, undermine, or re-invent contemporary notions of citizenship. What does the

evangelical homeschool movement tell us about the production of “community” and civic engagement?

### **Dissertation Chapters**

Beyond this introduction, my dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter Two is a literature review that surveys major works, thinkers and debates that inform my project. I begin by exploring the sense of crisis that currently surrounds citizenship and national identity. Next, I consider writings on citizenship and political engagement as it intersects with conservative Christianity in the U.S., followed by a summary of the literature on citizenship education. Finally, I discuss the historical development of homeschooling in the United States, and the chief debates around home-education in relation to civic participation and social responsibility.

Chapter Three, which deals with my research design, focuses on sampling, data collection, and analysis. I describe my data sources – participant observation fieldnotes, interview transcripts (N=34), speech transcripts (N=22), and curricular materials from numerous organizations for Christian youth and explain how an ethnography of discourse “in action” was used to elucidate the role evangelical homeschoolers play in the managed construction of their children’s political *identities*. My study puts forward an ethnographic account of citizenship discourses, showing how they are produced, managed, taken up and contested through CHEC activities and homeschool teaching and learning. Using CHEC as an ethnographic case study, I illuminate the role of civic discourses in the lives of situated actors: homeschool parents endeavouring to shape their children into Christian Americans.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I present my analysis and empirical findings. Chapter Four examines the conservative, nationalist Christian worldview I encountered during my fieldwork. I begin with a history of the concept of “worldview”, surveying some key figures in its development such as James Orr, Abraham Kuyper, Karl Mannheim, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, James Hunter, and Samuel P. Huntington. I then describe the Janus-faced worldview of conservative nationalist homeschoolers, exploring its influence on citizenship in theory and in practice. I argue that the two major components of this worldview – one backward-looking and another forward-facing – come together in the present to spur zealous political engagement. This worldview’s remarkable coherence is important because it is a key *member category* that CHEC homeschoolers actively construct and disseminate. This worldview informs a localized, nation-centric conception of civic duty that has major implications for citizenship and civic education.

Chapter Five explores how Christian homeschool parents pass their worldview on and build civic identity in their children through the social organization of formal and latent citizenship education. I explore how parents manage the adoption of theistic nationalist discourse, and how this process constitutes both parent and child as Christian-American political subjects. I contend that, for evangelical home-educators and their children, civic selfhood draws on particular interpretations of history to establish membership and belonging. Meanwhile, defending this national identity is additionally crucial in its production. This goal is achieved by responding to “others” who lie outside conservatives’ political imaginary, or directly oppose it, with two discourses. One stresses “contamination vs. purity” (Mackey, 2002, p. 27), casting difference and

diversity as encroachment in ethno-religious terms that encourage withdrawal. The other underlines “discernment” that “arms” conservatives against cultural, linguistic, religious, and moral difference. Practically, this is accomplished through meticulous social organization that combines deliberate role modeling, participation in certain activities, and the mobilization of specific discursive resources. By engaging their children in particular practices, organizing the texts their children have access to and the manner in which they are interpreted, homeschool parents attempt to shape their children into passionate, engaged citizens.

Chapter Six elucidates how patriarchal discourses of gender and the normative heterosexual family tie into nationalist ideology to guide the social organization of gendered socialization and civic learning. I document how Christian homeschoolers dichotomize views of gender, and how this carries over into understandings and practices of citizenship. I report on how CHEC parents and speakers normalize Biblical gender roles that do not so much eclipse women’s meaningful political participation as they sideline it by limiting women to an “invisible ministry”. The chapter likewise investigates how patriarchal discourses of gender hierarchy connect with nationalist ideology, guiding the social organization of gendered socialization and civic learning. I document how homeschool parents create political subjects in gendered ways. I address discourse around citizenship for sons/fathers and daughters/mothers separately, because Christian homeschoolers view both gender and citizenship dichotomously. I show the overlap and divergence of discourse around citizenship amongst CHEC parents and speakers. I also report on the social organization of citizenship education. The chapter argues that evangelical homeschools concentrate women’s activity almost entirely in the home and

church, and that the social organization of civic learning and political practice normalize gender roles that do not necessarily eclipse, but often constrain and undermine, women's meaningful political leadership. At the same time, a certain fluidity in prescribed gender roles, and ways in which CHEC home-education socially and politically empowers women is also apparent. With this in mind, the chapter also looks at the contradictions and tensions that arise in evangelical homeschools.

Chapter Seven summarizes the major findings of the study and their implications for future research. I explain what kind of further projects could enrich our understanding of conservative Christian homeschooling in relation to politics and citizenship education.





to preserve it? At the same time, if we strive to encourage difference and diversity then we must accept that citizens will increasingly have less in common. The loss of large-scale social *homogeneity* – not to be confused with *solidarity* – is the price of sustaining the distinct lifestyles, beliefs and values of different groups.

Michael Walzer's "civil society argument", too, suggests that citizenship should be abandoned as an inferior source of political community (Walzer, 1991, p. 204). He contends that traditional citizen-state relations are predicated on individual subservience to an intrusive, paternalistic, and bureaucratically remote state. Such models, Walzer submits, are incapable of promoting genuinely democratic citizenship and should be jettisoned. In their place, he calls for an autonomous civil society composed of voluntary associations that stand separate from the state (p. 204).

In the U.S., these rationales have led many intellectuals on both the left and the right to proclaim the "devaluation" (Schuck, 1989), "decline" (Jacobson, 1996) and even "death" of citizenship (Geyer, 1996). Neo-conservatives blame "wasteful" social programs and policies for balkanizing American public life and replacing a philosophy of civic obligation with "politically correct" liberal rhetoric that coddles the "unmotivated" and "untalented" – the "47 percent", if you will (see Corn, 2012, to view Mitt Romney's infamous speech at a May, 2012 fundraiser). Meanwhile, progressive scholars trace America's "civic crisis" to the dwindling of public associational life, the growth of corporate power, and the fetishization of consumer culture (Beiner, 2003, p. 22). Academics and policy-makers occupying a wide range of national, disciplinary, and ideological positions have thus arrived at the view that citizenship has become obsolete. New conditions, they argue, "have dissolved the linkage of national membership, unitary

identity, political agency, and personal rights by which the citizen was legally and ideologically constructed during the twentieth century”, leaving behind only a vague “specter” (Scobey, 2001, p. 11).

Despite these ominous assessments, the sense of distress surrounding citizenship has also catalyzed hope for its renovation. Its defenders argue that even if civic bonds can no longer draw sustenance from outdated understandings, they have not become entirely irrelevant. Rather than accepting pluralist efforts that risk reducing citizenship to an aggregate of sub-national ghettos, populist American intellectuals call for new models of citizenship that will “re-engage ordinary citizens in public life and renew civic cultures” (Boyte and Kari, 1996, p. xxi). Similar currents have emerged in Europe, where influential theorists such as Etienne Balibar decry what they see as the erosion of solidarity in the face of a nationless world of corporate globalism, mass migration, diasporic communities and multiculturalism. According to Scobey, instead of “mourning the death of citizenship, or dancing on its grave, such public intellectuals have sought to revivify it” (Scobey, 2001, p. 13).

## **B. Conservative Christian Citizenship**

In recent years, the role of the Christian Right in U.S. politics has drawn a great deal of attention from the media and academics. While national identity is salient in America’s public collective consciousness (Billig, 2000, p. 3), the conservative Christian vision of what America can and should be, and the individual citizen’s role, diverges profoundly from that of secular humanists. Pressing for a return to “traditional family values”, evangelicals contest the separation of church and state, arguing that government must integrate Christianity into all levels of decision-making, and that Biblical doctrine

should be the foundation of public education. Within both media and the academy, such a fusing of religion and policy would constitute nothing less than an attack on democratic pluralism and a move towards “theocratic fascism” (Hedges, 2007, p. 6).

**Christian political engagement.** The evangelical movement first emerged as a political force in the U.S. in the late 1970s, and quickly went from influencing legislative agendas through lobbying to setting them outright (Bolce and De Maio, 1999, p. 31). The literature produced on the movement throughout the 1980s and early 1990s followed two broad directions. One caricatured right-wing Christians as a collection of naïve hillbillies duped by swindling televangelists – a view that was eagerly taken up by the media (p. 224). The second assumed religious conviction was the pathological result of personal or social strain, explaining it as an offshoot of anomie, authoritarianism and moral entrepreneurship. Taken together, they cultivated the perception that the political involvement of evangelicals was somehow suspect. As a result, until recently, works on their participation was framed in non-empathetic ways.

Many conservative evangelicals are adamant that America had been established as a “Christian nation”, and that 20<sup>th</sup> century liberals insidiously replaced it with an un-American secular state. Kramnick and Moore (2003) believe that the “party of religious correctness” works tirelessly to spread this conviction by advancing a policy approach that undermines the Constitution and curtails meaningful political debate (p. 14). They acknowledge the importance of religion in American life, but maintain that the Constitution was developed with an explicit secularity in mind (p. 14). They affirm that, contrary to the assertions of many conservative Christian leaders, most Americans during the Revolutionary War were a “distinctly un-churched people”, with only about 10 to 15

percent of the population belonging to a congregation (Kramnick and Moore, p. 17). Thus, while some important intellectuals of the day, such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Benjamin Franklin did view religion as essential to the health of liberty, Kramnick and Moore make a compelling case that most of the principal architects of U.S. national government envisioned a secular state. Significantly, Kramnick and Moore's response takes for granted that the key debates in American politics should be framed in terms of what the Founders wanted and what faith was held by the majority of the population of their time.

**The development of the "Christian right".** Much work has been devoted to tracing the development of the fundamentalist evangelical<sup>7</sup> movement since its resurgence in the U.S. in the late 1970s. According to Moen (1994), the so-called "Christian right" passed through three distinct phases between then and the mid-1990s. The expansionist period (1978-1984) was characterized by steady growth and the proliferation of a wide array of evangelical organizations (p. 347). Conservative Christian leaders began to influence political agendas at the state and national level by placing a host of issues concerned with "conventional morality" and "family decline" in the public eye (p. 352). The transition period (1985-1986) was characterized by an effort to promote retrenchment because the

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<sup>7</sup> The terms "evangelical" and "fundamentalist" are often mistakenly interchanged. "Evangelicalism" is derived from the Greek "evangelion", which means "good news" (Ruthven: 2008, p. 32). Within the specialized literature, evangelicalism has generally been used as an umbrella term for evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatics (Jorstad, 1993, p. 10). "Fundamentalism", in contrast, first appeared in 1910, when Milton and Lyman Stewart edited a series of pamphlets, distributed at no charge to protestant pastors, entitled *The Fundamentals: a Testimony of Truth*, that sought to underscore the erosion of the "fundamental" beliefs of Protestantism (p. 11). Fundamentalism has since been used to describe a movement within *any* religious group (not limited to evangelicals) that combines a literal interpretation of sacred texts with authoritarian leadership and an anti-modernist philosophy (Shibley, 1996). In popular literature, "fundamentalism" now encompasses many types of activity that are not even religious (Ruthven, 2006, pp. 32-33).

bulk of evangelical organizations faltered, merged, or disappeared. The institutionalization period (1987-present) established stable, sustainable and well-positioned Christian organizations. Christian political elites retooled and repositioned the movement. Financial coffers began to overflow and, from a public relations standpoint, Christian leaders became increasingly savvy at shedding moralistic language, adopting pluralistic rhetoric, and otherwise framing issues so as to maximize support (p. 355). Banning gay marriage and criminalizing abortion, for instance, were now being framed as “pro-family”. Evangelicals also embraced sources other than the Bible to support their claims, including academic writings and governmental reports, especially those with a focus on statistics. As a result, in the years since Moen developed his three-phase schema, the movement has remained prominent in state and local elections. For example, in 2010, fully 59 percent of the U.S. Congress self-identify as part of a Protestant denomination, the bulk of which are evangelical (Pewforum, 2011).

### **C. Citizenship Education**

The assumption that formal schooling is necessary to produce good citizens is deeply imbedded in American thinking (Carpini, 1997, p. 971). Education, it has long been held, provides the skills, knowledge and shared experience required to create a productive, informed, and engaged citizenry (Nie et al., 1996, p. 12). Civic learning has an extensive history in both primary and secondary education, is extremely institutionalized, and continues to be highly valued. Heater, for instance, notes that even in 1986, several years before the explosion of citizenship education initiatives introduced under the Clinton administration, fully 90 percent of states made a government or civics course a requirement for high school graduation (Heater, 1990, p. 145). In 1994, the new

“Goals 2000: Educate America Act” included strong requirements for citizenship education in primary and secondary schools. During the 2000s, the Bush administration introduced numerous similar measures through the “No Child Left Behind Act”. More recently U.S. President Obama’s policies have equally attempted to encourage citizenship in students of every age, nation-wide. Although he never formally endorsed the DREAM act, in the summer of 2012 U.S. President Barack Obama changed the federal government’s stance towards the children of undocumented immigrants, arguing that they too should be privy to the citizen building that goes on in schools.

Yet, there continues to be enormous ambivalence about the intersection of politics and education – anxiety from the right about liberal partisanship in the teaching profession, and suspicion from the left that civic education veils ideological indoctrination and maintains existing social hierarchies. The central debates in the field of citizenship education dispute whether the impact of post-Fordist modes of production, the growth of consumption-based lifestyles, and increasing globalization have been positive or negative developments. Either way, for many, these postmodern/postindustrial changes require us to rethink the way citizenship is taught.

Research into political socialization has shown that children begin to develop national identity as early as age four (Bennet et al., 1998, p. 903). As they begin to recognize symbols and discourse in both active and banal ways (Billig, 2000, p. 6), children and youth quickly develop strong attachments to their political communities and nations (Heater, 1990, p. 191). Invariably rooted in feelings that “my/our nation is the *best*”, these positive sentiments are based not on critical reasoning, but on passively absorbing nationalistic discourse disseminated through various institutions including the

mass media, the church and, above all, the school (p. 191). Over time, citizens internalize, and become emotionally invested in, the rituals, ceremonies, symbols, ideas and figures that are associated with national identity (p. 191).

Hahn (1999), argues that schools have typically taught pupils to be citizens in three ways: 1) selecting material that conveys a particular worldview (e.g., nationalist history, which in America has adopted a focus on European exodus and the foundational epoch, at the expense of the thinking of subaltern groups); 2) identifying teaching goals oriented towards a particular morality (e.g., many forms of faith-based schooling); and, 3) the hidden curriculum and messages regarding citizenship which students learn day-to-day through school assemblies, relationships with teachers, classroom interactions with peers and extra-curricular activities (p. 204). Common examples include ceremonies/rituals (e.g., reciting the pledge of allegiance, flying the American flag), and the teaching of a wide range of classes where citizenship-related issues surface, including civics, social studies, English, and religion (p. 204).

The question of what *kind* of citizen should be produced through civic education is all-important. Teachers have a variety of goals when it comes to sculpting national identity: instilling students with a sense of national pride (Heater, 1990, p. 206), cultivating virtuous human beings by entrenching principles of social justice (Freire, 2006/1970, p. 9), and, teaching youth to be active in the “public sphere” (Habermas, 1990). *Who* controls definitions of the citizen and citizenship education has significant implications for curriculum and the role of teachers.

#### **D. Home-Based Education**





closer to 2 million (Kunzman, 2012). Today, the homeschool population continues to grow.

This expansion signals not only mounting dissatisfaction with the decline in the quality of public schooling, but also the growing social acceptance of homeschooling and its steady legalization over the last 30 years. In 1980, home-education was illegal in thirty States, by 1993 it had become legalized in all fifty (Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.). This mounting recognition and legitimacy can be attributed in part to hard-fought battles waged by homeschool advocacy groups, mainly the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

Policies and legislation governing homeschooling vary widely, with some states requiring considerable oversight and others, very little (Basham, 2006, pp. 4-5). In high regulation states such as New York and Pennsylvania, parents are not only required to inform educational authorities that they are homeschooling, but must also get government approval for their intended curriculum, allow their children to take standardized tests and submit to periodic home visits by officials. In some cases, homeschool parents must undergo certification procedures (Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.). On the other end of the spectrum, states with no regulations, such as Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma and Idaho, neither require registration nor mandate contact with state representatives (Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.). Somewhere in between, states with low regulation such as California and Nevada, or moderate regulations such as Colorado and Washington, require parents to provide test scores and professional evaluations of students' progress to state authorities (Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.). In confrontations over homeschool regulation since the 1980s, homeschoolers have

generally emerged victorious; critics such as Reich generally regard homeschool regulation to be minimal (Hardenbergh, 2005, p. 97).

**Christian research on homeschooling.** The most comprehensive account of home-education's evolution in the U.S. is Milton Gaither's *Homeschool: An American History* (2008). Gaither, a Christian authority on education, sees the spread of home-education as a "reaction to the modern liberal state" (Gaither, 2008, p. 85). He maintains that, from the 1950s on, the increasing bureaucratization and standardization of schools provoked anti-institutionalism. A huge reliance on "experts" and how-to volumes such as *Baby and Child Care* began to breed a fear that kids were being "Spocked when they should have been spanked" (p. 91). Meanwhile, social scientists raised concerns that conformity made for alienation and malaise, notably Reisman in *The Lonely Crowd* (2001/1950) and Galbraith in *The Affluent Society* (1958) (p. 91). Embracing a new spirit of self-reliance, the American cult of the child stressed keeping kids at home to liberate them from the "deadening effects of institutionalization" (p. 113).

One of the most prominent Christian homeschool pioneers was Rousas J. Rushdoony, the founder of Christian re-constructionism, who promoted the view that the word of God should be the law of the land. Fifty years later, his "providentialist" interpretation of history is still used to contest "mainstream historiography"<sup>10</sup> (p. 135). In Rushdoony's formulation, the belief that God has selected the U.S. for greatness means that the homeschool movement should think of itself as a "divinely guided instrument in restoring a Christian America" (p. 137).

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<sup>10</sup> Rushdoony's "contrast between a Biblical worldview and the worldview of secular humanism has become a staple of conservative Christian cultural" analysts such as Francis Shaeffer (p. 136).

Between 1983 and the late 1990s, homeschooling was a grassroots social movement, but it has since shifted into the American mainstream. In Gaither's view, "Homeschooling" – a concerted, deliberate rejection of institutional schooling – is ceding place to "home schooling", an arrangement where learning at home is not so much a form of protest but a matter of convenience<sup>11</sup> (p. 203). The current population of home-educators is "considerably more heterogeneous than in the past" (p. 204), with no simple divisions between religiously- and academically-motivated parents.

Gaither highlights what he calls two popular misconceptions. First, he rejects understandings of the homeschool movement as a continuation of traditional education, as a return to the *original* American model of education<sup>12</sup> (p. 1). While it is true that the family had been the center of education in early America, the modern homeschool movement in many ways fundamentally differs from earlier efforts to educate children at home. In Gaither's words, homeschooling has "gone from being something that was done as a matter of course, to being an act, even a movement, of self-conscious political protest against government" (p. 2). Second, Gaither dismisses the "great man" history that assumes home-education was revived due to the writings and works of great individuals, arguing that this view obscures the populist forces at work (p. 3).

Today, says Gaither, home-education is characterized by "ambiguity, hybridization and cross-fertilization" (p. 4). As the homeschool population ages, the

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<sup>11</sup> Gaither reserves the compound "homeschooling" for home-education that is part of a concerted rejection of institutional schooling (p. 6). In keeping with his precision, I employ the compound form throughout this dissertation when referring to conservative Christian homeschoolers.

<sup>12</sup> According to Gaither, education in the home has indeed been a constant throughout the foundational period, but its social meaning has changed dramatically. It has gone from enforced by civil government, to eclipsed by other institutions, to antagonism with educators and legislators, and finally to hybridization (p. 4).

number of homeschooled young children is beginning to level off, but for older children it continues to build (p. 212). An explosion of innovative programs has occurred (p. 212). Many school districts, knowing full well that government funding is allocated on a per-pupil basis, now openly court homeschoolers by offering individualized services and support through satellite campuses (Gaither, 213). “Cyber-charter schools” are among the many forms of home-based education that have emerged, and now educate more than 65,000 students entirely online (pp. 214-215). The 1998 Higher Education Act even allows home-educated children to qualify for federal aid to colleges and universities, explaining why homeschool graduates are now represented in undergraduate and post-graduate studies (p. 213).

**Sociological research on homeschooling.** The sociological literature on home-education in the U.S. is characterized by four separate strains of research. The first provides a glimpse into the demographic composition of the homeschool population (Ray, 2005, p. 2). The reliability of such research is controversial due to low response rates by homeschoolers in quantitative surveys that make effectively sampling their population difficult. Researchers such as Brian D. Ray maintain that existing surveys *do* give us a sense of the features of home-educators and their children. We can say, with some confidence, for instance, that women shoulder the vast majority of the homeschooling workload; that parents employ a wide variety of pedagogical and curricular approaches (ranging from pre-packaged learning programs to “unschooling” that entails little pre-planned structure); that homeschoolers have larger than average families; and that homeschool parents have dominantly been white Christians, with above-median levels of education and income. Even if we accept Ray’s profile, however, given the paucity of

sound reliable data, we need to be very cautious about making any broader generalizations than these.

The second major strain in the homeschooling literature investigates parents' motivations for schooling their children at home (Knowles, 1988, 1991, 1992). van Galen<sup>13</sup> (1988) describes two distinct camps of home educators: conservative "ideologues" opposed to the secular content of public school curricula, and "pedagogues", representing the libertarian left, who condemn institutionalized schooling as "pedagogically unsound". The tenability of this dichotomy has become dubious in the 2000s, however, as new variants of home-education have emerged to meet the situated needs of families. Home-educators are indeed loosely united by dissatisfaction with public education and concern for moral instruction: in the 2007 NHES, 88 percent of homeschool parents cited concern about the school environment, and 83 percent noted their desire to provide religious or moral instruction as their main reasons for teaching their children at home (Kunzman, 2012). However, we should not lose sight of the incredible diversity of the homeschool population. Home educators now include single parents, parents and children with physical or cognitive disabilities, and cultural groups such as First Nations communities, African Americans and Latinos. When it comes to faith groups, Jews, Catholics, Mormons, and Muslims have all adopted home-education. To lump all of their motivations into two groups overlooks their heterogeneity and plurality.

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<sup>13</sup> van Galen's "ideologues" versus "pedagogues" terminology was snapped up by other researchers but, as Gaither notes, "both groups were clearly driven by ideological commitments, and both employed a range of pedagogies" (Gaither, 2008, p. 143). Mitchell Stevens refers instead to a distinction between "believers" and "inclusives" (p. 143), while Gaither prefers the metaphor of a continuum between "closed communion" and "open communion" homeschool families (p. 143).

The preeminent homeschooling experts adopt different positions on whether home-education qualifies as a concerted movement. Stevens' (2001) organizational research, conducted during 1990s, takes this for granted. He locates the homeschool families he studied firmly in the liberal-progressive and conservative-religious anti-school movements. In contrast, Gaither (2008) is convinced that:

homeschooling is currently being done by so many different kinds of people for so many different reasons that it no longer makes much sense to speak of it as a movement or even a set of movements. For an increasing number of Americans, it is just one option among many to consider, for a few months or for a lifetime. (p. 223)

A third strain in the sociological literature focuses on the effects of home-education on students' social and cognitive development and educational outcomes. This includes studies on homeschool students' achievement motivation (Apostoleris, 2000), academic success (Collom, 2000; Rudner, 1999), and levels of educational attainment (Winchers, 2004). A particular focus has been on the general success of transitions from homeschooling to formal schooling (Kranzow, 2005; Lines, 2000a and 2000b), especially from elementary school to junior high and from high school to university (Brown, 2004). A great deal of attention has also been paid to the psychological and social adjustment of home-educated students (Andrew, 2000; Wagenaar, 1997; Luffman, 1998). The available evidence suggests that homeschool families are very involved in extracurricular and social activities outside the home (Hoeflinger, 2001), discrediting the stereotype of the poorly adjusted homeschool student, but these studies do not necessarily dismiss charges of ideological isolationism or parochialism.

Finally, the fourth strain of the homeschooling literature, the most relevant to this dissertation, has analyzed the practice as a social and political movement. Work in this tradition has examined homeschooling as an articulation of identity, autonomy, and self-determination (Mayberry, 1988; Callan, 1997; Demaine, 1996; Riegel, 2001; Stevens, 2003; Bulman, 2004; Kunzman, 2009). It has shown that many homeschoolers have adopted an active grass-roots political approach in order to advance their agenda in the courts, state legislatures and the U.S. Congress (Somerville, 2005, p. 135). Such scholarship has grappled with longstanding debates about the role of the school in creating “good” citizens. Couching debates in terms of educational choice versus civic responsibility (Apple 2001; Stevens, 2003; Reich, 2002), it has examined the impact of home-education in promoting community solidarity (McDowell and Ray, 2000), and on political behaviours such as voting (Lines, 1999).

Sikkink and Smith (2000), using data from the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES), are two of the few who have shown how civic involvement may be shaped differently in distinct types of schooling. They found that homeschool and private school families are more involved in civic activities than families with children in public school (Ray, 2005, p. 15). They were “more likely to vote, contribute to political causes, contact political leaders, attend public meetings or rallies, and belong to community groups or volunteer associations” (pp. 19-20). There is, then, some evidence that homeschool families may be more willing and able to invest in community life, civic activities, democratic processes, and grassroots politics than their public school counterparts (p. 12).

There are two definitive works on conservative Christian homeschooling: Mitchell Stevens' account of the home-education movement, *Kingdom of Children* (2003), and Robert Kunzman's *Write These Laws on Your Children* (2009), the strongest extant effort to illuminate the day-to-day world of conservative Christian homeschool families. Stevens considers the political implications of a number of forms of homeschooling, including the evangelical homeschool movement that sprang out of Christian day schools during the 1960s and 1970s. He posits a fundamental *organizational* difference between conservative Christians and other homeschoolers (Stevens, 2001, p. 14). In Stevens view, Christian home-educators have been so successful politically, especially in the realm of homeschool legislation and regulation, because they mesh well with hierarchical structures and have cultivated a cohesive ideology that moves their agenda forward (p. 168). Other homeschoolers lack a unified identity or ideology beyond their status as homeschoolers, making it difficult for them to advance a detailed policy program (169).

Kunzman conducted interviews and repeated participant observation sessions with six homeschool families across the U.S. In one chapter, he uses Generation Joshua (GenJ), a civics education program initiated by HSLDA in 2003 aimed mainly at homeschoolers, as a case study. GenJ combines a dizzying array of options: on-line distance learning, civics coursework, adult-moderated "chats" about current events, discussion boards, summer camps, voter registration drives, clubs, "Student Action Teams" and participation in electoral campaigns (p. 100). Roughly 90 percent of GenJ'ers are homeschoolers (p. 103). Their curriculum emphasizes topics such as Constitutional law, the Founding fathers, Revolutionary War-era sermons, the Federalist



papers, and the numerous “great awakenings” (p. 102). Distrustful of public schools and mainstream culture, GenJ’ers see society and public education as permeated with an un-Godly moral relativism (p. 103).

Ultimately, Kunzman’s appraisal of Generation Joshua is ambivalent (p. 106). Although conservative Christian homeschoolers in some ways epitomize civic engagement, they also seem to promulgate intolerance towards divergent views. As Kunzman notes, “Gen J fosters an adversarial political engagement informed by narrow ideological boundaries, rather than compromising and accommodating” (p. 107). They emphasize notions of liberty and freedom, but do not see this as conflicting with their dogmatic positions on abortion, same-sex marriage, religious references in public displays, the Pledge of Allegiance, and a host of other issues.

Taking a cue from Stevens and Kunzman, my dissertation moves beyond research that treats homeschooling as monolithic, adopting a more nuanced approach that acknowledges its multiplicity and does not try to capture all of its practitioners under one umbrella. Recognizing this variability, I respond by honing in on one particular manifestation – conservative Christian homeschooling – and purposefully orienting my research problematic, questions, and conclusions to a particular case study within that group. In doing so, I add to sociological understandings of contemporary American homeschooling by highlighting that it is now composed of many sub-groups that merit academic scrutiny, setting the stage for more comparative research on the ways these distinct forms of home-education differ or converge.

I contribute to the fourth string of homeschooling research by providing a fresh, textured exploration of conservative evangelical educators in relation to citizenship,

establishing ethnographically not only what ideologies and discourses are in play, but also *how* these are purposefully transmitted to homeschool youth. My research shows how homeschoolers actually go about teaching their children to be American citizens, in both generalized and in gendered ways. It thus extends extant work, such as Kunzman's 2009 analysis, which briefly touches on issues of politics in relation to Generation Joshua, but does not explore the practices of the players involved in-depth. Similarly, because Mitchell Stevens' valuable work on conservative Christian home-educators was conducted during the mid 1990s, I build on his research by capturing the current features of evangelical homeschooling, showing how the movement has changed in the intervening years.

## **Conclusion**

The previous chapter outlined my project's problematic and the research questions that I use to address it. This chapter sought to frame relevant research by sketching the central themes and debates in the sociological literature on development of the evangelical movement, civic education and homeschooling. Now, on to a discussion of the epistemology and research methods I employed in my study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods**

My dissertation elucidates citizenship discourse and the social organization of civic education amongst CHEC homeschoolers using interview research on homeschoolers and homeschool graduates, ethnographic observation of the annual CHEC conference and analysis of curricula and key CHEC documents. I see discourse as language and practice that figure in the production of identities (Philips and Hardy, 2002, p. 2). Engaging with and interpreting discourse can construct what Kress calls “subject positions” (Kress, 1989, p. 37), building up what Luke refers to as particular “life-worlds” (Luke, 1996, p. 17). Discourse plays an important role in the process through which socially constructed and contested identities – “subjectivities” – are made and remade, and in shaping how political subjects in the U.S. are taught or learn how to “be” an “American”. Dominant and emerging discourses provide a repertoire of concepts that social agents in particular communities employ to influence the construction of identities, be they social, occupational, or, in the case of my research, civic (Luke, 32). Discourse shapes identities, which are fragmented and changing, through the interplay of different actors and texts (p. 41).

Orienting to discourse as social practice that includes language and talk – phenomena that can be explored analytically through participant observation and ethnographic interviewing – my study reports on how CHEC parents and speakers are involved in creating, interpreting and disseminating discourse around virtuous American citizenship and how to foster it. I examine the worldview that guides conservative Christian homeschoolers in their teaching by examining the civic, moral and pedagogical

discourses CHEC parents and speakers adhere to. I show how they go about passing these on to their children in order to constitute them as a particular type of citizen: conservative Christian nationalists. Above all, I am interested in how the content and circulation of citizenship discourse and ideology figure in the managed construction of political identities.

This chapter describes my study and how I went about it. I lay out the methodological approach and epistemological assumptions that underpinned my data collection and analysis, explaining how I used ethnography to study citizenship discourse. Specifically, I explicate how I conceive of discourse and how I used ethnography to illuminate its role in the lives of situated actors – homeschool parents endeavouring to shape their children into Christian Americans – using the Christian Home Educators of Colorado (CHEC) as a case study. I then go on to outline my case study approach and describe my research site, respondents, and means of entrée. Next, I discuss my fieldwork, and the four data streams that it produced. Finally, I explain my analytic approach in detail.

### **Exploring Discourse Through Ethnography**

While sociologists have long been preoccupied with “what things *mean*”<sup>14</sup>, over the last three decades the “linguistic turn” has drawn attention to the role of “discourse” in meaning-making. Accordingly, thinkers such as Derrida, Bahktin, Halliday, Foucault, Smith, Butler, Fairclough and Wodak have all devised methods of discourse analysis to explore how discourses simultaneously construct meaning, and are made meaningful (Philips and Hardy, 2002, p. 5). Discursive activity does not occur in a vacuum; it is

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<sup>14</sup> Weber’s interpretive sociology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Symbolic Interactionist literature of the 1950s and 1960s are but two examples of the interpretive approaches that emerged to challenge positivist, methodological individualist frameworks.

crucial to attend to historical and social context (p. 4). This requires that we concern ourselves with both the *how* and the *what* of discourse by attending both to processes of representing and to representations themselves (Wodak and Meyer, 2009/2001). Individual experience is mediated by a multitude of interwoven and often conflicting discourses (p. 2). It is thus necessary to explore how such discourses are enacted, organizing and regulating the social world. Fairclough and Wodak (1997), explain that:

Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s), which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned. It constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 263).

In other words, while discourse is socially constitutive, it is also constrained by social and institutional structures (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448).

As a result, it is important to recognize that examining textual materials out of context can eclipse how they are being used and interpreted. The mechanics of using ethnography to study discourse, however, are not always straightforward. In my case, it was challenging to use ethnography to describe how discourse is created and enacted in particular historical-cultural circumstances, while also analyzing how the discursive construction of texts fits into the lived experience of my respondents. The emphasis of conservative Christian homeschoolers on Biblical self-government, for example – the belief that it is up to individual families and communities to govern themselves, not the

state – is manifest in diverse ways in their day-to-day lives. For some, like Joseph, this notion spawns a defensive position that stresses the need to be armed against potential bullying by “big government” (Interview 20). For Eve, in contrast, this philosophy produces an emphasis on homesteading and entrepreneurship (Interview 13).

Ethnography works to make situated data speak to larger issues (Geertz, 1973, p. 23), by demonstrating that “big conclusions and broad assertions about culture can be developed out of small but very densely textured facts and complex specifics” (Alexander and Smith, 2003, p. 16). Examining discourse ethnographically requires identifying linkages between broader social contexts, institutions, and the everyday discursive interactions that animate them. I attend to social structure *and* situated social and political processes in order to sidestep abstracted, de-contextualized accounts that obscure immediate social, economic, and political dynamics.

Like the homeschools I visited, I see the CHEC conference as a venue where discourse is staged. The conference brings home-educators together in a crucial location where discourse about patriotism, nationalism, and civic learning is produced, consumed and negotiated through interactions between actors and discourse. Diverse social agents are positioned at the CHEC conference as paid staff, volunteers, speakers, attendees, consumers, sellers, and so on. They engage in distinct practices that “enact” different threads of citizenship discourse. Some deliver keynote speeches that are witnessed by all in the largest lecture halls and are given the preferred time-slots. Others, like parents, especially homeschool Moms, are there to absorb homeschool discourse by taking diligent notes and interacting with speakers. Some even do so while breast-feeding in

special reserved seating. Meanwhile, sellers operating small vendor tables distribute formal curricula for civics, history and other related fields.

Textual materials such as formal curricula can help reveal the character of nationalist discourse among CHEC leaders and families, but the ideological effects of texts cannot be revealed through textual analysis alone. To research meaning-making, one needs to look at interpretations of texts as well as texts themselves, and at how texts figure in particular areas of social life. My data included interview/speech transcripts and formal learning materials that were placed in ethnographic contexts. It is important to acknowledge, however, that my observational data are profoundly informed by my own subjectivity, more so than curricular materials or transcripts from co-created interviews. It is this amalgamation – the use of ethnographic data to document the features and operation of discourses – that uncovers the ways in which knowledge and values are diffused, debated, and propagated. Put differently, nuanced observations enhance insight into texts by identifying and illuminating the cultural settings in which they are constituted and negotiated (Hammersley, 2005).

### **Case Study and Research Site: Christian Home Educators of Colorado (CHEC)**

Given the nature of the homeschool movement in the U.S., notably its success in managing its public image, its rapid growth, and its political influence, it was important that this study include fieldwork in the U.S. My project's central case study is of the Christian Home Educators of Colorado (CHEC), a prominent homeschooling association that describes itself as a non-profit, Christian organization. It provides information and resources on the legal status of home-education in Colorado, curriculum requirements and materials, and special events (CHEC, n.d.b).

CHEC is an appropriate focus for my research because it is well established and incorporates citizenship education explicitly into its activities. For example, each April, it organizes a *Day at the Capitol* with the express purposes of 1) further securing the legal rights of home-educators and 2) helping teach students about the U.S. Constitution and legislature. On the CHEC website, parents are told that “students are trained in principles of Godly citizenship, leadership, and the U.S. Constitution, and both you and they learn how to make a difference for America’s future” (CHEC, n.d.a). The Day at the Capitol involves a workshop where students can “learn about the proper function of authority and civil government – its responsibilities and limits” and a “Citizen Lobbyist Workshop” that guides them through what it means to be a lobbyist at the state Capitol. CHEC also runs the “Future Statesman Program”, which teaches Christian heritage and the Biblical and Constitutional roles of civil government. Completion of this program fulfills the Colorado home-education law requiring regular courses of instruction in the U.S. Constitution.

### **Ethics Approval**

My research proposal was approved by the Ethical Review Board, through the Graduate Program in Sociology and the Faculty of Graduate Studies at York University, on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009<sup>15</sup>.

### **Access**

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<sup>15</sup> This process involved completing online training on the Tri-Council Policy on research involving human participants, outlining a project description and rationale, providing samples of interview protocols and informed consent forms. The informed consent document explained who the participants would be, how they would be recruited, as well as assurances that there were no risks to participants and that no inducements would be exchanged for their participation. It made clear that my data would be kept confidential, how it would be stored and for how long and that, throughout the study, the names of participants, consent forms, tapes, transcripts and all other confidential material would be kept secure, and ultimately destroyed.



Gaining access to members of CHEC raised a host of questions: How would I approach them? What would I say? How would I represent myself? In practical terms, this involved both negotiating with organizational gatekeepers and assuming roles conducive to acceptance. Generally, the existing literature on “getting in” to conservative Christian groups or organizations, such as Richardson et al.’s (1978) ethnographic work, highlights the importance of key leaders and decision-makers in officially approving research access and in more subtly condoning it through their own participation. Richardson et al. reported that “gaining initial approval for the research from group leadership can lead to very high response rates among members, and to considerable candor from respondents” (Richardson et al., 1978, p. 66).

In my case, the most important gatekeepers were the executive and administrative staff of CHEC, including the organization’s Executive Director, Kevin Swanson<sup>16</sup> and its chief communications officer, Michael. That my sister and her family are conservative Christian homeschoolers and members of CHEC was an asset because I could make my familial connection to the organization explicit in my initial contact letter. Michael responded promptly, requesting a phone conversation to address a few issues related to my research. Chiefly, he wanted to be sure that I did not have an anti-homeschooling agenda. For instance, I was asked whether a teacher’s union funded my research, or whether I expected to employ my findings to cast homeschooling in a negative light. I responded that my perspective towards homeschooling was open, and that the aim of my research was to illuminate and explain how home-based education intersects with citizenship, not to disparage or undermine the practice. At the same time, however, I also

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<sup>16</sup> Names of respondents are either their own, with ethics procedures duly followed, or are pseudonyms.

made clear that my dissertation would be analytical in nature, and that critiques of the homeschooling movement or its members might emerge, just as points of strength and merit would also be acknowledged.

Michael did not provide me with an extensive e-mail list for potential respondents as I had first hoped; instead, he contacted prospective participants on my behalf. The participants he nominated were clearly meant to be shining examples of Christian citizenship. Compared to the respondents I met through my sister, they were unusually involved in politics, though they echoed many of the same sentiments. Finding informants hinged on making a good impression on CHEC gatekeepers so as to form initial connections that would produce referrals. This yielded eight respondents whom I interviewed at the CHEC conference, who then provided referrals to other potential interviewees. My sister also provided names of some 16 prospective interviewees, 11 of whom participated.

When forging these initial connections, and throughout my research more generally, I took an open approach, aiming to be as transparent about my research interests as possible. I did not feign interest in being “saved” and becoming Christian, but tried to cast myself simply as a social scientist that has come to do research. Of course, a certain degree of presentation management is implicitly necessary in all fieldwork. Peshkin (1984) maintains, the “presentation of self as well as the research are not organized in a vacuum but are shaped by the people in the setting with whom the researcher interacts” (Peshkin, 1984, p. 262). With my status as a non-Christian in mind, I aimed to adopt the classic “outsider” role, without alienating respondents or potential respondents by advertising when my views differed from theirs.

Peshkin flags numerous issues that can arise when studying evangelical groups. During his eighteen months of fieldwork in a fundamentalist Christian school and church, he felt himself to be “the odd man out” because of his Jewish background, and found that this affected his relationships with his respondents in several ways. He presented himself as an academic planning to write a book, and stated that his desire to learn about Christian schools motivated his inquiry. He emphasized that he and his research assistants would respect the church/school’s prevailing behavioral guidelines and refrain from contravening behavior expected of community adults. Peshkin notes that “even if we were not Christians, we meant not to act in un- or anti-Christian ways; but we also never promised to act in pro-Christian ways” (p. 257). Peshkin thus made no effort to disguise his role as a researcher collecting data, but sought to look, as much as possible, like any other Christian adult. Ideally, he wanted his non-Christian identity to be forgotten because he believed it precluded the invisibility necessary for the community to be themselves. I took my cue from Peshkin by being forthright about my motivations and religious background when asked, but at the same time I did not go out of my way to draw attention to my atheism. I explained my research and the motivations for it in simple and accessible terms: “I’m a graduate student doing research on citizenship education amongst conservative Christian home-educators. I’m studying home-based education as part of my degree and I will write a report based on the research”.

Peshkin also discusses a matter that has been frequently reported by researchers studying conservative Christian groups: attempts at conversion. According to the literature, this may lead to a great deal of attention and cooperation, but can also generate significant tension and resentment if “conversion” is not effected. The standard practice

of identifying the “unsaved” as a potential “convert” is one I did not have to contend with during my research. This pitfall was side-stepped by making clear to respondents that their priorities were being taken seriously, respected, and valued, but that I was not there to join their community or adopt their belief systems. This was most easily accomplished simply by dialoguing with members of the group in order to build a rapport and produce open and honest interviews.

### **Data Sources and Data Collection**

My research design utilizes a variety of complementary approaches to qualitative data collection and analysis. I conducted participant observation and interviews with people involved in CHEC, focusing on conversations with them in their homes and at their annual conference. To collect my data, I used three strategies: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and the compilation of key curricular and organizational documents. This yielded four distinct sets of data: interview transcripts, participant observation notes, transcriptions of lectures delivered at the CHEC annual conference, and the curricular documents focusing on citizenship and political participation put forward by CHEC and other Christian political organizations aimed at youth. In total, 1562 pages of data in the form of Word documents were generated.

**1. Interviews.** A total of 34 interviews were conducted with individuals from four different CHEC constituencies: the leadership (the two communications directors and the Executive Director [N=3]), homeschooling parents (N=27), homeschool grandparents (N=1) and homeschool graduates (N=3). All of my interviewees were white and identified as evangelical Christians. They ranged in age from their early twenties to mid-seventies. See Table 1 for a summary of their basic characteristics.

**Table 1: Interviewees by Sex, Pseudonym, Age, # of Children and Occupation**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Pseudonym*</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b># of Children</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
1	F	Ruth	50	4	Homeschooler
2	M	Timothy	53	4	Insurance Agent
3	M	Daniel	22	0	Homeschool Graduate/College Student
4	F	Susan	54	4	Homeschooler
5	F	Tabitha	45	3	Homeschooler
6	M	Michael	55	5	Public Service
7	F	Charity	55	5	Homeschooler
8	F	Sarah Anderson	20	0	Paralegal
9	M	Aaron	45	3	Entrepreneur
10	F	Elizabeth	50	4	Homeschooler
11	M	Jonathan	50	4	Accountant
12	M	Adam	70	3	Retired Engineer
13	F	Eve	37	4	Retired Social Worker/Homeschooler
14	F	Mary	26	4	Homeschool Graduate/Seamstress
15	M	Jacob	27	3	Software Engineer
16	M	Kevin Swanson	50	5	Minister/Radio Program Host
17	F	Rebecca	45	5	Homeschooler
18	F	Hannah	38	3	Homeschooler
19	F	Joanna	45	1	Homeschooler
20	M	Joseph	45	1	Mechanic
21	M	Peter	46	3	Certified Counselor/ Youth Pastor/ Homeschooler
22	F	Judith	46	3	Dental Hygienist
23	F	Alexandra	45	6	Homeschooler
24	F	Joy	24	0	Homeschool Graduate/Missionary
25	F	Dana	35	2	Homeschooler
26	M	Felix	32	2	High School Teacher
27	M	Ichabod	50	5	Minister/Pastor
28	F	Rose	45	3	Homeschooler
29	M	Jeremiah	47	4	Auto Parts Salesman
30	F	Naomi	45	4	Homeschooler/

31	F	Grace	45	2	Homeschooler
32	M	Isaac	55	4	Government Researcher
33	M	Paul	35	3	IT Consultant
34	F	Miriam	32	3	Homeschooler

\* or real name with permission. Pseudonyms were chosen to reflect CHEC members' penchant for Biblical names, and were selected based on the personality and characteristics of my individual respondents.

On the whole, my interviews focused on gathering information on Christian homeschooling, enhancing understanding of my respondents' perspectives, beliefs, and gaining insight into the discursive resources and practices through which homeschoolers construct national identity. In other words, the interviews concentrated on participants' conceptions of citizenship and citizenship education. They were conducted in a variety of venues, including respondents' homes, the CHEC conference space, and public meeting spots such as coffee shops. My approach to interviewing was driven by a dialogic, reflexive epistemology. I was straightforward with my respondents when they asked me about my background or research goals, and was happy to share details from my own life and exposure to homeschooling. I strove to develop a two-way dynamic, rather than presenting myself as a disinterested, "objective" observer. For example, I spoke with numerous respondents about the benefits of homeschooling for my autistic niece, who shows no signs of the depression and anxiety suffered by the bulk of autistic children as they move into adolescence and adulthood. I adopted a conversational, collaborative strategy that recognized my data as co-constructed with respondents.

Whenever requested, interview transcripts were distributed to respondents for their feedback and perspectives. Though only three of my interviewees took this option, I was surprised at the way they qualified and elaborated their comments. One couple was

astonished at how different their responses were when they shared their transcripts with each other. The mother described citizenship as “extremely important”, while her husband stated that it was “not something I’m really concerned about”. Moreover, I spent time with certain respondents on repeated occasions, and it was common for them to mention that “something occurred to me after our interview”. This allowed respondents to expand on and refine their statements, greatly enhancing my interpretations. I used this feedback to develop my interview questions to address themes I had not anticipated when formulating my research, and by incorporating them into my data analysis.

My initial questions included:

***CHEC parents:***

1. How do Christian principles inform your teaching philosophy and practices?
2. How do you incorporate citizenship education into your children’s schooling? What is the importance of citizenship in your children’s education?
3. Does your instruction involve students and parents from other families and the larger community? How?
4. What benefits and challenges have arisen in the course of your teaching Civics, History and The Constitution at home?
5. What material do you use to teach these three courses to your children? What textbooks, websites, and other resources do you rely on? Why have you chosen these resources over others?

***CHEC executive:***

1. How do you see citizenship and citizenship education as fitting into CHEC’s mandate?

2. What should be the goals of citizenship education? What issues or problems do the goals address? What is the importance of citizenship in children's education?
3. You recommend numerous resources on your website as ideal for courses related to citizenship education such as History, The Constitution and Civics? Why have you chosen to highlight these particular textbooks, websites, and resources?

***Guest speakers:***

1. How do you see citizenship and citizenship education fitting into home-based education?
2. What should the goals of citizenship education be? How important is citizenship in children's education?
3. What materials would you recommend to parents teaching these three courses to their children? What textbooks, websites, and other resources do you rely on? Why would you suggest these resources over others?

***Homeschool graduates:***

1. How did Christian principles inform your homeschooling?
2. How did your parents incorporate citizenship education into your schooling? What was the importance of citizenship in your education?
3. Did your education involve students and parents from other families and the larger community? How?
4. What benefits and challenges arose in the course of studying Civics, History and The Constitution at home?
5. What material did your parents use to teach you these three courses? What textbooks, websites, and other resources did they rely on?



**2. Ethnographic observation.** In addition to interviews, I conducted ethnographic observation at the CHEC annual conference from June 16-18, 2009 and during the day-to-day activities and routines of my respondents throughout June, July and August 2009. My attendance at the conference was essential not only for meeting potential informants and arranging interviews, but also to see how discourse(s) surrounding Christian citizenship surfaced in talks and discussions. My observations provided me with a sense of how discourses of citizenship are collectively constructed in larger groups, and of the roles that vocal or prominent members of the community play in guiding or determining processes of identity formation.

The initial questions that guided my observations were similar to those listed above for my interviews:

1. How do CHEC parents and speakers, in the setting of the CHEC conference, express and enact discourse around citizenship and citizenship education? What social actors, such as parents, youth, CHEC volunteers, speakers and officials are involved in the CHEC conference, and how? How do these different actors interact?
2. What goals of citizenship education do different players demonstrate and articulate? What issues or problems do they talk about? What type of citizenship do they encourage and/or criticize, and in what ways? What kinds of rights and responsibilities do they emphasize, and how is this conveyed? What kinds of practices do they engage in or speak about as “good citizenship?

These questions are best understood as signposts that I used to help orient myself in the research setting. Throughout my fieldwork, my observations were not constrained to only answering these questions.

### 3. CHEC speeches related to citizenship

In 2003, CHEC began recording and distributing the speeches and workshops presented at their conferences via the *best-christian-conferences.com* website (n.d.). The third data source for my research consisted of 22 speeches devoted to citizenship, recorded between 2003 and 2010, eight of which I attended at the 2009 conference. These speeches concentrated on a wide cross-section of topics, ranging from the role of Christians in the military to the promotion of certain political advocacy organizations, such as Generation Joshua. They were transcribed verbatim, and their context was carefully documented. See Table 2 for a summary of the speeches I attended or downloaded.

**Table 2: CHEC Speeches by Speaker, Title, Year Delivered and my Attendance**

Speaker	Title of Speech	Year delivered	Attended?
Kevin Swanson	The Rise and Fall of Western Civilization	2010	N
Kevin Swanson	2035 A.D. Raising Children that will Stand	2010	N
Mike Winther	Biblical Principles of Government	2010	N
Mike Winther	Revisionist History Exposed	2010	N
James Nickel	What is Leadership?	2010	N
Bill Jack	The Biblical Basis for True Authority	2009	Y
Andrew Pudewa	Rebuilding Your Education Paradigm	2009	Y
David Hazell	Working Dad can Homeschool Too!	2009	Y

Richard “Little Bear” Wheeler	Warning! Public Schools Aren’t for Christians	2009	Y
Kevin Swanson	Why Homeschooling will Change the World	2009	Y
Kevin Swanson	The Core Curriculum	2009	Y
Kevin Swanson	Homeschooling - Capturing the Vision	2009	Y
Kevin Swanson	Pragmatism: The Slippery Slide to Hell	2009	Y
Jan Bloom	YES SIR! Homeschoolers in the Military	2007	N
Voddie Baucham	Government Education	2007	N
Ned Ryun	Should Christians Be Involved in Politics?	2007	N
Michael Farris	Restoring American Values	2006	N
Jeremiah Lorrig	Youth Empowerment and Involvement in the Political Arena	2006	N
Ned Ryun	Generation Joshua: Raising Up the Next Generation of Christian Leaders	2006	N
Ned Ryun & Caleb Kershner	Electing Godly Leaders	2006	N
Rick Boyer	Reclaiming the American Vision	2005	N
James Hogan	Seven Steps to the Great American History Course	2004	N

#### 4. Texts from pro-citizenship organizations for Christian youth

My final data source consisted of documents compiled from the websites of organizations for Christian youth that were recommended by parents or CHEC speakers. These materials reflect and re-articulate the views and discourses of biblical-literalist families in relation to citizenship education, and simultaneously help to constitute these views and discourses. They include resources from three citizenship education-oriented

organizations that warranted particularly close scrutiny: TeenPact, WallBuilders and Generation Joshua. All three organizations coordinate camps, local fieldtrips, visits to state Capitols and the national Capitol, as well as e-mail discussion forums and message boards, to encourage Christian, American youth to become involved in conservative, grass-roots political activism.

### **Phases of Research**

Fieldwork took place in two phases, drawing on Berg's "spiraling research approach" (Berg: 2004/1989, pp. 19-20). First, an initial three-month field visit was conducted in June, July and August of 2009, overlapping with the annual CHEC three-day conference, held that year from June 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>. During this visit, I recorded the majority of my observational fieldnotes and conducted most of my interviews. A second visit was conducted for three weeks in December 2009. Transcription and analysis took place from August 2009 to September 2010.

### **Reflexivity and Positionality**

Reflexivity, one of the defining features of ethnographic studies, is an important component of my approach. Ethnographers endeavor to be continually self-conscious in their descriptions, and to consider a wide range of theoretical lenses in interpreting their implications. A heightened self-consciousness allows analytical choices to be transparent throughout the research and writing process. Consequently, reflexivity entails identifying and pondering how we as investigators are embroiled in our research in ways that can have a profound impact on the conclusions we draw. Researchers exercise reflexivity by consistently turning the analytic lens back on themselves, precisely at the moments when it seems most cumbersome or distracting. Reflexivity, further, not only requires self-

reflection, but also a cognizance of the “slipperiness” of language. Indeed, Fairclough (1995) asserts that reflexivity is caught up in social struggle that presupposes that researchers are part of the language practices they aim to study.

I came to this project in a personal, seemingly private way. Fifteen years ago my sister “found Jesus” and converted to conservative evangelicalism. Shortly thereafter, she moved from a suburb of Toronto to a small community in Colorado and began homeschooling her children with Biblical principles in mind. Patriotism and citizenship soon became important aspects of her children’s home-instruction. My sister and her husband embraced their newly acquired American citizenship to a degree that caught me off guard. After all, I had been one of those clichéd Canadian tourists who sewed the Maple Leaf flag on my backpack when I traveled overseas to make sure that everyone knew I was most certainly not an American. Moreover, my liberal academic parents had never emphasized religion or church attendance. In fact, most of my family adopts a secular humanism that clashes rather sharply with the worldview of the newly conservative Christian part of our clan.

My sister and her family thus not only provided the inspiration for the project, but have also been involved in it. As members of CHEC, some of my respondents knew my sister and her family and my entrance into the CHEC community was potentially aided by my activation of this social capital. I would argue that this is a good thing. Despite the non-positivist stance of this dissertation, worries about “bias” were not so easily dismissed. Rather, I came to view my sister as a “key informant”, as an invaluable sounding board and cultural translator who is not only immersed in and conversant with the cultural milieu I focused on, but who is also very knowledgeable about me. With

“rapport” therefore a given, I spent a great deal of time discussing issues with her in an informal, casual way. My sister’s home, or anywhere else we happened to be, hence became the venue for many illuminating discussions that shaped my understanding of Christian homeschooling in connection to national identity.

At the same time, however, these close familial connections raise at least two important ethical issues. The first is a potential sense of betrayal on the part of my informants or, closer to home, my sister and her family. Put simply, they might find my descriptions and interpretations of their views and practices to be negative or un-flattering and hence a breach of trust and good faith. The second was what Lofland and Lofland (1995) refer to as an “ethical hangover” (p. 28). As researchers, we sometimes have to manage negative feelings towards participants that can make it difficult for us to maintain close connections with them. Our emotions and feelings not only influence research outcomes, they also become part of the research process. How I (an outsider) felt about my respondents is important to examine for its possible influence on my collection, representation, and interpretation of data. Given that my views and beliefs are in many ways at odds with those of my respondents, this was a potential area of tension.

I strove to avoid being judgmental or dismissive in my assessments, but from time to time the scales tipped and my irritation would get the better of me. As a Canadian conducting a study on citizenship education in the U.S., I was continually surprised by how conservative nationalism was fused with Christian faith in a wide variety of contexts. While most of the people I met were kind, caring, and well-intentioned, at times it was difficult to be immersed in a socially and politically conservative subculture,

especially when it came to intolerance towards undocumented immigrants, LGBTIQ communities, and racialized groups.

Fortunately, these two concerns did not emerge as major issues. I tried to carefully manage such tensions through a self-conscious and collaborative research process. Working to mitigate a potential sense of misrepresentation on the part of my respondents I was also diligent in documenting all of my own personal feelings, thoughts and reactions in my fieldnotes. As Alvesson (2003) demonstrates, strong ethnographers incorporate themselves into their writings while attempting to render faithfully respondents' "definitions of the situation". For a more concrete example, consider the following excerpt from my notes on a church sermon where congregation members were repeatedly urged to "dig deep" when it came to their financial contributions to the donation plate:

MN [Methodological Note]: Feelings of discomfort and anxiety. Awkward. Tight muscles. Irritated. Irritation at church pastor using guilt/shame to get members of the congregation to tithe more: "Don't be stingy...". Members of the church are expected to give at least 10 percent of their income. The weekly church bulletin shows precisely what the yearly budget is, how much has been contributed thus far, how much more needs to be contributed etc. The theme of the sermon is "anger". I'm irritated and angry myself, how do those lessons/thoughts apply to me? Feelings of guilt: Why am I feeling so resentful and threatened? Why so annoyed? Aren't I supposed to be the tolerant, accepting academic?! (Fieldnotes, July 2009)

Beyond being aware of and documenting my negative reactions to situations, it was also key that I explore and articulate them. Here, my sister was invaluable. When something troubled or confused me, I would simply ask her about it. The ensuing discussion was inevitably fruitful, whether it fully addressed my concerns or not. When I boiled over, I poured my frustration and anxiety into my fieldnotes.

### **Coding**

Lofland and Lofland (1995) note that field research consists of three overlapping tasks: gathering, focusing and analyzing data. I employed an emergent coding process, oriented towards the central themes and language articulated by my respondents, to sort and analyze my data. Critical discourse analysis was used to draw out major themes and power asymmetries in each of my data streams. I went through several processes to deconstruct and reassemble the data. McGregor (2004) suggests that texts should first be approached in an expository, uncritical manner, and then be revisited through a critical lens. Accordingly, my first step was to read/listen to my data set several times. I listened to my interviews and CHEC speeches not only during the transcription process, but also during my day-to-day routine, on the subway or while running errands. Only after developing a more intimate and detailed understanding of my data did I turn to a more critical interrogation.

Given the large size of my dataset, I inevitably had to make choices about which themes to pursue. This was no easy task. I struggled with a positivist reflex to choose themes that would be representative, somehow capturing all the complexities of the large dataset they were culled from. No such luck. My goal therefore quickly shifted from trying to capture my data in total, to choosing themes that would highlight the nuances,



complexities and contradictions that revealed the location and uniqueness of small bits of data, while also situating them in larger, systemic social processes. My data analysis first identified recurring themes that surfaced within and across data streams and individual data sources, and then explored them by looking at a range of features to determine how power relations and identities were manifest in, and constituted through discourse.

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA) can aid in accomplishing these tasks (Dohan and Sanchez-Jankowski, 1998, p. 478). The quantity and nature of ethnographic data, the researcher's epistemological stance, and the compatibility between the aims of a research project and the capabilities of available software all influence what software researchers employ<sup>17</sup> (p. 479). On a practical level, CAQDA programs can facilitate organizing data, searching and retrieving text and, above all, can logistically simplify coding by nullifying the need for fragile, wasteful printouts or hundreds of index cards (p. 482). In order to aid organization and analysis of my four data streams, I employed the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> editions of NVivo. All transcripts, fieldnotes and curricular documents were imported into the software package. Designed chiefly to aid in conceptually organizing and coding data, NVivo helped me to sort and analyze, as well as to consolidate all data material into a single easily backed-up location. This centralization facilitated the drawing of connections between data streams and individual data sources.

Homeschooling is primarily conducted in the private sphere of the home but also connects with a diffuse, yet effective, social movement. My strategy for bridging these two analytical levels was to be both *emic* – concerned with the interpretations of individuals in the field, and *etic* – cognizant of key academic conceptualizations of

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<sup>17</sup> For a useful discussion of CAQDA, see Lewins and Silver's *Using Software in Qualitative Research: A Step-By-Step Guide* (2007).

citizenship, citizenship education, evangelicalism and homeschooling (Nesbitt-Larking, 1992, p. 82).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter summarized the methodology I employed to conduct my dissertation research. Ethnographic inquiry was used to study the content of discourse, as well as the way it is negotiated and socially organized by homeschool parents and the experts they follow. Treating discourse as practice, which includes interacting and interpreting textual resources, my study sheds light on the process through which home-educators groom their children politically. The following chapter explores how conservative Christian homeschoolers adhere to a form of conservative nationalism that springs from their larger worldview. Treating worldview as synonymous with ideology, I chart the main features of this perspective as well as the discursive mechanisms that are used to express it. Let us now explore this ideology in detail.

## Chapter Four

### Conservative Christian Homeschooling And “Worldview”

With a long shriek, the meter attached to the small, bright-green tank reminds Adam that his oxygen levels have dropped dangerously. He places the nosepiece back in his nostrils automatically and takes several sharp inhales. His bluish lips redden slightly; the meter falls silent. Like so many elderly people, Adam seems to have been forgotten by his children, but to my sister's family he has become a surrogate grandfather. The sense of belonging that this has fostered explains his reluctance to move to a lower altitude, where the thicker air would better agree with him.

Adam had long been frustrated with the curriculum his grandson John had been taught in public grade school. He was horrified, for instance, when John came home with a history text emphasizing class struggle, not individual liberty, as the primary motor of history. Then, in June of John's 6<sup>th</sup>-grade year, the school indicated, without any warning, that John would have to repeat the grade. At that point, Adam and his daughter Anne decided to homeschool. Since his daughter was a single Mom employed full-time, recently-retired Adam shouldered the bulk of the teaching for the next three years.

A white man in his early 70's with a bright shock of silver-white hair, Adam is dwarfed by the high-backed lounge chair he perches on. He sips a weak, heavily sugared tea as we talk in the master bedroom of my sister's home, long since re-organized as a schoolroom. It is full to bursting with books, computers, maps, and the like. The shelves hold multiple copies of *Ray's Arithmetic* and *The McGuffey Readers*, two series of highly Christianized textbooks that dominated 19<sup>th</sup>-century education in the United States. Numerous copies of Verna Hall's *The Christian History of the Constitution of the United*

*States of America*<sup>18</sup>, which many Christian home-educators call the “red book”, are also at hand. Prominent upon the windowsill is a cross, emblazoned with the stars and stripes.

Adam’s poor hearing makes it difficult for him to hear my questions at times, but it hardly matters; he has his story to tell and needs no prompting. He articulates it in a slow voice that hangs in the air. For Adam, recent decades have seen:

an attack on the worldview that was the foundation of America, a competition between two basic worldviews. Worldview one is a creationist view that might be called theistic. The other competing worldview, and this has many varieties within it, is the atheistic worldview that becomes humanistic in its application. Humanistic to the extent that it does not declare or acknowledge a God as a creator or as an influence in life today. And humanistic to the extent that it ultimately deifies man. It substitutes man for the highest authority. (Interview 12)

Adam believes that the last century has witnessed a transformation of American society from an individualistic and religious culture to an atheistic and socialistic one. In his opinion, this change was fueled in part by the “Trojan Horse” of public schools, which, around the 1960s, began to move from a creationist worldview toward humanism. He echoes two common Christian critiques of American public schools. First, that they teach poor values and weak morality and, second, that they are inefficient, more concerned with bureaucracy and protecting the teaching establishment than with instruction. Adam

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<sup>18</sup> Numerous Christian scholars in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century worked to assemble all the important founding documents and to interrogate them in light of Biblical scripture. Verna Hall’s *The Christian History of the Constitution United States of America: Christian Self-Government and Union* (1958) stands as the most enduring. It brings together Constitutional law, Revolutionary War-era sermons, selections from the Federalist Papers, the Constitutional Convention, etc.

sees homeschooling as resistance against the deterioration of academics, discipline and values in the public education system.

When I asked if that explains why homeschool parents, mostly Moms, do such considerable work, he leans in towards me, sharing a secret, and whispers, “Yes, in part. But what this homeschooling thing is really all about is trying to restore the beliefs and practices that recent generations have mainly rejected or abused.” Adam is convinced that many Christian home-educators feel a specific calling. After another quick inhale of oxygen, he explains that:

Many of those that are engaged in homeschooling came to the belief that their children are part of a restoration generation. That in order for things to turn around, it was going to be on their kids’ shoulders. And that became the core strength of the homeschool movement.... and that’s also the underlying drive you might say – to motivate to homeschool. And that’s best restored by simply going back in history to when it was working good, and copying and modeling the education systems that we had...from roughly the period of...you might say 1620, which was the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, on the Mayflower, from there forward to the Constitution, 1776, the Declaration and the Constitution that came about after that. And on into about, oh, let’s say about 1875, roughly. We don’t have to invent anything new. All we have to do was return to what did work. (Interview 12)

In Adam’s view, recreating “what did work” involves teaching the principles of social order that come out of natural law, i.e., the Ten Commandments, and basing instruction on the detailed study of the leaders that formed the country. He is quick to

draw a line between “restoration” and what he sees as its distasteful Marxian sibling, “revolution”. Restoration involves returning to the original concepts of the nation rooted in individual liberty, rather than the “collectivism” that has been “taking over the country”. It involves reconstituting the “original”, “true” American nation. Adam wonders aloud, “Is there a movement going on?” and answers in the affirmative:

It isn’t getting much press, and is not directed by a centralized leadership, but consists of like-minded individuals acting independently. Homeschooling is a key manifestation of this. The next generation is poised to change things. Statesmanship must be fostered in the coming generation. Ben Franklin, John Adams were both statesman that understood God is over man. Homeschoolers seek to re-establish a movement that has God working through it, we must return to Godly leadership. (Interview 12)

Several of my nieces and nephews, impossibly quiet for almost three hours, burst through the door to round us up for dinner. I’m ready to shift gears too. I turn off the recorder, knowing the few seconds of children caterwauling in the background will make me chuckle when I transcribe the interview. With Adam’s air tank in tow, we exit the schoolroom, and pass what I’ve come to think of as the girls’ “dorm”. We enter the kitchen and scoot awkwardly to our spots at the series of aligned tables, designed to accommodate up to twenty. Interviews, especially good ones, are exhaustingly performative. I’m ready to eat.

### **Worldview**

Adam’s comments pull together both sides of the conservative, nationalist Christian worldview I encountered during my fieldwork. Many Christian home-educators

are passionate about a mythical golden age that is simultaneously situated in the past and projected into the future. The goal of this chapter is to chart this Janus-faced worldview with a broad compass. Drawing on the work of David Naugle (2002), I begin with an intellectual history of the concept of “worldview” in Christian thought, philosophy, the social sciences and sociology, surveying some of the central contributions to the worldview tradition by scholars such as James Orr, Abraham Kuyper, Karl Mannheim, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, James Hunter, and Samuel P. Huntington. I then describe the role of worldview in this dissertation, explain how it connects with discourse, and how it figures in my empirical analysis.

The rest of the chapter uses my data to explore the two major components of this worldview: on the one hand, a backward-looking mythologization of the past and, on the other, a forward-looking fixation on restoration. Nostalgia and anticipation converge in the present, framing political knowledge and civic participation theistically. My argument centers on the content of this worldview and its two central poles: an orientation to a mythologized view of the past nation and its Christian underpinning that has been lost, but also a focus on reclamation and the need to produce a kind of character through homeschooling that can return America to that glorious past. For many, this vision has ignited a fervent political engagement that flies in the face of the political withdrawal many Christians had exhibited between the 1960s and the 1980s.

What makes this worldview so intriguing is its coherence. During my empirical investigation, I came to focus on “worldview” because, while analyzing transcripts of my interviews, CHEC speeches and going over my fieldnotes, I was stunned by the level of consistency evident in talk about homeschooling and how it fits into American

nationalism. I call this unified understanding “worldview”, because that is how my respondents and CHEC speakers regularly identified it. As I thought this through, I came to see connections across the data sources I produced that bolstered my sense that a worldview distinctive to Christian homeschoolers was coalescing. This chapter presents the findings of that analytic process.

While convergences in moral values and attitudes occur widely in society, loosely connecting individuals to larger networks and communities (e.g., political parties, charities, and so on), the deeply-shared thinking I came across among the CHEC homeschoolers is anomalous (see especially Converse, 1964<sup>19</sup>). In their context, “worldview” is important because it is not only a sociological *analytic lens* that I use to theorize conservative home-education, but also a key *member category* that homeschoolers actively construct and disseminate. As we shall see, this worldview informs a localized, nation-centric conception of civic duty and embraces laissez-faire markets, privatization, and de-regulation. Consequently, this ideological orientation has major implications for citizenship and civic education. Before delving into these issues, however, let me make clear what understanding of “worldview” I adopt. Here, some background is required.

### **Worldview In Christian Thought**

Protestant evangelicals in the last three decades have shown a surge of interest in the concept of “worldview” (Naugle, 2002, p. xv). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, neo-Calvinists

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<sup>19</sup> In his classic article “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics” (1964), Converse maintains that only a small fraction of the population consists of “ideologues”, reserving the term for those with a high degree of internal coherence in their views. He argues that most people do not have strong belief systems and therefore they *do not* interpret their day-to-day lives, much less local and national politics, through an ideological lens. See the dissertation’s conclusion for a more detailed discussion of how his thinking connects with my main findings.



James Orr and Abraham Kuyper were the earliest theologians to mobilize the German worldview tradition as a strategy for defending Christianity from the onslaught of modernity (Naugle, 2002, p. 5). Disconcerted by the ubiquitous erosion of Christian hegemony, both Orr (p. 6) and Kuyper (p. 16) abandoned absolutist claims of Biblical truth, making a radical turn toward an apologetics rooted in relativism. Underscoring the situated and conditional nature of “truth”, they co-opted burgeoning anthropological scholarship on cultural variation in order to criticize Enlightenment claims of scientific neutrality and objectivity. Each independently argued that human reason is necessarily guided by a host of antecedent, taken-for-granted values and assumptions that condition thought and action, rendering claims of non-biased detachment untenable (p. 31).

Orr and Kuyper’s emphasis on contingency has become a valuable tactic for reasserting the legitimacy of Christian outlooks and, by extension, for opposing secular humanistic domination. Casting the two as distinct, yet equally valid, perspectives on the world, Christians now use relativism to buttress their absolutist claims. This signals a distinct shift in their rhetoric when engaging with the secular world; the assertion that “my view is just as valid as yours” has come to be deployed whenever “I am right because the Bible says so” is contested or dismissed<sup>20</sup>.

According to David Naugle, “conceiving of Christianity as a worldview has been one of the most significant developments in the recent history of the church”, and has “come to the rescue” amid secularization (p. 4). To better grapple with mushrooming religious and cultural diversity, contemporary Christian leaders have employed the

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<sup>20</sup> For example, a key Supreme Court decision in 1961 gave “non-believers” the same legal protections accorded to followers of religious faiths. Ironically, today, fundamentalists invoke the ruling to argue that secular humanism is also a “religion”, that it, too, is a form of faith (Ruthven, 2006, pp. 24-25).

concept to delineate Biblical perspectives on all facets of life. Rousas J. Rushdoony's<sup>21</sup> contrast between a Biblical worldview and that of secular humanism, for instance, has become a seminal part of conservative Christian cultural analysis, developed in detail by individuals such as Francis Shaeffer (1976, 1981) and David Barton (1996).

### **Worldview In Philosophy and the Social Sciences**

When they embraced “worldview” as a means of enduring the displacement of Christian hegemony, Christian thinkers chose a concept with a long history in philosophy and the social sciences (Naugle, 2002, p. 55). The word, which many scholars use interchangeably with its German equivalent, *Weltanschauung*, was coined by Immanuel Kant, who used it only once in *Critique of Judgment* (1790) to refer to sense perception (Naugle, 2002, p. 59). It was quickly taken up by other thinkers, however, and rapidly came to refer to “an intellectual conception of the universe from the perspective of a human knower” (p. 59).

First, certain formulations of worldview, such as those put forward by Hegel (p. 69) and Nietzsche (p. 98), contend that it can describe *both* isolated, individual perception and collective thought, while others reserve the term for belief systems embedded in the consciousness of large groups, as in the more recent works of Mannheim, Hunter and Huntington.

In his seminal essay “On the Interpretation of *Weltanschauungen*” (1971), sociologist Karl Mannheim outlined a meta-level, historical-methodological approach that pays little attention to individual perception, aiming instead to pinpoint the broader

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<sup>21</sup> Rousas J. Rushdoony, the founder of Christian reconstructionism (the notion that the law of God should be the law of the nation), put forward a “providentialist” interpretation of American history. From his vantage point, the U.S. “has been chosen by God to play a special role in the unfolding of this Divine plan” (Gaither, 2008, p. 135).

outlook of each epoch or culture. Founder of the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim concerned himself with the critical interrogation of epistemological and ontological assumptions and ensconced, unquestioned beliefs. His writings critiqued research that focused narrowly on different “parts” of social life at the expense of experiential wholes and cultural totalities (Mannheim, 1971, p. 32).

In a similar vein, proponents of the “culture wars” thesis that came to prominence in the 1990s claim that two opposing, overarching worldviews – “liberal” and “conservative” – transcend situated, individual interpretations of the world, acting as the strongest determinant of moral values. According to thinkers in this tradition, it is the adoption of one of these two polarized worldviews, not a person’s class, gender, political affiliation or faith that determine his or her sense of morality and their value systems (Hunter, 1992, p. 64). They do this by shaping perceptions in ways that predispose individuals to accept particular sets of oppositional claims (Bennett, 1992, p. 27). This cultural bifurcation, the argument goes, has produced a remarkably deep schism, cleaving Americans into two neat camps.

While the argument that culture is a site of struggle can be traced back to Gramsci’s writings on hegemony in *The Prison Notebooks* (2010/1923), the term “culture wars” first gained widespread traction when it was used by conservative politicians such as George H.W. Bush and Pat Buchanan in the 1980s and early 1990s. It was employed to denote the incommensurability of “orthodox”, “theistic” or “conservative” moral and political values with those of “liberals” or “progressives” (Hunter, 1992, p. 42), gaining currency in academic circles with the publication of James Hunter’s *The Culture Wars* (1992) and Samuel P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* (1996). According to Milton

Gaither, 15 years later, one of the most significant developments in recent social life in the U.S. remains “the fragmentation of much of the population into two factions” (Gaither, 2008, p. 94). In Christian circles, this outlook continues to resonate, informing the political stances and civic behaviours of many.

Second, sociological thinkers in the worldview tradition have differed greatly in their applications of the term. For Mannheim, worldviews are “pre-theoretical” phenomena that lie beneath intellectual understandings as their *a priori* foundations (Mannheim, 1971, p. 38). He thus conceived of worldviews as the unrecognized, taken-for-granted frames of reference that are the prime movers behind thought and action. Alternatively, in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann extended Mannheim’s thinking by more precisely describing the terminology of the sociology of knowledge, but adopted a different understanding of the concept of worldview. One of Berger and Luckmann’s fundamental suppositions is that different groups hold to different constellations of meaning and symbolism, and thus see aspects of the world in dissimilar ways (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 7). Accordingly, in sharp contrast to the culture wars literature, which reifies the contrasted worldviews, Berger and Luckmann maintained that interrogating the production, uptake and contestation of knowledge involves explicating how structural forces influence the interpretation of social reality.

Berger and Luckmann diverge profoundly from Mannheim by reserving “worldview” for rarefied cognitive systems that are “intellectual and theoretical” (p. 15). On this basis, they distance themselves from *Weltanschauungen* because:

Although every society contains these phenomena [*Weltanschauungen*], they are only part of the sum of what passes for “knowledge”. Only a very limited group of people in any society engages in theorizing, in the business of ‘ideas’, and the construction of *Weltanschauungen*. But everyone participates in its ‘knowledge’ in one way or another. (p. 16)

Consequently, Berger and Luckmann maintain that the sociology of knowledge should concentrate on explicating the underlying, innocuous assumptions that guide “common sense”; on “what people ‘know’ as ‘reality’ in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives” (p. 15). Their major concern is the presuppositional, preconscious epistemic structures that they see as *productive* of worldviews as formal theoretical constructs (p. 19). They therefore emphasize the significance of the sociocultural “lifeworld” as the primary source of cognitive awareness. In this interpretation, it is the underlying assumptions of the lifeworld that define “reality” and constitute intellectual worldviews that merit the closest scrutiny (p. 94).

### **Worldview In This Dissertation**

My dissertation treats “worldview” as synonymous with “ideology” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009/2001, p. 22). I draw foremost from Berger and Luckmann by taking worldviews as “coherent and relatively stable sets of beliefs and values” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009/2001, p. 9) that are constituted by underlying assumptions. They are “schematically organized complexes of representation and attitudes with regard to certain aspects of the social world” that bracket social cognition (p. 9). Worldviews represent social reality and interpret particular practices from situated vantage points (Fairclough, 2003, p. 16). They are, quite simply, how particular social agents interpret the world and

their role within it. Evangelical home-educators in the U.S. struggle to bring the dominant ideology closer in line with their beliefs and priorities. The importance of worldview in my research lies not in what can be gleaned from representations at the surface-level, but in unpacking the complex assumptions immanent to them. The idea is to probe a:

more hidden and latent type of everyday beliefs, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies...In daily life, certain ideas arise more commonly than others and dominant ideologies appear as 'neutral' holding on to assumptions that stay largely unchallenged. (Wodak and Meyer, 2009/2001, p. 6)

Worldview can be understood as encompassing positions, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives. Worldview has a co-constitutive relationship with discourse. Discourse *articulates* worldview by expressing underlying assumptions, values and beliefs. At the same time, worldview helps *create* discourse by shaping the vocabularies, concepts and arguments social actors have at their disposal. Consequently, I use my empirical data to not only illuminate how this worldview is *expressed* discursively – how my interviewees and CHEC speakers enacted it through their talk and behaviour – but also to flesh out how worldview can constrain discursive possibilities by eclipsing alternative views. Building on the theorists above, I analyze the worldview undergirding citizenship and citizenship education in the context of CHEC, by exploring both its preconscious and conscious ideological underpinnings, as they are communicated through language and practice.

My understanding of worldview pulls from the literature surveyed above in a variety of ways. First, I take inspiration from Berger and Luckmann's focus on unveiling

underlying, preconscious assumptions, but fear that they underestimate the influence of the theoretical ideas that these spawn. I agree that the distinction between “pre-conscious” and “intellectual-theoretical” knowledge is useful, and concur that most of a given worldview is enmeshed in unquestioned, taken-for-granted assumptions. However, amongst Christian homeschoolers, considerable effort has also gone into producing intellectual ideas and arguments that justify underlying axioms rooted in Biblical thought<sup>22</sup>. These rationalizations, too, need to be methodically analyzed, lest an important part of the picture be lost.

I study worldview in this chapter by exploring both the underlying, preconscious assumptions *and* the formal, intellectual constructs they produce. A truly rigorous analysis along these lines would necessitate a detailed inspection of the multiplicity of works by Christian scholars related to citizenship and civic education. While I have scanned this literature, a detailed survey of it is a project unto itself, and is thus beyond the scope of this dissertation. I gesture towards such theoretical formulations in places (e.g., in my discussion of the elaborate legal and constitutional theorizing about originalism) but, overall, restrict myself to the underlying assumptions that are articulated through discourse.

Second, Mannheim’s insistence that we can empirically flag and theoretically explicate an overarching epochal worldview also sits uneasily with me. While he is correct that worldviews are not static – like the discourses that articulate them, they emerge, change, proliferate and disappear – attempts to discern a single, unitary worldview can ignore the diversity of outlooks. Unexpected commonalities can certainly be identified, as I do in this chapter, yet beliefs and values are also taken up and activated

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<sup>22</sup> See especially Shaeffer (1976, 1981); Barton (1996); Morris (1989) and Fendall (2003).

by individuals in disparate ways. Lumping together all the views of a time or place will produce only a contrived, artificial unity. There exists a multitude of perspectives on the world. Home-educators themselves are a case in point. Since the late 1990s, homeschooling as a movement has become more mainstream, splintering into a highly heterogeneous population. For some, it is a deeply political act, while for others, it is “just one option among many to consider, for a few months or for a lifetime” (Gaither, 2008, p. 223). Accordingly, I do not aim to reduce the heterogeneous perspectives of homeschoolers, conservatives, or the Christian Right to a solitary worldview. Instead, I focus on a particular “snapshot” of worldview amongst a particular group at a particular moment: Christian home educators connected to CHEC and conference speeches delivered between 2003 and 2010.

Third, while acknowledging homeschool diversity, I also take a cue from Henry Giroux (1983), and Dorothy E. Smith (2006), by insisting that pedagogical practices and discourses cannot be understood apart from how consciousness is structured within a particular, situated arrangement of power. I therefore emphasize that the worldview of CHEC members does not exist in a vacuum. It hooks into larger network of highly standardized Christian homeschool conferences that revolve around a fairly small faction of national and state leaders. It is they who deliver the speeches, determine which issues are worthy of attention, and choose which vendors are appropriate (Gaither, 2008, p. 17).

### **The Worldview of Conservative Christian Nationalists**

The remainder of this chapter draws on my data to describe the content of the backward- and forward-facing sides of the conservative Christian worldview I encountered in my fieldwork. My interviewees and CHEC speakers echo a tendency to



highlight threats (Smith, 2010, p. 82), and this sense of imminent danger facilitates the maintenance of a “climate of consent around a coherent set of moral values” (p. 84). These moral values, which form the core of the conservative worldview, center on cultural nationalism, “pro-family” politics and an antagonism towards reformist social movements<sup>23</sup>.

The worldview of conservative Christian homeschoolers I document is highly nationalistic. For Anthony Smith (2010) “nationalism” is defined as an ideology, movement, and symbolic language (p. 1), which centers on a “perceived homeland with common myths, a shared history, a distinct public culture and common laws and customs” (p. 13). According to Smith, when studying national consciousness or sentiment, it is important to differentiate between organized, ideological nationalist movements and more diffuse feelings of national belonging (p. 4). Michael Billig (2000) also emphasizes this distinction, arguing that there is a major difference between an orchestrated nationalist program and everyday, banal nationalism embedded in lived experience through ever-present, yet barely visible, symbolism (Billig, 2000, p. 2). Billig and Smith agree that such symbols as national flags and anthems “conjure a vivid sense of unique history and/or destiny” (Smith, 2010, p. 8), and reinforce the imagined boundary of the nation. It unites “insiders” through a common set of memories, myths and values, while labeling those who fall outside their imaginary as interlopers (p. 8). While nationalist ideologies assume a variety of forms, they share a pursuit of nationhood and orient towards three major goals: national autonomy, national unity, and national

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<sup>23</sup> Michael W. Apple (2001), who terms this segment of American society “authoritarian populists”, is critical of its contribution to ongoing processes of “conservative modernization” that he feels promote divisive, adversarial and parochial understandings of political community (Apple, 2001, p. 26).

identity (p. 24). Nationalism often inhabits other ideologies and belief systems (in the case of education, “appropriate” pedagogy and curriculum), channeling ideas and policies to its ends (p. 27). According to Smith, six core concepts typify nationalist discourse: “authenticity”, “continuity”, “dignity”, destiny”, “attachment”, and “homeland”. Destiny is of particular relevance in this dissertation, as the Christian notion of providence is seen to chart a special, pre-determined course for America’s citizenry (p. 33).

With this backdrop in mind, the following pages examine the two major faces of my respondents’ conservative, nationalist Christian worldview. I begin by exploring the underlying assumptions of its nostalgic, backward-looking aspect, and then examine its anticipatory, forward-looking cousin.

### **Face One: Nostalgia**

The first face of the conservative, nationalist Christian worldview that coalesced during my data analysis is based on tradition. Christian home-educators have responded to the modern liberal state by fixing their gaze on a mythologized past, lamenting the erosion of Christian hegemony and straining to salvage the “original intent” they believe undergirds American democracy. Accordingly, this section sketches the underlying assumptions that inform three features of this nostalgic outlook, as expressed by my interviewees and other data sources. First, I describe the widespread pre-supposition that America’s “true heritage” and “tradition” have been undermined. Second, I identify the perceived causes of this cultural decline: secular humanism, socialism and public schooling. Finally, I explore the curriculum and pedagogy my research participants employed to teach American history and civics in a way that, they believe, does justice to America’s heritage. These taken-for-granted assumptions emerged in remarkably homogenous ways.

**Christian heritage under attack.** The first aspect of the Christian, conservative nationalist worldview is the widespread belief that the U.S. has strayed far from its Christian roots. This supposed drift toward moral and social degeneration is seen as manifest in a dilution of patriotism and the marginalization of Biblical values. Eve, for instance, felt this acutely. A former social worker, she had retired when she and her husband, an insurance agency owner, decided to have children. The work of home-educating their two young boys, who only recently reached school age, has fallen entirely on her shoulders. Yet, like many homeschool Moms, Eve has taken to it enthusiastically.

A self-described “novice who’s eager to learn” (Interview 13), she buzzed around the CHEC conference workshops taking notes, and combed the vendors’ hall for curricula.

In her mid-thirties, Eve is upbeat and high-energy with short-cropped hair and sharp green eyes. I interviewed her outside Denver in her family’s neat, well-appointed living room, where a conspicuous gap in the furniture and an imprint on the carpet hint that a large television had once been a focal point. When I asked, Eve proudly explained that she had recently convinced her husband to get rid of their TV to allow for more family time – an idea she was exposed to at the CHEC conference.

When it comes to citizenship, Eve decries “latter-day backsliding” and expresses a deep concern with the turn that mainstream American culture has taken since the 1960s. She notes that “the cultures that actually built the country in the first place are still here and they are still growing. But, the whole body is expanding much more rapidly, and, so, we have a culture, right now, that has begun to lose this heritage” (Interview 13). When pressed for an example, Eve asked whether I had heard of “the Great Generation” – the American men and women involved in World War II. She described them as “a very patriotic people that really took pride in their country. There was just that sense of let’s stick together as a nation and we’re gonna go and, fight for freedom, you know, around the world” (Interview 13).

During my data analysis, I came to recognize that CHEC speakers used a shared vocabulary to mourn the perceived loss of religious liberty, and vehemently supported freedom of religion. CHEC conference speaker Jan Bloom, a homeschool Mom whose son now serves in the US Navy, maintained that “preserving the freedom God has placed us in that’s a grand thing. To be free. To be free to worship at church on Sundays Or on

Mondays or on Tuesdays or any time you want to worship” (Bloom, 2007). For her, homeschooling is an exercise in liberty, providing:

the freedom to teach my children about my religion and about my God on a regular basis and not just, you know, take it out and you gotta put it over here while you’re in school for most of your life. And I just find it kind of ironic that when you look at our American history and why we came to America and why we founded America: for religious freedom, and it was for the right to be able to teach our children our beliefs. And here we are fighting, in a way, against our own country to be able to teach our own children our beliefs, other than in our own houses and under our roofs. (Bloom, 2007)

This sentiment recurred in a 2009 talk by Richard “Little Bear” Wheeler, a longtime speaker on the homeschool conference scene. Wheeler acquired his frontier-style nickname while serving in the National Royal Rangers in his youth<sup>24</sup>, and is known for dressing up as civil war officers, medieval knights, and – his favourite – “Braveheart” at homeschool conferences. Until his recent retirement, he travelled the country delivering talks idealizing William Wallace as an exemplar of Biblical determination, and for over a decade organized an annual pilgrimage in which groups of 30 trod Wallace’s trail across Scotland.

Many Christians share Wheeler’s passion, it seems, as he has never had problems filling the trip’s roster. When I asked Kevin Swanson, CHEC’s executive director, about Braveheart’s popularity in homeschooling circles, he explained, “we feel overwhelmed by modernity. Christians feel persecuted and therefore latch onto stories about heroes

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<sup>24</sup> The National Royal Rangers is a worldwide ministry advertised as a Christian alternative to the Boy Scouts.

who survive and fight persecution” (Interview 16). Perhaps this explains why Little Bear’s vendor table at the CHEC conference, like so many others, was piled high with books and DVDs championing underdogs who beat the odds, such as Joan of Arc and Arctic explorer John Branford.

**The culprits: secular humanism, socialism and public schooling.** For conservative Christian nationalists, the perceived sources of America’s “cultural decline” are painfully obvious: “secular humanism” – as both an intellectual strain of thought and as a grouping in society – and “socialism” – which informs policies considered to unfairly drain taxpayers’ pockets. During my summer 2009 fieldwork, Congress had recently approved a fresh set of corporate bailouts. Consequently, many of the conservative Christians with whom I crossed paths murmured unhappily about “the government now owning the banks”, or stated that they would never buy a car made by “Government Motors” (GM). Along the same lines, take the following quote from a 2006 CHEC talk given by Michael Farris, co-founder of HSLDA and President of Patrick Henry College, an elite Christian college designed to propel faithful youth into positions of influence on Capitol Hill:

An excess of government leads to excessive taxation. The average person in this country works until sometime in the middle of May to pay for all their taxes. That is economic burden that amounts to slavery, and there’s no other way to, to say it other than that... People talk about how we need civil liberties and civil rights, and what they mean is another government handout. That has nothing to do with civil liberties or civil rights or freedom. It [freedom] means the ability to make your own decision, rather than the government making your decision. And, we are taking away people’s

freedom with the concept of a safety net. The safety net, it's really more of a spider web that's capturing everyone. (Farris, 2006)

Numerous respondents quoted the adage "that government is best which governs least" and saw the state as intrusive, paternalistic, and detrimental to their liberty and freedom. In the words of Judith, a dental hygienist whose youth pastor husband is home-educating their two children, "we don't need big government to be in the role of a parent telling us what to do" (Interview 22). Equally, Joseph, a homeschool Dad who was off fixing a lawnmower repeatedly left to join in my interview with his wife, Joanna, insisted that "we're not going to solve America's problems with government" or by making "government into God" (Interview 20). Joanna agreed that it is essential to:

bring our children into an understanding that this country wasn't brought into existence so that we could mooch off of it or leach off of the system.

JB: Do you think the state should be involved in providing those kinds of care [social services]?

Joanna: Honestly, I think it is an affront for the state to be involved. I think that in the United States this has been fairly born out, when the State gets involved, the people go, "well, my tax dollars are already going there. Well, shoot, I could use this extra twenty bucks to pay that bill." And they start thinking more about themselves than about the other because, well, they're going to get taken care of by the state. We have programs for that. And so now they start delegating their responsibility off to the state. (Interview 19)

It should come as no surprise, then, that when it comes to their children's education, many conservative Christian homeschoolers are apprehensive about

government involvement. Voddie Baucham, another prominent speaker on the Christian conference circuit, likes to remind audiences that “they’re our kids, not Caesar’s kids” (Baucham, 2007). A homeschool Mom of 12 years and mother of three, Rose concurred, underscoring that “children should be raised in the home the way children should be raised, by parents. Not by a social system or a government. The Lord gave our kids to us. Not to the government” (Interview 28).

Distrust of government is a major reason parents like Joy, a homeschool graduate raised by missionary parents in several South American countries, are reluctant to register their own children as homeschooled or take advantage of public school resources. Like numerous other participants, she referenced the cautionary example of Germany (Interview 24), where, despite legal battles that have gone as far as the EU Supreme Court, homeschooling remains illegal. In Germany, parents face steep fines or even removal of their children if they refuse to enroll them in state-run public schools. In Joy’s eyes, if left unchecked, U.S. educational policy could quickly take the same turn.

Such wariness was frequently directed at public schooling. Hannah homeschools her two teenage boys during the day while her husband teaches at a Colorado high school. Initially hesitant about what path to choose for their children’s education, she and her husband had moved their sons from home-education to public schooling and back, before settling on home-education for the long haul. Like many participants, she was suspicious of the financial and bureaucratic imperatives underlying public school policy. Below, she explains her children’s permanent transition into homeschooling:



We were homeschooling Kindergarten and 1st grade and [my son] went in the public school the last quarter of first grade and they test him and they said, “Oh, he’s ahead of grade level. He’s doing great.”

So we went through the summer and the next year he started second grade. And by the middle of the year he was all of a sudden below grade level. And I thought, “What happened?” I haven’t done anything different, you know, and I still did all of my homeschool stuff, and he was put on an ILP – an Individual Learning Plan, which is kind of like, it’s not like Special Ed. or anything like that, you go and get extra help for reading and extra help for math and these things...All children who are on an ILP are considered in an special program, like a Title I program. And a Title I Program [Title I (“Title One”) of the *Federal Education Act* distributes funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families] is funded by the federal government. They send money, or the state sends money...well, the federal, I think, sends it to the state and the state sends it to the schools, depending on how many kids are in that Title I program.

So my son, all of a sudden went from above grade level to in a Title I Program. [Scoffs]. And, hello! I didn’t say anything, I was just like, well, maybe, boys...Boys can do that, you know? That’s what I thought. But he stayed on that same program the whole time he was in school. And I thought, isn’t the point of this to get them [caught up with their peers]?...And he was a very good learner.

Then my second one went in school and the same thing happened to him. And he was even more scholastic and studious than my older son. And loved school, and loved sitting...And I thought, why is he on it now? So then I had two children in it, and so by that point, I started to get a little frustrated. (Interview 18)

**Curriculum and pedagogy.** The Bible is the automatic starting point for homeschooling curricula, whatever the subject, be it Civics or Biology. In the case of Mathematics, for example, numbers in the Bible might be incorporated into questions such as “how many sons and daughters did Isaac have? Show me on the abacus. Now, how many daughters did he have? What is the total?” (Interview 26) and so on. Even the numbered verses in different books of the Bible could be used to query “what is verse 18 plus verse 22 minus verse three” (Interview 4). The Bible’s pedagogical significance, however, extends far beyond such trivial examples. Charity, a homeschooling mother who prided herself on planning elaborate trips to American historical sites on a shoestring budget, made clear that:

the Bible is not a literature book. It’s not something to study along with Shakespeare, and great authors of history and, the great themes of all time. Those things are all very important, and it’s important to know what’s gone before you, but we look at the Bible as way beyond that type of basis for informing ourselves. So the Bible we see as God’s holy word. So, with that as a basis, the scripture is on a much higher plane for Christian home-educators. So that becomes our textbook. (Interview 7)

In addition to scripture, CHEC members drew on a wide variety of resources. They preferred writings from the 18th and 19th centuries, produced before knowledge began to be “revised” and “dumbed down” by what they saw as meddling school boards and vote-grubbing politicians. Numerous participants mentioned the Noah Webster’s (1828) *American Dictionary of the English Language*, which defines “family” as a married Christian man and woman and their children, and primers such as Ray’s *Arithmetic* and the *McGuffey Readers*. Sarah, a 19-year-old homeschool graduate, described being exposed to:

a lot of older books. I don’t think I used a textbook that was newer than about a hundred years old for the first eight years of my schooling. And so I think the fact, at least in my education, that I was taught from books written so longer ago, that kind of infused that sense of citizenship that was there in the schoolrooms at that time. (Interview 8)

The curriculum Sarah was taught helped her to develop a strong sense of civic responsibility early on, which is no doubt why the CHEC administration proved eager to arrange for me to interview her. In their eyes, her background represented the accumulation of valuable cultural capital they were eager to put on display. A poster-girl for homeschooled citizens and a clear outlier in the population I met, Sarah volunteered on her first electoral campaign when she was nine by collecting signatures for petitions and stuffing envelopes for a would-be Republican governor. She immersed herself in politics from then on. Sarah helped run a campaign in 2004 when she was only 15, for a county commissioner. From 2004 to 2007 she worked at the Capitol as their youngest intern ever. A few months before we spoke, she had been elected to the county and state

executive committees for the Republican Party, as well as sitting on the general election committee, acting as the issues manager for another commissioner campaign, and managing a campaign for state House of Representatives.

Although participants occasionally discussed world history, usually with reference to ancient civilizations, it was early American history that they considered of paramount importance. The very word “history” was automatically assumed to pertain to the U.S. context, relegating the pasts of other countries and cultures to a peripheral position. Clearly, this contradicts educational experts who favour global approaches to citizenship education, and claim that global conceptions of community are now essential. According to thinkers such as Reeher and Cammarano (1997), Banks (2004) and Shultz et al. (2011) transnational trends are increasingly undermining long-standing citizen-state relationships; the goal of civic learning should be to foster political involvement at local *and* global levels (Smith, 2010, p. 242). For thinkers of this ilk, such as Osler and Vincent (2002), Henry Giroux (2006) and Peter McLaren and Barry Kanpol (1995), the objective should be to develop cosmopolitan, collaborative and fluid models of citizenship education. As Ann McCollum writes, “rather than producing prescriptive blueprints for citizenship education, there is a need to identify core principles and concepts that are widely debated and negotiated and tested collaboratively in the development of new practices” (McCollum, 2002, p. 179).

Instead, Christian homeschooling collapses myth into history, framing citizenship in a nation-centric way that reinforces outdated understandings of political community. Nonetheless, such approaches predominated. Numerous booths at the conference sold items from the foundational period, such as Civil War artifacts, replicas of clothing and

weaponry used by the Pilgrims, as well as writings on or from those times. Many female attendees – and, indeed, my sister and her daughters – enjoyed the floral pastel dress styles worn by Ingalls family members on *Little House on the Prairie*. One family joining us for dinner came directly from a TEA party rally at the state Capitol, clad in full 18th-century garb. Others sought to honour early American self-reliance through “homesteading” – raising goats and chickens, maintaining a small farm, making their own soap, cheese and butter, and a host of other independent practices deemed antiquated by contemporary society.

America’s “founding” – i.e., from Columbus’ “discovery” of the New World, to Puritan colonization and the post-Civil War era (1913) – was intensely romanticized. This period is fastidiously documented, from a Christian perspective, in oft-mentioned texts, such as Marshall and Manuel’s *The Light and The Glory* (1980) and Barton’s *Original Intent* (1996), which frame the issue of what the Founding Fathers “really” had in mind, in terms of “originalism” or “original intent”. This framing is also used by Ned Ryun, Director of Generation Joshua for several years in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as many respondents. There are abundant references in my data to the importance of knowing the “Christian founding of our nation, “understanding how the Founding Fathers created this country”, “following the Founding Fathers’ approach” and “knowing where we came from”<sup>25</sup>. In a speech at the CHEC conference in 2006, Ryun urged attendees to ask:

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<sup>25</sup> CHEC parents spoke of many organizations they rely on for curricula and pedagogical strategies in order to address these questions. For on-line civics curricula, they draw on organizations such as WallBuilders, TeenPact, Generation Joshua, Liberty Day Kids, Olive Tree, and KONOS, as well as printed textbooks from a plethora of Christian presses including Christian Liberty Press and Bob Jones University Press. They also discussed the importance of youth

Where has America come from, who are our Founding Fathers? What was their original intent, what did they believe? And, most importantly, what was the worldview that they moved in?...What was their intent for our form of government? And if we can know where we've come from we can know where we're supposed to be and where we should be going. (Ryun, 2006)

In the works of some Christian thinkers, the assumption that America is a Christian nation occupies the realm of rarified theory. For instance, Ruyn, was one of many speakers at the CHEC conference to argue that a systematic examination of the Founders' political motivations reveal them to have been profoundly driven by their Christian faith when designing American democracy. However, unlike the many who flagged the *most* religious Founders, generalizing their faith to all, he summarized a study published by Hyneman and Lutz (1983), of the Harvard School of Theology. Ryun asked:

Where did they [the Founding Fathers] get the ideas, where did they get the inspiration for this form of government? Well, not too long ago, about 15 years ago, there was some research done. They took 15,000 documents, they wanted to find out where the Founding Fathers found their inspiration for our form of government. What documents did they cite most often? The Bible. They kept on looking and they saw that Montesquieu and Blackstone and Locke were the other three sources that they cited from most frequently. And the important thing to remember about these three gentlemen: they moved within the Judeo-Christian worldview but they also cited from the

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organizations including the Boy Scouts and 4H and enrichment programs such as HOMESAT, a satellite school that uses videos.

Bible quite frequently. So the Founding Fathers were either citing from the Bible, or from sources that were citing from the Bible. (Ryun, 2007)

In this context, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were also discussed as essential curricula, complementing designed syllabi, projects and texts/textbooks, in training children to become godly American citizens. Several respondents mentioned that these sources should always be at one's fingertips. Alexandra, for one, regularly carries a copy of the Constitution, explaining that although people like to paraphrase it with certitude, "there's a lot of times when somebody will say something and, you know, that's not quite right. See? Look here" (Interview 23). It is because "revisionism" is seen as pervasive that this is so important. As academic analyses of American society accentuating inequality gained credibility amongst educators and in curricula, defensive Christians responded with accusations that history was being "re-written" (Winther, 2010) and "perverted" (Jack, 2009). In many cases, participants understood this as a prime source of the dilution of civic responsibility and engagement, particularly amongst America's youth. Charity noted with exasperation how:

People don't even know what we lost. Because they've quit teaching history as it was. So much has been re-written to be politically correct and certain groups were, are, being vilified. Not to condone that...some of the things that different groups have done throughout our country's history haven't been right, but to vilify them when you're not taking in all the circumstances going on isn't right either. Re-writing things to make them politically correct or palatable or sanitized so that it, you know, pushes a certain viewpoint rather than portraying the facts as they are. (Interview 7)

For Charity, this necessitates “teaching from the beginning” (Interview 7), taking European colonization of the new world as the starting point, while also acknowledging the long histories of diverse indigenous cultures in the Americas. In her view, it is critical that her children study primary accounts of colonial times, rather than relying on secondary sources that “spin” the issues to suit the rhetoric of the day (Interview 7). An important component of this slant on history was a nationalistic underscoring of “manifest destiny”, the belief that a Christian America is God’s will. As Ned Ryun puts it, “do we think it’s some random chance that we have been born Americans, that God has put us here? No. It’s not chance. We were made, we were born Americans for a reason” (Ryun and Kershner, 2006). Adam discussed the subject as follows:

The Pilgrims that landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620 aboard the Mayflower, when they discovered that they were off-course and considerably North of their intended destination...every time they turned either East or West, they had no wind. It was obvious that they could only go two ways. They could either head back to England, or they could go back into the Cape that they came from. Those people went into the hull of the Mayflower and had a meeting in prayer and sought guidance of the Lord. They came out of that meeting with the full belief that they were where they were supposed to be, back in that little patch of abandoned land.

It had been abandoned by the Indian tribe, which, by some act, the whole tribe died about nine months before they landed there. The whole tribe, except for one, died. They died of a mysterious plague or something.



Something that surrounding tribes of Indians...Something that they saw and they thought was an act of God punishing that tribe. (Interview 12)

This emphasis on providence has spurred the development of an elaborate cult around notable U.S. patriots that were ostensibly chosen for greatness, representing another area where underlying presuppositions have fueled more formal intellectualizing. Homeschoolers have compiled an extensive list of historic Americans whose biographies demonstrate that the U.S. was intended to be a Christian nation that stands on the shoulders of great individuals. They place enormous value on the life stories and writings of such Founders as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, John Dickinson, John Quincy Adams, Noah Webster, Jonathan Mayhew and a multitude of others<sup>26</sup>. Their preoccupation with this period (1492-1913) cannot be overstated.

Here, the work of Barry Schwartz is highly germane. In the same manner that people cherry-pick when quoting from the Bible, each mobilizing it for their own purposes, representations of historical political figures are also drawn on selectively. Exploring the shifting, and historically contingent understandings through which American heroes have been interpreted and re-interpreted, Schwartz provides an insightful analysis of the memory and memorialization of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Schwartz shows how, from 1800 to 1865, Americans remembered George Washington as an iconic, larger-than-life figure, but after the Civil War “they began to remember him as an ordinary, imperfect man with whom common people could

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<sup>26</sup> A like emphasis on “great men” framed perspectives on the practice of homeschooling, with many participants believing that a small number of heroic figures had restored home-education to prominence (Gaither, 2008, p. 2). This assumption obscures the workings of larger social forces, while at the same time it ignores the “mainstream” homeschoolers who have driven the statistical shift (p. 2). Accordingly, we must steer clear of the “great man” focus that underpins many homeschoolers’ understandings of both American history and the history of home-education (p. 3).

identify” (Schwartz, 1991, p. 221). He maintains that an analysis of the image-making that caused this shift elucidates how Washington’s post-Civil War representation was “made and remade for present use” (p. 221). Similarly, Schwartz documents how the collective memories of Abraham Lincoln explore the process through which commemorative symbolism creates new images of the past (p. 472). He draws on a variety of sources such as Lincoln Day observances, press commentary, and political cartoons.

Schwartz shows us how Washington and Lincoln have both been held up to promote different messages. This connects with my data because my respondents’ fixation on America’s Founders goes far beyond simply highlighting their importance as figures from the past. Rather, the Founders are selectively romanticized in a manner that emphasizes their conviction that Christian faith should be pre-eminent in America’s political workings. My respondents’ favourite face of Lincoln, of Washington, and of others that they promote stress that they were pious Christians who were committed to forging a democratic society based on Biblical values. As a result what my respondents see are very much larger-than-life figures. A fascinating example of this kind of framing is a 2007 speech delivered by Ned Ryun at the CHEC convention entitled “Should Christians Be Involved in Politics?”. Ryun works his way through the biographies of numerous Founders – focusing on their faith – in order to paint a picture of the Founders as devoted Christians who worked to create a Christian nation.

Ryun puts forward the example of Sam Adams who, upon signing the Declaration of Independence, stated that “we have this day restored the sovereign to which all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting

of the sun, let his kingdom come” (Ryun, 2007). Interestingly, however, rather than latching on to the most pious Founders, Ryun spends a large part of his talk trying to show that even the Founders who were known for being the least religious were nonetheless strong Christians in practice. He notes that even Benjamin Franklin called for prayers in the legislature and quotes Franklin as saying:

God governs the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid. We have been assured in the sacred writings that except the Lord build a house, they labour in vain that build it. I firmly believe this and I also believe without us concurring and we shall succeed in this political building no more than the builders of Babel. I therefore beg we to move that henceforth prayers imploring the insistence of heaven and of blessing our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business. (Ryun, 2007)

Similarly, Ryun goes to great pains to represent Thomas Jefferson, seen by many as the strongest advocate of the separation of Church and State, as surprisingly committed to Christian principles. Ryun describes Jefferson’s response to a letter from Dr. Benjamin Rush asking whether he is a Christian:

And this is what Jefferson had to say in response to that question: “I am a real Christian. That is to say a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus”. Now when Jefferson was President, he attended church at the largest Protestant church in America at the time. He attended regularly at that church, and in fact while he was there as US president he used his executive powers to basically bring in a military band. He didn’t like the band that was playing, he thought they were

very poor, and he used his executive power to bring in a military band to play the hymns. And so I always find that ironic. Here you have the supposed champion of the separation of church and state, actually using his powers as president to not only meet in a church in a federal building, but to bring in a band to play religious music in a federal building as well. Now one of the more controversial aspects of Jefferson are *The Life and The Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*. When Jefferson was President, he took two new testaments and he clipped out the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth. Now some will say that he did that as an attempt to cut out the divinity of Jesus. What they don't know is that in the first edition of this, the divinity of Jesus, the miracles and everything that showed the divinity of Jesus were still in it. Now the important thing to remember is why Jefferson did this. Of course he had the treaty to the Indians, felt very strongly about them having missionaries preach the gospel. He also wanted to give them some text, the Bible. But he felt the Bible was going to be way too big to translate into various Indian dialects; he wanted something much smaller. And he felt that the life and sayings of Jesus was a great place to start and at least be introduced to what the Christian faith was all about. And you know, the amazing thing to me is that every night before he went to bed Jefferson would read this, he would read *The Life and Moral of Jesus of Nazareth*. (Ryun, 2007)

Clearly, then, it is far more than the Founders' status as historical figures that renders them so important to conservative Christian nationalism; it is their supposed faith that leads them to be held up as role models.

Finally, homeschoolers commonly assumed that experiential education was crucial in civic studies. Michael and Charity, for example, felt that “the whole world is our schoolhouse, everything in it is potential curriculum”, and unwaveringly stated that, to be learned in a meaningful way, civics needs “hands on” engagement. Notably, this mirrors the thinking of numerous progressive, liberal pedagogues and educational theorists including Paulo Freire and John Taylor Gatto who have argued that citizenship education must be concrete to successfully produce an engaged, empowered citizenry. However, among Christian home-educators, this pedagogical stance takes a distinctive turn. Here, the rote learning and memorization, emphasized by the McGuffey readers, jostles up against experiential learning activities that homeschoolers maintain remain under-valued in public schools<sup>27</sup>. In other words, many homeschoolers continue to rely on a one-sided “banking model”<sup>28</sup> emphasizing the memorization and regurgitation of reified, canonical material, while adopting the type of engaged, “real-world” pedagogy advocated by authors promoting critical, transformative frameworks (e.g. McLaren and Jaramillo, 2010; Rosas, 2007). This illustrates the highly selective, sometimes contradictory, ways in which different pedagogical strategies are drawn upon by contemporary Christian home-educators.

As Charity noted, experiential learning is “especially important for learning about history, government and so forth” and involves a range of possibilities: “we’ve had caucus in our home, being involved, meeting your legislators, writing letters” (Interview

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<sup>27</sup> See the works of McLaren (1998), Kincheloe (2005), Giroux (2006) for discussions of why schools have been unable, or unwilling, to make this shift.

<sup>28</sup> Freire criticizes current educational systems as being banking educational operations in which people make deposits of information into students, maintaining the status quo. Instead, Freire argues for a process through which the individual is helped to examine his/her life situation, to reflect on it, and to act in such a way as to transform it (Currie, 1972, p. 164).

7). Debates and mock senates were also discussed. In *Real Citizenship*, the primary “textbook” for the TeenPact<sup>29</sup> Christian youth organization, founder Tim Echols illustrates the importance of argumentation and debate training and advises that “if possible, a person should participate in a cross-examination debate league, moot court program, or mock trial club. Even if an organization is secular, it can teach valuable reasoning skills” (Echols, 2003, p. 27).

Trips to the state Capitol (including the CHEC Day at the Capitol), Washington, and historic American sites were described in the most laudatory terms. For instance, Susan and her family had visited Boston’s Freedom trail, the Constitution archives and monuments in Washington and Jamestown, “to see this living history that we have” (Interview 4). Likewise, supporting their eldest daughter’s interest in Civil War history has led Rose’s family across the country, from the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia to a battleship in New Jersey. As a family, they relished “a battle re-enactment in Gettysburg to historic sites commemorating Robert E. Lee (a Confederate Army leader) and Stonewall Jackson and where he died, and where he was born” (Interview 28).

It is important to note that such trips were not only valued as educational tools, but also functioned symbolically as cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). In *Social Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977), Bourdieu and Passeron focused on the role that “cultural capital” (accumulated, Eurocentric, “high culture” knowledge that can be activated to help maintain elevated status) plays in maintaining stratification and inequality. For Bourdieu’s intellectual heirs, such as Willis (1977), and

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<sup>29</sup> A large number of my respondents and CHEC speakers referenced “TeenPact” a non-profit formed by Tim Echols in 1994 to help “teens make an impact” (TeenPact, n.d.). The TeenPact website boasts that they have taught over 28,000 children, teens, and parents nationwide (TeenPact, n.d.).

MacLeod (1987), such capital marries structural and cultural explanations of stratification processes, eliminating the need to choose between them. It is important to underline that symbolic forms of capital are constituted *in situ*. Consequently, while some have questioned the applicability of Bourdieu's frame to cultural contexts outside France (see, for instance, Apple, 1986), the challenge is not to assess whether his conclusions can be mapped onto other locales, but to creatively apply his framework to different and emerging milieus. In my eyes, homeschools are settings where analyses of symbolic capital can be applied especially fruitfully.

Citizenship-oriented trips, whether with family or Christian organizations, allow for the accumulation of two distinct forms of cultural capital. On the one hand, exceptional worth is attached to voyages to Washington and historic sites not only by fellow homeschoolers, but also by gatekeepers in Christian post-secondary institutions. Patrick Henry College, for instance, courts students with such backgrounds in their admissions procedure<sup>30</sup>. As a result, these experiences are internalized as prized sources of *embodied* cultural capital (Wildhagen, 2010, p. 521). On the other hand, the expenses involved in these types of trips and programs function as meaningful signifiers of *objectified* cultural capital (p. 521). Everyone in a congregation or homeschool support group knows who can and cannot afford them and, lest one forget, photo travel diaries, merchandise such as T-shirts and backpacks, as well as certificates of completion from citizenship organizations act as emblems of prestige.

Taken together, the preceding pages convey the deep sense of loss that permeates much Christian homeschooling. The overriding belief that America's "true heritage" and

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<sup>30</sup> For a fascinating discussion of the internal workings of Patrick Henry College (PHC), see Hanna Rosin's journalistic account in *God's Harvard* (2008).

“tradition” have been undercut causes many to blame secular humanism and socialism that my respondents believe is spread through public schooling. As we have seen, many conservative Christian homeschoolers have reacted by adopting curriculum and pedagogy that interpret history in their own terms. However, this only accounts for the history-oriented half of the worldview of the conservative, nationalist Christian home-educators I met; now on to its forward-looking face.



## **Face Two: Anticipation**

During the 1970s and 1980s, many sociologists of education, such as Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Oakes (1985), and Collins (1979), denounced entrenched discourses of “neutral” education, conceiving of schooling, above all, as an institution supporting inequitable social relations. For a time, this led to an excessive focus on the diagnosis of educational inequality. In response to these accounts, the literature began to conceive of schools in slightly different terms – as sites that may reproduce inequality that also offer opportunities for resistance and transformation. Work by researchers including Giroux (1983), McLaren and Kanpol (1995), and Apple and Buras (2006) emphasizes that pedagogy, and the values, beliefs, and visions of the social world that underpin it, have always been contested. Far from being seen as an impartial dispenser of culture, schooling is treated as an arena in which groups perpetually struggle to position their knowledge and worldview as that of society as a whole. As such, the assumption that most Americans are Christian and that schools should therefore teach Christianity, i.e., “what society as a whole believes”, underpins the view that Christians are a persecuted majority. It also draws attention to disagreement around what should be privileged, “society as a whole” or “God’s will”? These tensions yield infinite possibility. After all, if curricula and education are imbued with questions of politics and hegemony, then they are also potential sites of re-invention. With this in mind, over the last two decades writers have increasingly focused on social and political opposition to educational institutions, highlighting education’s potential to articulate group interests and mobilize collective action.

Michael Apple's recent work is a prime example. In *The Subaltern Speak* (2006), co-edited with Kristen Buras, they take Gayatri Spivak's famous claim that "the subaltern cannot speak" as a jumping-off point, providing examples of where oppressed groups actually are given voice. Concentrating on the perennial question of "whose knowledge is worth the most and why?" Apple and Buras examine how certain perspectives, experiences, and histories are privileged in curricula. The aim is to "trace encounters between elite and subaltern groups in the field of education with the intent of making possible more transformative action" (Apple and Buras, 8).

Apple and Buras criticize processes of "conservative modernization" (i.e. the consolidation of rightist positions) that, over the last decade, have profoundly influenced American curricula and educational policy. They describe how conservatives, particularly fundamentalist Christians, have sought to cast themselves as oppressed and marginalized, despite their longstanding structural privilege. Kristen Buras' analysis of the CORE knowledge movement in the US, for example, is particularly instructive in this regard. She traces the development of J.D. Hirsh's "back to basics" curriculum, which emphasizes rote memorization and hierarchical teacher-student relations, and explores how this pre-packaged and ideologically loaded material has been taken up by American homeschoolers, particularly conservative religious Christian sectarians. In line with Dorothy E. Smith's *Institutional Ethnography* (2006), Buras argues that valuable insights can be gleaned from tracking the orchestrating and coordinating role of texts. She documents how the CORE curriculum is not only activated differently in distinct contexts and venues, but also concert teaching, learning and knowledge construction, in systemic and overlapping ways.

Many conservative Christian homeschoolers understand their choice to homeschool as transformative, seeing their educational practice as resistance against a mainstream culture and education system that marginalizes their beliefs and values. Unsurprisingly, then, the second component of the theistic, conservative nationalist worldview is a fixation on renaissance, expressed as a desire to “restore”, “renew”, “rebuild” and “reclaim” America. Defying their liberal, secular humanist opponents, many Biblical literalists believe that the current generation of homeschool students will resurrect America’s former glory. The enduring influence of Rushdoony’s reconstructionism has generated a tendency for Christian homeschoolers to think of themselves as a divinely-guided instrument, raising up the “Joshua Generation”<sup>31</sup>. This component of worldview revolves around identifying and promoting good Christian citizenship conceptually and in practice.

**Good citizenship, in theory.** Understandings of good citizenship and how to encourage it are more homogenous in the Christian context than amongst other groups of homeschoolers. There is a general consensus, for instance, about the basic messages to be passed on. The aim is to transmit particular conceptions of virtuous civic traits that carry over to a set of concrete practices. This section hones in on five specific qualities that surfaced in my data: character; leadership; participation; authority and obedience; and gratitude. I describe how civic education goes about trying to cultivate these virtues and then discuss the set of material practices they inform.

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<sup>31</sup> According to its website (Generation Joshua, n.d.), GenJ was inspired by Mike Farris’ book *The Joshua Generation* (2005). In the book, Farris casts a vision for this next generation to build on the foundation their parents built (the Abraham Generation). Founded in 2003 by Farris, and Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) President Mike Smith, Generation Joshua exists to “train this generation of young people and equip them to be Christian servant leaders in America” (Generation Joshua, n.d.).

The first virtue of Christian citizenship is “character”. Home-educators have not been immune to the discourses of accountability and measurement characterizing the neoliberal turn Harvey (2005) has described so lucidly. My sister, for instance, spends a great deal of time framing her homeschool practices in ways acceptable to the public “umbrella school” to which she submits her grades each June, and glows with satisfaction when describing the progress her children have made according to the Colorado Board of Education’s “A-Z literacy levels”. This achievement should come as no surprise as she is a qualified grade- high-school teacher in the Colorado educational system. She also holds a Masters degree in education, and has been trained to evaluate the levels that have been attained by her own as well as others’ children. Nonetheless, she, like many of my respondents, contends that when push comes to shove, ongoing, spiritually-rewarding learning is the priority. As Kevin Swanson, CHEC Executive Director for more than ten years, chuckles “our kids don’t know what grade they’re in...they’re in four grades at the same time!” (Swanson, 2009b). The public school obsession with benchmarking, in other words, loses salience in homeschool venues that give precedence to family relationships and spiritual growth.

Michael, father of four homeschool graduates and a CHEC volunteer for almost twenty years, described how he and his wife had at first tried to reproduce the type of school experience they had grown up with. They made one room of their home into a schoolhouse and set up rows of desks with hinged lids. They put up a blackboard and covered the walls with the alphabet, maps and famous art. Their days started promptly at 8:30 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and were spent absorbed in the “basics” of math, reading and writing. Above all, they documented their children’s scholastic advancement

down to the minutiae. Before long, however, Michael and his wife abandoned the notion that education had to be standardized and classroom-based. As he stressed, “you take your school wherever you need, in order to accomplish what you want them to learn” (Interview 6). The couple thus gradually came to emphasize informal, experiential learning and moved away from a fixation on meeting benchmarks and measuring progress. Michael explained that:

the more we were into it [homeschooling], the more we realized that, no, it’s the character in the kids that matters. And so whether they get their lesson done or not isn’t as important as what they are learning character-wise by studying this information or doing this. So that’s kinda, I guess, the foundation: how do we develop character in our kids? (Interview 6)

Andrew Pudewa, the founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing, also shrugs off the neo-liberal emphasis on assessment, asserting that the biggest issue is rebuilding the character and integrity that have become rare in American youth. Sporting a bowlcut and a bushy mustache, he crisscrosses the nation selling his specialized curriculum for critical reading, writing, logic and debate. Character is its crux. In a talk at the 2009 CHEC conference Pudewa described character as a deeply spiritual conviction he has sought to nurture when homeschooling his own children:

character to me is number one and that’s where the conversation starts... I have had times with one of my children in particular where we literally didn’t do any high school at all, zero academics for her between the ages of 15 and 16 and a half, because her character was so disordered. (Pudewa, 2009)

Pedagogically, the route to strong character was what some referred to as the “principle approach”. This faith-based pedagogical method integrates Christian scripture into all subjects and facets of a child’s education and epitomizes conservative fundamentalism. Here, the Bible is positioned as *the* lens through which all experience is interpreted. As Kevin Swanson stated: “I’ve put the textbooks out in the periphery and what we’re going to do is bring our Bible into the forefront in everything that we’re doing. And we’re just gonna read and reason through the scriptures” (Interview 16).

Joy, a recently-married twenty-four year old who does not yet have children, attended the CHEC conference with her new husband and came away convinced that “homeschools are the monasteries of the new Dark Age, rooting in the word of God over two decades of a child’s life” (Interview 24). This, for her, was a compelling reason to home-educate when she eventually becomes a mother. Along the same lines, in a 2005 speech at the CHEC conference, Caleb Kershner, a representative of Generation Joshua, concurred that no topic is beyond Biblical interpretation, least of all politics and civic life:

current events, what’s going on in DC, what’s going on in the world, let’s discuss the issues of the day in a Biblical context. What does the worldview...what does the Judeo-Christian Worldview say about the events that are taking place today? Social security reform, taxes, stem-cell research, same-sex marriage. What does the Bible have to say about it, and what does the constitution have to say about it? (Ryun and Kershner, 2006)

The second key civic virtue in the worldview of conservative Christian nationalists is leadership, and a focal point for many home-educators is the cultivation of

just and effective future Christian leaders. The stakes are seen as exceedingly high, no less than the future of the nation. Ryun maintained in a 2006 speech that, “good men and women make good laws that are in accordance with God’s word and natural law” (Ryun, 2006). This line of thought assumes that government authorities are ministers of God and that good political leadership will cause a nation to be blessed. It also assumes that “if you have men and women in office that are not making moral laws in accordance to God’s will and natural law, typically it will cause a nation to be cursed” (Ryun, 2006). The belief that a higher power is eternally waiting in the wings, both to reward and chastise, is a widely recognized hallmark of fundamentalist Christian thought (Ruthven, 2006, p. 22).

Leadership surfaced in my data in a variety of other ways. Elizabeth, the mother of four home-educated children aged fifteen to twenty-five, had made a point of reading aloud to her children when they were young the entire *The Light and the Glory* series, a historical work that traces America’s Christian history from the late 1300s to the Civil War, to entrench leadership’s importance as they developed (Interview 10).

Others, such as Judith, a mother of three who has been homeschooling for 18 years, contrasted Christian leadership’s foundation of servanthood, with secular leadership driven by self-interest and corruption. Non-Christian leaders, she argued, fall prey too easily to the temptation to become self-aggrandizing tyrants and thus fail to be true helpers and servants of the people. Judith described servanthood as “what I really feel exemplifies a leader” (Interview 22), applauding those who “serve behind the scenes” rather than promoting themselves. Servanthood, moreover, should not be mistaken for weakness. As she stressed, a leader “is caring and sensitive enough to listen

to the people that he leads. But, yet, strong enough to make the call when there's no clear path ahead" (Interview 22). Employing a corporate-world analogy, another participant argued that "if my children were to run a company, they should have to work every single position before they start giving orders. They should not ask employees to do things they would not or have not done themselves" (Interview 14). Lastly, CHEC homeschoolers described good leaders as knowing how to relinquish power. Michael, for instance, held that "legislators should be temporary. They should do their service and then go back to their homes and work. No lifers" (Interview 6).

The third virtue of Christian citizenship is participation. Between World War II and the 1980s, many Christian families in America retreated entirely from the "moral cesspool" of politics. In a 2006 presentation at the CHEC conference, Michael Farris criticized this reflex, arguing that political involvement is Biblically-mandated:

If you look at Exodus 18:21: "Choose men that fear God and men of truth". Second Samuel 23:3 says: "he who rules men must rule in the fear of God". Proverbs 29:2 was the scripture most frequently cited by the Founding Fathers, and it says: "when the righteous rule, the people rejoice". How do the righteous rule here in America? Well, they're voted into office. How are they voted into office? They're voted into office by those that are registered to vote. So I strongly encourage, whenever I go out and talk, that they become registered to vote so they can get out there and help get good men and women into office...The last 50 years, Christians have not been involved like they should be. (Farris, 2006)



That civic involvement is waning among American youth has received a great deal of attention in sociological literature in recent years. Jonathan Martin (2008), for example, contends that rampant, worsening alienation from education works to reinforce instrumentality and individualism, undercutting meaningful political participation (p. 32). He maintains that the sources of this alienation are overly bureaucratized, standardized, teaching methods and resources that dominate the majority of educational institutions (p. 33). These fail to adapt to students' individual weaknesses and aptitudes in a meaningful way. Christian conservatives suggest homeschooling as an alternative that inherently shields children from these forces. However, as we shall see later in the chapter, the contention that home-education will necessarily promote heightened engagement should be met with skepticism.

Fourth, understandings of virtuous citizenship are saturated with references to authority and obedience. That citizens need to "obey the law of the land" was frequently articulated during my fieldwork, as was the feeling that obedience should be emphasized day-to-day. To quote Aaron, father of two young boys, "obedience needs to be not only preached to them, it needs to be practiced in the home. It needs to be practiced in government every single day" (Interview 9). He felt that role modeling was central in this because, "[if] I'm not practicing obedience and I end up being a total hypocrite about it, I don't think it's going to affect their [his children's] hearts as much" (Interview 9). Aaron was typical of my respondents in discussing the tensions that could arise among multiple sources of authority:

Who's in authority? Who do we obey? Authority of Government? Authority of parents? Authority of God? Citizenship is based on the word of God, I'm

first and foremost gonna follow those principles, over and above any national or State form of government. (Interview 9)

He also suggested the existence of two “kingdoms”: “in the right hand kingdom we are taught to obey God as the final and ultimate authority. In the left-hand kingdom we are taught to obey the government insofar that it does not conflict with our Christian beliefs” (Interview 9). CHEC speakers and families I encountered spoke frequently about the necessity of “submission” and “discipline” in the home as part of “character” development, and saw parental authority as absolute.

Nationalist gratitude is the fifth most prominent virtue. Eve, for instance, stated that “I’m really so grateful to live in America because of the liberties that we do have” (Interview 13). At the 2005 CHEC conference, speaker Jeremiah Lorrig emphasized thankfulness for the sacrifices of citizens killed in military service: “in Colorado Springs, when I lived there (I don’t know if they’re still doing it), every time a soldier was killed, they would publish his biography and really honour him. And that’s so important” (Lorrig, 2006). The same view was advanced by Miriam, who criticized Memorial Day as inadequate: “I don’t really celebrate Memorial Day because I think that they [soldiers killed in battle] earned way more than one day” (Interview 34).

**Good citizenship practice.** On a more tangible level, numerous practices are talked about as central to Christian citizenship. Many respondents spoke about “making an impact”, or referred to the Sermon on the Mount’s “bringing salt and light to the world” by helping to share the gospel (Matthew V, 13-16, King James Version). This was one of the few places where a global, as opposed to nation-centric, conception of citizenship was articulated. Joining missionary trips, sponsoring international exchange students,

adopting children from non-Christian nations, and financially supporting organizations with similar aims throughout the global south were highlighted repeatedly. Pictures of foreign children who had been adopted financially by Christian families adorned fridges in numerous homes I visited.

This evangelical impulse carries over to getting other Christians involved politically, through initiatives such as voter registration drives. Sarah, the highly involved citizen introduced earlier, commented with distaste on the unwillingness of many in her community to keep up with political developments. In so doing, she pointed out a disjuncture between the abstract virtues many of my respondents promoted and actual practice:

that's actually one of my biggest pet peeves (laughs). When I think...educating yourself on the issues, which really isn't that hard given the technology that we have today. You know, pop something into Google and it takes fifteen seconds to get a hundred web pages that have more than enough information. (Interview 8)

In everyday conversations, and in texts on Christian citizenship, *prayer* is consistently flagged as a crucial part of civic duty. Theologians such as Mike Morris (1989) and Lon Fendall (2003) advocate praying for government leaders. Similarly, Morris recommends getting “acquainted with and following at least one public official so we can pray for specific requests he or she might give us” (Morris, 1989, p. 7). Daniel echoed this opinion:

in the Bible, Paul tells us that first of all we should, give prayer and supplication, thanksgiving and request for those in authority over us. The

police department, the county commissioners, the City Council, the dog-catcher (laughs), the President of the United States, the Congress. Most importantly, and the first thing, is to pray for our nation, pray for our leaders. Prayer is a very powerful thing, I want the young people to be involved. Timothy 1:2 calls us to pray for our leaders and for our government, so I want them to be praying. And praying for our leaders, praying for wisdom.

(Interview 3)

For Daniel, this pursuit involves researching legislators and their positions because “to pray for our leaders, it’s good to know something about them” (Interview 3). While some respondents engage in extensive research on political leaders, other participants only require a simple litmus test to judge a leaders’ value or worth – examining their positions on gay marriage, abortion, euthanasia, and taxation. However, according to Fendall (2003) even legislators who do not pass this vetting are to be prayed for, out of respect for their office and in the hopes that they will ultimately make righteous decisions. Charity explained how scheduling was required to pray for political leaders conscientiously: “every Friday, I’ve got a prayer list that I typed up for myself that lists the names of leaders to pray for” (Interview 7).

The desire to spiritually support leaders, however, does not imply that leaders’ decisions were to be passively accepted. Many respondents discussed the need to write, e-mail and call legislators regarding specific issues or bills. Dana explained that such engagement is requisite for democracy and is welcomed by many legislators, that “representatives, thankfully, in America, like to hear from their constituents. They want feedback” (Interview 25).

Volunteering was also discussed as a way to exercise good citizenship. Take Jonathan While his wife homeschools, this father of three works from home as an accountant so that he can see his family throughout the day. Jonathan has made it his mission to help provide programs for homeschool youth that are “healthy, integrity-driven and father-driven” (Interview 11). His blue eyes lock on mine as he explains:

That’s what America was about. Everybody has something that their heart is pulled on, and they go do it. They go start a program. For me, I started a homeschool basketball program. Well now we got kids that have something other than just sitting at home with Mom learning school. You know, first through twelfth grade we’ve got a basketball program... so Mom can stay at home and homeschool them and the kids can still do athletics. (Interview 11)

Jonathan’s wife, Elizabeth, noted that volunteering is a family affair. Smiling brightly, she detailed how they have volunteered in “campaigns for Godly candidates” (Interview 10), as well as in community sites such as an “old folks’ home.” It is also an opportunity for children to develop relationships with other homeschool children and to entrench the belief that aiding others is important. The CHEC conference also provided a fascinating opportunity to witness the enactment of discourse around service. Dozens of volunteers aided in the planning and preparation of the conference, as well as assisting in its execution. Entire families involved themselves in the process, filling roles from registration desk attendant to audio technician. Even the facilitation provided for my research was done entirely on a volunteer basis, as the CHEC leaders I spoke with in the early stages of my project were not remunerated for sitting on its Board of Directors or filling administrative positions.

This altruistic impulse was mainly mobilized in local or national contexts, and was rarely discussed in a global or transnational way because opportunities to volunteer overseas are far more limited. Joanna's comments capture this nicely, describing how she and her 14-year-old adoptive daughter volunteer within their community and:

help meet the needs of people around us. And she sees that. And hopefully that will inspire her to do the same. I know that, you know, I was raised with my Mom volunteering quite a bit so that's something I try to do. Mostly through church, sometimes I help, with the local food bank and our church is also starting a clothing closet. That will go in conjunction with the local food-bank, on the same Saturdays. You know, try to meet the local needs.

(Interview 19)

Finally, voting was flagged as an essential civic practice. Several respondents underlined that failing to vote is literally opting-out of the democratic process. Take Judith, who maintained that "I think a lot of people, a lot of Christians, and that's more of a general term in this country, see voting as personal duty" (Interview 22). Judith insisted that "if you don't vote, you can't complain about what happened. You have no say in it". Jacob echoed this sentiment, stating that "voting, I believe, is important for the same reason as TEA parties. It's giving voice. If you don't choose your leaders, who's going to get in?" (Interview 22).

## **Conclusion**

As I write the closing passages to this chapter, I pause for a moment to flip through the pages of Tim Echols' *Real Citizenship*, which lies on my bookshelf next to copies of other Christian writings such as *The Light and the Glory*, *How Then Shall We*

*Live?* and *Original Intent* – books that, four years ago, I never thought I’d be glad to own. In the introduction to *Real Citizenship*, the main text used by “TeenPact” in its leadership courses for Christian youth, the author, Echols, effectively captures the two-sided worldview explored in this chapter. He begins the work by noting that:

Lately, it seems like society’s drift away from God has become an outright sprint, and the culture is growing more and more hostile toward Christianity. Inspired by the works of Darwin and Freud, American liberals have attacked all that Christians hold dear and the principles which are, in my opinion, the foundation upon which this country was built. Additionally, the Modernist movement has been a poison pill inside our society, turning our citizens against the best ideas of Western Civilization and wreaking havoc on families and communities. That brings us back to revival. It is not too late for America. If we train the next generation of leaders to believe in the principles of freedom, our constitutional Republic is capable of securing the blessings of liberty for us and our posterity. (Echols, 2003, p. 1)

In many ways, this quote, like this chapter, can be connected to with Barry Schwartz’s prolific work on collective memory that I touched on briefly above. As I contemplated these connections in August 2011, the familiar “ding” of my e-mail inbox alerts me to a new message. It is a mass e-mail from Eric Odom, communications director for the “Patriot News Network” (PNN). In the past weeks, as the debate around the U.S. debt ceiling has reached fever pitch, my e-mail account has been swamped by similar communiqués. PNN is part of *Grassroots Action Inc.* an organization which funds and runs TaxDayTeaParty.com, Liberty.com, TheUnionLabelBlog.com, and other sites that

collect donations and orchestrate opposition to new U.S. legislation seen as chipping away at “liberty”. I opted-in to their e-mail lists in 2009 when I began my fieldwork and have been following their “e-alerts” ever since. The subject line of this particular message reads “It’s time to look ahead... 2012 here we come!” It speaks to the persistence mandated by the conservative Christians’ worldview on politics, even in the face of defeat. Rather than focusing on the “disaster” of the newly raised debt-ceiling, Odom suggests that readers turn their attention to the future:

As many of you know, 2012 is critical. In fact, I believe it’s our LAST stand for liberty. If we lose next year, I fail to see any possibility of salvaging our nation as we all once knew it. What makes the task even more daunting is the fact that winning the White House OR the Senate is not enough. We need to win both. And not just win... but elect principled candidates. (E. Odom, personal communication, August 23, 2011)

As this passage shows, when the past is spliced with the future, the present becomes a time for action. Far from neutralizing engagement, the belief that “citizenship in heaven” is paramount activates a unique spirit of participation in the here and now. Considering these underpinnings, how is the conservative, nationalist Christian worldview, taken up in individual and collective identity? How do homeschool parents socially organize their children’s civic learning to constitute them as political subjects? Exploring this process is the task of the following chapter.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Identity And The Fashioning Of Christian Americans**

We didn't have a lot of fun in the desert  
We didn't have a lot of fun in the sand  
But saddle up your cow and fall behind us now  
Because we're goin' to the Promised Land  
  
And in the Promised Land, it's gonna be so grand  
We'll have our fill from the grill as much as we can stand  
It'll be so great, oh, we can hardly wait  
'Cause we're goin' to the Promised Land

The dining was lousy with Moses  
But we'll be feasting with Josh in command  
I'd like a taco, please, and some pintos and cheese  
Because we're goin' to the Promised Land

(Heinecke and Visher, 1998)

Belted out by Bob the Tomato, Larry the Cucumber and Junior Asparagus, the protagonists of the popular Christian cartoon "Veggie Tales", these lines may seem quaint. Yet, they tap into some of the nationalist beliefs homeschoolers seek to impart to their children – in this case, that America was divinely selected to be a beacon of religious freedom. Like many books, DVD, toys, games and organizations marketed to

evangelical parents in the U.S., *Veggie Tales* is part of a larger toolkit that Christian home-educators use to cultivate a particular kind of national identity<sup>32</sup> in their children.

The preceding chapter described the central features of conservative nationalist ideology and the discourse that expresses it. Here, I examine how this discourse is “done”, day-to-day, by examining the efforts of homeschool parents, and the homeschool leaders who influence them. What do they do to instill a sense of national identity in their children? To answer this question, I explore how parents manage the uptake of theistic nationalist discourse, and how this process constitutes both parent and child as Christian-American political subjects.

I argue that this process is accomplished through meticulous social organization that combines deliberate role modeling, participation in certain activities, and the mobilization and control of specific discursive resources. By engaging their children in particular practices, and organizing the texts their children have access to and the manner in which they are interpreted, homeschool parents endeavour to purposefully shape their

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<sup>32</sup> “National identity” denotes numerous things simultaneously – an ideological ideal, a naturalized category of practice, and an analytical term – and has been rightly criticized on that basis (Smith, 2010/2001, p. 18). It unavoidably frames perceptions of social overlap and difference within and across nation-states, often in highly divisive ways (p. 20). As a result, national identity has increasingly been panned for coming “with strings attached” instead of providing an equitable basis for meaningful solidarity. Yet, precisely because it remains central in the development of individual and collective selves, it is a ‘blurred but indispensable’ concept (Tilly, 2001, p. 9). I treat “national identity” as synonymous with “situated subjectivity” and “self-understanding”. National identity is partially constituted by structural positioning, social location and “standpoints” that unavoidably shape individual subjectivities. At the same time, however, collective identity encompasses perceptions of “commonality”, “connectedness”, and “group-ness”. For both individuals and broader groupings, I take it as enduring, but not indelible, because selfhood is subject to change and progression through ongoing processes of “identification”. Borrowing from Smith, I define national identity as: “the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation by the members of a national community of the pattern of symbols, values, myths, memories and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the variable identification of individual members of that community with that heritage and its cultural elements” (Smith, 2010/2001, p. 20).

children into passionate, engaged citizens. Christian homeschoolers believe the fate of the nation rests on returning America to its Judeo-Christian foundations, and that while it is America's youth who must oversee this restoration, it is up to their parents to teach them how. The chapter examines this development, and the challenges it sometimes includes.

My analysis hones in on two overlapping child-rearing philosophies that structure explicit and latent citizenship education among CHEC parents: "combative isolationism" and "discernment". These philosophies share a great deal. Both control children's interactions with citizenship-oriented texts and mediate social practices that mold national identity. They are united in their self-conscious construction of their children into citizens through the reinforcement of everyday, "banal" nationalism. Building up a sense of "we-ness" and imagined political community, their shared goal is to instill a sense of membership and belonging. This process fixes selfhood to America as both a geographic space and a symbolic public.

In examining how discourses of citizenship and nationalism construct identity by linking self to place, Nandita Sharma's *Home Economics* (2006) elucidates how ideas of "home" and a limited sense of "homeyness" – what Benedict Anderson (1983) referred to as "nation-ness" and "imagined community" – work to establish belonging (Sharma, 2006, p. 58). According to Sharma:

The idea of home has been occupied by nationalist practices and nationalized imaginations...Hegemonic conceptions of home are grounded in the notion that there exists communities of similarity; a homeland...this allows the idea of home to masquerade as a place. (Sharma, pp. 5-8)

In her view, European colonization hatched enduring notions of discrete, bounded homelands. This perception continues to buttress the assumption that certain groups “naturally belong” to a given space because their identities are “historically rooted in blood and soil” (p. 9). In the U.S., creating an overarching Christian-American identity by romanticizing the providential “discovery” of the “new world” has been central in struggles to establish national unity.

Beyond striving to create and maintain a feeling of community, evangelical homeschoolers additionally build Christian identity in their children by teaching them to actively *defend* it. Here, discernment and combative isolationism diverge, offering distinct strategies for responding to religious, cultural and political diversity. Combative isolationists respond to “others” who are not easily folded into their political imaginary with a discourse of “contamination vs. purity” (Mackey, 2002, p. 22). When social actors frame pluralism, difference and diversity as encroachment by unwanted interlopers, citizenship is invariably construed in nation-centric, ethno-religious terms that encourage withdrawal from, and struggle against, the threats of modernity. Discerners, in contrast, come to express a discourse of “judgment” that “arms and shields” them, permitting engagement with cultural, religious, and moral difference in more dialogic ways. Homeschool families take up these approaches variously. Some adopt but one of these strategies, while others deploy them sequentially, initially shielding children and then “slowly letting out the rope” (Interview 6) as their children reach adulthood. Others slide back and forth between these options or, contradictorily, deploy them simultaneously.

The adult actors involved are diverse: family, fellow homeschoolers, congregation members, community leaders, CHEC authorities and other “experts”. All influence how,

as situated actors, home-educators orchestrate their children's engagement with certain texts and practices. The social organization of homeschools that springs from these influences shapes civic identity by projecting idealized versions of the national subject into formal and informal learning. Attending to this social organization is vital because home-education sidesteps the influence of teachers, staff and a multitude of institutional factors that would be shaping the construction of citizen-selves were this public education. There are no rigidly differentiated "tracks" or "ability groups". Negative, self-fulfilling labels such as "at risk", "struggling" and "failing" are of little relevance and never invoked. Consequently, the "semantic fog" that Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p. 108) argued hampers countless students in public schools rarely finds form, or is quickly evaporated.

In Christian homeschools, the "figured worlds" (López-Bonilla, 2004, p. 47) that parents build up for their children are based on a particular set of nationalist identity symbols and language that are concentrated in the home, but parents also draw on other Christian influences and organizations for inspiration and support. These resources guide parents' purposeful efforts to define for their children what it means to be "us" (i.e. "Christian-American") while, simultaneously, carving out youths' individual roles *within* this larger collective. This occurs in part through generalized practices through which homeschool mothers instill notions of the kind of citizen their children should be through formal teaching, but also in more individuated ways based on children's interests and aptitudes.

The chapter is laid out as follows. After briefly describing my experience at a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration I attended at my sister's home, I turn my attention to how CHEC

parents painstakingly craft their children's civic identities. I begin by scrutinizing a range of ways that homeschool mothers and fathers moderate the learning of nationalist discourse and ideology, as well as the challenges this sometimes entails. I then turn to a discussion of perceptions of difference and diversity, exploring how "combative isolationism" and "discernment" play out in the social organization of citizenship education.

### **Learning The Tropes**

The defunct faux wood-paneled 1970's camper I sleep in is already starting to bake in the Colorado sun as the hateful smartphone blares on at 7:30 a.m., met for once with enthusiasm. It sits impossibly far away on a pile of curricular materials passed on by respondents. They bear titles like *Not Yours to Give*, which recounts David Crockett's objections to appropriating money from the public, even for the cause of war widows, and the *Future Statesman Program*, an elaborate illustrated workbook for CHEC's *Homeschool Day at the Capitol*. I clamber down from the bunk I've adopted, flailing for the "off" button on the smartphone. Squeezing past the broken shower stall, I brush the waist-high pile of carefully gift-wrapped educational toys and books it contains – presents purchased at museum gift shops that my parents have secreted away for my nieces' and nephews' upcoming birthdays.

It's the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and I am excited. The importance of "America's Birthday" was evident in my interviews and at the CHEC conference. This is a chance for me to observe citizenship and its enactment. The first to wake, I shamle across the long gravel driveway. Mariah, my eldest niece, now a quiet teen, slumbers in another old camper she shares with her dog a few yards from the house. No one stirs.

Slipping into the house through the back door, I rustle through a kitchen drawer for an eight-inch chef's knife and gather together the packets I'd picked up at Target the day before. As I tiptoe through the main living room, the Biblical verses painstakingly stenciled on the walls glimmer in the morning light. I creep past shelves full of books and DVD's on early American history and Christian leaders. The eldest children have seen some of the movies so many times they've committed much of the dialogue to memory.

Nearby, a cabinet sags under a stack of laptops, one for every child over eight in the household. Used to access everything from online games and Facebook to resources related to creative writing and school projects, they are often employed in ways that connect to citizenship. Mariah, for example, uses hers to produce an elaborate weekly bulletin, *The Encourager*, for several dozen members of her family, homeschool and church community. She frequently references political issues around liberty and freedom, as in her October issue that describes the walk of the Christian in contemporary America as "spiritual warfare" that the faithful can only survive by putting on "the armor of God".

As I open the front door, Stacey, one of the family's three golden retrievers, lifts her head slightly, sighs, and melts back into the sofa cushions. On the porch, a crisp new American flag, mounted the preceding afternoon, flits in the breeze. Against the side of the house, the five Douglas-fir sticks are still where I left them. The preceding afternoon, two of my nieces, Lydia and Edna, had helped me collect them on a walk through the nearby woods. I use the kitchen knife to trim away their remaining branches, and attach lengths of fishing line, hooks, and the gleaming red-and-white bobbers to each of their 4- to 6-foot lengths. After all, the annual "Huck Finn and Becky Thatcher Fishing Derby" we're bound to win has a prize for the best costume, as well as for the biggest fish. An

ol'-time fishing pole seems like the perfect finishing touch. I, too, it seems, have become a part of the influences shaping national identity amongst my nieces and nephews.

My sister, her husband and I arrive at the community center about twenty minutes late, five of my nieces and nephews in tow, dressed in their best impromptu Mark Twainesque garb – really, their usual pastel floral dresses or pants supplemented with whatever hats were on hand and long pieces of thatch to chew. I feel a surge of embarrassment when I look around at the twenty-five or so young Hucks and Beckys strewn around the edge of the concrete pond that is our fishing hole. No one else is using the type of rude pole I'd spent so much time fashioning; few are in costume. The prime spots are long-since taken, so we position ourselves wherever we can. The fish aren't biting; only a couple of attendees catch anything worth keeping. The highlight is when my nephew Matthew hooks a minnow.

But the fishing is not really the point, nor is the sharing of over-grilled hamburgers and lukewarm lemon pop while Credence Clearwater Revival blares in the background. As Denise, a young mother told me as we waited in the BBQ line, "you might not get this coming from Canada, but July Fourth is a chance to take time out and really celebrate our really special, God-chosen country. For us and our kids".

We head back to the house to begin the family's more private celebration. My sister's homeschooling curriculum has no shortage of civics and American history, but today's learning is more informal. Small American flags are passed out to all, with a reverence and respect not lost on my younger nieces and nephews. They clutch the flags determinedly with potato chip-greased fingers as they bounce around the living room. As on most occasions, guests are plentiful. More than twenty people fill the small house, and



the laidback atmosphere in the living room contrasts with that of the kitchen. The afternoon's activities are oddly ceremonial, quirky-yet-meaningful traditions, focused on a large flat-screen TV. We watch first *Independence Day*, in which the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is declared a worldwide holiday to mark America's defeat of an alien invasion, and then *The Patriot* with Mel Gibson playing Benjamin Martin, who goes from quiet farmer to colonial Rambo, killing hundreds of King George's redcoats single-handedly with muskets and axes.

As a good-natured jibe, Joel and Ezekiel, students in their mid-twenties who are considered family, suggest that we also watch *An American Carol*, a Leslie Nielsen spoof of the classic Dickens tale. In the film, three vengeful apparitions help a Michael Moore-like character shed his loathing for America and recover his patriotic spirit. At first, my sister is ambivalent about this choice, fearing that it would smack of intolerance in my eyes. I assure her, however, that the ribbing goes both ways – I certainly didn't pull any punches when teasing a couple of her pro-military friends as we watched *Dr. Strangelove* the week before. Everyone reacts in concert, hushed during the suspenseful moments and flinching at the gore, even those too small to really follow the plot. People drift in and out at the low points, munching and sipping wine. The friendliness, hospitality and excitement, I must admit, are contagious.

Sitting down to dinner – chicken breasts, New York strips, shrimp and all manner of veggies, none of which the kids equate with their prized Veggie Tales buddies – involves not only a prayer for America, but also a ceremonial reading of the Declaration of Independence. In slow, solemn tones, Adam recites the words while adults and children alike sit and listen, heads bowed. Few family events in my childhood

commanded such awe. The solemnity of the reading and the profoundly hopeful nature of the document are strangely appealing. I wonder how all this comes across to my nieces and nephews. Are they lost in their own world, mimicking the adults or, as their parents hope, will this experience stick with them as decisive? Wait. Stop. Why am I pontificating? Why is my urge to sustain “objectivity” rearing up, when I thought I put this notion to rest years ago? After hours of jotting surreptitious fieldnotes, it occurs to me that it’s high time I join the party...

### **“In The Trenches”: Training Godly Citizens**

The narrative above provides a glimpse into how the development of national selfhood in homeschools is managed by adults; in this case, myself included. Canadians grow up removed from the back-to-the-Founders ideology of Christian-American nationalism, and do not frame historical conflicts between the French and British in terms of great individuals. Yet, my investment in my family winning the fishing contest shows how the efforts of Christian Americans to forge national community can be strangely seductive. The anecdote also raises questions about the assorted resources – here, ranging from mainstream movies to the American Constitution – that parents draw on to shape their children’s political identities.

Many thinkers have closely linked the production of political identity to language and practice<sup>33</sup>, arguing that the “subject” is constructed through discourse (see especially Althusser’s *On Ideology* (1969), and his classic essay on ideological state apparatuses,

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<sup>33</sup> Neo-Marxist social theorists, in particular, have exhibited this preoccupation. For Antonio Gramsci, for instance, the development of identity involves the appropriation of hegemonic ideologies; slowly coming to know, and accept as commonsense, entrenched relations of power. Bourdieu, in contrast, suggests that one’s *habitus* – an embodied “sense of one’s place” – anchors selfhood by conditioning taste, expectations and aspirations in a given field of cultural production (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

1977). Understanding how the social organization of homeschool milieu brings political subjects into being and defines roles in the political arena requires an analysis of not only the content of Christian homeschoolers' nationalistic discourse, but also the concrete *practices* through which it is circulated and internalized. My strategy is to establish the influence of nationalist discourse on homeschoolers' cultivation of particular civic identities<sup>34</sup>. Specifically, I explore how parents organize social relations to produce a certain notion of the political self. Through a carefully supervised process, certain signs – in this instance, the very act of home-education itself as a form of “self-government” – impact students' political attitudes and behaviours. Locating myself at the point where homeschoolers teach civic rights and duties, I explicate the *delivery* of citizenship education through formal and latent learning.

Parents employ an enormous variety of strategies to groom their children politically. To identify these tactics systemically can be challenging. Some are ubiquitous, such as methodically studying America's founding documents – almost all my respondents underlined this as a must. Others are idiosyncratic. My sister and brother-in-law's tradition of watching certain violent, “patriotic” action movies on the Fourth of July, for example, is one that other homeschool families are unlikely to share.

Moreover, financial means temper hopes and constrain options. All of my respondents discussed the monetary sacrifice implicit in homeschooling. As Isaac, a

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<sup>34</sup>This is a good place to underline that identity formation is contingent, not all-embracing. It does not automatically eclipse other attachments or affiliations. Since different facets of the self are continually hybridized in spontaneous and serendipitous ways, we cannot simply lump members of a community together based on shared traits, nor can we crudely extrapolate the dispositions of individuals from their membership in a collective (Smith, 2010/2001, p. 15). National identity is not static; like all parts of selfhood, it is subject to dissolution and change (p. 22). There is an ongoing “reselection, recombination and recodification of previously existing values, symbols and memories” that can be internalized by individuals in very different ways (p. 22).

forty-something father of three with an accounting background, put it, “by home-educating we actually pay three times: we lose out on mom’s income because she stays home, we lose out on her pension, because she doesn’t have one, *and* we pay taxes for schools we don’t even use! [my italics]” (Interview 32). Accordingly, while the bulk of my respondents expressed an intense desire to visit the nation’s Capitol with their children and tour its historic sites, not everyone, especially those with large families, could afford such trips.

Nonetheless, the degree to which the homeschoolers I came to know are united in their *intentions* is remarkable. They share a coherent vision of what kind of citizens they want their children to be: informed, engaged and Godly. Christian home-educators thus shape political subjectivity in situated ways depending on their particular means and circumstances, but put forward an amazingly cohesive understanding of what good Christian citizenship means, and how to train their children in it. As we shall see below, this entails governing moral-political growth through role modeling and structured engagement with texts and practices.

### **1. Homeland, “We-ness” and Belonging**

CHEC parents work hard to cultivate a sense of “we-ness” and belonging in their children. I see this as part of a larger project of teaching “self-government”. This section highlights three key ways in which they go about this: encouraging the study of a particular version of history, involvement with citizenship organizations for evangelical youth, and role modeling. I also discuss some of the difficulties parents encounter along the way.

**American history.** Carefully guiding exposure to American history is a major part of the crafting of national identity. The fixation on a particular version of national history I documented in the preceding chapter comes up in important ways in the social organization of citizenship education amongst evangelical home-educators. In practice, learning “where our nation comes from” (Interview 11) involves parents selecting books and films for their children and mediating how their content is interpreted.

In terms of literature, Verna Hall’s *The Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America* (1958), David Barton’s *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution and the Law* (1996), and Peter Marshall and David Manuel’s *The Light and the Glory* (1980) stand out as especially salient. Hall’s 489-page tome, known as the “red book”<sup>35</sup> in many families, argues that America is the world’s first Christian Constitutional Republic. Her collection brings together Constitutional law, Revolutionary War-era sermons, and selections from the Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention. Hall’s analysis adopts a providential approach to history and government, documenting “the Hand of God in the history of men and nations” (Hall, 1958, p. 4). Compiling primary texts from figures in colonial American history such as Samuel Adams, John Smith, and Patrick Henry, she advances the notion of the “Westward Chain of Christianity”, the idea that God is gradually “moving man and government westward”, culminating in America as a Constitutional Republic. Like Barton’s work, which seeks to prove that the U.S. was purposefully founded as a theocracy, Hall anchors national identity to a particular geographic space, “America”.

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<sup>35</sup>Most would think of Chairman Mao’s infamous “Red Book” in communist China when hearing this moniker – certainly not a treatise on the theistic basis of Western democracy.

The homeschoolers I met made sure that Hall and Barton's books do not collect dust. Children are made to read and study them closely. This practice often involves writing reflective essays and summaries that link history to current political issues at the state or national level. Alexandra's three grown children, all homeschool graduates, spent so much time with these books that they felt they deserved more personal (and less tongue-twisting) nick-names. Hall and Barton's treatises have been referred to as "Steve" and "Frank" ever since (Interview 23). Some parents made reading and discussing such texts an activity for the entire family. Tabitha fondly described reading a few chapters of *The Light and the Glory* with her husband and young children before bedtime (Interview 5).

Joseph, a mechanic who works out of the family home in order to be close to his daughter during the day, described watching historical documentaries with her. He sees this as a way of engaging his daughter with her nation's past, as well as providing her with the opportunity to link global historical precedents with current events (Interview 20). The goal of these screenings was to teach her to be wary of state encroachment on religious freedoms, "the first step down a slippery slope." He explained how:

we were watching some history, World War II, ok? Some documentaries on how the Japanese took over Manchuria, and then they were taking over all of China and the techniques that Mussolini did with, Italy going in and invading Ethiopia. Ok? And Hitler did the same thing with Austria. And I was showing her, the documentary pointed out that the last obstacle for Hitler, in all these cases, actually, was God. If he could remove God from the church, or from the

public, ok, that he could put in the rest of his plan. So he did, he did try to remove God from the churches. (Interview 20)

Agitatedly tapping his fingers on the tile countertop that separated us, Joseph stressed the importance of teaching his daughter “unrevised”, “authentic” history from Biblical outlets, and of continuously connecting these to the present. He insisted that parents need to ask, “How do the lessons we take away from history, how does this apply today? How would the Founding Fathers respond?” (Interview 20). For the most part, it is this type of narrative that parents use to connect their children to America’s formation, and prod them to become invested in its future.

Among the homeschool families I studied there is widespread agreement on which books are most valuable, and that they should be closely studied and connected to contemporary developments in American politics. However, extensive “book-learning” involving workbooks, written summaries and research projects, are only part of the picture. In the effort to make historical-civic learning as engaging as possible, it was universally accepted that experiential pedagogy is equally crucial.

Many parents strive to form their children into Christian Americans by immersing them in the practices of “good citizenship” that I documented in the previous chapter. For instance, training homeschool youth to not only participate, but to also recruit other involved citizens was a major theme in my interviews. Susan described how, after studying a big unit on national history, she took her children to spots like the post office, the airport, or “anyplace that has a lot of people where people are just waiting around, kinda bored” where they engaged strangers in a mock quiz show on American history and politics *à la* Jay Leno:

So we'd go up to them...and my kids did their own little organization of these by simple, medium, and hard questions. So they would say to people, "We're working with Liberty Day Kids, and we're here to ask you some questions on our Constitution. Would you mind if I did that?" And you'd get looks on these people like, "Uh-oh, I don't know if I know my Constitution!"

(Interview 4)

Not all parents, however, felt confident in their ability to teach civics entirely on their own or were willing to coordinate such outings to "get their kids out there around un-righteous strangers" (Interview 34), identified by asking them straight out if they were Christian. This is where Christian organizations like CHEC, Generation Joshua, TeenPact and WallBuilders come in.

**Christian citizenship organizations.** The desire to have children learn from experience is closely connected to involvement with Christian citizenship organizations. Numerous parents spoke about supplementing their children's home-based citizenship education with participation in groups such as Generation Joshua, TeenPact, WallBuilders, Liberty Day Kids and CHEC. At this point, some descriptive background on these organizations is useful. First, it should be emphasized that CHEC's background was discussed extensively in the Introduction to this dissertation, it will suffice here to say that CHEC was founded in 1990 by Kevin Lundberg and is headquartered in Parker, Colorado (CHEC, n.d.b). Its current membership is in the thousands and it has a close affiliation with the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). Its funding is derived from membership fees and registration fees for its numerous activities, which range from father-son camping retreats to high tea for ladies (CHEC, n.d.b). The second



organization, Liberty Day Kids, was founded six years later by Andy McKean and his wife (Liberty Day Kids, n.d.). It is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to educating Americans about the intricacies of the U.S. Constitution (Liberty Day Kids, n.d.). Since 2009, Liberty Day, as my respondents called it, has focused its efforts in five major states: Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, Tennessee, and Maine (Liberty Day Kids, n.d.).

Another organization, Generation Joshua, or “GenJ”, as it is more commonly known, was founded in 2003 to encourage young people to learn about the U.S. government, history, civics and politics (Generation Joshua, n.d.). Generation Joshua is also a nonprofit organization and is based in Purcellville, Virginia. All of its partisan activities are operated and funded by a HSLDA “PAC” (Political Action Committee) (Generation Joshua, n.d.). It sponsors voter registration drives and student action teams whereby the students can campaign for specific political candidates. Its current membership is over 7,500 members and there are more than 100 clubs operating nationwide (Generation Joshua, n.d.). The funding comes from donations as well as membership, registration and activity fees. Its growing importance is evidenced by the fact that it has been actively involved in over 60 political campaigns since 2010 (Generation Joshua, n.d.).

A similar group, TeenPact, was founded in 1994 by Tim Echols and is currently active in 39 states (TeenPact, n.d.). The final group, WallBuilders, is to exert a direct and positive influence in government, education, and the family in three main ways - to educate the nation concerning the Godly foundation of the U.S., to provide information to federal, state and local officials as they develop public policies which they want to reflect

Biblical values and to encourage Christians to be involved in the civic arena (WallBuilders, n.d.). David Barton, WallBuilders' founder, is based in Aledo, Texas. His organization is a Christian book publisher that was established in 1989 (WallBuilders, n.d.). It serves mainly to publish its founder's writings and is clearly a for-profit organization with annual earnings well over \$1 M (WallBuilders, n.d.).

I see these groups for Christian youth as discursive resources that direct parents' organization of political education. Many home-educators spoke of their reliance on such organizations for help in structuring the form and content of civic education, often adopting the curriculum and exercises they recommend.

CHEC's annual "Day at the Capitol" is a case in point. Parents bring their teenage children to reinforce conservative Christian ideology around a host of political issues, especially the "big three": abortion, gay marriage and Keynesian "big government". Frequently flagged by my respondents as worthwhile, the event is explicitly geared towards mentoring "future political leaders" (CHEC, n.d.a) who will one day enact policy and legislation based on Biblical law and values. This is accomplished practically by turning the occasion into a political rally on the steps of the state Capitol in Denver.

Such groups allow parents to offload some of the labour involved in civic education. They are part of a small cadre of institutions outside the fortress of the home that parents rely on to entrench civic rights and duties. They aid parents in shaping civic selves through written work, lectures and seminars, mock campaigns and elections, as well as participation in actual campaigns. Attendees are thus introduced to new political knowledge, language, and behaviour, at the same time as they come upon familiar discourses in which they have long been immersed. In other words, many parents trust

such organizations to not only cement, but also help instantiate, their children's self-understanding as part of a particular political community.

The websites for organization such as Generation Joshua, WallBuilders, Liberty Day Kids and TeenPact give parents a clear sense of the political views and activities their children will encounter at these events. Mission statements, sample schedules for camps, day- and week-long workshops, newsletters, pre-class vocabulary lists, sample homework and testimonials are all put forward to convince parents that they should sign up for whatever program streams mesh best with their children's interests. For example, "TeenPact Media" offers training to those interested in journalism and "TeenPact Judicial" promises "an intensive moot court and law school experience", "TeenPact Survival" centers on "outdoor-based team building" and "TeenPact DC" acquaints students with their nation's Capitol through a "fast-paced week of politics, history and sightseeing" (TeenPact, 2009a).

Generation Joshua, too, boasts a variety of programs: their IElect stream is aimed at teaching youth about the Presidential election process, while the IAmend and IGovern groups are oriented towards Constitutional procedure and elections for state Governors, respectively (Generation Joshua, 2009). The "I" before each program name is intended to underscore the role of the individual in these large-scale political processes while making the programs seem hip. All three are rigorously organized by the half-hour, cramming numerous lectures and mock legislative activities into nine-hour days (Generation Joshua, 2009). Each employs the official legislative vocabulary of the Senate and Congress in Washington, using terms like "caucus", "convention", "platform", "primary" and "party lines" to prepare children for the real political arena (Generation Joshua, 2009). Geared

towards homeschool parents, the promotional materials are designed to convince prospective clients that GenJ shares their values and can be trusted to teach their kids what it means to be a Christian American.

Christian citizenship organizations underscore the need to “train” youth, a term used by CHEC speakers and my participants in lieu of “raising”, “teaching” or “educating”. Here, paradoxically, a devotion to self-government and liberty sits comfortably alongside the belief that children need to be steadfastly *molded* into citizens. The Biblical assessment of Original Sin, and of human nature as inherently negative, leads many parents to assume that their children are not automatically born good people, much less good citizens. Moral-political development therefore needs to be carefully supervised. After all, even when experiential learning is utilized, many children find politics boring and youth are not always eager to embrace their civic responsibilities. This is where the importance of “discipline” enters the equation. Hannah, mother of two teenage boys, strongly supports their involvement in sports to help them master leadership and self-control. She felt that:

we lack a lot of “discipline” in our country. I just think people get away with so much, the whole lack of integrity. How can our children or our country or anybody have integrity if there are no consequences for your actions and, to me, that’s more what it is. Discipline can have a bad connotation, you know, a lot of people, you know, say discipline is just punishment. And that’s not what discipline is; there’s the guidance part of the discipline. How can I help you and support you in doing the right thing next time? (Interview 18)

Numerous parents I spoke with enrolled their children in Generation Joshua, TeenPact or WallBuilders programs because of their stress on public speaking skills. According to Rose, a homeschool Mom who grilled me about my research for weeks before agreeing to be interviewed, affirmed that Godly Americans need to not only espouse, but also be able to convincingly *articulate*, Christian political views (Interview 28). Like so many respondents and speakers at the CHEC conference, she took as a given that “homeschool students are much better-spoken than public school students, especially around adults”; she clearly valued skilled oration. For the same reason Michael Farris, Chancellor of Patrick Henry College – the Christian “Harvard” whose student population is 80 percent homeschool graduates – bases the school’s curriculum on moot courts, public speaking and debates. He considers it so important that he personally coaches the debate squad. As a scene from the 2006 BBC documentary about the College, “God’s Next Army” demonstrates, the close attention to detail in his instruction shows how polished a product is expected to be. The scene depicts Farris in the school’s wood-paneled auditorium, grilling a female freshman student with questions while prodding her to “change your posture...enunciate more clearly...look me in the eye...stop tilting your head...when you get a softball question, you hit it” (Hurwtiz and Rothstein, 2006).

Using glowing terms, Jeremiah and Naomi described TeenPact’s pre-class homework (TeenPact, 2009b), which centered on workbook activities that test pupils’ knowledge of Tim Echols’s book, *Real Citizenship* (Interviews 29 and 30). Yet, when I examined this material, I was surprised at the level of rote memorization involved. Take the “pre-class vocabulary list” (TeenPact, 2009c). Students are asked to define terms such as “self-government”, “liberty”, “statesman”, and so on, using Echols’ book, particular

Biblical passages, and the Webster's 1828 dictionary. Filled with short questions and constraining blocks of blank space where students can replicate the book's content, rarely inviting individual creativity (though some students undoubtedly do innovate, using those empty spaces to challenge the material). The emphasis is on linking civic issues and concepts to the Bible or quotes from the "Founding Fathers" who fought in the revolutionary war and drafted the Constitution.

Other requirements are to memorize certain Bible quotes such as Timothy 2:1-3 and Romans 13:1-2 and "be prepared to write them from memory", and analyze their Governor's most recent State of the State Address using a worksheet compiled from David Barton's (2000) article "Analyzing Legislation" (TeenPact, 2009c). Interestingly, Jeremiah and Naomi strongly approved of the rote memorization the homework involved as a way of "drilling in the basics" (Interview 30). The larger point is that parents are approving of something that seems to represent the opposite of the principle they are espousing.

These parents were also quick to point out that beyond simple regurgitation, the homework also "gets our kids hands dirty" (Interview 30). This includes much more advanced, and potentially creative tasks such as writing a bill and then debating it during class as well as researching their state legislature in order to complete a TeenPact "Fact Sheet". Another couple, Susan and Daniel, was impressed with how the homework asks students to inform themselves about, and engage in, local politics. For instance, it instructs them to "pray for your STATE representative and STATE senator by name every day before you come to class" (TeenPact, n.d.), and to mail a letter to each of them addressing a key issue (TeenPact, n.d.). Learners are required to express gratitude and to

grammar-check compositions in order to appear as professional as possible. One mother whose 16-year old daughter had attended TeenPact's four-day Washington trip the year before, felt strongly that these assignments helped her daughter take up the independent practice of regular letter-writing to representatives (Interview 31). And this is something her daughter does to this day – from sending U.S. president Barrack Obama a birthday e-card, to asking her state senator to vote in favour of a particular bill. Designed to personalize and normalize individual engagement in political affairs, these learning strategies begin shaping personal civic identity in TeenPact participants long before they arrive at their first event.

Michael and Charity, who could not afford TeenPact or GenJ programs, emphasized that numerous inexpensive or free options can also be used such as Boy- and Girl-Scouts and 4H (Interviews 6 and 7). They noted how these programs help to teach children that it does not suffice for citizens to address only “big” issues of national scope (Interview 7). Michael likewise discussed how, both of his sons earned multiple Eagle Scout merit badges, each of which required extensive contributions to their local communities (Interview 6). Jonathan talked eagerly about “Make a Difference Day” (Interview 11), a volunteer effort her church participates in each fall, devoted to helping the homeless. Whatever their form, Christian organizations play a role in how some parents establish identity by amplifying ongoing processes of identification and mutual recognition. If nothing else, they permit “like-minded young people” to come together and bond.

**Role modeling.** The third key strategy parents use to impart civic learning is role modeling. Again, this assumes both direct and latent forms; parents have conversations

and engage in citizenship-related practices *with* and *around* their children. Jonathan and Elizabeth explained how:

Jonathan: We're always just talking about it [politics] at the table. Especially during the elections. Well, pretty much all the time.

Elizabeth: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Jonathan: So they [their two children, aged nine and twelve] get exposed to that. And I kind of personally keep up on politics and things like that so they hear me talk about it. Probably too much (laughs).

JB: What do those conversations sound like? Are the kids just listening or...?

Elizabeth: I don't know that they debate with us as much as they hear our perspectives.

Jonathan: Yeah. So there's just an aspect of that. They just hear us and then they'll say stuff. And then we'll say, "well, that's not quite right". When things come up we have to make sure they're understanding it. 'Cause they get opinions just because they hear it from us and you have to be careful of that sometimes (laughs). Sometimes you don't realize how much of yourself they carry. Just like a teacher in regular school. (Interview 11)

Other families took a more deliberate approach to role modeling. Charity discussed how she and her husband encouraged their four children's involvement in CHEC's annual *Day at the Capitol*, which they, as parent volunteers devoted a great deal of time to (Interview 7). And their children learned from watching. While the kids worked on independent homeschool tasks, Charity helped with formatting and editing the CHEC promotional materials. On evenings and weekends, her husband was often on the



phone drumming up support and liaising with potential speakers and other conference coordinators. Describing their sons' and daughters' move from participants in their teens to organizers and publicity agents as young adults, this couple was immensely proud of their children's desire to "get the word out on that event so other people can learn about citizenship in Colorado, and how to become a citizen lobbyist" (Interview 7).

Guiding the interpretation of shared events also figures prominently in latent citizenship education. Susan (Interview 4), Alexandra (Interview 23) and Joy (Interview 24), all middle-aged homeschool Moms, described going to the polls with their parents to vote for the first time as a rite of passage. It indelibly imprinted them with a sense of membership in something larger than themselves. Accordingly, they spoke about having a strong desire to share such key moments with their children. For some, this meant having the whole family participate in political rallies and demonstrations. Timothy discussed how:

one time when George Bush was here, when he was running against Kerry, he came to town so we took the kids and went. And at some debates, this last election, they had different candidates actually, of totally different viewpoints and positions. So we thought, we've got to take 'em [the children]. (Interview 2)

A number of respondents and CHEC speakers stressed the importance of shared parent-child moments. In a 2006 talk at the CHEC conference, Jeremiah Lorrig, a twenty-something homeschool graduate who has become a lobbyist for HSLDA in Washington DC, discussed how meaningful it had been for him to attend marches with his parents around "hot button" issues such as abortion and gay marriage (Lorrig, 2006). Mary and

Jacob characterized their attendance at a TEA Party protest with their children as “profound”, describing it as a communion with fellow, like-minded people that was deeply reassuring and empowering (Interviews 14 and 15). They came away deeply gratified that they had brought their children with them so they could see first hand “how many people are out there who care about the same things we do”. Mary explained how:

going to the Capitol to oppose excessive taxation was about citizens of the United States coming together. We were part of something big there, as a physical presence and, you know, cheering on those who were speaking when they were making points that we agreed with. (Interview 14)

Sometimes, parental modeling of community spirit and activism incites an even firmer commitment than intended. Tabitha a homeschool graduate, recalled how her mother and father “opened the floodgate” by bringing her to the Pike’s Peak parade in Colorado Springs when she was nine (Interview 5). Before long, she was insisting on carrying a sign for her Gubernatorial candidate at every rally within driving distance. Her parents were supportive, but Tabitha was always the motivating force “out there dragging them along ” (Interview 5). She giggled as she recounted how, at one parade, “my Mom was walking with me and some lady pulls her over and she goes “you can’t make your child do this. This is child abuse!”. “And my Mom just looks at her and she laughs and goes”, “you have no idea, this is parent abuse!” (Interview 5). Tabitha spoke of how her sense of collective belonging was sparked by doing activities with her parents, grandparents and aunt that many would consider a chore. Volunteering on campaigns, they were part of a group that laboriously contacted “over 10,000 households on the

issue. Phone-Banked ‘em, lit dropped with them, sign-waved. Really helped get out the vote” (Interview 5).

**Challenges and conflicts.** Taken together, the evidence I’ve presented thus far paints parents’ efforts to build a meaningful degree of “we-ness” in their children as largely fruitful. Before moving on to a discussion of how this is complemented by constructions of “they-ness”, however, I want to underscore that fostering nationalized solidarity is not always easy. My ethnographic data showed that educating homeschool students to endure citizenship education, much less take up engaged practices on their own, was not entirely painless, or even successful. Some children retreat or resist their parents’ attempts to sculpt them into Christian Americans.

A few mothers and fathers I spoke with described struggling with their children to complete even basic civics or history assignments (Interviews 19, 22 and 28). Forget about citizenship education to ignite passionate and dedicated political participation! In these cases, the goal was to get students to do the bare minimum to satisfy state requirements for graduation. From what I heard, the experience was looked back on more as infuriating than gratifying. Interestingly, even TeenPact’s brochure maintains that civics is relevant “even for students who have no prior interest in government” (TeenPact, 2009a), acknowledging that not all students dive into the political realm with great enthusiasm.

Consider Grace and Ichabod. Their 17 year-old daughter detested American history, and spent years stubbornly refusing to complete her work and meet deadlines (Interview 31). She dodged her studies so expertly that they became exasperated and sent her to public school, where structure and boundaries are more rigidly defined (Interview

31). Similarly, another young women wrote in a testimonial on TeenPact's website "my Mom and Dad signed my brother and I up for our first State class in February of 2004. Honestly, I did not want to attend a week of government lectures" (TeenPact, n.d.). The best example from the testimonials, however, is that of Caitlin who attended her first State class in 2005 as a senior in high school. She noted how "like many first time students I attended only at the request of my parents and mainly because they threatened to hold my diploma till I attended a TeenPact class" (Teen Pact, n.d.).

These narratives illustrate what Fairclough (1995) refers to as "cruces" – points of tension or rupture in a dataset. Being attentive to both thematic overlap *and* meaningful outliers allows us to consider how inconsistent data may challenge or amend theoretical conclusions (Rogers et al., 2005). Anomalous data emerged at numerous points during my research, most notably in the assertion made by a few respondents that politics and participation are entirely un-important. Peter, for example, maintained that "I really don't have a strong patriotism at all" (Interview 21) and Felix commented, "I just don't want to be involved because I do feel like politics is a moral cesspool" (Interview 26).

Similarly, I was taken aback when, after listening to a number of his nationalism-soaked speeches, Kevin Swanson explained in an interview that:

government just doesn't play that big of a part in our [he and his family's] lives. It's five to ten percent of our lives. Building a Godly family, a good solid strong family with good relationships, those are the institutions that really matter. You're not gonna fix it [American society] with government. See, this is a problem conservative Christians often fall into. They fall into the

trap that if you can just get involved and get that government straightened out, we're gonna save this country. (Interview 16)

This same lack of interest occasionally showed up amongst the children of the most civic-oriented parents (Pudewa, 2009). Just as the brevity of the responses called for by the TeenPact and GenJ homework had implied, Christian parents and organizations are not always effective in sustaining the attentiveness of young participants to politics.

This is one reason why “hands-on” training is seen as so important. Parents believe it is more likely to resonate, even with doggedly uninterested youth (Interview 20). While rote learning often occurs, both because this is how many parents were taught in state school and out of necessity to satisfy state requirements, mothers and fathers also privilege experiential learning to make sure they do not fall into the abstracted, mechanical “banking model” trap that Paulo Freire critiqued so fervently. Interaction with other peers and facilitators makes it very difficult to tune out or disengage. This experiential element, instead of promoting *consciencization*, facilitates an element of social control, governance, and supervision. Rather than encouraging homeschool youth to learn independently and think critically, hands-on learning is used to make ideological indoctrination more effective.

## **2. Grappling with Difference and Diversity**

Beyond developing children's national identities by fostering solidarity, homeschool parents also form nationalized selves antagonistically. This involves actively defending Christian American identity by bracketing difference and situating evangelical political identities relative to it. As Fairclough notes, pondering orientations towards difference, “as understandings of self and others” allows us to explore:

to what extent there is mutuality and symmetry between those co-involved in social events. Or, conversely, to what extent considerations of communicative strategy result in a reduction of the difference of the other and a lack of dialogicality. (Fairclough, 1995, p. 160)

Openness to difference and dialogicality are integral to civic education because “effective citizenship depends upon dialogue” (p. 161). As a result, examining efforts to construct national selfhood requires questioning how discourse and social organization integrate, order, represent or silence outsiders and their views.

The final section of this chapter does just that, explicating how the Christian homeschoolers I spoke with formally and informally framed perceptions of, and engagement with, social and cultural difference. I contend that in addition to shoring up community, many homeschool parents bring national selfhood into being by teaching youth to respond to “others” in two distinct ways: “discernment” and “combative isolationism”. The former “shields” and “arms” Christian youth, allowing them to confront and engage with cultural, religious and moral difference in conversational, but often unbending, ways. The latter re-articulates “contamination vs. purity” discourse, (Mackey, 2002) that equates growing pluralism with unwanted encroachment. It therefore encourages antagonism towards, and withdrawal from, the threats of secular modernity. Below, I sketch these two positions and consider their implications.

**Discernment.** My sister and her family love movies. Old movies. New movies. Action, comedy, documentaries. They watch and re-watch the ones they like. Filed away in 500-DVD binders by genre and title, their collection of upwards of 5,000 DVDs represents one of the most important and ongoing family activities they share. This assortment

draws attention to the generalized practice of concentrating everything within the family that typifies many homeschoolers in Colorado. My sister and her husband are not worried that these movies will lead their children astray, unlike some respondents who felt that to indulge in such films was an exercise in idolatry. Rather, they consider movies as providing unending occasions to flesh out and apply the Biblical lessons learned in homeschooling.

Diversity was dealt with variously by the families I met ranging from heavy exposure to non-Christian views to a complete walling-off of the secular world. Some of my participants were extremely open to difference, in the form of cultural and political attitudes, customs, faith, and so on. Rebecca, for example, encouraged her children to participate in public school activities like “sports, just so that they can also build relationships with those children and, not be like completely submerged in a world where they spend most of their time at home with family and people just like them” (Interview 17). Most parents and CHEC speakers, however, were more cautious.

Some articulated a discourse of “discernment”. This surfaced in parents’ vocabulary through expressions such as “learning sound judgment” and “developing wisdom”, which were synonymous with teaching Christian youth to *navigate* the temptations and threats of a largely non-Christian nation. The goal is not to bunker children in the home, but to “armor” youth by coaching them to be “master question askers” (Interview 3) and strong critical thinkers who will resist secular temptations. As Rebecca noted, “my goal is that my children become really good thinkers” (Interview 17), while Michael was adamant that “we’re not gonna just turn them loose but kind of teach them how to decide for themselves” (Interview 6).

Done right, discernment involves preparing children to continually apply scripture to everything from pop culture – such as the *Twilight* Saga, which presents vampires as cool – or fantasy sports that seduce Christians into gambling) to vetting candidates for President. In the words of David Hazell, in a political landscape where few players seem trustworthy, the aim is to prepare youth:

to make hard decisions, show them how to turn from evil, how to seek the ones [elected officials] that are good. It's hard, living in the world, it is...Dobson once said it's like we're on a corridor, and when he was growing up you only had two or three doors. You now have a corridor placed [so that] every five or six feet you got a door that will get you off the track. And you have to learn how to avoid those doors. (Hazell, 2009)

Hazell, a CHEC speaker with a penchant for rhetorical questions, employs the metaphor of an electrical wire to capture this tension between virtue and vice. He distinguishes between “exposed”, “isolated” and “insulated” forms of engagement with unfamiliar or oppositional political ideas (Hazell, 2009). He pleads with parents to avoid both the exposed approach that allows a wire to dangerously short circuit, and an isolated posture that wastes a wire's utility. Instead, he advocates an insulated stance, wherein a wire is productive, yet shielded. In guiding his teenage daughter's social and political development, rather than cutting her off from mainstream popular culture, or “letting her loose on the world with no supervision”, Hazell states that he carefully oversees her exposure to the secular world's culture industry. Keeping a close, almost constant role in mediating her experiences, he takes no issue with her watching Michael Moore movies or the Harry Potter series – but only if he is there to make sure they are analyzed and



interpreted according to Scripture, not fetishized. The intention is to consistently instruct her to maintain her worldview once she leaves her parents' nest.

For Judith, too, “throwing my children to the wolves” is not an option (Interview 22). Mother of six grown children, all homeschool graduates, she joined numerous other respondents in referencing the importance of Deuteronomy 6-7, verses which read: “and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:7, King James Version). In home-educator circles, this passage is interpreted in three ways: as a command to keep children with one at all times; as a call to act as role models to them; and, as a decree to mediate their interactions and control the influences to which they are exposed. Ruth felt that having “my kids joined to my hip” (Interview 1) is especially important in maintaining their faith, a claim that homeschoolers contend has been supported by some academic research (Smith, 1999). Voddie Baucham, for example, regularly quotes a study conducted by Christian Smith, which found that:

it is when teens' family, school, friends and sports lives and religious congregations somehow connect, intersect and overlap that teens exhibit the most committed and integral religious and spiritual lives. (Smith, 1999)

Baucham (2007) takes this as a warning that exposing children to alternative political viewpoints can create dissonance and undermine a Christian worldview.

Kevin Swanson tells a story about involving his seven year-old son in his first meeting with a serious book publisher (Swanson, 2009b). What seems like a charming anecdote, however, turns ugly when it becomes clear that he is training his son in a

systematic process of exclusion. Swanson maintains that the rationale for keeping children close is to *reinforce* and *disseminate* Christian beliefs, not interrogate or undermine them. He warns his audiences about “pragmatism”, viewing “accommodations” for minoritized groups as the road to the intellectual “Gomorrah” of “synthesis”. In Swanson’s view, synthesis is synonymous with “compromise” which gradually erodes morality by “watering down” God’s law (Swanson, 2009d). Citing the example of legal adoptions by LGBTIQ couples, which have gradually become “ok”, he emphasizes that the “autonomy” relativism breeds has negative results when it comes to citizenship. Swanson quipped that:

politics have become exercises in pragmatism. They force us to accept routinely choosing the better of two evils. The real problem is that people are not committed to fearing God. A good national citizenry will do so, by recognizing that their first duty is to God and His Commandments are meant for us as not just as individuals, but also for the US as a nation. (Swanson, 2009d)

Jan Bloom described how her son J.J.’s first night of deployment in the U.S. Navy, solidified his identity as a Christian patriot by showing him the need to seek out and draw strength from other Christians in the military. Accordingly, while many of his peers celebrated by trading tales of sexual exploits over whiskey, J.J. went straight to the ship’s chapel to join fellow Christians in prayer. (Bloom, 2007)

**Contamination vs. purity.** Finally, some parents are adamant that it is not enough to tutor youth to maneuver around the moral landmines of secular social and political views; they need to be avoided *and* neutralized. While acknowledging the genuine interest in

social difference that I witnessed here and there, for the most part the orientations towards diversity I came across accentuated “divisions and conflict, treating alternative perspectives as forces to be struggled with and overcome” (Fairclough, 2003: 192). The homeschool parents and community leaders I crossed paths with frequently framed divergent views, faiths and lifestyles in combative terms. Often, the vocabulary and attitudes they modeled for their children were outright hostile. Heads in the audience nodded in emphatic agreement at the CHEC conference when Wheeler, the *Braveheart* enthusiast, argued that this is “our” country and non-Christians can “like it or lump it” when it comes to customs that inconvenience them:

the banks were closed at 3:00 o’clock, on Friday, Good Friday. Secular banks where non-believers, atheists have to put up with us Christians who have the banks close on Friday at 3:00. Too bad! It’s a Christian nation. If you don’t like it, go to Russia. (Wheeler, 2009)

Michael Farris’ oft-stated assertion that the only value in considering different perspectives and arguments is for “opposition research” (Farris, 2006) to better “know your enemy”, and Aaron’s view that “they [non-believers] have their rights, but they should be also able to live in a Christian America” (Interview 5) are telling examples. The most convincing evidence, however, is the military metaphor that proliferated amongst my respondents, CHEC speakers, and citizenship organizations for Christian youth. References to “battles”, “war”, “struggle”, etc. saturated discussions of American society and politics, invariably casting religious conservatives as David standing firm against Goliath. Homeschool leaders such as Farris frequently refer to the political arena as a “target-rich environment” (Farris, 2006), while Andrew Pudewa ended a speech I

attended by leading the audience in a prayer that “God raise up an army of warriors for Christ” (Pudewa, 2009). Estrada also employs this type of antagonistic metaphor, representing young people as a “force” to “engage” in the “battles being waged” in response to “attacks” that could “crush” the future (Estrada, 2009, A Note From the Director). Engagement is thus framed competitively, in terms of *winning*, not simply participation.

This type of adversarial thinking also popped up in statements by CHEC speakers around family size and reproduction. At the 2009 conference, speakers such as Bill Jack, and Kevin Swanson compared the birth rates of Christian homeschoolers with those of “non-Christians” and “the Muslims”, treating childbearing as a competitive numbers game against “the bad people” (Swanson, 2009a). Jack speculated that by the year 2050 “most of the major countries in Europe will be under Islamic control” (Jack, 2009) unless Christian parents in America ante up and start having the quantity of children God wants them to, rather than the number that is convenient for their schedules or pocketbooks. Swanson’s thinking followed the same grain, extrapolating that:

90 percent of homeschoolers are going to homeschool their own children.

90 percent! In our movement, 90 percent of homeschoolers are going to perpetuate their parent’s vision at least to some extent. Okay, now, I did another mathematical calculation: if homeschooling flat lines at 2.4 million and we don’t see any more for generations coming from here on out, it’s done. Nobody else wants to homeschool, it’s done. First generation is done at 2.4 million. Though, the second generation, like myself, second-generation kicks in 2017, and the third in 2027, assuming that the birth rate

remains stable. And by the way, one more thing about homeschoolers, while evangelicals are having 1.7, [correcting himself] we are having 3.5 and four kids per family. Okay, so if you do the math, by the year 2027, 6 million of us. And by the year 2050 there are 15 million of us. (Swanson, 2009a)

Schooling was framed by speakers as *the* battle-ground. As Kevin Swanson argues, education is “the Omaha Beach of the war of the worldviews” (Swanson, 2009a). This is why home-education, for conservative evangelicals, at least, represents far more than a pedagogical choice to optimize learning. It is a self-conscious political statement that models for their children, each and every day, the need to embrace freedom and liberty (a.k.a. conservative logic and policy). Many of my respondents spoke about the powerful influence such figures had on their teaching and child-rearing. Eve, a homeschool Mom attending the CHEC conference for the first time, described the experience as “mind-blowing”, not only in shaping her vision of the citizens she wants their children to grow into, but also in influencing how she endeavours to bring them into being. Here, again, steadfast modeling is key.

CHEC speakers such as David Hazell proposed that every family dinner, every time children see Dad going out to deliver campaign flyers door to door or Mom volunteering to stuff envelopes, their political spirit is stirred a little bit more (Hazell, 2009). This type of role modeling involved flagging particular, and often negative, events – Bill Clinton’s sex scandal, the 9/11 attacks, the financial bailouts, Obamacare – to try and “strip away the blinders” (Interview 9), pulling their children’s attention to the damage being done to America. By speaking with their children and explaining their

position on such issues in detail, Hannah hoped that she and her husband would entrench the same views (Interview 18). She went about this day-to-day by helping her children assess current political events. She also instructed them to rely on Christian news outlets and to distrust the “biased” liberal media that refuses to meaningfully cover conservative activism. Thus, while parents frequently lament the current political and judicial shape of America, many, like Aaron, also felt it was important to help their children recognize achievements such as the Tea Parties and Town Hall meetings that have “swept the nation” to protest big government. Overall, parents strive to instill the sense that we’re the underdogs, but we’re in this together and are tipping the scales.

Much like Farris’ (2006) discussion of “red vs. blue states” and Colorado as a swing “purple state”, the goal is not to instruct Christian youth to spur *everyone* to civic action, but to get *our kind of people* to register and vote. Consistency and dedication are among the most important political characteristics parents try to model. Jeremiah Lorrig (2006) stressed that “if you get one congressman in, that’s only one congressman. If you want to see change, have an impact that’s long-lasting, you have to be long-suffering. Just doing one election is not going to have a lasting impact” (Lorrig, 2006). Rather, what counts is consistency, pushing children to become “young, energetic volunteers. Making thousands of calls, knocking on thousands of doors. Actually bring the ideas forward and implement them” (Lorrig, 2006). Lorrig’s call to action, however, is implicitly directed toward Americans who share his worldview.

Cabrera (2010), Giroux (2006) and many others, have expressed concern that, when “symbolic borders become real”, the goal of preserving a perceived cultural homogeneity emerges as paramount. If difference is constructed as a political threat to

national identity and integrity, relying on nationalist practices that hone in on threats in order to construct a secure sense of self may be a misstep. The result is hierarchical organization of people through differential state categories of belonging. This is one of the main reasons that, today, “Christian-American” continues to work as a ruling identity in much of the U.S., including homeschools.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at how homeschool parents methodically manage the construction of national identity amongst their children. Pulling from a variety of curricula and resources, homeschool parents combine diverse approaches to teaching and learning to try and shape their children into Godly citizens. My discussion showed how many Christian parents employ similar tactics to govern the concrete organization of citizenship education, notably studying history, participating in political organizations for Christian youth, and role modeling. Taken together, they construct identity by reaffirming neighbourship and shared community, while also delineating individuals’ roles and responsibilities within them.

Despite a broad consensus on how to guide the development of membership and community, however, home-educators differ in how they deal with its ideological counterpoint: “they-ness”. Some engage with outside groups and thinking in a conversational way, using “discernment”. Others adopt a stance of combative isolationism that entails hunkering down in the sphere of the home while occasionally emerging to wage war with secular politicians.

In both cases, this process is centralized in the home. In homeschools, it is the flexible unit of the household, not schools with rigid age- and ability-groups or grade

levels, which acts as the primary organizer of civic education. This cultivation is punctuated by certain outside influences, mainly political organizations for Christian youth and church activities. It is the home that structures children's civic engagement in particular ways and provides them with specific interpretive frames for making sense of the political realm. This is why it is so imperative for my participants that parental liberty is not encroached upon by educational requirements and controls. When the prevailing view is that children "don't belong to the government, they belong to their parents" (Baucham, 2007), the hostility that speakers such as Voddie Baucham and Kevin Swanson express towards the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child makes perfect sense. From this vantage point, the real question is "Where is the UN Convention on the Rights of the *Parents*? [my italics]" (Swanson, 2009a).

With this backdrop in mind, the stage is set for considering how homeschoolers go about gendering nationalist identities. The following chapter does this by interrogating how citizenship education in Christian homeschools is organized to construct "masculine" and "feminine" political subjects. Specifically, I examine how discourse around appropriate citizenship roles and practices differs between men and women and how homeschoolers socially organize their children's appropriation of this discourse.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Power And Gendered Citizenship Education**

1, 2, 3! And we heave, straining to lift the chicken coop and the shipping pallet it rests on off the damp floorboards of the old shed, out the door, and onto an overgrown patch of wet brush. Beneath, hunched in a corner, a three-week-old chick chirps indignantly as Mary reaches down and scoops it up. With an exasperated sigh, she tosses it back into the crate with the rest of its squeaking siblings. We take a second to catch our breaths and move the coop back into position.

A few hours earlier, on a rare gloomy afternoon, I'd been nestled on my sister's couch transcribing interviews when the phone rang. Mary, a young mother in her mid-twenties and a member of my sister's congregation, needs a favour. A chick has escaped the coop and trapped itself beneath the floor of the shed, 30 yards down a hill from the house. With three children under four who cannot be left unattended, and her husband at work until midnight, Mary could not undertake the rescue operation alone.

The task completed, I latch the shed door behind us as we leave. We trudge back along the muddy path and up the stairs to the main level of the two-floor house. Entering through the kitchen door we pass dozens of roughly cut bars of soap, made with milk from the family's three goats, which sit stacked on a windowsill. Down the hall in the master bedroom, my adolescent nieces Edna and Lydia, an inseparable team, play dutifully with three-year old John and two-year old Luke while a Veggie Tales DVD plays in the background. They are also keeping their eyes on Jen, the youngest at eight months, who sleeps in the small children's bedroom down the hall. Edna and Lydia came along because they had previous experience babysitting John, Luke and Jen. Due to the

fact that my sister's oldest children are all girls, boys in the family have not yet taken on such roles.

In the living room, two golden retriever puppies slump in a training crate. On the wall above a piano cluttered with sheet music and drawings, a large broadsword, a reproduction of the one wielded by Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*, and two replica Revolutionary War muskets, hang as centerpieces. Amid the children's toys, a tailor's mannequin, donning an elaborate wedding dress in the making, occupies a place of pre-eminence in the living room. To help make ends meet, Mary works from home as a seamstress for a small local shop and practices "homesteading" – painstakingly raising goats and chickens and making products such as butter, cheese and soap. As with most evangelical homeschool Moms, she shoulders the bulk of the day-to day workload on the home front, while her husband puts in long hours as a software engineer.

Mary exemplifies the fiercely conservative Christian homeschool Mom. She owns a pink Day-Glo 9-mm handgun that she frequently carries in a studded hip holster, and was a proud attendee at a Tea Party rally in Denver. Herself a homeschool graduate, Mary has very negative memories of her own learning experience due to the rigid approach her mother adopted. When she and her husband decided to homeschool, Mary vowed to employ a much more flexible, student-centered method.

On the numerous occasions I spoke with her, Mary laughed off the isolation her circumstances frequently produced, but also intimated that she felt bound to her home. She rarely voiced frustration at the stress that came with reconciling all of her responsibilities, but admitted to being exhausted. Lonely and overwhelmed by the strain of managing multiple, sometimes conflicting duties, Mary frequently looked to the

internet for interaction and support. As we shall see below, the disjuncture between Mary's brave face and sense of strain reveals a great deal about the separation between popular representations of womanhood among homeschoolers and women's lived realities in conservative Christian homeschools.

### **Gendering Christian Citizens**

This chapter investigates how patriarchal discourses of gender hierarchy hook into conservative<sup>36</sup> Christian nationalist ideology to guide gender socialization and civic learning. I document how homeschool parents create political subjects in gendered ways, analyze discourse around gendered citizenship amongst CHEC parents and speakers, and report on the social organization of gendered citizenship education. My analysis emphasizes the centrality of the home as a site for the production of gendered differences because Christian homeschooling collapses distinctions between home-based learning and formal schooling. I argue that Christian homeschooling discourse calls for men to be local patriarchs who provide for and govern the family as well as subjects who have a public life as "leaders" in the realm of Christian politics. Such discourse constructs women as mothers and "servants" whose lives are primarily focused on and lived in the domestic domain. I explore the gendered division of labour in the production of gendered

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<sup>36</sup> My respondents do not describe themselves as "conservative". Rather, in a world they believe to be spiraling morally out of control, they understand themselves to be "traditional". While the CHEC community unquestionably occupies a rightist position on the spectrum of conservatism, they should be situated not only in relation to less gender-segregated religious communities, but also ones that are more extremist. This positioning is important because, just as it is crucial not to naturalize my respondents' interpretations and practices, it is also important that they not be represented as rightist caricatures. For example, compared to The Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints (The FLDS) in Utah, whose proponents practice polygamy on a remote ranch, reject all modern clothing and technology, forbid women to leave the grounds unaccompanied by men, and where the community patriarchs have literally hundreds of children, my respondents may seem liberal. How my respondents decide "how far to go" on the conservative spectrum rests on the "common-sense" assessments that underpin their larger worldview.

subjects, showing what conservative Christian homeschool mothers and fathers actually “do” with respect to accomplishing gender as well as how those activities simultaneously gender them. At the same time, my analysis illuminates the imagined gendered men and women that CHEC homeschool parents want their children to become.

I contend that a major dimension of citizenship education and related activities in conservative Christian homeschools centers on the production of the classic heterosexual, breadwinning patriarch, and the wifely corollary. A focal point is trying to form gendered people with respect to what and how they will be in families. This work extends beyond “families”, however, in that the labour that parents engage in to socialize their children is discursively supported by CHEC. CHEC leaders and speakers are principally men, but the hands-on labour of homeschooling and the construction of gendered subjects is done primarily by women.

Performance of the “masculine” and “feminine” in evangelical homeschools concentrates women’s activities almost entirely in the home and church. This ties into civic learning and political practice by normalizing gender roles that do not necessarily eclipse, but often constrain and de-prioritize, women’s political participation in the public square, especially as leaders. It is not non-involvement, but rather a specific understanding of political engagement – one that is largely concentrated in the private realm – that is encouraged for women. Consequently, Mary’s case not only draws attention to the practical difficulties involved in homeschool motherhood, but also to how gender roles are folded into political participation.

The worldview coherence I documented in Chapter Four carries over to understandings of gender and citizenship. The Christian homeschool mothers I met are

highly focused on their families, and they have a clear vision of what kind of adults they want their children to become. While raising children to be good citizens is indeed on parents' minds, what drives them is the deep conviction that education is a vital part of parenting, a task so important that it should not be entrusted to formal schools, Christian or otherwise. Talk about acceptable gender roles in relation to civic behavior is homogenous in this context.

### **Gendered Citizenship Education**

To deepen understanding of how evangelical homeschool parents constitute children and youth as political subjects requires showing both how homeschoolers understand citizenship to be gendered, and how they go about bringing gendered citizens into being. Here, gender regulation is key. An abundance of research has revealed how such regulation occurs within the home (Butler, 1990; Brundage, 1987; Namaste, 1996), educational institutions (Youdell, 2005; Iacovetta, 2007; Walls et al., 2010; Phillips, 2009; Chappell et al., 2010) and religious organizations (Zuckerman, 1998). When home doubles as school in a highly religious context, the effects of such regulation is amplified. In formal schools, the hidden curriculum has long been flagged for its role in reinforcing traditional gender roles. Latent messages are also powerful in homeschools, producing "boys", "girls" and the political agents they become. Through a process initiated in early life that stretches into adulthood, the social organization of gendered learning in homeschools sidesteps much of the secondary socialization that typically occurs in schools through interaction with peers and teachers and other outside influences. Instead, evangelical homeschool parents use the home to control all of their children's interactions and maintain normative gender roles.

My respondents explain that having numerous children and teaching them to evangelize is part of their duty as Christian-Americans. Some, like Peter and Jacob, employ the metaphor of a quiver to describe their family's role in American politics (Interviews 21 and 15). Having large families is understood as a means of "training up quivers full of Christian patriots" (Interview 32). Speakers such as Kevin Swanson (2009a), Michael Farris (2006) and Ned Ryun (2007) frame reproduction as a way of building a political constituency. While my sister's family of 11 children is far above average based on my sample – the mean number of children is 3.6 – five or six children is not unusual, far above the 2010 national average of 2.06 (World Bank, n.d.).

This conception of the family, often implemented through the rejection of birth control and family planning, has an enormous impact on the lives of homeschool Moms. My sister has spent over eight years of her life expecting. Yet, she describes her experience as a mother in glowing terms, as do my other respondents with large families. Conservative evangelicals cast homeschool motherhood as deeply gratifying. The few complaints my female interviewees articulate are about practical concerns – they never express larger doubts about home-education. Charity, for example, rolls her eyes and groans when describing difficulties around "having them [her three children] just pay attention" (Interview 7), and Susan explains how "it's really, really time consuming. The biggest drawback by far is it's a lot of organization" (Interview 4). Alexandra, with her six children, maintains that while organizing schooling for so many children, especially when they are close in age, can be draining, "I love having a full house. And I don't even have grandkids yet, which I am really looking forward to!" (Interview 23).

This philosophy of “the more, the better” profoundly shapes what is expected of evangelical homeschool mothers and fathers. For fathers, it ups the ante when it comes to providing for their families as breadwinners. In the case of my brother in-law, Benjamin, making ends meet requires a grueling work schedule that involves not only full-time teaching of statistics and computer science at a Christian university, but also picking up as much extra contract teaching and consulting work as possible. For evangelical mothers, a large family means a huge amount of caregiving and housekeeping labour. It is important to note, however, that parents’ overriding concerns around reproduction are not spurred solely by political concerns; they are also personally, religiously and socially motivated. The Biblical dictate to “be fruitful and multiply”, the perception that children are always a blessing and the simple desire to have kids override civic duty. Citizenship is valued, but faith trumps it. As Peter put it:

in a Biblical perspective, there’s two kingdoms. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of the world is all about self-existence, apart from God. As a Christian, my priority is the kingdom of God. It’s all about existence with God. National pride, patriotism. I think it’s good the way that the United States was started, mostly by the puritans and people really escaping religious oppression in some way. Coming to the United States and saying, hey, religious freedom. Of course, that was Biblical, scriptural religious freedom. And it, kind of expanded from there. So, as far as patriotism, I’m firstly, first and foremost, patriotic to the kingdom of God (Interview 21).

My respondents and CHEC speakers essentialize gender differences, stressing that men, by nature, are strong, active and powerful, while women are caring, nurturing and submissive. As a result, evangelical homeschoolers believe that their sons' and daughters' divergent temperaments and aptitudes necessitate that they follow distinct educational trajectories. The 2009 CHEC conference lineup attests to this conviction. There was a panel on "preparing sons and daughters for marriage" and presentations bore gendered titles like "The Heart of Fatherhood", "The Mom Heart: Following the Beat of God's Heart as a Mother", "The Sacred Mission of Motherhood", and "The Joy of Raising Boys" (CHEC, 2009). Down the hall, vendors sold books and DVD's such as "Daddy's Songs for Daughters: Fostering the Father-Daughter Relationship" and "The Apostle Paul on Fatherhood"<sup>37</sup> (CHEC, 2009).

While both men and women spoke at the CHEC annual meeting, speeches by men were assigned bigger venues within the massive Convention Center; I did not witness a solitary woman speak on the keynote stage. Male presenters concentrated on large-scale philosophical and moral issues such as "training up the Joshua generation" (Ryun, 2006),

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<sup>37</sup> Paul, in Corinthians, does not endorse the fruitfulness and multiplication mandated in Genesis 1:28, showing that not all Biblical exemplars are concerned about the multiplication of Christians in the long term. In 1 Corinthians, verse 7:1, he states: "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Corinthians 7:1, King James Version). In 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, he asserts that "For I wish that all men were even as I myself [unmarried]. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, King James Version). Lastly, in 1 Corinthians 7: 2-6 he notes: "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment" (1 Corinthians 7: 2-6, King James Version). Overall, then, Paul's preference for bachelorhood and framing of regular sex as a "concession" makes his position on fatherhood rather detached.



while women focused on the “nuts and bolts” of homeschooling in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and record-keeping and other day-to-day aspects of home-education. Audiences were more distracted and less respectful when women spoke – some homeschool Dad chatted and refused to respond to questions when female presenters tried to open a dialogue with the audience.

Women deferred to their husbands’ authority. I overheard numerous mothers, for instance, ask for approval when it came to spending limits and curricular choices. Furthermore, though several speakers presented jointly, only one duo was a husband-wife team. Chris and Wendy Jeub, drew attention to the financial pressures large families can create in a talk entitled “Cheaper by the Baker’s Dozen” that laid out tips and “the principles of frugal living” that have helped them “keep a reign on their spending while raising fifteen children” (CHEC, 2009, p. 27). For the most part, however, while husbands delivered speeches and answered questions from conference attendees, their wives adopted less glamorous, supportive roles like running a sales booth.

Although homeschooling is central to socialization processes, there is little scholarly research on how it readies young adults to enter the world as gendered citizens. My ethnographic fieldwork showed that the extremist views put forward by supporters of the “stay-at-home-daughter movement”<sup>38</sup> – which encourages women to forsake education and devote themselves to their fathers/husbands – are not held by my sample. My respondents imagine more diverse educational trajectories for their daughters. There is no evidence of a systematic plan to keep daughters at home and out of college. Rather, the prevailing stance is that higher education is not mandatory, but can be beneficial in

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<sup>38</sup> Members of this movement claim that, instead of being exposed to temptation and immorality in university, the best preparation for young Christian women is to stay home from college and learn how to be a wife and mother through maternal mentorship.

producing dedicated Christian wives and mothers. Numerous respondents, such as Michael (Interview 6) and Timothy (Interview 2), urge their daughters to train in fields such as caregiving and teaching to prepare for homeschool motherhood. At the same time, some women view attending university less instrumentally, as gratifying for its own sake. Elizabeth is immensely proud that her daughter is excelling in a creative writing program (Interview 10), and Joy describes how, when she first graduated from her parent's homeschool, she was excited to start university simply because "I really love learning" (Interview 24).

University is thus an acceptable option for women, in part because it is not seen as curtailing stay-at-home motherhood in the long-term. Eve discussed how, although she completed an MA in social work and was employed in the field for seven years, she "always knew that I would quit and become a stay-at-home Mom when I started having kids" (Interview 13). Similarly, Sarah Anderson, who does not want to attend college, notes that her current high level of involvement in no way threatens her being a wife and mother because "I won't do this forever, I want to have kids" (Interview 8).

When it comes to boys, Alexandra similarly comments that university is far from the only option. She describes her eldest son as "a natural leader. So we've been looking around at military service, the fire department, and forestry since we're in the mountains. Paths like that" (Interview 23). Several parents I interviewed, and numerous presenters at the CHEC conference, stress the importance of higher education in Christian institutions. Schools in this vein, such as Patrick Henry College (PHC), emphasize Biblical gender roles. In "God's Next Army", the BBC documentary cited in Chapters 4 and 5, a female student explains that:

one thing I've learned here [Patrick Henry College] is that women do not do as well in the highest leadership positions. It's just something about their reactions. I mean [Laughs], this is really stupid but [Laughing] playing ultimate Frisbee is the best way to discover this. Because, if you're basically just trying to shove your way into it and saying "ok, I'm good, you must treat me like one of the guys and throw me the Frisbee", guys react really badly to that and then they'll ignore you. They basically just throw to all the guys. However, if you start going "oh, good job, that was really good", then they start noticing you and you start getting the Frisbee. (Hurwitz and Rothstein, 2006)

Other scenes in the documentary make clear that, at PHC, men and women are exhorted to different goals. A discussion between a handful of students in an empty classroom, in which a young man asserts that women should retire and become stay-at-home mothers when they start families, was especially telling. He argues that:

there's a reason that traditional roles for men and women have been around for as long as they have. People are free to choose. When you're initially married, there's probably nothing wrong with the two people working. When you have kids that's obviously something different to consider because, historically, you can just see that families are usually better off when the mother stays at home. (Hurwitz and Rothstein, 2006)

Two of the young women in the conversation are visibly caught off guard, laughing uncomfortably, one remarking "I don't know, let me think about this...probably" while

the three male freshmen insist “come on, you know” (Hurwitz and Rothstein, 2006) in the background.

For daughters who attend university, caregiving fields such as early childhood education, social work and nursing are not only encouraged as preparation for homeschooling, but are also connected to the emphasis on self-sufficiency I have discussed elsewhere. Mary, for example, describes the American history she studied during her liberal arts degree as one source of her inspiration for homesteading; it reminds her that “Americans thrived for centuries without modern conveniences that make families dependent” (Interview 14). For men, too, the value placed on self-sufficiency and autonomy in conservative discourse influences gender roles. My brother-in-law, Benjamin, completes any necessary home-repairs, sometimes with the help of Joel and Ezekiel, the two young men who live in the campers on the property. Be it mounting a new dishwasher or assembling a front porch from materials passed on by a congregation member, hiring professionals is always a last resort because they undercut autonomy and inflate costs. When the installation of their new modular home could not be approved before a retaining wall was installed, Benjamin used his engineering expertise to construct an elaborate support out of 250 eight-foot railroad ties and more than 1000 12-inch steel spikes. He drove each one in himself with a 30-pound sledgehammer. Benjamin is thus no stranger to the “handy man,” “Mr. fix-it” masculine role that is widely celebrated in popular culture. He exemplifies the type of self-sacrificing, servant leader that governs for the prosperity of all that is so reified in CHEC circles. In other words, the brand of conservative Christian nationalism that CHEC adheres to legitimizes the promotion of particular form of patriarchy.

Consequently, I want to stress the value of working with the notion of patriarchy to analyze gendered citizenship education. The concept of patriarchy was first developed to draw attention to male domination in the household, and was extended by early feminist thinkers to identify male dominance in all social relations. In more recent decades, much sociological research has examined how educational institutions work to reinforce gender divisions and hierarchies among students. In the context of my empirical research site, where home and school are one, the home is of particular significance in the production of gendered citizens. The bulk of civic learning and related activities is focused in the home because of how “formal” schooling is removed from the equation. A great deal of effort goes into the production of the classic breadwinner patriarch, who occupies an important place in public life, and the wife, who is relegated largely to the domestic sphere. An enormous emphasis is placed on the formation of gendered roles and identities with respect to what and how they will be in families. It is critical to note, however, that these processes extend beyond “families”, insofar as the reproductive labour is discursively supported by the work and activities of organizations such as CHEC.

The forces shaping national identity that are discussed in the previous chapter, role modeling, Christian organizations and formal curriculum, are still very much in play when it comes to gendered citizenship education. TeenPact, for example, contributes to the formation of gendered national identity through a variety of programs like the “TeenPact Challenge for Boys”, a “military style camp to help guys develop servant leadership and Godly courage” and its female counterpart, which helps girls develop “courageous femininity and adventurous beauty” (TeenPact, 2009b). On a practical level,

this entails young girls avoiding makeup until they reach their late teens and become old enough for courtship, and wearing modest clothes such as floor-length skirts. As the description of a talk by James McDonald in the 2009 CHEC conference program put it, this is important because:

Churches are filled each week with wives and daughters who are dressed in a way that would have gotten them arrested less than a hundred years ago. So how did she make it past dear old Dad? Join James McDonald as he confronts the issue of immodesty in our culture and find out how the way we dress reflects how we view God and ultimately how we communicate Christ to the world. (CHEC, 2009, p. 17)

For the most part, the home and church are where gendered national identities are formed through parental mentorship. Children's first training in gendered citizenship involves learning how to be male or female citizens of their families and congregations. The principles they learn there guide their constitution as gendered political subjects at the local, state and national level, creating different senses of place in the public/private spheres for young men and women. In order to show how this occurs, below I examine how parents cultivate gendered citizens by carving out distinct roles and expectations for girls and boys, and the men and women it is hoped they will become.

### **1. Onward Christian Soldiers: Male Citizen-Leaders**

Evangelical homeschoolers raise Christian-American men by coaching boys in the enactment of the masculinized roles of son, brother, father and husband. Like American citizenship itself, being the male head of a family is understood as a privilege that comes with both rights and responsibilities. Home-educators typically adhere to a

division of labour whereby men are breadwinners and women are stay-at-home caregivers. In the evangelical families I looked at, mothers do all of the formal teaching, discussion, assessment, feedback and grading. As some CHEC conference presentations, such as David Hazell's (2009) "Working Dad can Homeschool Too!" imply, some homeschool fathers want to be involved. My data suggest, however, that most husbands do not participate in the formal aspects of home-education. Fathers may be involved in "big picture" decisions regarding curricula and pedagogy, but the nitty-gritty work generally falls to mothers and older siblings. This is partially the case because many fathers see such work as outside their domain. Several husbands I requested interviews with, such as Eve's, were friendly but refused because "to be honest, there's no point. She's the one to talk to. She does all the teaching and planning. I pay the bills". The day-to-day practice of homeschooling, for the vast majority of respondents, involves husbands/fathers leaving the home to work while their wives and children remain.

Conservative homeschool boys quickly learn that even though Mom orchestrates formal learning and runs the house, Dad is the ultimate decision-maker and disciplinarian. He is the go-to guy with the wallet and the final word on every familial issue. And Mom defers to him. Eve jokes that "I have my own government here. He [her husband] is president and I'm vice-president" (Interview 13). This is an important message that parents work diligently to ensure their boys absorb – that their natural place is as heads of their households and communities and, perhaps, a higher station in formal politics.

Boys are encouraged to play with toys that differ dramatically from their sisters'. The vendor tables at the CHEC conference are packed with games and educational

resources targeting male youth, which share a military emphasis that reflects nationalist, patriarchal discourses. Male historical costumes, for example, include revolutionary, civil and WWII war uniforms from all the branches of the military, and re-creations of headdresses and leather armor once worn by local American Indian tribes in battle.

Several interviewees express concern about how mainstream games and toys might impact on their sons' development. Peter, for example, disapproves of his boy dressing up as a superhero, fetishizing Batman or Spider-Man action figures, cartoons and other "idolatry that draws his attention away from God and his responsibilities" (Interview 21). Consequently, such things are carefully kept out of his world. Rebecca likewise states how she and her husband only expose their sons to toys and videos with Christian content and righteous male role models, such as "Veggie Tales" characters like Jonathan (Interview 11). This tale, recounted in the full-length movie, *"The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything"* (Nawroki and Vischer, 2008) explains how Jonah rejected a direct commandment to travel to the town of Nineveh to evangelize, and was swallowed by a whale in his attempt to travel in the opposite direction. The Lord, being merciful, frees Jonah from the whale and gives him a second chance to follow his bidding, teaching Jonah the importance of obedience.

The focus on men and their accomplishments is explicit in the formal civics and history homeschool curricula. The texts discussed in the preceding chapter, the works of Verna Hall and David Barton, for example, assert that America has been forged by great men, as do the Christian civics curricula put forward by TeenPact, WallBuilders, and Generation Joshua. Presenting a version of history that erases women's accomplishments,



these materials state outright that women's place as political agents is in the background, facilitating their husbands' activities.

For homeschool youth, the interlacing of national and gender identity is a different process than in formal educational institutions. There is no sudden "first day of school" at age five or six that pierces the bubble of the home, introducing youth to peer and institutional influences that gradually stitch together gendered selfhood and national identity. Instead, the performance of gender is overseen almost entirely by parents and siblings.

Heteronormativity and the policing of sexuality also act as forces shaping male Christian citizens into representatives for their communities and Ambassadors for Christ in America. The Bible's "condemnation of homosexuality" is frequently evoked. I heard "it's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" several times during the CHEC conference (Wheeler, 2009; Farris, 2006), where such views are presented not as intolerance, but as incontestable Biblical truth. This perspective is typical of my respondents and representative of my population, and the sentiment that it is important that parents transmit such views to their children come up, in various ways, in 13 of my 34 interviews. Gender and heteronormativity are connected to citizenship in this context because they help to define, both legally and socially, the rights and entitlements of particular political subjects. This linkage was particularly apparent around disapproval for gay marriage, which Elizabeth describes as "an abomination", arguing that gay couples should not be allowed to adopt children or share medical benefits (Interview 10). Others see the issue as nominally semantic. Mary (Interview 14) and Sarah Anderson (Interview 8), for instance, were firm that they have no problem with equal legal rights

for gay couples, but object to the usage of the term “marriage”, which they argue should be reserved for Biblical unions between a man and a woman.

Meanwhile, the “invented traditions”<sup>39</sup> that Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) highlight as crucial sources of nationalism, such as raising the flag and singing the national anthem, continue apace, chiseling homeschool boys into American men. Grace speaks about how home-educating does *not* mean that such school rituals are cast by the wayside (Interview 31). Each morning, her eldest son raises the flag on the pole in their front yard and no schooling takes place until the national anthem has been sung. She notes proudly that these customs are supplemented with prayers for officials such as the President or for U.S. troops abroad – prayers that are not permitted in public schools.

CHEC speakers and my interviewees make clear that the overarching goal of civic learning for boys is to prepare them for leadership. Ruth’s answer to questions like “what does a good leader look like?” was an automatic, “well, *he*...”[my italics] (Interview 1), and Aaron defines a leader as “a man who’s married to one wife, has godly children. And one who leads those children well by having devotionals, making sure their foundation is straight, being involved in a strong Bible-believing church” (Interview 9). Susan, mother of two adolescent boys, also extends this masculinized conception of governance to fathers in the home:

Most importantly would be a leader of his household. Of family. That would be the most important leader. If he could, you know, be able to support a family and raise a family in the Lord, then they will grow up to be good citizens, so to speak. (Interview 4)

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<sup>39</sup> Hobsbawm explains invented traditions as sets of practices that “seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” through a “process of formalization and ritualization” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, pp. 1-2).

For Aaron, political leadership is conceived solely in male terms. He maintains that proper governance is clearly spelled out in Deuteronomy 19<sup>40</sup>, which Aaron interprets as commanding Christians to elect representatives who are:

outstanding, upstanding men, and by that means, you know, that means to have a foundation in what the Bible says and practice that in their daily lives. It's the same as being an elder in a church. You don't just pick anybody or an officer in a church. You pick somebody whose family is in order, whose wives are in submission to them. (Interview 9)

Elizabeth explained how regular chores are an important part of acquiring the responsibility needed to be an American father and husband (Interview 10). Tasks such as taking out the trash and yard work like pulling weeds, trimming hedges, chopping wood and mowing the lawn are seen as decidedly male contributions. Combined with the study of history that revolves around heroic, self-sacrificing male figures, homeschool parents work hard to teach their sons to be "servant leaders". In Rebecca's words, this entails:

caring for those, protecting those that you mean to lead. So, in other words, for his sisters. We're always encouraging him to be their protector. How can you protect your sisters in this situation? Are you hurtful or are you a protector? And another means of protecting, serving, is to help take care of them. If there's something that they need he'll help get that for them and I'm always encouraging him in those ways...trying to get him to put himself second or last, and put others first. (Interview 17)

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<sup>40</sup> I was unable to locate any verses along these lines in *Deuteronomy*, leading me to believe that Aaron simply misquoted the reference.

This quote frames protection as masculine, showing that safeguarding is conceptualized as something that boys and men do *for* girls and women.

One dinner I attended demonstrated that even Christian youth do not uncompromisingly adopt their parent's views on gender. The teen emerged from her room incensed about a debate she and some friends had been having online. At issue was the creation of a new youth pastor position at their church, and whether a man or a woman should fill it. The young woman, in contrast to her friends, felt that since it involved working with children and youth, perhaps a female pastor would be more appropriate. Her view is noteworthy because it associates femininity with caregiving while also indicating her potential willingness to stretch prescribed gender roles and normalize female leadership. At the same time, it is also a reminder of the constant influence that these parents exert over their teenage children. Both the men and the women at the table were up in arms at this suggestion. The gathering was unanimous that women are poorly suited to the task of leadership. Her parents and their guests wasted no time correcting the girl, setting her straight that formal headship is a distinctly male role. She playfully tried to argue her view at first and did not seem entirely convinced, but quickly backed down.

Teaching sons to be Christian American men requires showing them how to evangelize, and the most important site to spread faith-based views and morality is the political arena (Farris, 2006; Lorig, 2006). Homeschool boys are groomed to engage in the civic world as proactive participants through volunteering and charitable donations. CHEC speakers repeatedly assert that a Christian American man does not only tithe to his church (Swanson, 2009a), but additionally contributes to worthy causes like the Police

and Fire Association funds (Jack, 2009), “Support Our Troops” (Bloom, 2007), and political campaigns at the state and national level, either independently or through the umbrella of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). This kind of political action includes clear directives – specifically, to back Christian-Republican candidates who will work to ban abortion and gay marriage and promote the shrinking of government.

Finally, Christian American manhood is sometimes linked with military service and gun ownership. Women are not discouraged from keeping guns or training in their use, as Mary’s pink handgun conveys quite clearly. She was taught how to shoot by her father as a teen and kept up her skills by regularly visiting a shooting range in adulthood. But her gun ownership is not understood in the same way as men’s, who are believed to have a fundamental duty to own arms. Women can have guns, but it is not requisite. It is not seen as a transgression of gender roles, but as a demonstration of their willingness to go beyond a passive role to preserve liberty.

Respondents like Jacob (Interview 15), Aaron (Interview 9) and Joseph (Interview 20) insist that American husbands and fathers are duty-bound to own weapons to defend their families should the state begin to infringe on their civil liberties. Joseph is anxious that these forms of “home security” are increasingly being jeopardized by regulations and legislation that undermine his constitutional right to bear arms not by barring access to guns themselves, but by restricting the availability of ammunition (Interview 20). Citizenship training, for many young men, involves trips to the shooting range and lessons on gun safety and maintenance. Other respondents talked about guns in relation to hunting. Peter explained the connection between guns and politics:

We've got a 12 gauge and we've got a handgun. Now there's another political thing, right? I mean, we hunt. There's deer in the freezer, you know? I've been to Alaska bow hunting for bear. Scripture says that we are, that man was given, in essence, responsibility to be stewards of what God's given us. And one of the things that God gave us was animals to eat. So, politically, we would definitely not be vegetarians (laughs), or vegans or anything like that. (Interview 21)

Military service by men is held in high esteem and actively encouraged. Adam (Interview 12), Jacob (Interview 15) and Felix (Interview 26) speak about a tradition of military service in their families and are eager to see their sons and grandsons follow the same path. Jacob discusses how his four years in the military taught him much about leadership and obedience, and serves as a constant reminder that he is a role model to his son (Interview 15). Isaac fondly recalls "taking my son to enlist in the Army when he graduated from our homeschool at 18" (Interview 32).

In short, my respondents teach boys to equate citizenship with leadership, breadwinning, self-sufficiency and military service. This ethos extends beyond the home and church, into the public sphere. Parents pass on masculinized understandings of citizenship that place their sons in a privileged, decision-making role as the voices and shepherds of the restoration movement that will return America to its Christian roots by making scripture the basis for all legislative decision-making. In contrast, the role that women are expected to play is entirely supportive. In the following section, I outline how this ties into the norms and expectations around Christian-American womanhood, and the ways that parents go about socializing their daughters.

## **2. Female Christian Citizenship: Servanthood Backstage**

Girls in Christian homeschools are also trained to be citizens of their home, congregation, state and nation. Parents, however, have a different vision of their daughters' development as political subjects, one that emphasizes servanthood, not leadership. While CHEC discourse encourages girls and women to have an active interest and involvement in politics, it also teaches them that their roles are to be supportive, not directive. The internalization of this discourse allows for a seamless transition from homeschool girlhood to homeschool motherhood. For most mothers, home-education vastly increases the duties involved in raising a family. Shouldering the bulk of the unpaid labour needed to keep a household running, in addition to home-educating, curtails women's participation in the public sphere, eclipsing them when it comes to political leadership outside the home.

Of the dozens of CHEC parents and speakers I interviewed, only one family takes an alternative approach, with the mother working to support the family financially and the father staying home to teach their three children. Peter, with a graduate degree in theology and experience as a pastor, holds that he is better qualified to act as the main home-educator while his wife, Judith, works as a dental hygienist (Interview 21). Judith does not see this arrangement as a transgression of gender roles, and is in fact delighted, in part because it allows her to be politically engaged outside the home. She maintains that:

You can be an influence in local government or maybe in a national way. But I think the biggest influence a lot of people have is just in their work, as they're working. As they're at the grocery store, you know, getting a haircut.

You have conversations with people about this stuff [politics], especially around elections. As a hygienist, I have a lot of deep conversations with people about politics. (Interview 22)

Judith explains that working outside the home is not something that she was pushed into by her husband, but is a division of labour they have negotiated and find mutually acceptable. She admits to being deeply anxious and unconfident about her ability to act as an educator and disciplinarian day-to-day. As with most of the homeschool families I encountered, Judith and Peter want school time and non-school time to be unified, so that learning can be less structured and more enjoyable. In practice, however, Judith is unsure that she will be able to manage her kids in such a setting. When I ask how she feels about being the main financial provider, she notes:

I think, truly, for us right now, I think it's ok and I'm ok with it. I don't think that Peter is any less qualified to teach them than I am. He's very good with the kids. He's a very involved Dad. So I'm thrilled for that because for a couple years there he was hardly here. While he was working and doing more spiritual counseling, he'd be gone every Friday. Like he was gone from 7, 8 in the morning, maybe not see the kids hardly in the morning, and get home at midnight. Gone, gone, gone. There were a lot of days, and a lot of the people he would meet with were evenings, so he'd miss some of that or maybe he'd be sleeping in the morning so he wouldn't be a part of things so much. (Interview 22)

Others in the community regard this decision as exceptional, but it is not disparaged. Judith's wages are not understood to be her husband's by default, however, tithing is still



expected. This suggests that, on the rare occasions when women are the sole breadwinners for their families, they must contribute financially to their community and congregation.

Similarly, Adam's involvement in the day-to-day homeschooling of his grandson is another unusual exception. In such a family-centered community one would expect grandparents to play a more prominent role, yet, apart from Peter, I did not hear of any other male figure, grandparent or otherwise, acting as a child's primary educator. Furthermore, Peter and Adam's circumstances are not comparable. Peter, as a healthy, educated Christian homeschool Dad, is expected to provide materially for his family. Although I did not witness any stigma from his community, or detect a sense of shame on Peter's part, Judith's comments led me to believe that she would ultimately like things to be different, viewing her current family roles as temporary. As a retiree with savings and a pension, however, Adam was not subject to the same expectations and was "off the hook" as a breadwinner.

These anomalous cases aside, the rest of my female participants' conflate Christian-American femininity with maternal/spousal caregiving. Women contribute to political life not by running for office, but by raising Godly children who will influence America for Christ by spreading the gospel and using scripture as the basis for their views on national affairs. For daughters, chores that center on housekeeping (laundry, cleaning, preparing, serving and clearing meals) and, above all, childcare tasks (babysitting, changing diapers, giving baths and so on) are understood as hands-on preparation for girls' later years of motherhood. There are exceptions – Mary's outdoor farm work requires physical strength and stamina. Moreover, there are gender-neutral

chores that *both* boys and girls do, such as tidying their rooms, picking up after themselves, making their beds, and carrying groceries in from the car.

Fathers play a protective role in rearing Christian-American daughters, in ways that they do not for their sons. They provide for them financially, in the form of trusts and wedding funds (Swanson, 2009a). Again, in this context, protection is defined in male terms, as a privilege that is extended by fathers to their wives and daughters. Resentment that such forms of inheritance are being undermined or appropriated through excessive government taxation is a point that several homeschool fathers raised with frustration (Interviews 18 and 26). The significance of the trusts, as opposed to regular bank accounts, is that they come with strings attached, and young women are only allowed to use them in circumstances their fathers stipulate, e.g., to help cover the costs of wedding. Financial planning is thus seen as part of fathers' responsibility for protecting their daughters, because women are not expected to be materially self-sufficient (Interview 5). Boys, in contrast, are expected to be far more self-reliant, and "make their own way", although Swanson's comments below hint that sometimes parents heavily subsidize boys as well. He comments that:

there is a gift tax exemption. I just found this out. So, you can give 10 grand to each of your children per year. So, two years ago I wrote a \$5000 [cheque] to my first daughter, my oldest daughter. For my son I'm gonna wait till he gets married so as not to give him any nest egg to rest on. Until he gets married. On his wedding day, I think there's \$100,000 gift exemption or something. There's another gift exemption that we can do. So we can do something else later on. But for now, I'm gonna start, Emily gets \$5000, and

she gets maybe another \$2000, then Becka-Joy cuts in this year. And I've got four girls and they're all gonna get my inheritance. And so, I began writing these cheques, and then I got a little nervous. Because... I had to set the children down, I gathered them around in our family Bible time. We have signed away Social Security. So we're not getting any help from the government. We went ahead and took our inheritance, all the savings that were going to live on, and we went ahead and just wrote that off to you guys and you're going to get that on your marriage day. (Swanson, 2009a)

As with sons, instructing their daughters in civics involves preparing them to be ambassadors for Christ in America, but the emphasis on chastity in hegemonic Christian femininity is much more pronounced. Swanson connects “courtship” and not “hooking up” directly to citizenship, couching “promiscuity among American youth” as a symptom of the larger erosion of social solidarity and local community (Swanson, 2009c). To his mind, the undermining of relationships and the dependence on one's neighbours has turned America into a bloated welfare state. Critical of the loss of self-reliance in “de-relationalized” modern life, Swanson claims that practicing courtship is important for Christian homeschoolers precisely because “relationships matter”. As the quote above demonstrates, this is connected to a rejection of government support, based on the assumption that if parents provide for their children, they will in turn be taken care of in old age. In Swanson's words, “who needs social security?! What do I need the State for?! I have relationships” (Swanson, 2009c).

As in any community, maintaining relationships requires recognition of shared values, and one important way this is expressed is through appearance. Close attention to

self-representation is thus essential. Dressing conservatively entails wearing “church clothes” such as skirts rather than pants, and blouses and tops that can be relaxed, but should not include “skimpy” items like tank tops. For boys, the expectation is slacks or dress pants, a button down shirt and tie and, in winter months, a sweater or blazer. Girls at the conference ubiquitously wear “promise rings”. Commonly presented to girls as gifts when they reach Biblical adulthood on their thirteenth birthdays, at elaborate catered celebrations or father-daughter dances, promise rings are symbols of a vow by daughters to the authorities in their lives – their father and God – that they will not engage in pre-marital sex. I was amazed by how many young women at the CHEC conference, including my older nieces, donned them. As a heartfelt father-daughter recital of “I Know My Redeemer Lives” during an intermission conveyed, and a few speakers acknowledged outright (Swanson, 2009b; Hazell, 2009), homeschool fathers are reassured by the fact that their daughters are removed from the influence of what they would consider the temptations/distractions of male classmates. Teen boys are kept away from young women, except under parental supervision, to be sure that appropriate decorum is maintained. David Hazell described how his daughter’s suitors will have to accept a “three’s company” approach to dating – he plans to chaperone without fail, and jokes that if his future son-in-law is savvy “he’ll let me pick the movies!” (Hazell, 2009).

Promise rings also elucidate how the regulation of sexuality ties in with conservative efforts to reclaim a virtuous America through home-education. By sporting the rings, young women become role models for their younger siblings and peers. My niece Mariah, who has worked for several years at a local camp, “Id-Ra-Ha-Je” (short for “I’d rather have Jesus”), notes that it is a source of scandal if teen girls are not seen

wearing one. As a staff member, Mariah is required to attend extensive training sessions on appropriate contact between campers, other campers, and counselors. Girls and boys are not to be left alone together, nor to visit each other's cabins. Moreover, when it comes to physical contact, only "side hugs" are permitted, demonstrating that the camp has a distinctive vocabulary surrounding such forms of affection. This standard of propriety, carefully policed by camp administrators, echoes the close supervision girls experience at home. Feminized national identity is established in much the same way.

Overseen by parents, siblings and pastors, women's national identities – their sense of place and understanding of appropriate behavior in the political realm – are established through the same repetition that boys experience. There were recurring barbed references, by both male and female speakers, to "loose women" at the CHEC conference and in my fieldwork, such as the "floozy down at the topless legal bar in Boulder" (Interview 23) and "there's no way my daughter's flopping around in the back of some station wagon" (Swanson, 2009b). These statements, made by both men and women, were meant to discourage sexualized conduct among Christian youth. Hannah, for example, feels that:

inappropriate boy-girl relationships, we've put that off for our boys, that's not important until they're old enough to handle those mature relationships. If they watch a movie, if there's a love relationship there, it's important that they understand it in a Biblical perspective. (Interview 18)

Parents strive to help their daughters become self-policing in this regard by inserting "discernment" discourse into the performance of appropriate female behaviour. Kevin Swanson recalls with frustration a parishioner calling him from Wal-Mart to ask

what a suitable swimming outfit would be for his 16 year-old daughter (Interview 18). In Swanson's view, good parenting acknowledges that there is no magical switch that clicks on when girls turn 18 that suddenly allows them to be wise decision-makers. This needs to be learned and cultivated by consistently teaching girls throughout their upbringing that they are representatives for their families and their faith. If fathers do not clearly set out their expectations and standards of conduct, their daughters are more likely to stray.

A telling example of how these gendered boundaries are delineated day-to-day is discourse around participation in the armed forces. In sharp contrast to men, military service is strongly discouraged for women. During my fieldwork, I heard several references, in resoundingly negative terms, to the introduction of female soldiers into the ranks. Jan Bloom articulates this disapproval as a breach of American women's proper position:

nowadays with women in combat it's, it's really hard. It's really awful. If you can talk honestly with anyone who's been in a combat situation in Iraq or Afghanistan, it's not good that women are there alongside men. You know men look out for each other but they look out for themselves too. When you've got a woman next to you all of a sudden you're protecting your sister, you're protecting you mother, whatever. It's really changed combat, and not in a good way. (Bloom, 2007)

The expectation is that daughters will follow in their mothers' footsteps as homeschool mothers. As Eve noted, "I really love being a stay-at-home Mom. And I really hope that my daughter gets to experience that too" (Interview 13).

Homeschool girls are not taught to be disengaged citizens, and conservative womanhood/motherhood does not prevent staying abreast of politics. Far from it, women's awareness and involvement is strongly encouraged. Rather, it is a particular understanding of political involvement, one that is largely concentrated in the private realm, that is encouraged. I came across only one notable outlier, Sarah Anderson, the young woman I introduced in Chapter Four who throughout her youth engaged in a high level of political involvement. She is an important example, showing how unusual it is for women to take a role in politics. She jumps feet first into leadership-oriented activities, including:

numerous campaigns that I'm running. I co-ran a campaign for state House [of Representatives]...this past February I was elected to the county and state executive committees for the Republican party, the youngest member ever elected, at 19. I'm the county volunteer coordinator and on the general election committee. And then running one campaign for county commissioner and I'm the issues manager for another commissioner campaign, and then I'm running a campaign for state house. When I was fourteen I was volunteer coordinator for a campaign. So that teaches you very early on at a young age how to be a leader, how to organize people effectively and not control them but get them to do what you need them to do. (Interview 8)

Sarah acknowledges however, that her leadership is unusual and admits that she is the driving force behind her participation, noting that:

I was lucky in the fact that because I wanted to pursue politics I was allowed to. Not a typical hobby for nine-year old girls. My parents, especially my Mom, have always been really supportive of what I've done, but it always has been me out there dragging them along. (Interview 8)

Sarah's comment demonstrates the commitment that conservative Christian mothers put into their homeschooling. Lois' (2006) study of emotional burnout among secular homeschool mothers found that "role overload", "role conflict" and "role ambiguity" are common responses to the strain created by acting as full-time teachers *and* mothers (Lois, 2006, p. 510). Many, but not all, of her respondents were able to overcome this stress by achieving "role harmony" – "integrating some roles and prioritizing others" (p. 523). Lois found that the metaphor of "bowling instead of juggling" employed by an experienced homeschool mother in a cooperative homeschooler's meeting Lois attended perfectly captures how successful homeschool mothers learn to avoid being overloaded by their dual roles as teachers and caregivers. The woman noted that "jugglers fail when they drop one ball. Bowlers knock down what they can at each opportunity; they do not always need a strike to do well – it all counts" (p. 521). In other words, "bowling" means abandoning the idea that both the teacher and caregiver role must be done to perfection. In practice, this entails letting go of obsessive housework and time consuming, rigidly structured forms of teaching and learning (p. 522).

Lois' findings resonate powerfully with my data. Many of the homeschool mothers I met with speak to such tensions. Perturbed by the impact homeschooling had on their ability to "keep a clean home" (Interview 13), numerous mothers admitted that



fastidious housework and a “fit for the queen” level of spotlessness become less of a priority when homeschooling enters the picture. After all, as Dana asserts, “the day’s only so long” (Interview 25) and, in Joanna’s words “I’m not superwoman, and I can’t do it all” (Interview 19).

Cooperative homeschooling is another strategy that homeschool mothers adopt to mitigate some of the pressures they face. Often, collective efforts are organized as “turn-taking” that gives homeschool Moms breathing room by passing their children off to each other for a morning or afternoon. Alexandra explains how the “285 Homeschoolers E-list” – a group that aims to pull together all the homeschoolers in the “285 highway corridor” on the internet – is instrumental in orchestrating introductions between homeschool Moms, not just to collaborate in their teaching but to draw on each other for emotional support. She describes the chat list, which links over 200 women, as:

One of the best homeschool things that I’ve been in, there’s this connection.

You can just pop onto this list and ask questions about anything, related to homeschooling. Family issues, discipline, marriage issues, you can just, you know, pop these questions onto this list. And you get the input of all these people. And it’s a discussion about homeschooling and you don’t even have to leave home which, many of us find, you know, we’re here at home a lot.

JB: Have you provided guidance to other people through the list?

Alexandra: Yes I have. I’ve been able to encourage people, offer information about what I have used in homeschooling, the benefits and the drawbacks to using this particular curriculum, and that sort of thing. Political issues have come through a lot there. Homeschool Moms get intense! We all want

political learning to be involved in their homeschooling. We believe it has to be. (Interview 23)

She is displeased, for example, with the male emphasis in many of the texts she was using to teach history and civics. She recognized that this left her two daughters disconnected from the readings, manifest in their lack of interest in the material. Indeed, my own sister's irritation with this male-centric focus spurs her to assign an elaborate research project on the oft-ignored "Founding Mothers" to all of her children as part of their history curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter maintains that gender is the primary organizing category for the Christian theology adhered to by my respondents. For them, the scriptures decree a strict division of gender roles. Gender is envisioned as a hierarchal ordering with God at the top, followed by men, and then women. One's position in the economic, social, cultural, and spiritual spheres is circumscribed by gender. For the conservative Christians that I interviewed, men and women come together primarily in the heterosexual family, the unit that grounds both the structural and cultural contexts of their lives. The ideology of domesticity locates theological and spiritual fulfillment within the confines of the traditional family and legitimizes the idea that heterosexuality is intrinsic to the family and Christian existence. Women defer to men, and caregiving and homeschooling are prioritized over engagement in the public sphere.

My respondents seek to uphold traditional hierarchies between men and women in both the public and private realm. Adhering to a dichotomized, Biblical understanding of gender roles, it is hardly surprising that their perceptions of citizenship are deeply

gendered. In order to explore these dynamics, this chapter investigates how patriarchal discourses of gender hierarchy connect with conservative Christian nationalist ideology. I stress the centrality of the home as a site for the production of gendered differences because Christian homeschooling erases the divide between home-based learning and formal schooling. Christian homeschooling discourses teaches men to adopt multiple roles – on the one hand they are to be local patriarchs who provide for and govern the family and, on the other hand, they are to be subjects who assume leadership positions in the public realm of Christian politics. Women, in contrast, are shaped into mothers and “servants” whose lives are concentrated in the domestic sphere. I document how a gendered division of labour figures in the constitution of gendered subjects, honing in on the practices that conservative Christian homeschool mothers and fathers use to mold gender as well as how those activities gender them. My discussion also illuminates the imagined gendered men and women that CHEC homeschool parents seek to create.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusions

This dissertation was inspired by my sister's family and their community in Colorado. Even though my sister and brother-in-law both grew up in Canada as the children of secular, liberal academics, they took on their Christian-American identities with such zeal that it astounded me. How did they become so passionate about being Christians in America, and why did it figure so prominently in their homeschooling? My desire to understand their stress on American nationalism in their homeschooling and day-to-day lives ignited my interest in the nature, construction and management of national *identities*. I wanted to learn about the *content* of evangelical home-based citizenship education, and the concrete *practices* involved. At its core, my project asked about the nature of Christian homeschool parents' efforts to shape their children's national identities. What type of citizen do they aspire to raise and how do they go about producing them? Moreover, what does the evangelical homeschool movement tell us about the production of "community" and civic engagement?

I used the three thematic areas in my data that I found most intriguing to structure my empirical chapters. The chapters are deeply interconnected – they address related parts of the larger story that I sought to tell around the conceptualization and fashioning of national identity in conservative Christian homeschools. The first major component of my analysis, presented in Chapter Four, focused on something that I came to call *worldview*. The concept figures prominently in my thinking because it is not only an analytical category, but also a key *member category* that CHEC homeschoolers actively construct and disseminate. I came to concentrate on "worldview" because I was surprised

by the level of consistency in my data when it came to talk about homeschooling and how it fits into the perspective and values that conservative evangelical Americans transmit to their children.

My analysis honed in on the two components of this worldview. One mythologizes the past and particular interpretations of historical events and figures to establish membership and belonging. The other is fixated on the potential for restoration in the future. These come together in the present to promote political engagement framed in localized, nation-centric terms. In short, this part of my discussion documented the *what* – the content of the conservative Christian worldview on citizenship in theory and in practice that the homeschoolers I encountered adhere to.

In Chapter Five, I moved on to explore the *how* – the *concrete practices* through which Christian homeschool parents pass their worldview on and build civic identity in their children through the social organization of formal and latent citizenship education. In other words, I examine how this discourse is “done”, day-to-day, by examining the efforts of homeschool parents, and the homeschool leaders who influence them. My ethnographic research shows how parents manage the adoption of theistic nationalist discourse, and how this process constitutes both parent and child as Christian-American political subjects. Demonstrating that CHEC is a group preoccupied with identity and the policing of symbolic boundaries, I show how citizenship discourses are produced, managed, taken up and contested through CHEC activities and homeschool teaching and learning.

Practically, this is accomplished through meticulous social organization that combines deliberate role modeling, participation in certain activities, and the mobilization

of specific discursive resources. By involving their children in particular practices and organizing the texts they have access to and the manner in which they are interpreted, homeschool parents attempt to shape their children into passionate, engaged citizens. This learning entrenches social boundaries and groom homeschool Christian youth to respond to “others” who lie outside their political imaginary. On the one hand, “combative isolationism” casts difference and diversity as encroachment in ethno-religious terms that encourage withdrawal. On the other hand, “discernment” “arms” conservatives against cultural, linguistic, religious, and moral difference.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I use my data to examine one of the several dimensions of social location that emerged as salient in relationship to my dataset: gender. I demonstrate how patriarchal discourses of gender and the normative heterosexual family tie into nationalist ideology to guide the social organization of gendered socialization and civic learning. Examining how ideologies of gender and domesticity shape citizenship discourse and national identity and help cultivate Christian-American masculinity and femininity, I explain how bifurcated conceptions of political place and selfhood are based on distinct gender roles in both the public and private sphere. CHEC parents and speakers normalize Biblical gender roles that limit women to an “invisible ministry”.

The remainder of this conclusion summarizes the implications of my findings, outlines the limitations of my study, and makes recommendations for future research.

### **Results in Context**

In July 2012, I returned to Colorado for the first time since completing my fieldwork in January 2010. While my sister and some of her children had come to Montreal and Toronto to visit in the interim, being back in their community raised

questions about how things had changed in my absence. My sister had attended the CHEC conference again that year, and I was excited to hear how it differed from the one I observed in 2009. She pointed to a number of changes, including a more ethnically diverse audience and less vitriolic speakers.

A highlight was the screening of Joaquin Fernandez and Colin Gunn's new documentary "Indoctrination" (2012). The film follows Gunn, his wife and their five children as they travel around America in a yellow school bus for three weeks interviewing Christian homeschool leaders and public school critics. Gunn's narrative touches on many of the themes and tropes of my dissertation. Engendering crisis discourse around America's schools, he argues that Christian children are lost to public schools that are not just secular, but "overwhelmingly anti-Christian" (Fernandez and Gunn, 2012). He paints a highly dichotomous picture of American society, taking for granted that the nation's "culture wars" rage on.

Months later, as I draft this conclusion, the 2012 U.S. Presidential election plays out on a television in the background. CNN's analysts zoom in and out of different "red" and "blue" voting precincts on enormous touch screens, tracking the returns in real-time. With President Barack Obama's re-election a *fait accompli*, his acceptance speech emphasizes that "there is no blue America and red America: we are and forever will be the *United States of America* [my italics]". Revisiting my "research site" spurred me to re-assess my research through fresh eyes and recognize several of the limitations that characterize my study.

## **Limitations**

Overall, I believe I was successful at answering the first two of my three research questions by showing the *what* and the *how* of conservative Christian national identity formation. I showed what characteristics and behaviors are understood to represent virtuous citizenship in theory and in practice. Likewise, my analysis and discussion show very clearly how citizenship discourse is communicated and transmitted by CHEC members in both generalized and gendered ways. On the whole, I was able to demonstrate the content of the national identities conservative Christian homeschool parents strive to produce, as well as the processes through which they strive to bring these imagined citizens into being.

Where my analysis could be worked up more fully is in answering my third research question about the larger political and pedagogical implications of these conceptions and practices. What is the significance of home-education for the production of community and its associated notions of good citizenship? In pondering this question, my background in stratification and inequality and the sociology of education push me to consider how these play into social reproduction and the constitution of the *habitus*. Specifically, I am eager to explore how cloistering in the home may maximize social reproduction when this process is extended dramatically into adolescence and early adulthood.

Methodologically, this dissertation suffers from four limitations. First, as a qualitative case study based in Colorado, my project may not capture the differences among homeschoolers in different states and communities when it comes to understandings and practices of citizenship and civic education. Similarly, it does not explore how homeschooling differs in relation to citizenship in an international-



comparative context among countries where it is prevalent, for example, the U.K., and Australia. Similarly, my study focuses solely on conservative Christian homeschoolers. It does not provide insight into the other flourishing homeschool sub-populations across America such as African Americans (Gaither: 2008, p. 220) and Native Americans (p. 222).

Second, my research focuses almost exclusively on the views of homeschool parents; I was fortunate to be able to speak to a few homeschool graduates between the ages of 19 and 25, but these interviews provide only a glimpse into their experiences. My observational data similarly gesture towards the kind of civic teaching and learning that goes on in conservative Christian homeschools, but do not explore the topic from the point-of-view of current students.

Third, while it was helpful to observe speeches and listen to/transcribe audio recordings of speeches, interviewing more speakers would have been beneficial. Of my four data sources, the speeches were the only ones that were not part of a two-way, dialogic dynamic, and it may have enhanced my data to give CHEC speakers a chance to elaborate or refine their views. Finally, more demographic data on my sample, which in qualitative research software such as NVivo, could sort, aggregate, and analyze themes by participant, would have allowed for a more nuanced social history of my respondents.

### **Directions for Future Research**

I am left with numerous questions and several potentially fruitful avenues for research on the relationship between home-education and citizenship. At this point, I want to stress five. First, in-depth studies of current homeschool children, youth, and recent graduates would provide insight into their civic educations and political role.

Interviews with current students would reveal how they take up, interpret, and contest the discourses and ideologies they encounter. While many parents express the hope that their children will follow their example and homeschool, how likely is this? Do Christian homeschooled students see themselves as part of a “restoration generation”? Will they reproduce the perspective and concrete citizenship practices their parents have trained them in? What do conservative Christian homeschool students see as the benefits and liabilities of their parent’s educational choice? What do conservative Christian youth see in their futures?

Second, there is a dearth of comparative research on how other groups of religiously motivated homeschoolers take up issues of citizenship and national identity. African American, Muslim and first nations and aboriginal communities are increasingly turning to homeschooling, out of similar concerns as Christian homeschoolers – the sense that their values, traditions and knowledge are not being honoured or emphasized in public schools. How, compared with conservative evangelical Christian homeschoolers, are such communities tying theistic beliefs to conceptualizations of theistic citizenship, and what practices are being used to transmit these to children and youth?

Third, given that my Christian respondents are overwhelmingly first-generation homeschoolers, the importance of longitudinal studies that might look at what happens when these young adults leave home for college needs to be stressed. Such research has powerful implications for debates around the difference between religion as an ascribed identity versus a chosen identity. Where will the children of this movement be in ten years? What happens when these young adults leave home for college or enter new communities?

Fourth, future work needs to delve further into processes of conservative Christian religious and political identity formation in changing social and historical contexts. For example, how will the results of the 2012 Presidential election, and the response of the Christian Right in the coming years, alter discourse citizenship, and how will this influence the content and delivery of citizenship education? What does the election and the discourses that characterized it reveal about politics, religion, and citizenship education in contemporary America? Future work needs to extend my dissertation research by delving further into processes of religious and political identity formation in social and historical contexts, focusing on the 2012 Presidential election, and the response in the coming years of the Republican Party and Christian right. The election results have been widely regarded as indicative of the Christian right's diminishing influence and suggest that the cultural tide – especially on gay issues – has shifted. Future studies will need to examine how Christian political leaders will alter their discourse and strategies in response. Such work will necessarily grapple with debates about the primacy of religious identity over other forms of social identity, and how religion acts as a powerful base of personal identification and collective association.

Finally, more studies need to raise issues regarding the health of the collectivity, and the changing roles institutionalized education and homeschooling are currently playing in the creation of social solidarity. How, and under what circumstances, does homeschooling create educational contexts that maximize chances for political learning, and when and how does it sequester children in a learning environment that circumscribes their exposure to diverse views and social groups?

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