

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: “THE FIGHT IS YOURS”: ALLY
ADVOCACY, IDENTITY
RECONFIGURATION, AND POLITICAL
CHANGE

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Since at least 1990, scholars and activists have used the term “ally” to describe and theorize a distinct sociopolitical role: someone from a majority identity group working to end that group’s oppression of another identity group. While the term is recent, “allies” are present throughout America’s constant struggle to actualize equality and justice. The identity-rooted ideologies that empowered allies disempowered the groups for and with whom they sought justice and equality. But those empowering identities were pieces, more or less salient, of complex intersectional people. Given the shared nature of identity, this process also necessarily pitted allies against those with whom they shared an identity.

In this project, I ask two questions about past ally advocacy—questions that are often asked about contemporary ally advocacy. First, in moments of major civil rights reform, how did allies engage their own intersecting identities—especially those ideologically-charged identities with accrued power from generations of

marginalizing and oppressing? Second, how did allies engage other identities that were not theirs—especially identities on whose oppression their privilege was built?

In asking these two questions—about self-identity and others' identity—I assemble numerous rhetorical fragments into “ally advocacy.” This bricolage is in recognition of rhetoric's fragmentary nature, and in response to Michael Calvin McGee's call to assemble texts for criticism. I intend to demonstrate that ally advocacy is such a text, manifesting (among other contexts) around the women's suffrage amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the marriage equality movement.

I argue that allies rarely engaged the ideologies underlying identity-based inequality in any open, direct, or thorough manner, especially at these moments when those ideologies were optimally vulnerable. I conclude that allies must accept that they marginalize others through identity and its adjacent ideology, and allies must help identity-group peers reconstitute their shared identity in recognition of this. Such reconstituting is necessary for a healthy American democracy but especially so in the late-2010s, as Americans persistently grapple with a political system fractured along identity lines.

“THE FIGHT IS YOURS”: ALLY ADVOCACY, IDENTITY
RECONFIGURATION, AND POLITICAL CHANGE

by

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Introduction

On August 28, 1963, six celebrities recorded a conversation about their participation in that day's March on Washington. Three of these men—actors Marlon Brando and Charlton Heston, and director Joseph Mankiewicz—were white; the other three—author James Baldwin, actor Sidney Poitier, and singer Harry Belafonte—were black. Deep into their discussion, Heston and Mankiewicz disagreed about whether civil rights was “the negro *question*” or “the negro *problem*”—or “the *white* question” or “the *white* problem” (emphases added). Mankiewicz took the firm position that “the responsibility has shifted to the white people of America” because “we’re a problem to the negroes.” Heston countered that “to imply that it’s solely a white problem is to deny the burning interest of every fellow negro citizen.” Belafonte did not disagree with Heston, but instead declared that, “The person who holds in his hands the power to fulfill the American Dream, to fulfill the words of Tom Paine, to fulfill the words of the Declaration of Independence happens to be a white person.” Given this power imbalance, Belafonte assigned white people primary responsibility for “whether this thing is going to end successfully and joyously or is going to end disastrously.”¹

Nearly twenty-five years later, Belafonte’s assessment of identity-based power differences resurfaced in another context. In 1988, courageous students at Phillips Academy in Massachusetts formed the first Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). While there had been prior advocacy groups uniting gay and straight people, the name “alliance” “was unique to Phillips Academy.”² Priscilla Bonney-Smith, who helped initiate the high school club, explained that they chose “alliance” as a descriptor because, “We knew it would be too threatening to just have a gay organization, and we knew there were straight

folks (like me) who supported gay rights...”³ To some extent, then, the Phillips Academy students made a judgment comparable to Belafonte’s: members of one identity group—straight people, in this case—had real and symbolic power they could exercise to rectify their passive marginalization of another identity group.

Two years later, Jamie Washington and Nancy Evans delineated the common role played by Brando, Heston, Mankiewicz, and the straight students in the Phillips GSA. They developed their concept based on work being done at the University of Massachusetts’s Social Justice program.⁴ In a chapter from their book *Beyond Tolerance*, Washington and Evans defined the central concept—“ally”—as, “A person who is a member of the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population.”⁵

Since at least 1990, scholars and activists have used the term “ally” to describe and theorize a distinct sociopolitical role. Beverly Daniel Tatum wrote in 1994 that allies should not “‘help’ victims of racism,” but rather should “speak up against systems of oppression, and...challenge other [members of the dominant group] to do the same.”⁶ In 1996, Oakland Men’s Project founder and educator Paul Kivel juxtaposed “allies” (who “take an active but strategic role in confronting racism”), with “agents of the ruling class” and “collaborators” (who “[don’t] make waves”).⁷ The term spread widely beyond scholarly circles in the 2000s, typically in reference to straight people supporting equal rights for LGBTQ people.⁸ A LexisNexis search suggests the term “straight allies” arose almost three-and-a-half times more in news throughout the 2000s than the 1990s. By the mid-2010s “allies” detached from “straight allies,” and gained broader use to identify

white supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement, pro-feminist men, and Christians fighting Islamophobia among others.

While the term is recent, “allies” are present throughout America’s constant struggle to actualize equality and justice. White allies like William Lloyd Garrison, Sarah Grimke, and Wendell Phillips fought slavery in the mid-1800s. Thirty-two male allies attended the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls and signed the convention’s *Declaration of Sentiments* as “the gentlemen present in favor of this new movement.”⁹ In the late-1800s and early-1900s, male allies like Matthew Vassar and John Dewey fought for women’s equal education, while a Men’s League organized in 1910 to persuade men to support women’s suffrage.¹⁰ One year earlier, two black people and four white people founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.¹¹ White allies registered black voters in 1964’s Mississippi Freedom Summer Project; that June, white supremacists killed two white allies alongside a black organizer.¹² Straight allies marched, filed lawsuits, lobbied psychologists, and spoke to congregations in support of gay and lesbian rights; some organized themselves into Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). Many more straight allies nursed friends, family, and strangers with AIDS.¹³

This work required allies to grapple with significant questions about their varied personal identities. In the historic examples, the identity-rooted ideologies that empowered allies—patriarchy, whiteness, or heterosexism—disempowered the groups for whom they sought justice and equality. But those empowering identities were pieces, more or less salient, of complex intersectional people: they were Northern white women, or middle-class straight psychologists, or black Southern Baptists. Further complicating allies’ personal identities was the fluidity inherent in identity: did being “male” mean the

same thing to a male ally as it did to a male anti-suffragist? And what of those more-shared identities—American or human? As they advocated for greater equality and justice, allies processed such questions privately—in personal letters or diary entries, for example—and publicly.

Given the shared nature of identity, this process necessarily pitted allies against those with whom they shared an identity. Anti-slavery white allies needed to engage slaveholding whites, white supremacists, and complacent white people. To pass civil rights laws, white allies and black activists faced political leaders who were white at nearly all levels of government. Women’s suffrage required amenable male voters to elect amenable male leaders—and male allies to help target both groups. Straight allies confronted the homophobia of their professional colleagues, religious leaders, friends, and family on the way to achieving greater equality for gay and lesbian Americans. In each instance, allies joined movements of marginalized peoples, and together their rhetoric gradually ground down opposition.

These gradual shifts are the byproduct of cumulative exposure to fragmentary rhetoric. Michael Calvin McGee pushed rhetorical scholars to see “all discourse within a particular language community [as] produced from the same resources.”¹⁴ Allies and movement leaders draw from these shared rhetorical resources and they “*make* discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence” (emphasis in original).¹⁵ A major speech might not sway a person, but the ideas in that speech grow more salient when they are re-encountered in a newspaper editorial, a conversation, or a pamphlet. Allies and allied parties use initially-marginal rhetorics—say, gay people as parents—but through that usage and repetition, those discourses (ideally) gain cultural traction and become mainstream.

These micro-rhetorical acts snowball to significance around major civil rights reforms. Ideas gradually detach from their speakers and move from the margins to the mainstream as citizens rally, converse, make speeches, or write articles and letters. As these previously-marginal ideas gain power, policymakers in America's democracy are faced with a question: should these new priorities become new laws? With new policies proposed, the conversation about the proposals simultaneously showcases the underlying rhetorical shifts. Citizens, leaders, and movements pull fragments from shared, disembodied rhetorical resources with new urgency, setting new discursive patterns that (re)define identities and interrelations between identity groups. Allies model these new patterns for their identity-group peers, even as they work with marginalized communities to refine and adapt discourses.¹⁶

Understanding Ally Advocacy

In this project, I ask two questions about past ally advocacy around civil rights reforms—questions that are often asked about contemporary ally advocacy. First, in moments of major civil rights reform, how did allies engage their own intersecting identities—especially those ideologically-charged identities with accrued power from generations of marginalizing and oppressing? This is partially inspired by philosopher Linda Alcoff, who argues that speaking for others must include “interrogat[ing] the bearing of our location and context on what it is we are saying...”¹⁷ By many definitions, an ally “helps and supports [some other person] in a difficult situation”; but in matters of civil rights, or equality and justice, the root of the ally's ability to help and support is often *also* the root of the other party's “difficult situation.”¹⁸ Some advocacy groups like

the Otesha Project urge allies to reform the identity rhetorics from which they derive privileges, and “dismantle any form of oppression from which [they benefit].”¹⁹ Exemplary is white anti-racist Tim Wise, who works to redefine the meanings around “white” identity “because racism is a sickness in my community, and it damages me.”²⁰ Wise demonstrates Catherine Squires’s conclusion that subgroups within an identity can produce counterdiscourses that engage and disrupt the identity’s dominant discourses.²¹ But Wise also embodies how self-identity can splinter: he grew up in poverty, in the South, and weaves these identities into his engagement with whiteness. Historically, then, I specifically ask how men engaged masculinity in pursuing women’s suffrage, how white people engaged whiteness in pursuing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, how straight people engaged heterosexuality in pursuing marriage equality—and also how each group of allies identified themselves as they advocated. Ta-Nehisi Coates centered the importance of this self-location within any ally work: “you are not helping someone in a particular struggle; the fight is yours.”²²

Identity struggles require allies to speak about other identities that are not theirs, though—especially identities on whose oppression their privilege was built. Male allies spoke about women, white allies spoke about black people, and straight allies spoke about gay people. How did allies engage these others’ identities? Theodore Roosevelt’s support for women’s suffrage is a cautionary example. From his bully pulpit, Roosevelt argued that women “should join with the men in regulating the politics”—but also that woman’s “primary duties must be those of the home and the family, those of wife and mother...”²³ Roosevelt’s women might be “voters”—a progressive advancement for the time, to be sure—but then, reinscribed to the home, they were unlikely to move fully into shared civic life.

In asking these two questions—about self-identity and others’ identity—I assemble numerous rhetorical fragments into “ally advocacy.” This bricolage is in recognition of rhetoric’s fragmentary nature, and in response to McGee’s call to “[invent] a text suitable for criticism.”²⁴ I intend to demonstrate that ally advocacy is such a text, manifesting (among other contexts) around the women’s suffrage amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the marriage equality movement. Early scholars of social movement rhetoric such as Leland Griffin urged critics to discover “whether rhetorical patterns repeat themselves when like movements occur”; sociologists and political scientists, too, increasingly compare political movements to understand the march of social change.²⁵ To assemble “ally advocacy,” then, I first look at how shared rhetorical resources reoccur across multiple fragments from multiple rhetors within the same movement. Returning to Roosevelt, his invocation of “wives” and “mothers” was hardly unique among male allies to female suffragists while other references to “convicts” and “clergymen” were distinct.²⁶ With ally advocacy as my focus, I am less interested in Roosevelt and his distinctive rhetoric: I decenter individual rhetors and their distinctive fragments, and reoccurring examples take center stage.

This search for reoccurring examples also necessitated bounding each context. To find the most concentrated examples of ally advocacy, I anchored my search to three landmark civil rights reforms. Many men advocated for women’s rights, but chapter one narrows to male ally advocacy primarily in the 1910s—the decade preceding the 1920 ratification of women’s suffrage. Chapter two skips over many white allies to focus on white ally advocacy concurrent with the passage and enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Finally, chapter three concerns 2004 to 2015, which is the period between

President George W. Bush endorsing a same-sex marriage ban and the Supreme Court legalizing same-sex marriage in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.²⁷

To further bound the project, I searched outward from fragments generated by distinct, period-specific ally groups. The Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage (1909-1920) did not capture all male suffragists, but it was the broadest group coordinating men exclusively: its hundreds of local and thirty-five state chapters staged events, wrote pamphlets and circulated press materials. The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project (1964-1965) had participants who were not white, but its mostly-white volunteers drew press and community attention at exactly the moment the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was becoming law. These white allies were profiled by hometown papers that also published their letters home; those letters were otherwise circulated through community groups, and with diaries that were published in the later-1960s and beyond. PFLAG began coordinating straight allies in 1973, and by 2004 they were the largest among many groups of straight marriage equality supporters. While not the central organization in the federal marriage equality fight, they were one of the largest, most active partners; and their local chapters grounded state-based campaigns for marriage equality, non-discrimination laws, and civil rights expansions.

Because these activist groups appeal to policymakers, I include the presidents who, though moderates, came to champion their relative causes and amplify new identity rhetorics. After saying, in 1911, “that [his] personal judgment [was] strongly against it,” President Woodrow Wilson became a women’s suffrage supporter—even making a highly irregular appeal to the Senate to pass it immediately.²⁸ Beth Behn argues that this change reflects “suffrage [becoming] an issue of tremendous political value,” while Victoria Bissell Brown argues that Wilson merely “figured out how to incorporate it into

[his] existing views on gender, the family, and sex.”²⁹ Either way, his eventual repetition of identity fragments used by male suffragists demonstrates those ideas moving from the periphery to the mainstream. President Lyndon Johnson was, similarly, a dubious ally: in private, to some other southern white senators, civil rights legislation was “the nigger bill.”³⁰ But publicly, Johnson spoke of “purple, brown, black, yellow, red, green, or whatever” Americans—a bounding of “Americans” that resembles how Freedom Summer volunteers defined the term.³¹ In 2004 (as he campaigned for the U.S. Senate), and in 2008 (as he campaigned for the U.S. presidency), Barack Obama supported civil unions and opposed same-sex marriage. He “remain[ed] open to the possibility that [his] unwillingness to support gay marriage [was] misguided,” though, and with the constant prodding of gays, lesbians, and allies, he “evolved” to supporting same-sex couples’ right to marry.³²

Besides activists and presidents, I include a third category of white and straight allies: entertainers. With the explosive growth of mass audio and visual technology, entertainers became increasingly visible political advocates.³³ This growth happened primarily after 1920, and the dearth of entertainer-advocates in the suffrage movement is noteworthy: aside from Buffalo Bill Cody and several playwrights, I found no evidence that male entertainers were distinctly influential.³⁴ In later movements, entertainers’ ideas circulated widely and carried disproportionate weight, offering a potent boost to new identity configurations. Actor Marlon Brando’s assessment was that celebrities, more than other allies, could force people to “pause long enough to consider whether it is right or wrong that a negro should vote, that he should have a decent place to live, that he should be able to send his kids to a good hospital, get their teeth fixed, and have a decent job.”³⁵ In the civil rights movement, Brando and Charlton Heston participated in myriad

actions from local pickets to the 1963 March on Washington. Jumping forward to 2012, a straight rapper named Macklemore recorded a song—“Same Love”—that became “a sort of unofficial anthem for same-sex marriage,” according to *Huffington Post*’s Lisa Capretto (among others).³⁶ Macklemore then became highly visible in the marriage equality movement.

By overlaying ally groups, presidents, and activist entertainers, I try to capture fragmented, shifting identity from a variety of allies at pivotal moments, but within the limits of a single rhetorical project. Narrow time periods, limited search capacity, and standardization between movements eliminate both many important allies and also an array of related issues of equality and justice—women’s equal education, gay employment discrimination, or interracial marriage, to name a few examples. I also do not tackle an important question—are allies genuine, or “exploit[ing] solidarity with oppressed groups” for personal gain?—because such a discussion could tend toward adjudicating individual allyship.³⁷ Scholars such as Lisa Tillman and Sara DeTurk have attempted to do this using interviews and ethnographic methods; such scholarship is valuable, but not within the scope of this project.³⁸ Also beyond the scope of this project is valuable analysis of how allies relate to formal institutions that assign and shape rights.³⁹ I recognize, along with Mab Segrest, that “contests over the meaning of ‘ally’ are at the core of radical efforts to define our relationships-in-action”; and therefore that my project might raise more questions than it answers.⁴⁰ I am hopeful these questions will be of use to scholars and activists alike.

Allies are Political Advocates

This project contests the meanings of “ally” along three distinct dimensions. First, it assumes that *political advocacy* is a core—and underappreciated—dimension of allyship. Scholars have taken up allyship in education,⁴¹ professional,⁴² domestic,⁴³ and social settings.⁴⁴ Typically, both scholars and activists have been primarily concerned with how allies develop their consciousness⁴⁵ and deploy that consciousness interpersonally.⁴⁶ Even training materials for allies often eschew instruction on political advocacy, instead focusing would-be allies’ on themselves, their friends, and their families.⁴⁷ In Erin Casey, Anne Bishop, or Ellen Broido’s works, for example, allies work through their social networks: through intergroup dialogue, allies come to understand how structural oppression influences both the oppressors and the oppressed.⁴⁸ This insight is translatable but remains quite removed from curbing identity-based privilege in America’s political system.

Privileged identities are not new within politics, nor are they distinctly American. Before the word “identity” became commonplace, political theorists tied “socially and intersubjectively acquired roles” to the distribution of power.⁴⁹ One such theorist, John Locke, theorized that people gained power by becoming parents or assuming an analogous role. Parental identity applied to men and women, and “as much to the foster-father of an exposed child, as to the natural father of another.”⁵⁰ Roughly one hundred years later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau shifted the identity-power discussion from roles to observable traits. Political inequality, he reasoned, develops because “social man lives constantly outside himself,” reducing everything “to appearances” and using language to classify those appearances.⁵¹ This classification results in “different privileges, which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others,” and which eventually become codified into

laws.⁵² John Stuart Mill had a less-socialized view of power and identity. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, he proposed that “each is the only safe guardian of his own rights and interests.”⁵³ Since individual governance was unrealistic, Mill theorized that good governance required balanced representation from identity groups “as their guarantee of just and equal consideration.”⁵⁴

Buried in Mill’s statement is a question that contemporary scholars still debate: does healthy governance correlate with healthy interrelations between identity groups? Iris Marion Young asserts that similarly-situated people have valid claims to self-determination preceding and superseding governing institutions.⁵⁵ Ian Shapiro concurs—but only in part—by suggesting that societies with deep, identity-rooted divisions must work incrementally toward democratic governance if they are to survive.⁵⁶ Such societies lack the empathy necessary for communal decision-making. While any government can “convoke, provoke, and evoke collective and individual identities,” Anne Norton proposes that truly *democratic* governments collaborate with citizens to create identities.⁵⁷ These identities, in turn, fuel healthy alliances and shared governance. Chantal Mouffe declares that this task—constructing collective identities capable of alliance—“is one of the important tasks of democratic politics.”⁵⁸ Scholars may debate which comes first, but they nonetheless agree that healthy identities and healthy self-governance are deeply symbiotic.

By any measure, America’s political system is still unhealthily controlled by dominating identity groups. In 2014, 71% of elected officials were men (despite being just 49% of the population), 90% were white (despite being 63% of the population), and 65% were white men (despite being 31% of the population).⁵⁹ As of 2017, only seven of Congress’s 535 members were openly gay or lesbian (1.3%); there was one openly

LGBTQ governor, and only 105 state legislators over all fifty states (1.4%).⁶⁰ In direct democracy, the prospect of change is actually worse. Barbara Gamble’s 1997 finding—that political majorities “deprive political minorities of their civil rights” at the ballot box—has been repeatedly confirmed.⁶¹ One hundred years ago, male suffragist Jesse Lynch Williams mused that “every improvement in civilization has had to win its way against the indifference or opposition of the majority”; clearly, this is no less true now.⁶²

Facing a political system in which identity carries significant weight, and lacking a shared identity with majority political groups, movements can utilize allies to advocate. Todd Gitlin proposes that shared identities provide “a sense of community [and] an experience of solidarity”—which can ground allies’ political advocacy.⁶³ Right or wrong, argues Jenny Irons, they can personify the movement “in ways that do not stray too far from how elites define groups.”⁶⁴ Ally political advocacy is therefore quite important to political change, and understanding allies’ use of identity rhetorics within that advocacy is largely unexplored in existing ally scholarship.

Allies Reoccur in American History

The notion that allies have played a categorical role over American history is a second distinct way this project contests the meaning of “ally.” Because scholars have emphasized inter- and intra-personal allyship, they favor contemporary qualitative or quantitative methods: how could they study male teachers’ gender diversity work, say, one hundred years ago?⁶⁵ A rare exception—Amy Sonnie and James Tracy’s *Hillbilly Nationalists*—demonstrates the challenges of historical ally scholarship. Sonnie and Tracy studied urban, poverty-based cooperation between white Southern transplants and

black people in the 1960s; this required access to personal papers, interviews, rich organization records, and thorough attention to newspaper archives from three cities. Such resources are rarely accessible, if they are even available: the first chapter of this project would have been impossible without the relatively recent mass-digitization of newspapers.

The fact remains, though, that identity and political rights are tightly bound throughout American history. In America's earliest years, citizenship was often determined by what Rogers Smith calls "ascriptive hierarchy."⁶⁶ This hierarchy, argues Jennifer Mercieca, was based on the belief that "only some classes of people [were]...worthy of full citizenship."⁶⁷ The founders codified this belief into laws which, Smith notes, effectively "declared most people in the world [and the majority of the domestic adult population] legally ineligible to become full U.S. citizens solely because of their race, original nationality, or gender."⁶⁸ The result was a system of governance that, for years and years, inherently privileged white, Christian men at the expense of women, Black Americans, immigrants, and many others.

While Smith rightly calls these laws "arbitrary," such laws arose from historically-anchored links between political capacity and certain identities. Men presumed that women "[had] no experiential credibility in political or social matters," and Carole Spitzack and Kathryn Carter conclude that this was why men denied women equal rights and political power.⁶⁹ Their argument can be comparably applied to non-white people as well, as evidenced in the infamous *Dred Scott* Supreme Court decision. The 1857 Supreme Court ruling upheld the Founders' determination that Black people were "a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race."⁷⁰ As the nineteenth century progressed, Americans emphasized "visual

codes” that determined who was worthy of full American citizenship.⁷¹ Physiognomy “connected physical attributes to moral and intellectual capacities”; and these capacities, argues Cara Finnegan, determined who had political rights and power.⁷² As physiognomy faded, new scientific explanations—often psychological—justified unequal rights. The American Psychological Association continued diagnosing homosexuality as a mental disorder until 1974, for example—ten years after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act.⁷³ Given this, it is unsurprising that Massachusetts State Representative Thomas Lopes would argue, in 1975, that homosexuals “are like the emotionally disturbed and mentally retarded” as a rationale for why “they should not be given [civil] rights!”⁷⁴

As science and culture have evolved over time, landmark policies have chipped away at inequality, specific group by specific group. Nancy McArdle aptly frames the problem: even when advocates win legal battles for one group, or around one issue, “challenges remain to incorporate the nation’s diverse peoples into political and civic life.”⁷⁵ Women won smaller victories throughout the nineteenth century, but it took until 1920 to convince men they were capable of equal voting rights—and even then, the country has been unable to pass an Equal Rights Amendment or elect a sufficient number of women. African Americans gained legal rights after 1865 but white America vehemently resisted for another one-hundred years; *Brown v. Board of Education*, then the Civil and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 (respectively), cemented the shift. Beginning around the 1950s, laws extending rights to gay people passed locally while failing nationally. National policy change occurred judicially when the Supreme Court reversed the unequal status of gay people through a series of court cases in the 2010s.

Scholars already conceptualize subsequent historic movements as tactically-connected to each other, and it therefore follows that certain identity-linked roles—allies, for one—also align across history. Identities are historically-conditioned rhetorics, Linda Alcoff argues, “about how to understand, negotiate, and live one’s identity,” and Stuart Hall urges scholars to capture their “political movement” in whatever direction that might be.⁷⁶ Political scientists studying “contentious politics” compare social movements across historical contexts, and political historians like Julian Zelizer zero in on “how average citizens [in movements] had a profound impact on national politics.”⁷⁷ To the extent that *categories* of “average citizens” reoccur between mass movements, comparative or parallel study potentially produces valuable insights about those categories. This project chases such insights with a particular approach: juxtaposing allies’ rhetorical fragments from three historic civil rights reforms.

Allies Have Cumulative Impact

Mass and easy digitalization allow for contesting the meaning of “ally” in a third way: as a cumulative rhetoric. DeTurk fairly critiques ally research for not attending to “differences across issues, identities, and contexts,” but I have concentrated fragments from three periods, and from varied sources—letters, diaries, op-eds, speeches, pamphlets, blog posts, interviews—into searchable, digital form.⁷⁸ This allows me to easily juxtapose straight allies in 2012 with male allies in 1912; or male suffragists in California and male suffragists in Georgia; or white Freedom Summer volunteers and Lyndon Johnson. As rhetoric is fragmentary, its impact *must* be understood cumulatively,

and accumulation builds around both an idea and the repeated means of expressing that idea—in this case, allyship.

Underlying this claim is people’s micro-influence on language, each time they communicate. When a person speaks, Habermas proposes, that speaker “raises a claim to power *vis-à-vis* the addressee in order to get him to act in such a way that the intended state of affairs comes into existence.”⁷⁹ Communicators claim definitional power, and their intended state of affairs might be basic (e.g. labelling a color “orange”) or more complex (e.g. establishing men as superior to women). Everyday symbolic action then becomes “*the tactical dimension* of the operation of power,” whereby various discourses spar for dominance, argues McKerrow.⁸⁰

In times of landmark social change, this struggle over dominant meanings—especially the meanings of identities—intensifies. Nilanjana Dasgupta demonstrates both that policy change causes social norms to shift, and that norms are usually shifting ahead of policy change.⁸¹ This is particularly true with judicial decisions, which tend to “follow cultural shifts rather than lead in policy change,” argue Holly McCammon and Allison McGrath.⁸² Indeed, William Carroll and R. S. Ratner posit that movements that “fail to alter hegemonic constraints” result in “provisional gains”; these gains simply cannot be held without broader cultural change.⁸³ The backlash against the 1960s, for instance, reflects a “generous vision of racial and ethnic equality” paired with an absence of consensus around that vision, suggests Gary Orfield.⁸⁴ But clearly *some* consensus was built around new ideas to secure the Civil Rights Act of 1964, or the Voting Rights Act of 1965, or the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Understanding where allies have built consensus around new ideas (e.g., women are voters), and where they have not (e.g., women are leaders), can help illuminate their contributions to social change.

For this project, I specifically focus on how allies have accumulated force behind identity configurations—their own, and others’—while advocating for suffrage, civil rights, and marriage equality. As each individual performs identity, individually as much as in tandem with others, identity’s meaning both solidifies and shifts.⁸⁵ These changes happen, both Alcoff and Deluca stress, in place and time; both of these forces leave their mark on identity’s meaning.⁸⁶ Such performances in context “precipitate the retreat and contraction of politics” for individuals and communities, says Paul Gilroy.⁸⁷ Between the second- and third-waves, for example, “feminist” identity shifted such that many people who held arguably-feminist values rejected “feminist” identity.⁸⁸ Such shifts, argues Gloria Anzaldúa, allow communities to “shift positions, change positions, reposition ourselves regarding our individual and collective identities.”⁸⁹ This repositioning of an identity’s meaning is quite vital to a political system’s health.

Allies Reconfigure Identity

In surveying allies’ use of identities, I take as a starting point that all identities are constantly constructed and reconstructed. Stuart Hall acknowledges humans’ psychic need for stable identity but disputes that identities can ever be “fully and finally made.”⁹⁰ Even shared identity, advises Anne Norton, will have meaningful “differences within a culture.”⁹¹ “African American identity,” say, does not exist in stasis; and once articulated in some form, that form will not exhaust all experiences of that identity, nor capture all of those experiences accurately. Judith Butler therefore encourages scholars to “not assume in advance what the content of [an identity] will be,” and instead look for how individuals construct that identity in any given moment.⁹²

Such identity construction happens by and through discourse. Jacques Lacan theorizes only a brief period when identity is not “objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other.” The child adopts a self-identity that will persist until “language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.”⁹³ This subjectivity is composed of “points of temporary attachment,” says Stuart Hall—attachments which are made and unmade as people communicate.⁹⁴ A male suffragist may have identified as a “man” when verbally addressed as a man, dressed in male clothes, or juxtaposed with a woman. In such discursive moments, a person “recogni[z]es the ‘rightness’ of a discourse” to one’s lived experience, suggested Maurice Charland.⁹⁵ Linda Alcoff observes that “self-projection, identity anxieties, and the material inscription of social violence” shape whether an individual owns a discourse.⁹⁶ Those forces might also lead comparably situated people to invoke comparable identities, leading to some degree of consensus about the meaning of an identity.

Though not always, an identity is often a collective discourse. Such collectivizing is done by “speakers, listeners, and those about whom they speak” as they “creat[e] relationships and communities,” argues Katie Gibson.⁹⁷ They do so, notes James Boyd White, using “language that has its existence outside [the individual].”⁹⁸ That basis for connecting the individual to others might be material, per Carly Woods or Dana Cloud, or perhaps via shared beliefs as Vanessa Beasley proposes.⁹⁹ Whatever the unifying qualities, McGee proposes that these get organized “into incipient political myths, visions of the collective life dangled before individuals.”¹⁰⁰ Audiences, in turn, are conditioned to identify an individual by group membership (e.g., “Christian” or “parent”).¹⁰¹

Audiences and rhetors frequently configure the meanings of these group memberships—these identities—through stories. Habermas contends that narratives offer

“a core of basic concepts and assumptions” that animate identity.¹⁰² Narratives link common sequences of experiences between people, and across time and space. Besides unifying groups, narratives also make alliances possible because they “spark the possibility of identification and trust” between groups, suggests Rachel Alicia Griffin.¹⁰³ As vessels for “public-social knowledge,” Walter Fisher sees narratives “enabl[ing] us to observe not only our differences, but also our commonalities.”¹⁰⁴ Allies observe, but also craft *new* narratives that subtly reconfigure differences into commonalities.

Nevertheless, differences between collective identities serve a vital boundary function. That bounding can be negative, as when collective identities “[suppress] ambiguities and opposite elements in order to assure (and create the illusion of) coherence and common understanding,” per Joan Scott.¹⁰⁵ Brian Ott, Eric Aoki, and Greg Dickinson argue that this is especially true in America, where “we violently cast out difference, that which is not like us,” in the service of developing a national identity.¹⁰⁶ But Linda Alcoff encourages scholars to not dismiss identification-through-difference as wholly bad: “When I refuse to listen to how you are different from me, I am refusing to know who you are.”¹⁰⁷ Young proposes, diplomatically, that identity-through-difference “is something to be transcended,” and allies do just this when they advocate.¹⁰⁸

Transcending one’s identities, however, requires power—power that may or may not be vested in those identities. At a very young age people inherently possess this power, but that self-determination recedes as they encounter language. From that point forward, language “interpellates, structures, preserves, and undermines relations of power” as it constructs identity, writes Anne Norton.¹⁰⁹ Through this construction process, Alcoff sees language steering “the meanings of our identities, the possibilities of social interaction, and the formations of difference.”¹¹⁰ Linguistic practices, then, endow

different identities with differential power. Allies, by their identification with socially dominant groups, have greater discursive power and face a choice about how to exercise their power: do they alter or sustain problematic identity discourses?

One possible course is for allies to negate undesirable identity discourses. Negating involves forbidding, preventing, and precluding certain discourses, to paraphrase Anne Norton.¹¹¹ Anti-suffragists, for instance, negated ungendered meanings of “citizen” when they refused to speak of “female citizens.” As in this example, negation is often meant to “keep people ‘in their place,’” argues McKerrow, for the benefit of some dominating class.¹¹² As these discourses ossify and become what Foucault calls “regimes of truth”—norms with almost universal compliance—negation becomes particularly challenging.¹¹³ But oppressed groups or their allies might still resist domination by negating oppressive discourses. In the suffrage, civil rights, and marriage equality movements, I will show that allies negated narrow civic identities (e.g., “American” or “citizen”) on the way to establishing broader, more inclusive parameters.

Allies might also reconfigure identity by producing new discourses. Often, these new discourses arise as allies and “dominated groups creat[e] alternative social relations,” argues McKerrow.¹¹⁴ *Dominating* groups, too, produce new discourses; and although some of these reinscribe oppression, Barbara Biesecker argues that “resistance is always and already a structure of possibility within [them].”¹¹⁵ Rush Limbaugh exercised discursive power when he produced “femi-nazi” to redefine “feminist”; the Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage similarly boosted “male suffragists” in lieu of the derogatory “Aunt Nancy Men.” Some second-wave feminists created “womyn” to describe a similar subject position to “women,” but without the marginalized and

oppressed dimensions. This example is cautionary, though: as Friedrich Nietzsche argues, successful reconfiguration means *a critical mass* has embraced the new discourse.¹¹⁶

As the term “male suffragist” demonstrates, new identity configurations often require people to recognize how identities interact. Everyone has what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a “plural personality,” in which multiple identities co-exist, but Kimberle Crenshaw cautions that a person cannot be the sum of their various identities.¹¹⁷ Straight women, for example, embody the intersection of female and heterosexual identities. These women may be marginalized to some degree for their gender—but they may also *marginalize* gay people to some degree through heterosexism. At no point are these people not women, nor straight, nor are their lived experiences carbon copies of all other women and all other straight people. Rather, suggests Michael Schudson, people are “different selves in different situations” and “leave behind or actively repress certain parts of themselves” situationally.¹¹⁸ New discourses explain such movement with particular attention to how “prevailing structures of domination shape various discourses of resistance.”¹¹⁹ Crenshaw’s concern here is particularly apt for ally rhetoric, since allies are (to some degree) shaped by structures of domination.

With particular attention to these concerns, I develop questions about how male allies, white allies, and straight allies reconfigured identity during the suffrage, civil rights, and marriage equality movements, respectively. What identity groups emerged from each era’s collected fragments, and how were they constructed? What narratives animated these identities? What boundaries existed between groups, and where did allies locate power, symbolic or temporal? All of these questions must account for the historical context: what discourses were new, or negations of existing discourses—and how did

identities intersect within ally advocacy? And fundamentally, did allies merely “help others” or reform the oppressive identities at the root of each movement?

Allies Have Not Deconstructed Dominant Identity

Although it takes different form in each movement, my overall argument is that allies rarely facilitated a systemic reevaluation of their dominating identity at moments of significant civil rights reform. Male allies in the 1910s, I argue, reinforced men’s centrality if not their dominance, even as they expanded various identities—most notably, those of “citizen” and “voter”—to include women. White allies working adjacent to the 1964 Civil Rights Act generally failed at collectivizing inherent, inherited racial privilege between all white people, focusing instead on virulent whites and displacing responsibility to alternative fields of identity. Finally, in the marriage equality movement, straight allies identified gays and lesbians into existing rhetorics, constructing their sameness and, thus, cutting short a discussion about why their differences resulted in such disparate rights.

Comparing ally advocacy from these three groups also identifies useful content patterns (and deviations). National and regional identities were salient in all three movements, while family, religious, and class identities reoccurred among two of the three groups of allies. Americans’ founding ideals set the world on fire, even as they struggled to live up to those; they shared rights and values and mutually protected those from assault. But Americans also came from specific regions, and they exhibited great regional pride. Regions shared ideological tendencies and, if welcoming, allies celebrated it; if not welcoming, they criticized the region and stoked regional rivalries with other

areas. Families were symbolically important and, in ally advocacy, stabilized society amidst upheaval and change. Religion was also symbolically important but, rather than a stabilizing force, it became a way to separate good people (tolerant, welcoming people) from bad people (bigots). Allies repetition of class identity, on the other hand, changed significantly and demonstrated America's increasing discomfort discussing class identity.

Allies also repeated rhetorical moves between movements. First, it should be noted that allies saw identities as totalizing experiences across all three movements. Allies constructed themselves in glowing terms and delineated reasonable identity-group peers—moderates—between themselves and bigots. Marginalized groups were also exceptional but, in paradoxical contrast, lived horrible lives. Allies also constructed people of marginalized identities into existing roles—roles shaped by the same identity-rooted ideologies that had marginalized them. In ally advocacy, agency shifted from humans to ideologies or detached behind passive-voice constructions that hid actors. Allies further avoided confronting their oppressive identities by substituting ancillary identities at crucial junctures. All of these moves constituted new or reinforced existing identities, but ally rhetoric was also instrumental—geared toward passing a clear policy in each movement.

Comparative contextual differences also raise important considerations for scholars and activists. All three groups of allies faced very different media environments, but all three media environments encouraged different content and strategies. Digital media offer the particular possibility of extremely broad audiences, extraordinarily specific audiences, and uncontrollable circulation. A movement's policy goals also encourage certain content and strategies—content and strategies that re-inscribe some marginalizing identities and shortchange the necessary process of reconstituting

dominating identities. This is especially true when a proposed policy significantly shifts the balance of political or symbolic power away from a dominant identity group. And although allies have grown more fully tolerant and self-aware, movement to movement, their rhetorical context still demands more attention to their oppressive identities—not simply thorough reflection on how best to be an ally.

This demand is especially pressing as I finish this project. In the late-2010s, American politics is paralyzed by conflict between identity groups. This paralysis stems in part from allies' previous failures to openly, directly, and thoroughly engage patriarchy, whiteness, and heterosexism, and underscores how necessary empathy and alliance are for representative government. As allies focused on passing policies, and on constructing identities for marginalized groups, they have lost sight of the maxim so eloquently expressed by PFLAG: "change doesn't have to be about politics and policies."¹²⁰ Ally advocacy must be both instrumental—policy goals—and constitutive, and in being constitutive allies must focus on themselves. Allies must turn inward to deconstruct their identity as a marginalizing force, convey that deconstruction to those with whom they share an identity, and finally reconstitute it.

Notes

¹ United States Information Agency, *Roundtable March Washington* (Washington, DC, 1963), <https://www.c-span.org/video/?314549-1/roundtable-march-washington&start=184>.

² Alexandre P. Wolf III, “Ten Percent of Phillips Academy’s Untold History: A Case Study of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Community” (Phillips Academy, Brace Center for Gender Studies, 2006), 7.

³ Melinda Miceli, *Standing Out, Standing Together: The Social and Political Impact of Gay-Straight Alliances* (New York, London: Routledge, 2013), 28.

⁴ William Howell to Nancy J. Evans and Jamie Washington, “Question Re: Allies,” January 30, 2017.

⁵ Jamie Washington and Nancy J. Evans, “Becoming an Ally,” in *Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals on Campus*, ed. Nancy J. Evans and Vernon A. Wall (Alexandria, VA: American Association for Counseling and Development, 1991), 313.

⁶ Beverly Daniel Tatum, “Teaching White Students about Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope,” *Teachers College Record* 95, no. 4 (1994): 474.

⁷ Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* (Gabriola, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 2011), 139.

⁸ Throughout this dissertation, I primarily use “gays and lesbians” or “gays” rather than a fuller, more inclusive array of sexual identities. This is because, as Leigh Moscovitz argues, the marriage equality movement “relegat[ed] particular LGBT and queer identities to the margins.” Throughout Chapter Three, I contest this decision (and preserve allies’ use of broader identities) but, when selecting my own terms, will preserve the movement’s limited concentration on gays and lesbians: Leigh Moscovitz, *The Battle over Marriage: Gay Rights Activism through the Media* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 24.

⁹ Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman’s Rights Convention* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 278.

¹⁰ Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller, *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776-1990: A Documentary History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), pt. II; “Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage: Constitution and Charter Members” (1910), Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911; Scrapbook 9; page 82, Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

¹¹ Lynn Fabian Lasner, “Fighting Jim Crow,” *Humanities* 23, no. 5 (October 2002), <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2002/septemberoctober/feature/fighting-jim-crow>.

¹² Kristen Hoerl, “Burning Mississippi into Memory? Cinematic Amnesia as a Resource for Remembering Civil Rights,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 1 (2009): 54.

¹³ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York, London, Toronto: Simon & Schuster, 2015), Introduction.

¹⁴ Michael C. McGee, “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3 (1990): 284.

¹⁵ McGee, 279.

¹⁶ Throughout, I will use the terms “marginalized communities,” “allied parties,” and “allied leaders” to refer to the groups with whom allies work (e.g., LGBTQ people, women, people of color). I have chosen these formulations for three primary reasons. First, although I will discuss many descriptions that juxtapose “allies” with “oppressed groups,” I share Linda Alcoff’s concern that the latter phrasing reduces a person whose identity “[has] been historically subject to oppression...to that oppressive genealogy.” Second, my intersectional perspective pushes me to recognize that some members of oppressed groups are not wholly and absolutely “oppressed” or “marginalized.” That is, a gay man is oppressed to some degree by heterosexism, but also enjoys a degree of power and privilege by virtue of his gender. Finally, there is a need to differentiate between broader communities of identity, and the leaders within those communities who are leading the movement for change.

¹⁷ Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991): 25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354221>.

¹⁸ “Ally,” in *Oxford Learners Dictionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/ally_1.

¹⁹ “Otesha UK : Anti-Oppression,” *The Otesha Project* (blog), accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.otesha.org.uk/about-us/what-we-stand-for/an-anti-oppression-manifesto>.

²⁰ Tim Wise, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, Revised Kindle Edition (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2011), Kindle Location 3298.

²¹ Catherine R. Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres,” *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002): 447, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00278.x>.

²² Roxane Gay, “The Charge to Be Fair: A Conversation with Ta-Nehisi Coates,” *Huffington Post* (blog), August 10, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/roxane-gay-/the-charge-to-be-fair-a-conversation-with-ta-nehisi-coates_b_7956186.html.

²³ Theodore Roosevelt, “Speech on Suffrage” (August 30, 1912); Theodore Roosevelt, “Women’s Rights; and the Duties of Both Men and Women,” *The Outlook*, February 3, 1912.

²⁴ McGee, “Text,” 288.

²⁵ Leland M. Griffin, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38, no. 2 (1952): 188, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335635209381762>; e.g. John David Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Holly J. McCammon and Allison R. McGrath, “Litigating Change? Social Movements and the Court System: Social Movements and the Court System,” *Sociology Compass* 9, no. 2 (2015): 128–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12243>; Stuart Scheingold, *The Politics of Rights: Lawyers, Public Policy, and Political Change* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.6766>; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, “Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 529–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001234>.

²⁶ Roosevelt, “Speech on Suffrage.”

²⁷ Anthony Kennedy, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, No. 14–556 (United States Supreme Court June 2015).

²⁸ Beth Behn, “Woodrow Wilson’s Conversion Experience: The President and the Federal Woman Suffrage Amendment” (PhD Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2012), 27, https://scholarworks.umass.edu/open_access_dissertations/511; Woodrow Wilson, “Speech on Suffrage” (September 30, 1918).

²⁹ Behn, “Woodrow Wilson’s Conversion Experience,” 12; Victoria Bissell Brown, “Did Woodrow Wilson’s Gender Politics Matter?,” in *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace*, ed. John Milton Cooper and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Washington, DC; Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 154.

³⁰ Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate*, The Years of Lyndon Johnson 3 (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 867; 1011.

³¹ Joshua Zeitz, *Building the Great Society: Inside Lyndon Johnson’s White House*, 2018, 242.

³² Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (Crown/Archetype, 2006), 223; Mackenzie Weinger, “Evolve: Obama Gay Marriage Quotes,” *Politico* (blog), May 9, 2012, <http://politi.co/ILbRf3>.

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³⁴ Brooke Kroeger, *The Suffragents: How Women Used Men to Get the Vote* (SUNY Press, 2017), 120.

³⁵ *White Movie Stars Discuss Black Civil Rights March (1963)*, 1963, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPfarQ0DJDC>.

³⁶ Lisa Capretto, "Mary Lambert Says She Was Literally 'The Last Resort' For Singing On Macklemore's 'Same Love,'" *The Huffington Post* (blog), July 1, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mary-lambert-macklemore-same-love_us_577560cfe4b04164640edbd2.

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³⁸ Lisa M. Tillmann, *In Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism beyond Gay and Straight*, Innovative Ethnographies (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); Sara DeTurk, *Activism, Alliance Building, and the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center* (Lexington Books, 2014).

³⁹ An excellent example of such a study is Kimmel and Mosmiller, *Against the Tide*.

⁴⁰ Mab Segrest, "Allies," in *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle*, ed. Kelly Fritsch, Clare O'Connor, and A. K. Thompson (AK Press, 2016).

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Chapter 1: Male Allies and the Susan B. Anthony Amendment

Introduction

Nearly a year and a half after female suffragists began picketing his White House, President Woodrow Wilson made a surprise speech to the United States Senate. Wilson asked the assembled legislators to pass women's suffrage "as vitally essential to the successful prosecution of the great war..." He argued that World War I, one of several pressing forces of modernity, had "made many things new and plain" and caused the world's countries to look to United States "to lead them to the new day..." These other countries saw American women making "service and sacrifice of every kind" and wondered why "the great, powerful, famous Democracy of the West" did not enfranchise them. Wilson argued that women's enfranchisement was needed not only to win the war, but to bring women's "sympathy and insight and clear moral instinct" to "the great problems which we must settle...when the war is over." Historian Beth Behn deemed Wilson's request as "unprecedented" because, at the time, a president simply did not "personally [inject] his voice into the Senate debate..."¹

In this speech—by a man, to men, asking men to give up their exclusive privilege—Wilson did not raise any issue of men's exclusive power. Men could "give or withhold this thing," "trust [women] as much as [men]," and enter into "a partnership of privilege and right" with women. Wilson acknowledged that such actions would be "do[ing] this just thing," but carefully avoided the related conclusion: that exclusively male leadership was, perhaps, *unjust*. "Our own women" could "stand by our sides" and contribute to "our counsels" and "our vision of affairs." But even when women were included, men always had the power in Wilson's formulation, and they always remained

at the center of the political process. Wilson's appeal would fail to move the men of the Senate, though, and it would be another nine months before Congress would send the Susan B. Anthony Amendment to the states for ratification.

Nine more months was relatively minor in the scope of the seventy-two-year suffrage movement. In volume four of their massive *History of Woman Suffrage*, suffragists Ida Husted Harper and Susan B. Anthony identified the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention as “the first organized demand for the rights of woman.”² After fifteen years, in the wake of the Civil War, female suffragists joined with former slaves in the American Equal Rights Association to secure rights for both groups simultaneously.³ Instead of rights, though, women gained three new obstacles to suffrage. First, the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) simultaneously classified women as citizens, but *voters* as “male citizens twenty-one years of age.”⁴ Then, in 1869, strategy disagreement split suffragists into two organizations: the woman-only National Woman Suffrage Association, which prioritized a federal women's suffrage amendment; and the American Woman Suffrage Association, which prioritized winning state-by-state suffrage.⁵ These divisions were accentuated by the Supreme Court's *Minor v. Happersett* decision (1874), which gave states control over who would be voters.⁶ Even with this power, it would be fifteen years before a state—Wyoming—would pass women's suffrage. That passage coincided with women's suffragists reuniting as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and began a decade in which Colorado (1893), Utah (1896), and Idaho (1896) would pass suffrage. Even then, it would be *another* fourteen years before Washington state passed suffrage in 1910.

The decade between 1910 and 1920 saw explosive suffrage growth and activism, culminating in the 1920 ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Six additional western

states and Kansas passed suffrage for women between 1910 and 1914; and by 1913, the only state without a suffrage organization was New Mexico.⁷ The president himself—Wilson between 1912 and the amendment’s ratification in 1920—changed from being “definitely and irreconcilably opposed to woman suffrage” in 1912, to pushing the federal amendment and delivering his unprecedented speech to the Senate in 1918.⁸ Whereas both 1912 party platforms did not even address suffrage, Republicans and Democrats both endorsed it for state-by-state enactment in 1916; by 1920, both parties would endorse a federal amendment. Carrie Chapman Catt was one significant force behind this change: she would lead the federal amendment toward successful ratification following her resumption of the NAWSA presidency in 1915. Reflecting after the amendment’s ratification in August 1920, Catt summarized the sheer enormity of women’s efforts since 1868:

They were forced to conduct fifty-six campaigns of referenda to male voters; 480 campaigns to get Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 47 campaigns to get State constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions; 277 campaigns to get State party conventions to include woman suffrage planks; 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms, and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses.⁹

Although male allies participated in these efforts, their activism broadened and gained particular attention in the final decade before suffrage’s passage, between 1910 and 1920. A significant reason was the forming of the New York Men’s League for Woman Suffrage in 1909, composed of nationally-known intellectual, financial, and cultural leaders; Catt called them “the brains of our colleges, of commerce and

literature.”¹⁰ The New York Men’s League gave way to a National Men’s League in 1912, which facilitated the formation of local Men’s Leagues all around the country—twenty-four states by 1913, and another eleven by 1916.¹¹ Whether or not a region had a local chapter, though, locally-influential men joined their local suffrage organizations. While male allies led too often, most followed the direction of local female suffragists and, as one man put it, “assist[ed] the women in attaining full citizenship.”¹² At times, they defensively answered opponents’ arguments, but more often they advanced their personal rationales for supporting equal suffrage.

Male allies were keenly aware that their fellow men—as voters—stood between women and suffrage at local, state, and federal levels. When the New York Men’s League began, it was called a *voters’* league before being renamed to *men’s* league.¹³ Across the country, California pioneer and suffrage leader John Braly classified equal suffrage as “a man’s job” because men “must declare by their votes whether women shall be enfranchised or not.”¹⁴ Men had a *direct* vote in state or local referenda, but the federal amendment depended on Senators and Congressmen who, as one ally aptly noted, understood that “30,000 men represent 30,000 votes” for or against their reelection.¹⁵ Female suffrage leaders concurred. One leader, awaiting the ratification results from Tennessee, expressed her “maddening” feeling of “age-long helplessness” at having to “depend upon the judgment of men.”¹⁶ In the face of this dependence, Catt reflected that male suffragists were “a blessing to us” for their ability to speak directly, and sometimes candidly, to their gender-mates.¹⁷

Male suffragists utilized six fields of identity to argue for suffrage, with modernity as the primary driver of change. They split women’s identity, generating two paths to the same conclusion: women needed to vote. On one path, modernity so

threatened society that women were needed to apply their pre-modern skills to contemporary challenges. Male allies choosing this path constructed women as patriotic, virtuous mothers whose timeless childrearing and housekeeping skills could fight war, economic exploitation, industrialization, and liquor (among other evils). Nevertheless, there was a second path: modernity fundamentally changed contemporary identities, destabilizing previous justifications for limiting suffrage to men. Male allies trod these two distinct paths through representations of regional, civic, national, family, class, and gender identities. These six fields, and the two paths that run through them, allowed male allies to reach disparate male voters and lead them to conclude that women should vote.

Despite recognizing modernity as socially transformative, male allies did as Woodrow Wilson did in his 1918 Senate speech: they generally avoided analyzing male identity. There were certainly moments when allies acknowledged that modernity changed men, too, or would argue (like Rabbi Stephen Wise) that “manocracy” was historically inexpedient.¹⁸ These arguments, however, did not progress to consider male supremacy underlying society. Male allies thus led men to recognize that women should be enfranchised—but not that enfranchising women meant anything needed to change about men. If suffragists truly aspired, as Elaine Weiss argues, “to overturn...millennia of tradition concerning gender roles”—and if, as Michael Kimmel argues, men disproportionately bore the “burden of structural change”—I conclude that male suffrage allies during that last decade failed to move America to greater equality.¹⁹ Instead, male allies’ reinforced men’s centrality, if not their dominance, and cut short the potential for cross-gender cooperation within other shared fields of identity.

In support of this argument, I assemble male ally advocacy from three sources. First, fragments generated by, and in relation to, the various Men’s Leagues provide a

sense for how groups of men collectively expressed their shared belief. Local chapters sponsored dinners, fundraisers, debates, and rallies that were typically covered by the local newspaper; and those same local papers published letters, circulars, and op-eds. While some of these fragments survive in archives, the majority are found in the expanding digital newspaper databases that concentrate both local and national papers from around the country.

These databases also preserve advocacy by non-League-affiliated, locally-significant male suffragists. Elected officials, business leaders, faith leaders, and club men campaigned of their own volition or at the request of local suffrage organizations. These men often signed their names *en masse* to letters or pro-suffrage advertisements, enabling me to search backward and forward for other instances of their advocacy.

Finally, I include the pro-suffrage fragments of President Woodrow Wilson. While Wilson was not an ally when he became president, he quickly endorsed women's suffrage as a state-by-state decision, then announced his personal support, and eventually fervently advocated for the federal amendment. As the decade progressed, his rhetoric began to align with those who had been advocating for longer and more earnestly. Wilson, then, becomes a useful addition to male ally advocacy, and indicates how allies' tropes fed off each other to take collective argumentative form.

This chapter both captures that collective form—male ally advocacy—and argues that it reinforced men's centrality within society. That society was in upheaval on five fronts, all of which bore upon the identities of Americans. I begin, then, with this historical milieu, and suggest that this milieu ensured the women's suffrage debate would involve many identities besides gender. Specifically, historical elements positioned male

allies to speak about regional, civic, national, family, class, and gender identity as they argued for women's suffrage.

Toward a Suffrage Amendment

The three decades preceding the suffrage amendment's 1920 ratification upended many identities besides gender. Explosive growth in the industrial sector drove women to work and thus unsettled class, familial, and gender identities. America's expansion into the isolated, often-harsh West required women to play new roles as the new region developed and coalesced. The South, too, was changing—processing Reconstruction with a backlash that included regular lynchings (which would particularly spike slightly after the suffrage amendment was ratified). In the South and elsewhere, massive immigration—wave after wave between the 1880s and mid-1920s—shifted who constituted the United States and “Americans.” And the Great War—the war to end all wars—raised significant questions about America's place in the world, especially as a beacon of democracy. The war also necessitated that women do “men's” jobs since men were sent overseas to fight.

The war, though, merely exacerbated gendered economic changes that had begun forty years earlier. In writing about the decades following the 1870s, historian William Leach argues that “rapid capitalist development...increasingly subverted the older sexual division of labor.”²⁰ That division meant men had worked while women raised and educated children—but not in the late-1800s forward. The nation's second industrial revolution unfolded in these decades and, by the turn of the century, left Americans “in a social and economic environment radically different from that in which the nation's basic

political structures and values had been conceived,” argues Robert Kraig.²¹ It was not just that women worked in this new environment, says Rebecca Mead: by the 1910s, there was actually “a permanent female workforce.”²² That drastic shift in who “worked” also disrupted women’s dependence on husbands, fathers, or other male providers.

Women were also more independent in the West, in part due to the region’s harsh conditions and new laws. Eileen Krادitor notes that, on the grueling trail westward and “in pioneer farming settlements[,] the contributions of women as individuals to the community were more apparent.”²³ Suffragists Harper and Anthony observed that, alongside men, western women “ma[de] the wilderness blossom” and “took upon themselves the work of the households and the fields.”²⁴ Such cooperation necessitated that woman be “equal to her part of the [governing] activities” as well (per pioneer Californian John Braly).²⁵ As these regions became territories and then states, they instituted “virtual equality before the law,” argues Flexner.²⁶ Westerners also fought for local control and direct democracy to circumvent corporate-controlled legislatures, and regularly asserted their autonomy from the federal government.²⁷

The South, too, sought to assert self-control as it processed myriad changes post-Civil War. Writing almost a century later, President John F. Kennedy would call Reconstruction (1865-1877) “a black nightmare the South could never forget.”²⁸ During those years, Congress passed numerous laws “to reconstitute American citizenship,” argues Rogers Smith, telling the South how it needed to change to be readmitted to the Union.²⁹ The white South resented the federal government for intruding on their state sovereignty; it was that sovereignty, after all, that had facilitated their enslavement and denigration of black people for centuries. (Incidentally, Susan Marshall argues that this resentment, processed alongside the “historical connection between abolition and the

suffrage movement,” partially explains the robust southern anti-suffrage movement.³⁰ Fearful of black advancements, white Southerners both demonstrated their continued power and transferred their fear and anxiety to black people by lynching them. As W.E.B. DuBois noted, lynchings were often spurred by Southern white women’s “naive assumption that the height of [black men’s] ambition is to marry them” or worse, which in turn “artificially-inspired fear” and led “to frightful accusations and suspicions.”³¹ Charged by those accusations and suspicions, white vigilantes killed roughly 4,200 black Americans between 1880 and 1920.³² Until World War I, mobs were lynching two to three people a week; the majority of these occurred in the South, in public, viewed by thousands and thousands of white bystanders.³³

Lynch mobs did not just kill black people: they also targeted immigrants, who had surged into the United States in the late-1800s. Immigration to America reached its height in this period, causing a rise in nativism and a legislative backlash: Congress passed the first racial or ethnic restrictions on immigration (1882) and the establishment of the Bureau of Immigration (1891).³⁴ Lawrence Levine quips that the “already heterogeneous” population was changing so quickly and extensively that native-born Americans “look[ed] positively homogeneous in comparison to what they were becoming.”³⁵ Since these new (male) Americans could vote, and were full citizens, their newly-significant power sparked discussion about citizenship qualifications—discussion which necessarily covered women and black people, too. Nativists like Lucy Price of Ohio often spoke of “the so-called ignorant vote, or foreign vote” in the same breathe, and cast that bloc as easily manipulated by political machines and industrial interests.³⁶ Those industrial interests were “giant enterprises,” observes Flexner, which required immigrants’ “cheap tractable labor.”³⁷ This industrial displacement is yet another

dimension through which new immigrants unsettled native-born American men whose identity, Michael Kimmel argues, had been premised on their power to exclude immigrants (as well as black Americans and women).³⁸

These immigration issues unfolded over forty years, but it was America's year-and-a-half participation in World War I that finally pushed the issue of women's suffrage toward a resolution. When the United States entered the war in 1917—three years after it started—President Wilson's stated goal was to "make the world safe for democracy." Behind that stated goal, though, Wilson foresaw America as a "missionary" of democracy, argues N. Gordon Levin Jr., and pursued "moral and economic pre-eminence" in the world.³⁹ This pursuit was fueled by a robust propaganda machine that "united most of the public in common cause and common hatred," per Geoffrey Stone.⁴⁰ Yet this propaganda also raised important questions similar to those asked about immigration: what was required of citizens, especially in wartime, and what were the government's reciprocal obligations? Men could be soldiers—but not all men—and women could not serve even if they wanted to. Instead, many women raised money, volunteered, nursed, and filled jobs whose occupants were fighting overseas; the women of NAWSA took this approach, says Sally Hunter Graham, "hop[ing] to convince the president and Congress that as patriotic citizens they were entitled to the ballot."⁴¹ Some militant suffragists did none of this, though, and were actually accused of undermining the war effort because they picketed the White House. Their banners—emblazoned with slogans like, "America is not a democracy"—critiqued Wilson for waging war for democracy while American women remained unable to vote.⁴² When Wilson eventually championed suffrage, both militants and NAWSA claimed their approach to the president

and the war motivated Wilson's change.⁴³ Either way, the final stretch of suffrage advocacy was surely tied to the war.

This context shaped the suffrage movement and concentrated male ally advocacy on six fields of identity. First, a variety of regional identities called attention to origins and affiliations both in the United States and abroad. Allies invoked and defined fundamental civic identities—citizen, voter, leader, and activist—while proposing how women voting might further change each. Third, allies discussed national identity and what they felt it meant to be American. Societal anxieties about family roles—especially those rooted in gender—were often tied to work as well. I discuss family, class, and gender identities as the respective fourth, fifth, and sixth identity fields present in male ally advocacy. In surveying male ally advocacy across these six fields, I argue that male allies reinforced men's centrality in their advocacy, cutting short the potential for cross-gender cooperation within other shared identities.

Regional Identity: “This town is not fossilized”

One shared field was regional identity, and male allies imbued their region's identity with both competitiveness and exceptionalism. They invoked other regions that “have adopted [suffrage]” and challenged their regional peers: “What [they] did we can do.”⁴⁴ Allies “dislike[d] to think of [their regions] as lagging behind the rest of the country” and instead cast their neighbors as “proud of [their] new citizens” and “pioneers in every movement which has guaranteed to women equal rights with men.”⁴⁵ Where *their* region was superior on suffrage, other states held a “willfull,” “outworn feudal attitude toward women” that reflected their “backwardness.”⁴⁶ Alternatively, if their

region was inferior on suffrage, allies goaded other men to take action by invoking regional peers' or other regions' progress.⁴⁷

Eastern male allies particularly stoked the competitive flames with the West, where many states passed equal suffrage statewide before the national amendment. Some eastern allies suggested that “greater courtesy is shown a woman in Western than in Eastern cities,” which had also been the case “before the extension of suffrage.”⁴⁸ Those western women “have played a large part in uplifting politics,” and Eastern men would do well to avail themselves of that same benefit.⁴⁹ Eastern men, they argued, should reject “being governed in national affairs to a considerable extent by women of the West,” who were “other peoples' wives in a far distant country.”⁵⁰ Such comments—*prima facie* about regional identities—capitalized on masculine insecurities and offered Eastern men a chance to centralize themselves as women encroached.

Western men, in turn, grounded their sense of exceptionalism in their positive treatment of women. Their region was “the birthplace of liberty and the home of freedom,” “where men love liberty and are willing to concede to others rights which they enjoy.”⁵¹ The implicit “others” were women, “whose courage finds no nobler measure in history!”⁵² These noble pioneer women stood behind a bevy of laws benefiting women and children, which allies contended were fueling a nationwide “wave of political idealism.”⁵³ Western men were proud that equal suffrage came to define their region in the eyes of the nation.

Southern male allies, too, tied suffrage support to regional pride, arguing that it embodied the region's chivalry and reinforced states' rights. They questioned if “the men of the South [should] be less just or less chivalrous” than men of other regions, emphasizing Southern men's superior commitment to “this code.”⁵⁴ In keeping with post-

Reconstruction sentiment, they rebuked Southern Congressmen who voted “against permitting the state legislatures to express their wishes on the suffrage amendment as guaranteed by the constitution.”⁵⁵ Southern states stuck together, they argued, and followed each other’s lead on key policies; prohibition was often cited in lieu of more divisive examples.⁵⁶

Some southern white allies had no trouble with divisiveness and saw suffrage as a tool for *white* southerners to protect their race. One such ally—the chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court—proffered that equal suffrage was “the only sure guarantee of white supremacy.”⁵⁷ Black voters “realize fully what was expected of them” and would only vote for black candidates, and so the other “half of the strength and mentality of this Anglo-Saxon blood” was needed to set things straight.⁵⁸ White women, these allies argued, would dependably “[maintain] the integrity of the White race and...the right of their children to control this country.”⁵⁹ This quality was recognized by northerners, too, who observed that “[t]he southern white women...will undoubtedly, at first, help willingly and zealously to disfranchise [sic] Negroes, cripple their schools and publicly insult them” should they gain the right to vote.⁶⁰ Southern white women votes would bolster southern white male votes, overtaking southern black votes to sustain the system centered on the latter group.

Where the southern suffrage allies were racist, allies around the country insulted foreign ethnicities and countries to goad U.S. citizens. Allies cast anti-suffragists as “Oriental in [their] thinking and living,” or as “Turks” who believe “that every wife should be a prisoner in her husband’s house.”⁶¹ More often than these derogatory quips, male allies cited progress by countries they deemed to be backward or “Old World” (e.g., China or the Philippines).⁶² They expressed “disgrace” that “one country after another,

oriental and European”—even those with “pig-headed opposition”—made women “the social equals of men” while the United States remained “semi-civilized” or, in some regions, downright “barbarous.”⁶³ In the years before the 1917 revolution, allies tarred Russia as a particularly backward country that, though backward, had the same suffrage policy as the United States.⁶⁴

After the revolution, male allies pointed to Russia as a fount of women’s rights. The “revolutionists demanded [suffrage] for [women],” which gave her the “honored place” she deserved.⁶⁵ The United States, meanwhile, should “be jealous to maintain our democratic leadership in the world” over both “England and Russia.”⁶⁶ England and Russia were often paired with the United States lagging “behind” and “not...a real democracy.”⁶⁷ The pairing was often referenced adjacent to a discussion of the war so as to demonstrate that the war “for democracy” actually meant something to the United States’ allies.⁶⁸

Regardless of their role in the war, other equal-suffrage Anglo-European countries were similarly exalted by male allies. Such countries were classified as “civilized” or comparable terms.⁶⁹ European women were “marching on to victory” with “no prisons and hunger strikes” and “no leagues of militant Suffragettes.”⁷⁰ Women in *some* European countries “have voted for years” and “not known of graft during this period”—and surely “women in the besieged cities of America would do their part as manfully as those women...”⁷¹ When multiple equal suffrage countries were listed, or when the movement was described as “world-wide,” allies seemed to forget the “backward” countries and only listed Anglo-European countries.⁷²

Many residents of those countries were immigrating to the United States, but they did not retain allies’ positive assessments once they arrived. Cultures praised for passing

equal suffrage were dismissed as “ignorant” and “Old World ideas” when associated with new immigrants.⁷³ Allies noted that most immigrants were men, and therefore voters—which meant immigrant men “who know nothing of our government or our institutions” were making decisions for disenfranchised “native-born citizens.”⁷⁴ Immigrants were “strange and sinister” people who “lend themselves very naturally to machine politics.”⁷⁵ Women’s suffrage was therefore needed to add native-born women to the voter rolls and offset immigrant men.

Generally, then, allies selectively and conveniently reduced regional identities to their suffrage position. Foreigners were virtuous and civilized to adopt suffrage in their home countries, but the same people threatened America when they immigrated. Russia was progressive when its new leaders instated equal suffrage, but backward prior to that moment. Internally, women’s suffrage was a proud dimension of regional identity where it existed, and grounds for competitiveness (rather than shame) where it did not. And suffrage was a useful tool for identity groups to sustain their superiority: native-born over immigrants, and white over black. Male allies’ capacity to shift suffrage’s meaning *vis-à-vis* regional identities gave them a degree of control over these adjacent identities.

Civic Identity: “It is for man to say whether woman shall have the vote”

Where regional identity was tangential to the suffrage debate, civic identity was one of two central fields. At issue were not only the meanings of “voter,” but of “leader,” “activist,” and “citizen” as well. The pro-suffrage position necessarily expanded the legal definition of “voter” while in the process raising many questions about the other three identities. Male allies cut many of those questions short by showing that women already

fit within existing identities, or that those identities needed to change for reasons bigger than gender. Allies' approach aligned with Eileen Kraditor's claim—that expediency arguments marked the final years of the suffrage movement—but extends “expediency” in a distinct direction.⁷⁶ In discussing civic identities, male allies reassured reluctant men that, even with an expanded electorate, men would remain in control of civic affairs.

Male allies could argue, for instance, that citizenship had no relation to gender without breaking new ground. This was, after all, the Supreme Court's conclusion in *Muller v. Oregon*.⁷⁷ Allies argued that “every person” had a right to citizenship—a “stake and hazard in the government”—which he or she “[felt] intuitively.”⁷⁸ That feeling was “not confined to the male sex” because men and women were “equal in politics.”⁷⁹ As evidence of this equality, allies—who often defaulted to male pronouns—notably used “people” to discuss citizenship, observing that “women are clearly entitled to be classed as people.”⁸⁰ Citizenship was everyone's “business” since it originated in her or his “rights as a human being.”⁸¹ It was, therefore a natural right requiring “the possession of political rights” to ensure it was “permanently maintained.”⁸² By appealing to nature, and sheltered under a well-established legal opinion, male allies safely built the argument that women should vote.

Male allies could argue, for example, that men and women brought distinct qualities to citizenship. “Women are not inferior to men,” one ally said plainly, “just different.”⁸³ It was “humanity's vital need,” therefore, that men and women “shar[e] the responsibilities of citizenship” because “there cannot be identity of function.”⁸⁴ Through “combined political action” “in the larger as well as in the smaller things of life,” men and women would “complement” each other “for the benefit of the citizen[s].”⁸⁵ Because men's perspective was “partial and inadequate,” men were “only half wide” without

women making “essential” civic contributions along “the terms they think in.”⁸⁶ Men therefore “ought to demand that women come into the body politic,” a call which reminded men of their ultimate power over the success or failure of suffrage.⁸⁷

Allies also asserted control by proposing that citizens should be educated. Again, allies appealed to existing civic norms that held “it is the purpose of this Republic” that citizens “shall be educated at public expense.”⁸⁸ The republic needed “active rather than...reflective creature[s]” to “make and fashion policies,” but it was also fundamentally necessary that each citizen, leader or not, “comprehend the standards of organized society.”⁸⁹ Allies’ primary targets were “foreign-born voters,” who were dubiously “acquainted with our affairs and conditions.”⁹⁰

Some allies also questioned whether women had the education to be good citizens. Allies acknowledged that all women were part of “the people,” but some specified only “the intelligent women”—those of “sufficient intelligence and good character.”⁹¹ All women might be citizens, but maybe only those “who ha[ve] received a course of instruction in our schools” deserved “the same chance to exercise the rights of citizenship.”⁹² Some allies rejected this perspective, countering that it was “prejudiced” anti-suffragists who thought so little of women’s intelligence.⁹³ Most common was a middle path, where allies acknowledged that “women as a class have not the knowledge which pertains to citizens” due to “a lack of training” rather than something innate.⁹⁴ To resolve this deficiency, allies split over whether “women need to educate themselves,” or whether men needed to teach them civics.⁹⁵ While generally favoring the latter position, allies framed it using the passive voice—women needed to “be educated,” “be shown [how to vote],” or “be given the aid and stimulus of sufficient imagination.”⁹⁶ Assuming

(as they did) that women had deficient knowledge, who but men could accomplish these tasks?

Discussions about citizens' education reflect how allies saw women existing somewhere between being citizens of an inferior class, and not being citizens at all. Some allies found it necessary to explicitly state that "women are American citizens"—"the most useful and important of all the citizens"—with "the same rights under the law to exist and to live and to work..."⁹⁷ Allies again turned to external reinforcement from "the laws of this country," arguing that voting would simply be women "lawfully exercising that supposed right..."⁹⁸ Another position, though, was that "women are shut out from citizenship" and "need it badly."⁹⁹ Still other allies argued that women lacked "full citizenship," and needed to "get their rights."¹⁰⁰ These men felt women needed "the dignity and defense of political recognition" to "round out and complete their citizenship."¹⁰¹ This notion—that women citizens were deficient in their rights—predominated ally advocacy.

Overcoming that deficiency, though, would make women better all-around. Allies returned to the verb "stimulate" to describe what this process would do to women.¹⁰² In fighting for fuller citizenship, women would "investigate [civic] subjects for themselves" and "wake...to an active discontent with their situation."¹⁰³ Civic participation, in turn, would educate women and "mak[e] her more conversant with human interests, more in touch with vital activities, more alive to the call of noble aspiration."¹⁰⁴ Voting would specifically "arouse and educate women," "increase their sense of personal responsibility," and "broaden [their] outlook and vision."¹⁰⁵ Just as suffrage "elevated and broadened [men]," allies proposed that it would "have exactly the same effect on the women."¹⁰⁶ Women were not the only ones who would benefit, though: enfranchising

women would also elevate men to “a higher grade of citizenship,” too.¹⁰⁷ As will become quite clear, this move—to frame women’s suffrage as a benefit to men—was a frequent rhetorical move for male allies.

These allies bridged from “citizen” to “voter” by suggesting that voting was how citizens fulfilled their myriad civic duties. Citizens shared “public aims” and cooperated to “promot[e] their common ends.”¹⁰⁸ Such cooperation demanded “trust and confidence,” creating a “duty” or “responsibility” to “take an active interest in politics, to study measures and to vote.”¹⁰⁹ Voting was not only “the act of a citizen,” but also “desirable for the happiness or betterment of any citizen.”¹¹⁰ It was, furthermore, “the fullest opportunity to serve best the State,” which “needs to have the sentiments of the citizens freely and officially expressed” and “hav[e] that judgment count...”¹¹¹ Such rhetoric called to mind two contrary examples—women’s war service and militant suffrage protests—which both traced to the same conclusion.

In seeming contradiction, though, many allies contended that not all citizens should be able to vote. Most allies agreed that suffrage was a right of “freeborn citizens of this great republic,” tied to a person’s “humanity” and therefore extending “for the whole human race.”¹¹² A plurality of allies, though, only thought citizenship “*ought* to mean the ability and right to participate in [civic] affairs,” and therefore saw voting as a “privilege” extending only to “qualified citizens” (emphasis added).¹¹³ “Educational and property qualifications are debatable,” argued some allies, and allies split over whether to qualify only “intelligent citizens” or, more broadly, all “sane adult citizens.”¹¹⁴ Citizens might properly be excluded from voting if they were “not mentally competent,” or if they lacked the “moral qualifications...essential to a competent exercise of citizenship.”¹¹⁵ Proceeding logically from this position, allies chastised their fellow men keeping women

“politically on a level with the vilest criminal and the most driveling imbecile.”¹¹⁶ Male voters, allies argued, created those grounds for disqualification, and could therefore get rid of them if they so chose.

Allies also qualified citizen’s voting rights by his—or her—ownership of property, and payment of taxes. This position had roots in western history, with allies beginning at “wealthy landowners first [wringing] the ballot from their sovereign” and then “men without property” gaining suffrage alongside landowners.¹¹⁷ Allies noted that women were “large owners of property in their own right,” and needed “to protect their interests” and “their possessions through the exercise of the franchise”; this would give them control over “how the property may be disposed of.”¹¹⁸ This final piece was an allusion to taxes, and allies often explicitly clarified that “women...are required to pay taxes” or identified them as “women taxpayers.”¹¹⁹ Women earned money and “turn[ed] it over to the state in taxation,” whereby they “contribute to the policing” and “the funds” “same as men.”¹²⁰ “If a woman pays taxes,” one ally succinctly concluded, “she should vote on how that money is spent.”¹²¹

Tax, property, and education restrictions aside, male allies posited that men and women had equal standing to the right to vote. On a macro level, allies felt that “all classes of our people have something of value to contribute to the making of laws,” and men and women were equal “before the laws of nature.”¹²² That meant that neither men nor women had “an exclusive monopoly on moral virtues,” and that both gender’s “moral standing should not affect [the] right [to vote].”¹²³ In the civic arena, that meant “work[ing] according to his or her place or power,” with “women hav[ing] as much to do as men” (especially “to win the war”).¹²⁴ This train of thought obliged allies to conclude that, if women did not have standing to vote, “men...ought not to have any right to vote,”

too.¹²⁵ Were male voters, then, to “take the right to vote away from men” when “women in voting make mistakes just as the men do”?¹²⁶ It would be far easier, allies concluded, to acknowledge that men and women had equal qualifications (within otherwise acceptable bounds) to vote.

Despite this, allies accepted that men were the archetypical voters with few disrupting this association. Allies reminded their fellow men that “you...didn’t always have the vote”—that “Anglo-Saxon men...grovelled and lied and slaughtered and perished for a thousand years” to win it.¹²⁷ Now, though, “the polling booth is [men’s] castle,” and men “hold our right to the ballot sacred” because it “gives him a little bit of the personal sacredness of a sovereign.”¹²⁸ As these examples reflect, when allies spoke of “voters” they conveyed that “man [had] a monopoly of the right to vote.”¹²⁹ A select few allies, though, questioned “who has said to [man] that he is by nature the superior,” “who gave [man] the right to grant [suffrage] to the women or to withhold it,” and “who gave [man] authority to say that the women do not want it?”¹³⁰ Unfortunately, these important questions were rarely answered, and most allies uncritically accepted the male voter paradigm.

Allies allowed, though, that women had the potential to be exceptional voters. As evidence, they assigned electoral importance to traits they associated with women. Women’s practicality, for example, “will show” “whenever the responsibility of being a voter is accorded to [them],” as would their interest in political affairs, “their moral sense,” and their “tenderness” and “philosophy.”¹³¹ Whereas some allies doubted that women had the education to be citizens, others praised women’s intelligence as “far superior to that of many of our voters” and certainly enough “to take sufficient interest in the affairs of government.”¹³² Allies also noted women “ma[king] her place in the arts,”

“the economic world,” “the home,” and “the church,” and cited these as evidence that she would “make her place in the political world.”¹³³ Finally, male allies looked to states where women could vote for evidence that they “notably improved political life.”¹³⁴ In equal suffrage states, “more women than men vote[d],” “election frauds [were] much rarer among women,” and parties were “impelled...to include in their program and platform humanitarian projects and moral issues.”¹³⁵ In these states, women voters were “practically speaking, nonpartisan,” and “exercised their right of suffrage as intelligently as did the men” with “as clear an understanding as the men of the issues.”¹³⁶ Based on these assessments, allies projected that women would “vote for...righteous measures” and “take politics out of politics.”¹³⁷ These hyperbolic assessments, coupled with allies repetition of the male-voter archetype, could reassure male voters that women would tend to government without men losing their civic centrality.

Such reassurance often took the form of housekeeping allusions with allies locating women within in the civic house. Women’s role was, metaphorically, the same as “in an orderly conducted home,” with “the State being, in effect, but a larger family.”¹³⁸ Women were in charge of “public housekeeping” or “housecleaning,” which meant “purifying” and “clean[ing] up some of the graft.”¹³⁹ Alternatively, voters were comparable to housewives and legislators to hired help: “the prudent housewife does not part with control over the cook and the kitchen,” but rather keeps playing an active role in maintaining the home.¹⁴⁰

Men played the most active role in civic affairs, though, because they alone had the power to vote. Historically, “men took suffrage”—“usurped” it, argued more radical allies—giving them “say whether woman shall have the vote.”¹⁴¹ Because men “now exclusively exercise [suffrage],” “women cannot win this fight alone” and needed men to

“come to the rescue” and “[carry] the voices of the women...right into the polling booth.”¹⁴² Allies said equal suffrage “can only be answered by the men voters” who could “demand equal suffrage legislation” because a demand “from a man just bears a little bit of relation to a threat”: men’s votes could “make and unmake the executive, legislative and judicial agents.”¹⁴³ As voters, men also shouldered “the burden of the propagation of the equal suffrage idea” (even if the actual campaign was run by women).¹⁴⁴

Alternatively, allies abstracted men’s civic power as political power. Men, reasoned male allies, “practically control[led] politics” and thus “mediate[d] the process of change.”¹⁴⁵ More than simply voting, men “[were] stronger politically than women” and had the “power to raise money to circulate literature, to make speeches, and to campaign actively—to publicly “try the women’s case.”¹⁴⁶ Men could “stand together,” collectively raise their voices, and “find out” why an issue was not politically viable.¹⁴⁷

More often, though, male allies constructed men’s power over women in broad, abstract terms. Allies linked men’s influence to sexual power by arguing “men whose names would carry weight” must be “thoroughly aroused” or “fully aroused to this vital question.”¹⁴⁸ “Within the limits of man’s pleasure or man’s economic determination,” men might also “help,” “allow,” “consent,” or “give to” women, or they might “admit [them]” to specific social spheres.¹⁴⁹ Radical allies critically spun such constructions, suggesting that “men want the sense of power” over women, but this was a minority opinion.¹⁵⁰

It was not a minority opinion, though, that men’s leadership skills were questionable. Men “had ample time...to make laws,” but their laws were “for the most part poor.”¹⁵¹ “Partly through unintelligence, partly through unwillingness to impose self-

restraint,” male leaders “bow down and worship before the altar of red tape,” “refus[e] to tote up the pennies that might be saved,” and “make [deplorable] conditions possible.”¹⁵² In short, they were dangerously close to “overthrow[ing] what was been done by Washington and Lincoln.”¹⁵³ Allies took issues with “men’s sole control of the government”—the “go it alone” attitude that made for a “one-sided civilization.”¹⁵⁴ The “crooked men’s government” was a result of men’s “arrogant and careless” leadership which “[put] filth and mire in politics.”¹⁵⁵ Such leadership revealed “the failure of man’s political faculty” and his “[inability] to cope with the problems of government and society which at present confronts us.”¹⁵⁶ Allies’ harsh assessments of the very people whose support they needed depart from their typical strategy: reassure men of their continued centrality.

Yet allies’ departure could be a U-turn that underscored men’s power over women by questioning whether male leaders effectively looked after women. Women’s issues were “a peculiar, a special interest,” and it was “physically and morally impossible for man to feel as woman does.”¹⁵⁷ Women’s rights could therefore not be “left with entire safety” with male leaders because they were “as unfit to legislate for women as women alone would be unfit to legislate for men.”¹⁵⁸ Men “[had] been working for centuries” to adequately represent women but was never “so willing...that he is willing to go and pay her taxes for her,” or provide more than “a paltering relief.”¹⁵⁹ Such constructions presumed men were chivalrous and provided for women, faulting leaders who failed to put these traits into civic practice.

Such arguments also left an opening for male allies to construct women voters as anecdotes to poor male leaders. Women’s “indispensable assistance” and “competency...par excellence” would bring about “the moral resurrection of this city.”¹⁶⁰

Women would “tear down the flash standard which men have allowed” and “beat the freak legislation that men have placed on the statute books.”¹⁶¹ This work would begin at the ballot box, where women would take “men of immoral character” nominated by “machine politicians,” “quickly size [them] up,” and “hand [them] what is coming.”¹⁶² Savvy women voters “will not overlook things that men pardon” as they undertake to “[transform] our politics from a vicious end to an efficient means—from a cancer into an organ.”¹⁶³

Female suffragists were especially qualified to lead this transformation, but allies questioned whether women would ever want to lead. Suffragists had many worthy leadership qualities—they were “notable speakers and debaters,” “worthy of respect,” “self-sacrificing and public spirited,” and “determined”—which could “be set free for public service in other directions” once suffrage was won.¹⁶⁴ Suffragists had won offices in equal suffrage states and, even elsewhere, women had “the right to hold office” with “none of [the laws] disqualify[ing] women.”¹⁶⁵ But in equal suffrage states, allies noted that “women [disregard] the mere scramble for office,” “are not ambitious for office,” and “have refused to show the interest in office-holding.”¹⁶⁶ Allies hypothesized that elsewhere, women would not take “the bait of an office”—and even if they did, men did not have to vote for them if they were not “fitted for it.”¹⁶⁷ Reluctant men were thus assured of a final check on women’s civic advancement—a check that they still controlled.

If suffrage activism made women potential leaders, it made male allies virtuous citizens. Their work on behalf of votes for women made them “honest,” “intelligent,” “right-thinking,” “sane,” and “sensible.”¹⁶⁸ Allies were also optimally moral—“just,” “true,” “good,” “fair-minded,” “clean-souled men,” and valorous.¹⁶⁹ Yet even with all

this moral capacity, they were capable of “drain[ing the suffrage debate] of sentiment, and hitch[ing it] up into some sort of working contact with reality.”¹⁷⁰ In short, their work for suffrage made them exactly the kind of citizens that anchor a government.

Male anti-suffragists’ opposition to suffrage, in turn, made them poor citizens. Allies classified “condescendingly opposing woman suffrage” as grounds itself for bad citizenship, but elaborated male antis’ other civically dangerous qualities.¹⁷¹ Male antis shared *feelings* rather than made *arguments*, and hung to “preconceived opinions...and customs.”¹⁷² Denying women voting rights may have made sense years earlier, allies argued, but now “any one suggested the sex basis as a voting qualification, he would be greeted with as much laughter.”¹⁷³ When it came to suffrage, they were “bigoted,” “blinded by prejudice” and “form[ed] their opinions...upon hearsay.”¹⁷⁴ Worst of all, they were taking away other peoples’ citizenship and standing in “the [way] of the people.”¹⁷⁵ These were not desirable qualities in citizens, to say the least. Male antis were “judicially blinded” to the point that they were fighting “accomplished fact” and, “as surely as the sun will rise tomorrow,” equal suffrage was “but a short distance” off.¹⁷⁶

Upon this already-negative portrayal, allies added another layer: male antis were agents—or pawns—of civically-dangerous interests. “Every crooked and evil influence”—“the ward politician,” the corporations, the brothel keepers, the “white slavers,” “the organization, the machine or the ring”— fought women’s suffrage together in a fight “financed and organized” “by the full weight of the liquor interests.”¹⁷⁷ These collective interests were not just suffrage opponents, but actually “foes of democracy,” “smug and respectable tyrants of political power” who were fundamentally “opposed to a cleaning up of the community morally and physically.”¹⁷⁸ Because America was a democracy, though, these interests needed to “have the men rounded up”—to “control”

voters—who in turn could be “instrumental in bringing about” favorable political circumstances.¹⁷⁹ Men “were not really self-governing,” allies concluded, leaving the degree to which they were knowing “agents” open to debate.¹⁸⁰

Once again, allies turned to women to, in lieu of men, fight those same civically-dangerous interests—liquor most particularly. Allies believed women voters would “vot[e] liquor out” or, in dry states, “forestall forever the return of the saloon.”¹⁸¹ Women were also “bitterly opposed” to the brothel and would fight brothels as they fought greedy corporations and lawlessness.¹⁸² By constructing women voters as fighters against these civically-dangerous interests, allies took the burden off men to fight them—or to eliminate them from individual daily life.

Allies thus constructed “activist”—or “leader,” “voter,” or “citizen,” for that matter—to lighten any man’s burden while keeping men central in civic affairs. Allies did not encourage male activists, leaders, and voters to change their own civic behavior in any way but one: supporting women’s suffrage. If they made just that one slight change, they would be civically virtuous *and* women could take care of whatever unpleasant changes needed to happen. Best yet, supporting suffrage easily fit within a well-established framework of citizenship and a historical trajectory of voting rights. All that allies needed to do, then, was reassure men that they would remain gatekeepers, and that women voters would remain in-check.

National Identity: “If we be indeed democrats and wish to lead the world to democracy...”

Americans, both men and women, needed reassurance about their national identity in light of the destabilizing, destructive world war. By naming the stakes—to make the world “safe for democracy”—President Wilson placed one of America’s core principles at the heart of its participation. America’s delayed entry, then, called into question whether it was *truly* a defender of democracy, and where it landed within the world more generally. As women sacrificed significantly for the war effort, this discussion of American identity bled into the suffrage debate.

Allies engaged by reassuring male voters that Americans were still philosophical world leaders—but that those philosophies naturally encompassed suffrage. America’s “origin...in aspirations for the deepest sort of liberty” meant that “taxation without representation was tyranny.”¹⁸³ If America was to adequately model liberty for the world, then, it needed to extend suffrage to (at least) women taxpayers. But other countries also drew inspiration from “the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence,” which said “no class of human beings has a right to the exclusive usurpation” of “the ‘right’ to govern ourselves by our own votes.”¹⁸⁴ It followed, said allies, that, to remain fully consistent and retain America’s model philosophies, male voters need to “stand forth, ready with the blood of [their] courage, liberty and democracy”; and “prove...that the blood of [their] forefathers has not congealed.”¹⁸⁵ They needed, in short, to pass equal suffrage if “this country...[is] going to reach the light we ought to reach.”¹⁸⁶

Equal suffrage was also an example of Americans’ generosity, which allies often discussed in terms of Americans’ wealth. “Few nations have done more than we,” allies felt, and America’s “untiring accomplishment” had amassed enough wealth to “easily

feed ten times [the population].”¹⁸⁷ Americans could have stayed neutral but, “worried about our respectability,” they instead “voted to consecrate every dollar of [their] wealth and every drop of [their] blood to the cause of human freedom.”¹⁸⁸ As part of that consecration, Americans—“the hope of humanity”—“voluntarily assisted to supply the suffering peoples of the world” as part of the war effort.¹⁸⁹ That generosity was also reflected in domestic policies, which secur[ed] to all [American] citizens an opportunity for economic well-being” and punished those who “invade[d] or destroy[ed] the prosperity and happiness of the other fellow.”¹⁹⁰ When discussions of generosity turned to suffrage, allies argued that “[men] of the United States...are the most generous in every attitude” toward women.¹⁹¹ More often, though, allies recast generosity as “gallantry and chivalry” in challenging their countrymen to “grant women citizenship” “for the credit of American civilization.”¹⁹²

But were American women gaining citizenship in a *republic* or a *democracy*? Allies who argued the latter dubbed America “the great, powerful, famous Democracy of the West” and Americans “natural-born democrat[s].”¹⁹³ Allies called these natural-born (male) democrats to act: they needed to “show the world...that they are fighting for democracy because they believe it,” and that they would fight for it “until the last breath of hope is gone out of us.”¹⁹⁴ That was a domestic fight, too, against “unjust and unrighteous laws which deny to woman the right to go to the polls”—a fight that boiled down to, “are you in favor of democracy or are you not?”¹⁹⁵ As these examples show, allies seldom defined “democracy” structurally or philosophically; at best, they generalized in phrases such as “carrying out the popular will” or “letting every human being have the power of protection in its own hands.”¹⁹⁶

Allies who constructed America as a republic focused on the representation process. America's republic kept government "as far removed as possible from control by the majority," requiring citizens "to express themselves" through "the right to the ballot" so that representatives might "carry out the will of the people."¹⁹⁷ But to the extent that citizens did not have that right, they could not be represented. Allies made this point by quantifying how "partial" a republic America was: men could not vote for "one-third of the federal government," "five or ten per cent. [sic] of the voters" do not vote, and "one-half of the intelligence, one-half of the ability" was not allowed to vote.¹⁹⁸ That "one-half" meant "women," and allies railed against the "old-fashioned masculine pretense at representative government" which only "represent[ed]...the man or male caste."¹⁹⁹ Such deficient representation was counter to "the purpose of this Republic."²⁰⁰

Whether allies constructed America as a democracy or as a republic, though, they agreed that Americans were committed to government by the people. Allies posited that America "place[d] the government in the hands of the people" and gave those people "equal political powers," so that "all those who have a stake or hazard in the government...share in the management of its affairs."²⁰¹ This premise was settled with one open question: who were "the people"? To allies, "the fullest, freest, most responsible" answer to that question was "not half the people, nor the male people, nor the propertied people, but the people"—*all* the people.²⁰² "The exclusion of women" undercut republican claims, rendered "[Americans'] democratic pretensions...pure hypocrisy," and made America a "sex oligarchy."²⁰³ If America did not enact a government in which "the average man and the average woman" wield "equal rights" from "equal footing," "not only our democracy but civilization itself will perish."²⁰⁴

Americans were also, allies argued, committed to deliberation. “Nations of the world” did not “classify” Americans as “a narrow-minded people,” but rather a people who provided a “sympathetic hearing” to all issues.²⁰⁵ Political questions became “social questions” in which “a full, open, and fair hearing” “[gave] attention to” matters bearing upon the people.²⁰⁶ Allies offered their position on these questions while, simultaneously, constructing Americans as proponents of deliberative democracy; this gently shifted the burden to “those who...maintain that women ought to remain unenfranchised.”²⁰⁷

Those opponents, allies argued, kept suffrage from women whose extraordinary patriotism made them incredibly deserving. Allies increasingly identified women as “patriotic” due to their war service but that identifier also appeared earlier—in testimony to the 1912 House Judiciary committee, for example, that claimed “the world has never enfranchised as patriotic a class of people as the American women...”²⁰⁸ Women’s patriotism stemmed from their loyalty, heroism, “[interest] in the problems and events of this nation,” “serv[ice to] the nation,” and “aspiration for the future of the land.”²⁰⁹ Such patriotism would “benefit...the nation” more if channeled through votes, and would make “a great contribution” in moral, political, and intellectual dimensions.²¹⁰ While these were hypothetical outcomes, women “ha[ve] proven [themselves] equal to every responsibility,” and their willingness “to hazard all in behalf of country” made them “as indispensable to the republic’s life as the men.”²¹¹ Allies bluntly concluded that “[women were] the inspiration of [American] life,” and that withholding the vote from them “[was] un-American for us.”²¹²

As these examples encapsulate, allies had to construct American identity in relation to World War I, but they deftly linked national identity to suffrage at the same time. Suffragists sought a significant change in American political life while the country

was on edge about its place in the world, and its commitment to its foundational ideals. Allies could alleviate those concerns, reconstruct American identity and, in the process, locate support for suffrage within America's reconstructed sense of itself.

Family Identity: “Equal suffrage has developed better wives and better mothers”

Family identities were also shifting at this time, and allies (re)constructed those identities so that suffrage would not be further destabilizing. Rather than dwelling on men's family roles (father, husband) they focused almost exclusively on women's family roles (mothers, wives, sisters, daughters)—and on mothers most of all. Allies walked a fine line between acknowledging cultural changes and interpreting those changes as transformative. When linking women's family identities directly to suffrage, allies especially turned to traditional family roles—roles that centered men within families.

First, though, they centered families within American political culture. Families were “the foundation of the Republic,” “the foundation of the State,” or something similar, and the “the welfare of the commonwealth rest[ed] fundamentally upon the high character of the average family.”²¹³ A healthy family and a healthy state were similar, allies suggested, in how each “manag[ed] its affairs,” with “American men help[ing] American women”—“equal cooperation” the “foundational stone” of both “a just government” and a “perfect family.”²¹⁴ America needed politicians to “take their families into the conduct of the government,” and it needed families to “[sit] around the table, discussing...some public measure” “of common interest for father, mother and

children.”²¹⁵ Allies envisioned an America in which politics was a family activity, with families going to vote together, debating each other, and even disagreeing.

Allies took the position that political differences within a family were not unhealthy. This was primarily an answer to antis who argued that women would not want to disagree with their husbands or fathers, or that they would be pressured to vote the same way. Allies conceded that, “with the broadening of woman’s sphere...many women have interests which are not concerned with the family.”²¹⁶ But allies countered that, “Any man who would quarrel with his wife for holding a different political opinion should be disfranchised,” and they also “refuse[d] to believe men are so domineering or inconsiderate.”²¹⁷ Allies in equal suffrage states confirmed that they “[had] never heard of any ill feeling between husband and wife over political questions” and reasoned that “if politics should break up some homes, there are some miserable homes...had better be broken up.”²¹⁸ Unless male voters saw *their* homes as miserable, logic would place them in the other camp—with those men who wanted women enfranchised.

Allies located men at the heads of their families, in large part through their financial responsibilities. This position seemed detached from changing economic realities, but allies papered over that discrepancy with a conditional, predictive tone. They held that “the father *should* be able to command sufficient salary” and “*should* be the real wage earner” (emphases added).²¹⁹ Men’s “duty and pleasure to pay for [things]” meant fathers had a duty “to support the mother and children,” or “wives and families.”²²⁰ That duty, or the “need” for “men to...make the homes,” could exist irrespective of men’s actual ability to fulfill it.²²¹ This deft rhetorical move enabled allies to invoke the fading ideal without actually confronting the altered historical circumstances causing it to fade.

While men provided financial stability, women were often synonymized with “mothers” and assigned primary authority over home and children. Allies located all women somewhere on a motherhood spectrum, “actual or possible”: motherhood was a “feminine interest,” a “womanly” attribute, and “[women’s] sacred office.”²²² Male allies tied men’s biological “need [for] women to bear children” to women’s socialization as “the home maker[s].”²²³ That linkage meant women inherently “[knew] best the problems of the home”: how to “please the men,” tend to the “financial affairs of the family,” and oversee “the lives and health of the children.”²²⁴ As I demonstrate here, allies spent an incredible amount of rhetorical energy constructing the identity of “mothers” and defining their behaviors.

Allies constructed mothers as the very foundation of society. One male ally captured the degree of their importance by arguing that children actually had a “right to be mothered.”²²⁵ Mothers were “the most sacred thing on earth,” allies believed, and “a part of the sovereign power.”²²⁶ Beyond their spiritual value, they were also society’s “productive faculty personified,” and their products—children raised “in ideas of truth and justice and morality”—were, “from the point of view of the race...the most important thing any one can do.”²²⁷ Such service “entitle[d] [women] to...citizenship”; her capacity to “do appreciable good to the government” was tied to her mothering, allies reasoned, as was the nation’s capacity to “ris[e] higher than the motherhood of that nation.”²²⁸ The nation was limited by “the sacred cornerstone of society and government”—motherhood—which allies argued was “of infinitely more worth to society than any possible service the woman could render...”²²⁹ For tangible examples of mothers’ infinite worth, allies invoked their own “sainted” mothers, “to whom [they] owe[d] everything.”²³⁰ Through such examples, allies demonstrated their deep personal

commitment to a conservative motherhood ideal—and made a decent bet that even opponents would not insult someone’s mother.

Why, indeed, would suffrage opponents insult people who, faced with destructive modernity, executed the important task of raising children so comprehensively? Children were a mother’s “passionate interests,” “the dearest and most important thing[s] in [her] life,” and the recipients of “her nerve force and vital energy.”²³¹ Her “responsib[ility] for the care and protection of the young” would “make her more careful in voting for the government” which, in turn, would instill comparable “responsibility...[for] civic progress.”²³² Mothers would “go into the factories, the mines, the sweatshops and the streets” for “the sake of the little children,” and “employ every weapon” against “the [forces] that [ruin] her child.”²³³ Mothers, allies concluded, needed another weapon—the vote—to more fully “care [for] the body, mind and soul of a child.”²³⁴ This need was especially stark in the shadow of World War 1, since mothers “furnish[ed] the soldiers” to “be slaughtered by savage hell-like war.”²³⁵ So long as those soldiers “[bore] the arms of the republic,” their mothers would work tirelessly to “[settle] international disputes [and] make the present conflict the world’s last war”—but only with the ballot.²³⁶

Allies also identified mothers as the source of the next generation of citizens’ values. The country, allies posited, needed “noble sons and high-souled daughters” “to make good citizens.”²³⁷ Mothers’ influence “flowed directly from the great mother-soul into the life of her child,” enabling her to “direct the family interest along the line of social questions” and “the lines of good citizenship.”²³⁸ This raised a crucial question, which male suffragists posed to undecided male voters: if mothers are blocked from “all phases of our modern government,” “who is to arm the young with efficient virtue?”²³⁹

Raising virtuous citizens was so decisively a mother's responsibility that "the woman who in fact takes no interest in public affairs is unfit for mothering," allies concluded.²⁴⁰

Unsurprisingly, then, male allies advocated both celebration and defense of motherhood. Allies believed society depended on its "free, noble motherhood," and that required "men...[to] hold the mother sex in tender, reverent regard."²⁴¹ Allies turned to passive formations to argue that "motherhood must be protected"—"special protections" that ameliorated bad "[working] conditions that corrupt health and motherhood."²⁴² Allies again invoked the disappearing ideal as they urged men to "think of those little children whose mothers have to be away to work and who don't have any meals."²⁴³ If only they had the ballot, allies implied, mothers could stay home to raise the children and cook the meals.

When allies did not single out mothers, they lumped them with wives and sisters—all three identities, side-by-side, in the same sentences. This rhetorical move effectively collapsed differences between the three identities, creating a unified—necessarily broad—mother/wife/sister (MWS) identity. MWSs, for example, were wrongly unequal in their political rights. Allies "recognize[d] our mothers and wives and our sisters...as American citizens," and there was "no principle in justice or equity that bestows upon [men] the right to make laws to govern [them] without their consent."²⁴⁴ By claiming "the same rights [men] claim for themselves," MWSs overcame "the old world barrier of political inferiority" and "fulfill[ing] the functions of wife, mother, sister."²⁴⁵ Even though they collapsed MWSs into one, "the effort to give our mothers, wives and sisters the right of voting" was highly personal: "it is *our* mothers and wives and sisters...who are going to vote," allies reassured (emphasis in original).²⁴⁶ This

personalization for men—and synonymizing of women’s identities—created space for undecided men to see their personal political influence multiplied.

Men could also count on MWSs to be valuable voters. Men relied on MWSs “in times of trial, sickness and tribulation,” and allies “[had] faith... that [MWSs] would not vote for anything which would be detrimental to society.”²⁴⁷ “We need our wives’, our sisters’, and our mothers’ votes and assistance,” argued allies, fully confident that MWSs would have “an elevating influence on government.”²⁴⁸ Allies wanted to see “the motherly woman, the woman who is a good sister and a good wife...in power”—and men who did not were “afraid of her power and influence,” or victims of “mental perversion and degeneracy.”²⁴⁹ Surely, undecided men would not want to self-identify as mentally perverse degenerates.

When allies did not include “sisters” they either synonymized wives and mothers or presumed that wives *were* mothers. Wives and mothers shared “special interests” that “qualified [them] both mentally and morally” to vote.²⁵⁰ “The wife and mother” was “the highest type of the woman” to allies—“no better...in the world”—and, in equal suffrage states, voting rights actually “developed better wives and better mothers,” or at least kept them “as good...as before.”²⁵¹ Allies reassured men that “a married woman’s heart [would] always [be] in her children and her home,” that she would always prioritize “the family welfare,” and that “tremendous lot remains to be done... before women who are wives and mothers will be set free to take their part in the work of the outside world.”²⁵² Such constructions enabled allies to acknowledge that “[the housewife] ideal ha[d] become impossible” while still holding it up as an ideal.²⁵³

When they did not collapse the line between wives and mothers, male allies characterized wives in two contrasting ways. First, and most often, male allies described

wives as assets to their husbands—valuable companions who made their husbands better. “Companion” meant “cheering [husbands] in difficulties, administering kindness, usefulness and love”; “be[ing] able to understand [husbands’] point of view on all matters”; and being educated.²⁵⁴ Allies believed that all men would “concede that their success is due largely to the loyalty of their wives,” who “cultivat[ed] a certain gentle humility and good sense in their husbands.”²⁵⁵ Voting, allies argued, would “alter the character and status of women in society,” push them to be “better informed,” and make them “better companions” and “better wives.”²⁵⁶ Allies further noted that “women have always been what man wanted them to be,” including a demonstrated willingness “to suit his changing ideals.”²⁵⁷ Reluctant men encountering this sentiment might rest assured that they could approve equal suffrage and remain a determining force over women.

But some male allies recognized that modernity was developing a second trait in wives: power and agency, independent of men. Wives, these allies argued, were no longer “the mere appendages of men”: they now “settled by [themselves]” “the question of woman's sphere.”²⁵⁸ Rather than simply enlightened companions, they enjoyed a “full partnership” with the husbands “in home and national affairs.”²⁵⁹ A “happy and virtuous” partnership meant husbands did not “dictate [wives’] personal pursuits or personal happiness.”²⁶⁰ These allies also proposed that “woman should have more freedom in the selection of a husband,” and “that a woman who wants a divorce should have it for the asking.”²⁶¹ This position was not mainstream—not even among allies—but it reflects one (progressive) rhetorical path some allies trod as they processed modernity’s impact on their family identities.

Allies used that progressive construction more widely in connection to the next generation of women—daughters. Daughters, they ventured, “ought to rebel against [the

traditional mother role].”²⁶² More daughters were being educated than sons and, with “their minds...strengthened and broadened by modern discipline,” were eager to “to speak words of real power instead of cajolery.”²⁶³ But whether they wanted to “[seek] adventures,” “work in cotton mills,” or get involved in politics, allies proposed that daughters “should be allowed to do what they want to do.”²⁶⁴ This from the same rhetoric that constructed all women as mothers—what can be made of this discrepancy between how allies constructed daughters’ and mothers’ identities?

Daughters could absorb the forces of cultural change better than any other familiar identity. Casting daughters in such aspirational terms stirred men’s paternal feelings and adjoining those to equal suffrage pointed men to an action that could actualize those aspirations. Men might want *wives* who were deferential, or *mothers* completely preoccupied with their upbringing, but they did not want their daughters so limited. They might talk about sons but that would require them to grapple with the realities of a new economy, and war—forces that severely limited what their sons could become. (There is a noteworthy dearth of sons in male ally advocacy, and surprisingly little about fathers and husbands.) Dwelling upon changes to fathers and husbands, too, came too close to home and reminded their male audience of their new, reduced place in society. The solution, then, was to avoid talking about modernity, displace most necessary discussion to daughters, and reassure men that they would remain central to wives and mothers.

Class Identity: “Sex is not, as it never was, the line of class cleavage”

Modernity affected more than just family identities: it simultaneously transformed class identities. Women entered the economy (especially as a function of World War I), upending labor markets and production norms. As with family identities, the changes to class identities were too obvious to ignore. Male allies similarly responded by avoiding the changes to *their* class identity, and engaging changes to *women's* class identity instead—but they did something else. They stitched women and men together within classes—propertied and laboring, for lack of clearer terms—and articulated how members of the laboring class might work together. Unlike so many other identities constructed by male allies, the laboring class lacked gender gradations, with men and women cooperating around shared economic interests on equal footing.

That equal footing had at its root women's shift from being homemakers to being wage earners. Allies noted that “less favored” women were necessarily “engaged in almost every industry”: “creeping across the icy floors of office buildings...; toiling in mills and factories ten and twelve hours a day; [or] plying swift needles in fire-traps” among other occupations.²⁶⁵ Industrial growth had “take[n] women from the home out into the world,” allies bemoaned, and women's employment now affected “our whole industrial system”; “[men] may not like the idea,” but “it is too late to turn them back.”²⁶⁶ All men could do was figure out how to make “unjust economic conditions” “compatible with the physical and moral welfare of women” so that women were not “working in circumstances corruptive of health and motherhood.”²⁶⁷ Men could not ensure this alone, though, and needed to “pay this price”—extending suffrage to women—so women might “protect her interests as a wage earner.”²⁶⁸

Not all women were wage earners, and male allies particularized female workers as a subsection—but sizable subsection—of women. Allies had not bothered to quantify how many women were wives or mothers, but “one-fifth of the female population of the United States is employed in shops, factories, and similar establishments,” “working in conditions corruptive of health and motherhood.”²⁶⁹ That meant “millions of women engaged in labor”—perhaps “six million,” “nine million,” or “10,000,000”—but “multitudes,” and enough that if female workers struck, “practically every important activity from the railroads down would come close to a standstill.”²⁷⁰ It was not *all* women but specifically “those working women”—“the bread-winning portion of the sex” “who earn their livelihood” and “struggl[e] for a living”—“whose lives require the safe guard of the ballot.”²⁷¹ By spotlighting just “the women driven into the wage earning class,” allies created a bridge to men in the wage-earning class while leaving symbolic space for women to still occupy the traditional home-making role.²⁷²

If women could not fill this role, though, allies associated them with three specific non-laboring occupations—clerk, nurse, and teacher. “Women clerks” “discharge[d] official duties in some of our most important offices,” public as well as private.²⁷³ Far away from such offices, women “[took] an important part in war as nurses,” “heal[ing] war’s bruised and broken victims” and “bringing comfort and cheer and hope.”²⁷⁴ Even before the war, though, women had “elevated the calling” by not just “nurs[ing] the wounded,” but also “giving that encouragement that has caused their soul to shake.”²⁷⁵ While nurses tended to the soul and body, teachers—“nearly nine-tenths” of whom were women—“impart[ed knowledge] to the minds of children.”²⁷⁶ This influence on children led allies to compare “the mothers and teachers” since both “present[ed] needs and present conditions” to future citizens.²⁷⁷ So prevalent were “women teachers” that allies

defaulted to female pronouns when discussing teachers (e.g. “...giving value for her services than the public school teacher”).²⁷⁸ Allies clarified that “most of those who are not married” filled one of these three jobs, which again put primacy on a social arrangement that (largely) subordinated women.²⁷⁹

When not specifying professions, though, male allies generalized female workers as laboring under deplorable conditions. Allies positioned “girls in factories” as lacking “economic shelter” and “engulfed in dismal and degrading drudgeries” so consuming that female workers had “little room for thought of social sorrows.”²⁸⁰ Female workers endure this “agony of obscure and unremunerated toil” to gain “economic independence,” but earn “the reward of a parasite.”²⁸¹ If “parasite” seems extreme, allies also identified female workers as “more or less defenseless” “chattel” or “wage slaves”—or just “slaves”—who lived “[lives] of drudgery and poverty.”²⁸² Female workers were also “weaker, poorer, [and] less organized than the men” because they could not “represent [themselves]” and “enforce fair treatment, labor legislation, and decent rules” by voting.²⁸³ The extremity of allies’ descriptions—“drudgery” and “toil” appear again and again—is not noticeably *more* extreme as applied to female workers than male workers.

Allies also generalize and homogenize the interests of the laboring class versus the propertied class. “The line of class cleavage,” allies noted, was not gender, and male and female laborers “alike in their human nature... and alike in potential ability to perform most kinds of the world's work.”²⁸⁴ Allies juxtaposed this laboring class—“the people favoring human rights” and seeking to “be politically as well as industrially free”—with “organized corruption favoring property rights” and “engross[ing] the greater part of the wealth created by the many.”²⁸⁵ This “upper strata” was “naturally and inevitably inferior,” but nonetheless bore “responsibility for what the lower strata of

humanity does” because that lower strata “depende[d] on them for support.”²⁸⁶ Whether upper or lower strata, though, allies avoided gender when defining these broad class identities.

Allies did not avoid gender, though, when drubbing upper-class women—who were rarely industrialists but often anti-suffragists. Allies defined the propertied class, but wealthy women—who “who fly from one bridge table to another,” “wasting time at bridge parties”—were “the leisure class.”²⁸⁷ Allies often used “time to play bridge” to disparage wealthy female antis, but also noted that “women who weep over Ibsen, study Browning, and are...everywhere but at home...are most eloquent in crying that we should leave good sweet woman alone to her home.”²⁸⁸ These women of “society, literary clubs or ping-pong” were currently “not serious about public events,” but once they could vote “you may not be able to keep [them] from their bridge parties to hear about politics.”²⁸⁹ Male allies did not hold out hope, though, that these propertied women would ever be able to understand the experience of those who “need the vote to protect their homes and children,” or their labor interests.²⁹⁰

The propertied class, whether men or women, was politically protected against the weak, laboring class. Allies turned to history to support this claim, recalling how “the class with leisure and wealth assumed the control of the government” because “property was evidently afraid of manhood suffrage.”²⁹¹ When suffrage expanded to all men, the propertied class knew “a hostile vote...[can] be deftly counted out” as “flexible laws and flexible lawyers” enabled those with property to “demand what they want from their representative.”²⁹² Allies argued the propertied class could also circumvent mainstream channels and “buy both liberty and legislation”—or if necessary “submit to...the evils of bad government,” only to be saved from actual harm.²⁹³ In contrast, the laboring class

included “the members of the community who stand most in need of government protection,” and yet its influence was “practically a nullity” because female laborers could not vote.²⁹⁴ This left “the wage-earner in a democracy” without “a complete measure of protection,” with property owners using financial and political power “to protect their property.”²⁹⁵

Allies, then, constructed the laboring class as also sharing class interest that could produce powerful collective action. Allies occasionally made this point directly to “the ordinary man,” arguing that “the women are as helpless as the rest of us” and that it was only “the ballot back of laboring men that, used by them collectively, gives force to [their] demands.”²⁹⁶ Allies identified laboring men as supporting “suffrage for the women” but also noted that the suffrage movement united all “working people...who believe in social reorganization” and “the abolition of classes.”²⁹⁷ Radical male allies identified women by their “proletarian character”; or their membership in “[the] subject class,” “the masses,” or “the laboring population.”²⁹⁸ *Especially* radical allies observed that “constant appeal to racial prejudice” sought to keep black people as “wage slave[s]...and, along with [them], the rest of [their] class.”²⁹⁹ Such recognition—that shared class interests crossed not just gender, but racial lines, too—held within it the potential for broad, significant political action.

Egalitarianism, though, was but a piece of how allies constructed class identity, which was itself a lesser of the six fields of identity within male ally advocacy. The suffrage amendment extended voting rights to women, so allies focused on civic and gender identities; this seems logical. But such a view ignores why class identity was one of the six major fields in the first place: women needed to vote because of the economic changes that placed them in the laboring class and created significant class-rooted needs.

By emphasizing the identities at the heart of the bill, allies missed an opportunity to boost the egalitarianism they constructed in class identity. A male ally advocacy that emphasized class identity might have produced a different political climate in which greater equity vested in both class identities and gender identities.

Gender Identity: “If we men want moral courage in our politics we must have our women”

Allies construction of gender identity was, unfortunately, not as egalitarian as their construction of class identity. Male suffragists defined masculine gender identity but, other than the war, largely downplayed the significant cultural forces that were shifting that identity. Female gender identity bore the burden of these changes, but male allies soften the burden by redefining women with traditional traits. The result was a shallow construction of male identity and an erratic construction of female identity, resulting in a tepid sense that gender relations would stay more or less consistent should women gain the right to vote.

Men, for instance, were and would remain chivalrous and just toward women. Male voters who remained undecided or supported equal suffrage were often described as “fair-minded,” “honest,” “good,” or “sincere.”³⁰⁰ These traits meant men had “a duty to [them]selves” to, “without a moment’s hesitation,” “offer their chairs to the standing lady,” “[treat] ladies with respect,” and “elevate and protect women.”³⁰¹ Men had an “intense willingness to do [things] for [women],” and whatever they did they did with “a sense of justice.”³⁰² Indeed, a man treating “a woman with complete justice” was “a lovely and beautiful thing,” reasoned allies.³⁰³

Allies also identified suffrage support as a core trait of chivalrous men. “Most men,” allies argued, acknowledged “that equal suffrage [was] right in principle,” and it “hurt [their] pride” that women should “have to beg and implore and campaign and make so many sacrifices” to gain suffrage.³⁰⁴ Instead, men should be inviting women “into the realm of intellectual power” and treating them “as equal and full citizens.”³⁰⁵ Chivalry was not about “personal mannerism,” proffered allies, but rather “political action” to validate “our women’s influence in the civic housekeeping” by “giv[ing] the right to the women without compelling them to make a struggle for it.”³⁰⁶ Chivalrous men could “[get] the question submitted to the voters” and campaign for it, which passed the responsibility to “men with red blood” to extend “chivalrous treatment” to women or not.³⁰⁷ Fragments such as these gave undecided men a clear choice: did they want to be chivalrous?

Since men were chivalrous, and chivalrous men supported suffrage, it followed that male anti-suffragists were both unchivalrous and of questionable masculinity. Such men “[had] no respect for [women]” and “shirked [their] duty,” “cast[ing] a foul blot on American manhood.”³⁰⁸ Male opponents behaved like “sultans in little monogamic harems”: treating women as if they were “deaf and deficient,” “dragging their wives around by the hair,” and generally behaving “as they would in a barroom.”³⁰⁹ “A relic of primitive barbarity,” this behavior signaled male antis’ “imagined superiority” and was “unworthy of a chivalrous, modern manhood.”³¹⁰ Men “normally are very chivalrous,” allies argued, but *these* men “[had] somehow fallen short of that respect and honor of womanhood...”³¹¹

That male allies used masculinity against their opponents is in part a reflection of how poorly some of them saw their fellow men. Men were unintelligent as if they “never

[got] beyond the eighth grade in school,” and were therefore “engulfed” in “ignorance” and “imperfect knowledge” about “the actual scheme of civilized life.”³¹² Men’s “political intelligence” was “crippled” by “agelong prejudices” such that they “could not answer [simple political questions].”³¹³ Men could also lack “good character”: they were slanderous, easily bribed, quick to rationalize their “favorite pleasures or vices,” and would overlook “a great corporation kill[ing] with impunity.”³¹⁴ Men could be “tyrannical”; “cunning”; or “an expression of brute force,” “brute power,” or “brute nature.”³¹⁵ Worst yet, men kept women “under mental and economic subjection,” “us[ing] their monopoly of the franchise” to “[debauch] her.”³¹⁶ These hyperbolic statements, delivered to audiences of the hyperbolized gender, invited men to dis-identify—to reject the premise and, internally, resolve to do better.

Less hyperbolically, male allies identified men as potential soldiers—and used that potential to decouple military service from suffrage rights. Allies’ answered opponents who argued that because men could serve, and only men could serve, only men should vote. Allies conceded that men were “war-makers” who, “with...splendid courage and achievement,” “fought and died...[for] the right of suffrage.”³¹⁷ They pointed out, though, that “there are large classes of men who are regarded as disqualified to fight” “by reason of age, or physical debility.”³¹⁸ If “the ability to fight [was] a necessary qualification for suffrage,” allies reasoned, men who “have not borne arms” would need to lose the right to vote.³¹⁹ This willingness to delineate an identity within an identity was notably distinct in a rhetoric built far more on generalization and totalization.

Allies generalized, for instance, that women generally aspired to be homemakers. (Recall that homemaking was important to mothers’ and wives’ identities—but allies further tied it to *women’s* gender identity.) The home was woman’s “province,” “place,”

“her natural place,” and “the sphere in which it has pleased men to place them.”³²⁰ In that space, women had “a greater sense of responsibility than man” for “the cleanliness of her house[,] the wholesomeness of the food,” and “the rearing of children.”³²¹ Homemaking was “woman’s duty and pleasure” and women were “foolish” if they thought “the vote will excuse them from...home duties.”³²² Even with the vote, allies reassured male voters, women would not “in any way [neglect] their home” and would “never cease” to love her home most of all.³²³

Given women’s love of her home, allies lamented that women could not stay in their homes. Women “ha[d] gone from the house to the factory and market,” “driven...into varied pursuits” and “out of their domestic channels of life.”³²⁴ “Keeping them in the confines of the home” was “not now [possible]” since “society” had “forced [eight million women] out of their homes into industry.”³²⁵ Whether or not women were workers, though, they needed the law “to look after [their] own home[s] and [their] children”—which meant that even homemaking women needed to go beyond “the four walls of an individual house.”³²⁶ As with others constructions of women’s family and civic identities, allies urged their fellow men to see women as longing to return to a domestic arrangement in which life was simpler and men were central.

World War I especially heightened that sentiment since the war drastically complicated women’s lives. Allies proposed that women “chiefly” shouldered “the burdens and miseries of war,” and even “suffer[ed] more than man” as the war “[came] home with all its grim and terrible reality.”³²⁷ Women suffered the loss of brothers, husbands, and sons “long after the war is over.”³²⁸ “While men are in the trenches,” “women [did] the work of men”: they “[kept] the shops and schools and work in

factories,” and fulfilled “instrumentalities” for the government.³²⁹ Allies thus dubbed women “partners...in this war,” whether or not they wished to be.³³⁰

And they might not wish to be because women’s nature was to be dependent, vulnerable, and retreating. “The great majority” of women, allies said, “shrink from publicity” and would prefer to be married, “quiet stay-at-home women.”³³¹ Allies constructed women through adjectives such as “subordinate,” “suppliant,” “dependent,” “subservient,” or “sheltered.”³³² These “caged butterfly[ies]” were content being “mute, passive spectators in the drama” rather than being “Mothers of a new [Revolution].”³³³ Allies proposed that this was partially because “[women were] the weaker of the sexes”—“subject to periodical disabilities” which allowed men to “ignore [their] plain rights”—and the “weaker physically woman is the more she needs the weapon of the ballot.”³³⁴ Some men “erect[ed] her enforced feebleness into a holy thing” but regardless, allies felt women “need[ed] a protector” and “depend[ed] on men for support.”³³⁵

A subset of male allies, however, felt that characterizing women in these terms limited their potential. Women’s faults were “the faults of a mind that has been cooped up,” “kept in beautiful, glass cases” and “subservient to the caprices and rude passions of the other sex.”³³⁶ Women were distracted from “the obligations of democracy” by “the foolish gossip of fashion pages,” which kept their “[subtle] and [clever]” minds at bay.³³⁷ These allies felt “it [was] intolerable” to “[restrict] woman’s moral vision” and “[expect her] to live in terms of relativity, in terms of dependence, in terms of complement.”³³⁸ Amidst a rhetoric that largely reinforced that dependence, though, such allies failed to shift the tone in this direction of deeper reform.

Even if uncommitted to this deeper reform, though, male allies acknowledged that women were becoming more intelligent. Modernity was “developing a new kind of

humanity” thanks to women’s “opportunity to be as well educated as men.”³³⁹ “The doll-type of woman” was giving way to “the New Woman” who was “the highest and most useful type of woman.”³⁴⁰ These women “[had] intelligence and ‘charm’” “quickening every task that they touched”; indeed, “the intelligence of the women of this country” was greater than “[any previous] time in history.”³⁴¹ Allies described women “pouring out of our institutions of learning” and “into business and the professions...of great importance.”³⁴² Women were “ferment[ing] new interests and ideas”—they were managing property, practicing law or medicine, and making “some of the greatest discoveries in the history of science”—all because “[men] [gave] them an education.”³⁴³ Women also “exhibit[ed] remarkable political acumen” which, paired with their being “well informed on public affairs,” suggested they might “increase the intelligent vote.”³⁴⁴ As “intelligent, self-supporting human being[s],” women would “discuss [political] problems intelligently” and open new capacity for the political system.³⁴⁵

Women were actually more politically savvy than men, male allies argued. At the very least, “[women] had the same zeal and earnestness and judgment that the men had,” and “common sense at least equal to that of men.”³⁴⁶ But women would “make a study of political conditions” and “learn political justice a great deal more quickly than did their men”—and “much more satisfactorily,” argued allies.³⁴⁷ Allies could find no “proof of [men’s] superior [political skills],” and ample evidence they needed “modern Joans of Arc” to achieve “righteousness in our political, civil and domestic life.”³⁴⁸ This particular choice is telling, though: even with these political skills, women remained in supporting rather than central political roles.

Women’s (newer) political acumen augmented their preexisting ability to protect or improve civilization. Allies cast women as distinctly “interested in the problems of

humanity,” “the uplifting of humanity,” the “glorification of humanity,” “the welfare of...all humanity,” and “justice in human affairs.”³⁴⁹ To accompany these interests, women also had “a surer instinct than men for [preserving] the truest human values” and “in all which tends toward human betterment” and progress.³⁵⁰ Given these instincts and interests, women were “not... so active in politics as they should be,” but their entrance to that field would “[mean] a better state, better conditions, better citizens and better homes.”³⁵¹ Just as “she has made good in the civilization,” women would “do their share in directing the war” and “manifestly minister to the well-being of society through government”; and, allies predicted, “the blessings and glory will follow.”³⁵²

Allies similarly argued that women protect the race but split over what exactly that meant. White allies saw “the race progress[ing] in proportion to its women,” as women set “the line of the general elevation of the race.”³⁵³ Women were not just a benchmark, though: they wanted to “[better] the race” and would therefore “not tolerate any legislation which would not better the race.”³⁵⁴ But African American allies saw in these references to “the race” an implicit defense of white superiority. “Women” typically meant “white women,” they argued, and white women defended their race just as white men. White women “[stayed] silent on the lynching of colored people in the South” and behaved with “prejudice and petty meanness toward Negroes.”³⁵⁵ These allies agreed that women protected “the race”—they just knew that did not include them.

Allies agreed, though, that women were industrious. Industriousness might be newly apparent, but conservation “[was] the very mood and temper of women” as well as “the chief business” of society.³⁵⁶ In the contemporary industrial economy women were “economist-reformer[s],” conserving both “the funds of the family” and the funds of the nation.³⁵⁷ “With ardor and efficiency,” women “[applied their] genius for organization”

to “offices,” “banks,” “counting houses,” “the farm,” and “inebriate husbands.”³⁵⁸ Once again, allies constructed women as compensating for men’s failures without the related argument that men needed to change.

Women’s ability to foster peace similarly answered men’s war-making. Women could “convert this earth into a happy home for the human race” and ensure “our safety” better “than a whole squad of police.”³⁵⁹ Allies constructed women as “war-breakers” and “peace-makers,” capable of “abolish[ing] war and its villainies.”³⁶⁰ Because “they [knew] the cost of war better than men do,” women would “make the world safe for peace” if given the right to vote.³⁶¹ This peace-making identity was particularly poignant in the shadow of World War I and enabled allies to sidestep or reduce men’s responsibility for the conflict.

While women were peacemakers, their policy interests stayed geographically closer to home: municipal affairs. Allies noted women’s “splendid work throughout the United States for better municipalities” that were “newer [and] cleaner”—“centres of sweetness and light, as well as of activity and strength.”³⁶² This work was possible because many municipalities had enfranchised women, recognizing that they had “an even greater interest than [men]” in “street cleaning, doing away with obnoxious advertising, ...the housing problem, the question of playgrounds and parks.”³⁶³ Women could be counted on to further the “city beautiful” movement in their communities, and “[would] not refuse a library when it is offered to the city.”³⁶⁴

Within this municipal realm, allies emphasized women’s interest in education, public health, and “morals.” In the same way they connected mothers, wives, and sisters, allies often spoke of “sanitation, morals, and education” in some combination.³⁶⁵ Sometimes allies referenced spaces needing women’s attention (“school, churches,

theaters, water supply, the streets and the places of amusement”), while other times they just spoke of “education, public cleanliness, [and] public morals” as “[women’s] interests.”³⁶⁶ These areas were most relevant to women “because they realize how much these things mean for the happiness and welfare of the home”: “If there is lack of sanitation, their children suffer and die. If public morals are not guarded the evils fall upon their sons.”³⁶⁷ Because ally advocacy synonymized women with mothers and homemakers, allies could easily class public education, health, and morals as both “motherhood on a large scale” and “matter[s] that [touch] the household.” Give women the ballot, allies argued, and they would produce “better school legislation and a better governed board of health”; they would “abate [smoke]” and tackle “the problems of housing.”³⁶⁸

To these issues, women would bring exceptional virtues and morals, allies said. Whether because “women are more educated” or their “clear moral instinct,” women could “be depended on to support a moral issue” or “things which are clean and honest and just.”³⁶⁹ Allies always located women “on the side of justice,” “righteousness,” and “the moral side of every question.”³⁷⁰ Women voters, then, “[could not] be betrayed to the forces of evil” “when a moral question is up for consideration”—and when it came to evaluating candidates, women would always “[pick] out a grafter.”³⁷¹

Women were actually far *more* moral and virtuous than men. Allies dubbed women “the better half” or “the best half of mankind,” and noted the female half had “more than 50 per cent of the moral energy of the community.”³⁷² Women were “superior to man” in “morals and civic interests” and “in point of character,” and “by far the most virtuous [and] most moral.”³⁷³ Women’s “moral righteousness and purer idea of honor” resulted in more “emotional sensibility” and a stronger “innate sense of justice” than

men.³⁷⁴ Their “moral courage,” too, made them “better prepared to meet things than men.”³⁷⁵ For these reasons, allies concluded that women should gain suffrage rights—and did not conclude that men should lose them. Undecided men could thus grant the premise without needing to reevaluate themselves or their individual places in political society.

Male allies had to concede, too, that not *all* women were optimally virtuous, but allies worked hard to downplay the impact of bad women. “[Women’s] ideals are *generally* higher,” but allies also noted a “vicious and criminal class among women” that was “comparatively very small” (emphasis added).³⁷⁶ Although women did not “commit crime to anywhere near the same extent” as men, there were “unfortunate women” who would “fain conceal” their “unhappy trade[s].”³⁷⁷ Then, there was the “ignorant women, immoral women, [and] alien women” who allies alleged would not even vote—but even if they did, “the preponderancy of the good-women votes” [sic] would carry the day.³⁷⁸ Among men, too, “the proportion of bad men [was] very far greater” than among women—maybe “twenty-five” or “thirty times.”³⁷⁹ This meant that equal suffrage *would* mean more bad people voting, but virtuous women would still improve the electorate overall.

Virtuosity was one of many traditionally feminine characteristics that allies reinforced. Allies also constructed women as “mannerly,” “noble,” “quiet,” “dignified,” “gentle,” “refined,” “delicate,” and “pure.”³⁸⁰ Women treated men with “infinite patience,” “loyalty,” and “obedience.”³⁸¹ Allies returned repeatedly to women’s charm, which they linked to “grace,” “virtue,” “beauty,” “strength,” and “highest idealism.”³⁸² These traits cast women back to a time before the intrusion of modernity.

Male Ally Advocacy: Reinforcing Men's Centrality

More than just advocating for suffrage, male allies also helped men reckon with women's growing power and presence in contemporary America. Modernity shifted women from homemaking to wage-earning, made them labor under deplorable conditions (worsened by liquor and corporate greed), and displaced men in the home and economy. Americans' entry into World War I further complicated women's lives, destabilized America's national identity, and further displaced men to theaters of war. In men's absence, contemporary women became better educated, more independent, and ready to be civic leaders—or voters at least. The paradox: this justification for women voting was also the source of men's anxiety.

Given this anxiety, allies generally avoided talking about changes to men, or focused on their stable identities. Men were the archetypal voters, the leaders, the soldiers, and the praiseworthy activists for suffrage. Allies reinforced men's electoral power over women but, in allies' construction, that power spread to different spheres. Men would remain chivalrous and just toward women, gatekeepers to the political system, and at the heads of their families. In this final trait, though, allies' selectivity shows itself: was family leadership tied, in part, to income? In this—as in the broader fields of family, class, and gender identity—allies' attention to their own gender is sparse or absent. Given the significant change to men's identities in those fields, that absence speaks volumes.

That absence, I argue, must be read in light of how allies constructed women's identities largely in service to men. In civic, family, gender, and class identities, allies symbolically steered women back to the home. Women's potential civic behavior was described in housekeeping terms, and even her political influence stayed close to home

(municipal affairs, education, public health, “morals”). All women were, to some degree, synonymized with mothers and assigned—nay, aspired for—primary responsibility for home and children. Just as they protected the kids, they protected society and “the race.” If women did work—and allies downplayed how many women actually did—they filled traditionally-female jobs. Whether their industriousness resulted in money of their own or education, women ultimately depended on men to whom they behaved virtuously and supportively. Allies imbued these identities with tremendous social power—especially motherhood—such that challenging allies’ characterizations meant challenging the underpinnings of social relations. Indeed, what opponent would dare contend that mothers were not the foundation of society, or that motherhood needed to be preserved from modern intrusions?

Allies reinforced this male-centered construction of women’s identities by reminding men of what power and control they had. Whether or not they contributed directly, *American* men could graft on to America’s wealth, generosity, and world leadership to feel superior to other countries. Allies could concede that women were more virtuous and politically savvy, and that they had the potential to be exceptional voters, because men’s assessments on those points were determining. Not all citizens should be able to vote, allies reminded men, and men could benevolently choose to utilize women’s potential and make them better, or not. Indeed, in the course of advocating for suffrage, allies could muse philosophically about identity—whether Americans were Democrats or Republicans, what it meant to be a citizen, to what degree women were citizens—without any urgency. But such tangents served a rhetorical purpose: to remind men that they had stability and space to ponder such questions, even if other elements of their life seemed beyond their control.

Besides elevating men's egos, though, allies preyed upon men's insecurities to win suffrage support. They leveraged men's desire to be better than men of another region, or better than immigrants—and to retain their power over both. Allies hyperbolically tarred both men and male leaders with negative attributes and tied those attributes to suffrage opposition; men not wanting to share those negative attributes would simply need to support suffrage. Allies so adroitly aligned masculinity with suffrage support that men feeling any degree of gendered insecurity could find comfort and stability in becoming male suffragists.

While effective at securing suffrage support, these rhetorical moves cut short the possibility that men and women might cooperate within shared fields of identity. Allies pushed men toward a gender identity based largely on women's continued dependence and subordination. Such a strident construction overshadowed shared class interests, which was the most promising field in which men and women might cooperate. Some allies constructed family identities in which mothers and fathers genuinely cooperated, but this egalitarian vision was drowned out by those allies who insisted on traditional family roles. Allies also established the basis for cooperation within civic and national identities—saying men and women had equal standing to vote or referencing “the people,” for example.

It is unsurprising, then, that stark gender inequality still plagues America one-hundred years later. Between 1848 and 1920, and most intensely during those last ten, Americans (re)considered gendered differences in civil rights and societal norms. While the ostensible issue dealt with voting rights, so many other issues churned below the surface. If there was a time for major realignment, that decade held such a promise. I have argued, though, that rather than capitalize on this moment of political change, male

allies reinforced men's centrality, re-inscribing women in traditional roles along the way. Ally advocacy surely contributed to the suffrage victory, but its deficiencies linger. This decade was politically poignant, pregnant with the potential for cross-gender cooperation and broader reform. Such potential was scuttled, though, and men have continued to dominate American politics and culture ever since.

Notes

¹ Behn, “Woodrow Wilson’s Conversion Experience,” 9.

² Ida Husted Harper and Susan B. Anthony, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 4: 1883-1900* (Rochester, NY: Susan B. Anthony, 1902), xiv.

³ Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 139.

⁴ “Fourteenth Amendment” (1868), <http://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-xiv>.

⁵ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 145.

⁶ Angela G. Ray and Cindy Koenig Richards, “Inventing Citizens, Imagining Gender Justice: The Suffrage Rhetoric of Virginia and Francis Minor,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no. 4 (2007): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630701449340>.

⁷ “Resolution Establishing a Committee on Woman Suffrage,” § Committee on Rules (1913).

⁸ Behn, “Woodrow Wilson’s Conversion Experience,” 28.

⁹ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 165.

¹⁰ Kroeger, *The Suffragents*, 111.

¹¹ Kroeger, 134; 186.

¹² “Dr. Manheimer to Speak Here,” *The Daily Times*, February 22, 1916.

¹³ “Noted Men for Equal Suffrage Organize Voters’ League” (November 29, 1909), Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911; Scrapbook 8; page 118, Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

¹⁴ John Hyde Braly, *Memory Pictures: An Autobiography* (Los Angeles, CA: Neuner, 1912), 231.

¹⁵ “Albany Suffrage Powwow,” *The Sun*, February 17, 1910.

¹⁶ Elaine Weiss, *The Woman’s Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote*, Kindle Edition (Penguin, 2018), Location 4825.

¹⁷ Kroeger, *The Suffragents*, 111.

¹⁸ “Women Wage Wild War of the Ballots,” *New York Tribune*, December 5, 1908.

¹⁹ Weiss, *The Woman’s Hour*, Location 118; Michael S. Kimmel, “Men’s Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century,” *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (September 1, 1987): 266.

²⁰ William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (Basic Books, 1980), 123.

²¹ Robert Alexander Kraig, “The 1912 Election and the Rhetorical Foundations of the Liberal State,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2000): 363–95, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2010.0042>.

²² Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2004), 6.

²³ Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), 55–56, <http://archive.org/details/ideasofwomensuff00krad>.

²⁴ Harper and Anthony, *History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 4: 1883-1900*, 148.

²⁵ Braly, *Memory Pictures*, 127.

²⁶ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 221.

²⁷ Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Caroline J. Tolbert, eds., *Citizens as Legislators: Direct Democracy in the United States*, Parliaments and Legislatures Series (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 2; Nathaniel A. Persily, “The Peculiar Geography of Direct Democracy: Why the Initiative, Referendum and Recall Developed in the American West,” *Michigan Law and Policy Review* 2 (1997): 11.

²⁸ Todd S. Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come: Two Presidents, Two Parties, and the Battle for the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Henry Holt and Co., 2014), 46.

²⁹ Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 290.

³⁰ Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 211, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/8793>.

³¹ W.E.B. DuBois, “Votes for Women Xxxx,” *The Crisis*, November 1917.

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Chapter 2: White Allies and the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Introduction

Three months after the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—a law abhorred by many white Southerners—supporters packed a New Orleans hotel ballroom to hear President (and Texan) Lyndon Johnson. In his speech, Johnson identified himself with an anonymous Southern senator who, near the end of his career, mournfully rued being “at the mercy of certain economic interests.” Those interests, Johnson said, made every election message into “Negro, Negro, Negro!”¹ The crowd paused, surprised to hear the president use such a word, before applauding his frankness. Writing in the *Boston Globe*, Chalmers Roberts joined a chorus of observers calling the speech “one of [Johnson’s] best” and interpreted Johnson as “asking the white South to lift its eyes, to see the changing world about it, to accept the inevitable...”²

Roberts’ analysis missed a key aspect of the speech, however: in a speech replete with identity references, Johnson dodged racial identity. Johnson once referred to the “Negro problem,” but not black *people*; even his “Negro, Negro, Negro!” failed to link this racial identity to economic identity, as implied by his reference to “certain economic interests.” When speaking of white people, he used identities other than their skin color (e.g., class and region). He used “we,” “us,” and “they” without defining the scope of those pronouns. He located people—from New Orleans, Louisiana, Texas, or the South—while discussing additional qualities that could only mean *white* people in those locations. People were Americans, “people of this Nation,” or similar variations. Some were old or young, and many were economically-exploited; some were men, women, or children. None were (overtly) “white” or “black.”

It was not that Johnson was uncomfortable talking about “white” and “black” people, nor the classism and racism animating their relationship. Bill Moyers, Johnson’s former press secretary, recalls Johnson opining privately, “If you can convince the lowest white man that he’s better than the best colored man, he won’t notice you picking his pocket.”³ Former aide and speechwriter Richard Goodwin reports another private conversation where Johnson spoke of his desire to “make sure every Negro had the same chance as every white man.”⁴ Clearly Johnson made explicit connections between white skin and opportunity, between racism and economic exploitation. Why did he not communicate these to his white Southern audience, who had strong, progress-blocking beliefs caught in this ideological tangle? And why did he shy away from speaking about his own experience as a poor white man in the South?

Overt engagement with racial identity would seem necessary given the racist turmoil preceding and accompanying the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In May 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King’s Birmingham campaign vividly visualized the need for reform; cameras captured white officers pointing police dogs and fire hoses at black children.⁵ The resulting outcry pushed then-President John F. Kennedy to stop equivocating and introduce a civil rights bill on June 11. A summer of racist violence and local actions culminated in the late-August March on Washington where King delivered his famous “I Have A Dream” speech. As the bill plodded through the House Judiciary Committee, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) organized a parallel election since most white Mississippi officials refused to register black citizens to vote.⁶ White officials in St. Augustine, Florida, arrested black youths *en masse* until the city’s jails overflowed, and northern white activists travelled southward to compel complacent northerners to care.⁷ King barnstormed the country in March and April 1964, recruiting students for COFO’s

Mississippi Summer Project and stumping for the bill. The Senate finally passed its revision of the House bill on June 19, 1964—two days before three civil rights volunteers were murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi. Two of those volunteers were white.

White allies offered the civil rights movement a distinct capacity to engage the white power structure. In lobbying circles, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) lobbyist Clarence Mitchell quipped that, aside from him, “Everybody in [strategy meetings] is a white man.”⁸ White clergy, working through the mostly-white National Council of Churches (NCC), preached civil rights to mostly-white, mostly-northern congregants. Those congregants, in turn, lobbied their mostly-white representatives and senators about the bill, and donated to the movement. White celebrities also donated, marched, and advocated for civil rights when interviewed by publications with mostly-white readers. Northern white students called for civil rights from their mostly-white campuses and some journeyed south to work alongside black activists (most notably in COFO’s Mississippi Summer Project, often called “Freedom Summer”). Both indirectly and directly, across many different venues and in many different locales, white allies fought for the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the equitable society it envisioned.

Much of their advocacy drew on an array of salient identities with one significant caveat: like Johnson in his New Orleans speech, white allies paid scant attention to white racial identity—particularly their own. They pivoted to regional and political labels, for example—pinning blame on the South, extremists, or liberals. They put forth competing visions of what it meant to identify as an American and confronted alternative definitions that excluded African Americans. Some drew upon religious identities to explain their individual obligations and societal obligations, and many tied civil rights to class. And

they *did* discuss racial identity, but those discussions tended to celebrate allies' work or dismiss racists' white supremacy. Absent throughout is a sustained or deep critique of white privilege.

Ally advocacy did not go so far as to re-center dominating identity, as it did in the suffrage movement, but I argue it insufficiently critiqued inherent, inherited privileges benefiting all white people. Just like male allies in the suffrage movement, white allies appear uncomfortable talking about the dominating identity at the root of the new law—in this case, white skin rather than masculinity. They routinely shifted focus to alternative fields of identity—especially regional and class—as though those identities could explain African Americans' lack of civil rights. Ally advocacy thus fell short of rewiring corrosive racial identities when such rewiring was necessary to move white people from accepting the law to honoring humanity and equality. This shortfall fed continued racial turmoil throughout the late-1960s, leading James Baldwin to challenge white America to “face the fact that we are a racist society, racist to the very marrow...”⁹

White allies certainly helped pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, just as male allies helped pass the suffrage amendment, but my concern is the rhetorical sea change that would undergird the law's *sustainability*. Johnson himself acknowledged that a law could “abolish the evils of discrimination” but still be just “one step along the road to that American dream.”¹⁰ A Freedom Summer volunteer put it more bluntly: “Rights can be legislated, but love cannot.”¹¹ Kennedy, too, had observed that confronting America's racist history was “something much more difficult than any other country has ever done” and feared doing it required a stronger civil-rights foundation.¹² Given this sentiment, this chapter focuses less on ally advocacy *used to pass the law* than on ally advocacy *adjacent to the law*, underpinning its success or failure.

To that end, I assemble white ally advocacy from four sources. First, fragments produced by white Freedom Summer volunteers capture allies living at the nexus of changing identities. These volunteers were primarily northerners embedded with black Mississippi families for the summer of 1964 or slightly longer. As they worked to close racialized voting and education gaps, and to challenge the all-white Democratic National Convention (DNC) delegation, they implemented the Civil Rights Act's underlying principles daily. Their personal letters home—preserved in archives, books, and personal collections—poignantly capture their attempts to bridge between the new law and their daily lives. Affidavits for the DNC, and interviews before and after that summer, also show their grappling with regional, political, national, religious, class, and racial identities. Instead of illuminating political advocacy (as the fragments of male suffrage allies did), these fragments illuminate the intra- and inner-personal changes that accompany major political change.

Fragments from white actors Marlon Brando and Charlton Heston illustrate how these foundational changes chained-out publicly in two very different allies. Both participated actively in the summer of 1963 and brought celebrities to the March on Washington; Brando remained quite active and vocal for years, while Heston scaled back. Their celebrity meant their activism was well-known, and that they were often asked to reflect on civil rights in interviews and media profiles. Those reflections—made and circulated concurrent with the Freedom Summer volunteers—illustrate alignment in how allies in different social locations synthesized the identity changes accompanying the new law. Their autobiographies benefit from hindsight and the passage of time but add depth when evaluating how ideological change accompanies changes in law.

Finally, white ally advocacy includes fragments by Lyndon Johnson to show

continuity between grassroots allies (Freedom Summer volunteers) and the man with the bully pulpit. Like those allies, Johnson lived at the nexus of the issues underlying the Civil Rights Act. He was a proud Southerner; while he did not identify as a segregationist or white supremacist, he shared characteristics with people claiming those identities. Despite this, he was committed to civil rights as a continuing project: after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he pushed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968. He often deployed political, regional, and class identities, and his remarks (like his New Orleans speech) demonstrate a leader contemplating complicated identity changes. He rarely spoke publicly about civil rights, but a rich trove of private fragments survives in Oval Office recordings, thorough recollections by former aides, and personal correspondence.¹³ Johnson's rhetoric reflects something somewhat present in the fragments from Heston and Brando: an individual processing significant political changes as both a public and private figure.

This chapter, then, attempts to show how certain identities reoccurred in white ally advocacy adjacent to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. To do this, I begin with the circumstances that gave rise to the bill, surrounded its debate, and steered its implementation. Those circumstances encouraged people to associate the problem with certain identities and not others. In their advocacy, allies repeatedly turned to five fields of identity—regional, political, national, religious, and class—to convince other white people to support the bill and civil rights. I close by discussing instances when allies emphasized racial identity and argue that those references were insufficient.

Toward A Civil Rights Act

The decade preceding the 1964 Civil Rights Act conditioned civil rights activists and their allies to frame the issues using identities besides race. Throughout the latter-1950s, Americans grappled with the discrepancy between evolving social norms, American values, and laws. John F. Kennedy's election in 1960 held new promise for a solution. Movement groups—especially those affiliated with faith communities—pressured Kennedy on many fronts, and he finally introduced the bill on June 11, 1963. For nearly thirteen months, the bill inched forward as activists and politicians pushed non-southern communities and Congress, respectively, against white Southern Democrats' firm objections. The bill finally passed when moderate Republicans cooperated with non-southern Democrats.

Representatives in Congress solved a problem created ten years earlier by the Supreme Court. While its scope narrowly applied to public education, *Brown v. Board of Education* cracked the separate-but-equal doctrine established by the Court's 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. According to Todd Purdum, the *Brown* decision fomented “rising public pressure to make good at last on the full promise of emancipation”—to extend integration and align discriminatory laws with the times.¹⁴ Over the next few years, courts offered new rulings that kept extending *Brown* to new public domains; and, despite a toothless Civil Rights Act of 1957 (made more toothless by then-Senator Lyndon Johnson), Congress passed no new laws. As court-mandated integration progressed, *Jet* / *Ebony* journalist Simeon Booker noted that southern white segregationists were harassing “anyone thought to be awakening ‘the sleeping Negro’” with renewed vigor.¹⁵

Ironically, the people doing most to awaken “the sleeping Negro” were southern white segregationists, who resisted America's new norms publicly and violently. Fifteen months after *Brown*, two white southerners abducted, tortured, and murdered a northern

black teenager, who was visiting his Mississippi family. The shocking images of Emmett Till's mangled face—published first in *Jet*—“ignited a firestorm” in the North, recalls Booker, and quickly moved beyond the black press.¹⁶ White media covered the sham trial of Till's murderers and conveyed Mississippi “justice” to northern audiences. Roughly two months after that trial began, a black woman refused to move from the whites-only section of a Montgomery, Alabama, bus. Rosa Parks's action launched a year-long bus boycott that, buoyed by northern white media, overturned Alabama's bus segregation law.¹⁷ The boycott also nurtured the careers of Revs. Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King, Jr., birthed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and modelled how people with religious identity might support civil rights organizing. Then, in 1957—mere days before the 1957 Civil Rights Act became law—nine black high school students tried to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Southern white segregationists again resisted publicly and violently—and, again, in full view of outside cameras. White Arkansans screamed, spat, and threw things at the teenagers; the Arkansas National Guard at first blocked the school's entrance, then—after being federalized—escorted the students safely past the white mob. Other southern cities generated similar tableaux when they integrated their schools, and many simply did not integrate.

Racism was not exclusively southern, though. Beyond the South, schools often remained separate and unequal because of racialized residential patterns closely tied to class. Police forces were mostly white, and officers would brutalize and harass black citizens (albeit less often, nor as blatantly or violently as in the South). Many unions resisted black members, and some jobs were implicitly—if not explicitly—whites-only. Joshua Zeitz proposes that these “seemingly accidental” circumstances bestowed non-

southerners with “hidden privilege”: they relegated racism to another region while unconsciously benefiting from similar dynamics in their own communities.¹⁸

Northerners could particularly pass blame to southern *Democrats*. The South was solidly Democratic and had been for generations—largely because of Republicans’ leadership in the Civil War and Reconstruction. In the twentieth century, Democrats shifted ideologically to be more pro-civil rights—but the party sustained its discordant coalition for the sake of other issues. Over those same decades, though, southerners kept reelecting the same Democrats, meaning those Southern Democrats accrued significant seniority. Seniority in Congress meant that Southern Democrats led many key committees—which allowed them to kill numerous anti-lynching and civil rights bills before 1957. That year’s civil rights bill—the first in eighty-seven years—and the Civil Rights Act of 1960 reflected Southern Democrats’ raw power: if civil rights legislation must be passed, they would ensure it was weak to the point of futility.¹⁹

The 1960 election threatened Southern Democrats’ control, however. Democrats won control of Congress in 1957 (and would continue until 1980), but Republican President Dwight Eisenhower checked their power. That changed when Democratic President John F. Kennedy was inaugurated in January 1961. As a senator, Kennedy had supported civil rights but done little to overtly move legislation. Although he picked a Southerner—Lyndon Johnson—to be his vice president, civil rights leaders hoped Kennedy would act on his campaign promises. Kennedy framed civil rights through his Catholicism: Catholics had been discriminated against, too—sometimes by the same groups persecuting African Americans. The charming, popular Kennedy was well-positioned to neutralize Southern Democrats and get his congressional majority to pass substantive civil rights legislation. Civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph put it bluntly to

Kennedy following the March on Washington: “Nobody can lead this crusade but you.”²⁰

Randolph and other civil rights leaders, as well as their organizations, were mostly African American with variances based on region. Randolph led the first African American labor organization: the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, which was founded in the 1920s in (primarily) Chicago. Two other, older organizations—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, 1909) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE, 1942)—had mixed governing boards, but with African American directors. Both were founded in northern cities and did most of their organizing in the North (prior to 1961). The NAACP’s longtime lobbyist, Clarence Mitchell, embodied the organization’s preference for political and legislative advocacy. King’s SCLC began in 1957 and broke from these patterns. Not only was its leadership entirely African American and southern: it also eschewed lobbying for demonstrations and organizing.²¹ King met regularly with politicians and prioritized winning a substantive civil rights bill—but he believed the bill would be won in communities, not Congress. This vision inspired student leaders to form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960. Although some northern colleges had chapters, SNCC’s leaders attended southern colleges; all were black, although whites sometimes joined SNCC actions.

Civil rights demonstrations generated racist violence from white southerners and reflected poorly on Kennedy’s “new frontier” policies. The month after Kennedy’s inauguration, black students began sitting-in at segregated public establishments across the South. Three months after that, CORE began a series of bus trips—Freedom Rides—between southern states that would continue until December 1961. White civil rights supporters would sit in black-only areas of bus stations, and black civil rights supporters

would sit in white-only areas. (Segregation in interstate travel was illegal but permitted by southern law enforcement; the federal government, even under Kennedy, determined these demonstrations were beyond their jurisdiction to intervene.) Predictably, angry mobs repeatedly attacked the students and Freedom Riders in front of journalists and their cameras. Cameras also captured a black veteran—James Meredith—integrating the University of Mississippi in the fall of 1962. In prior attempts, Meredith was physically blocked by Mississippi’s (white, Democratic) Lieutenant Governor, Paul Johnson; in the end, he was accompanied by five hundred U.S. Marshals. Throughout the process of enrolling Meredith, riots roiled the South—and journalists covered those, too. Reflecting on the 1961-1963 period, the NCC’s James Hamilton emphasized photos’ role in fomenting national political change: “people in the Midwest and in other areas began to see what the problems were, what’s happening. The attitudes began to change.”²²

The images eventually caused one significant attitude to change: President Kennedy’s. Kennedy had appointed known racists as federal judges to appease southern Democrats.²³ Those judges would have heard cases brought by Kennedy’s Attorney General (and brother), Robert, but those cases were rarely filed. The Kennedys knew that southern states, counties, and cities had defied (or were currently defying) court-ordered integration but maintained that the federal government lacked authority to intervene. Robert Kennedy would later reflect, “You could argue, during that period of time it would have been much better not to have this system of government—you know, not to have a democracy...But I think that it comes back to haunt you at a later time.”²⁴ The Kennedys could have asked Congress for the authority they lacked, but President Kennedy believed that substantive civil rights legislation would be near-impossible to pass—and therefore not worth the political capital. Journalist Clay Risen also argues that Kennedy “believed

he would owe his legislative success to the Southern Democrats in Congress,” and therefore chose not to become indebted to them by raising civil rights issues.²⁵

The Birmingham campaign, and the images that emerged from it, changed Kennedy’s analysis. In the spring of 1963, King and Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth began a series of protests in Birmingham, Alabama, to provoke the local (racist white) sheriff. The protests would generate moving pictures of discrimination, and trigger mass arrests—nearly 2,200 by May 2, 1963—that would fill the jails. (Nationally the protest spawned 758 demonstrations in 178 cities over six weeks, generating almost fifteen thousand arrests.) This powder keg exploded with the “children’s crusade”: black elementary-through-high-school students volunteered to march and were attacked and arrested just like the adults. Fire hoses blasted them, police beat them, and police dogs tore at their clothes. Over four days, nearly eight hundred Birmingham children were arrested and kept in outdoor pens at the county fairgrounds.²⁶ Journalist Simeon Booker recalled that, “The stories and pictures brought such a hue and cry from around the world, an embarrassed White House was finally shamed into action.”²⁷

It took another month, but Kennedy finally unveiled his civil rights bill—while trying to disrupt the regionalism and partisanship underlying the bill’s inception. Kennedy stressed that “The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the Nation in which he is born,” will have a measurably worse life than “a white baby born in the same place on the same day.” All citizens needed to recognize that segregation and discrimination were problems “in every city, in every State of the Union...in every city of the North as well as the South.” The President also stated that civil rights were not “a partisan issue,” and that “men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics.” It is noteworthy, however, that he only referenced

southern localities by name, and the only *individuals* he named were northern Republicans. On balance, though, the speech entirely withheld blame from the white South or white southern Democrats.

Over the next thirteen months, Southern Democrats would repay the favor by pulling out all the stops to defeat the bill. The southern Democrats' leader, Sen. Richard Russell (D-GA), declared all out "war" against the bill and kept his southern soldiers in lockstep.²⁸ After Kennedy's speech, Sen. Strom Thurmond (D-SC) called for a general strike by southern congressmen against all of Kennedy's agenda.²⁹ Southern senators like Thurmond had greater power than southern House members because of the Senate's rules. The Senate's procedural rules allowed for filibusters, for example, whereby a bloc with a minority opinion might prevent a vote on a bill; Southerners had used the tactic before and would employ it again here. The filibuster was one of many delaying tactics, which also included imposing stringent rules for debate, forcing unnecessary procedures, following all formalities, and calling quorum (which forced civil rights supporters to be constantly present). And if the bill were to pass in some form, Southerners wanted it to be as weak as possible. That desire caused them to curb the delaying tactics because those tactics might, Risen argues, "turn off wavering members who might otherwise support their crippling amendments."³⁰

To counteract the southern Democrats, supporters turned to non-southern Republicans. Ohio's Rep. William McCulloch was the Judiciary Committee's ranking Republican and a key architect of the House bill. With Indiana's Charles Halleck, McCullough marshalled "liberal Republicans and those who identified with the tradition of Abraham Lincoln" while dampening the bill to sway just enough moderate Republicans. Senate civil rights supporters needed moderate Republicans, too, to reach

sixty-seven votes and end the filibuster. Illinois Sen. Everett Dirksen could secure the votes, but he first wanted to curb the bill's impositions on businesses. The bill's manager, Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), admitted that, "There's no chance of [ending the filibuster] unless we have Dirksen"; so Dirksen got most of what he wanted, and civil rights supporters got twenty-five moderate Republican votes.³¹ Kotz notes that most of these Republicans, and the Republicans in the House, came from "small towns and rural areas in the Midwest where there were few African Americans and whites were not necessarily free of racial prejudice."³² While these midwesterners may have been prejudiced, the sparsity of African Americans meant the bill would require few adjustments in their daily lives: it would more fully apply to other districts, other states, and primarily the other political party.

White ally advocacy reflected these circumstances, coalescing around six fields of identity. Regional and partisan identities became shorthand to correlate racism with non-racial identities, or vice versa. But allies also—as they did in the suffrage movement—volunteered their own assessments about what it meant to be an American. Religious identity was salient in the civil rights movement in a way it had not been in the suffrage movement—perhaps due to leadership from religious groups. A fifth field of identity carried over from suffrage—class identity—as allies sought to untangle the interweave with the sixth field of identity—race. My survey of white ally advocacy will travel through these six fields and demonstrate that white allies insufficiently critiqued the privileges rooted in their racial identity.

Regional Identity: "This whole thing of the Southerner"

Even without referencing civil rights, ally advocacy reinforced a stark regional divide by attaching regional to other identities. Northern allies repeatedly said they were “not alienated beatnik types,” rejecting the northern subcultural label often applied by southerners.³³ Southerners also applied, and northern allies rejected, identities attached to earlier northern political movements—“communist” and “subversive,” for example.³⁴ White allies hated being stereotyped as “Northern Agitators,” but freely described “some of the whites...down there” as “mountain boys in the old days.”³⁵ The cultural divide extended to political action, too, with Northerners “just sendin’ letters” and Southerners “do[ing] somethin’ about it.”³⁶ Cultural differences made southward civil rights trips feel like “departing for a foreign country” and allies “wonder[ed] whose land [they were] really in.”³⁷ Such comments were often coupled with surprise that, despite sharing a skin color, white people could be so regionally different.

Northern allies assigned themselves—not southerners—responsibility for bridging this identity gap, but rarely actually did so. “One part of the South [did] not want [white allies],” and these allies felt that those people might fairly “ask what [Yankees] like [us were] doing down here.”³⁸ Allies should therefore “engage [southern whites] and make them feel that you are not hostile” in order “to understand both the attitude of the person responsible for...racial discrimination, and the social situation which engendered the attitude.”³⁹ But over numerous fragments, there is very little evidence that allies engaged white southerners, or sought to adequately and fully understand them. Most often, allies saw “no resemblance to people whom [they] had known in the North”—a level of disidentification which precluded cooperation on anything, let alone civil rights.⁴⁰ Such disidentification is, unfortunately, a stronger characteristic of white ally advocacy than is identification.

Northern allies imbued their regional identity with both moral authority and capacity. Change in the South required “‘outside’ intervention” by those who “have less to lose here.”⁴¹ Northern allies had the moral authority to indict a southerner “for what his ancestors did,” dispassionately dissect how “opportunity is so distorted for the Negro,” and generally be “reasonable.”⁴² Northern allies also believed they had “done a great deal in [their] own back yard[s]” to advance civil rights.⁴³ Allies benevolently deployed this knowledge to “right the wrongs so entrenched throughout the South.”⁴⁴ These wrongs left a mark, and allies’ “contact with Southern Negroes [had] convinced [allies] that [Negroes] really need [pride in being colored].”⁴⁵ Northern allies believed their southern work so morally sound that some even argued, “nobody can really say that it’s wrong.”⁴⁶ Northerners even mustered the symbolic force of the whole nation (“We tell them that the nation has finally become interested in them”) to justify their civil rights work.⁴⁷ Such bold claims drove a wedge between allies and southerners, even as they fortified allies’ righteousness and capability.

From their righteous perch, allies constructed southern identity in quite negative terms. As the locale for Freedom Summer, Mississippi took most of the criticism with some allies blurring the state and region. Allies were prone “to believe any thing [sic] adverse about white Mississippi,”: that white Mississippians “are all bigots,” that it was a “sad and sick state,” and that “nowhere in the world” was white supremacy “more firmly entrenched, more cancerous.”⁴⁸ “People in Mississippi can’t help themselves,” non-southern allies reasoned; “they kill off people” indiscriminately and “will destroy a person not because of color but because of what the person stands for.”⁴⁹ Mississippi was, in sum, “the problem of the south”—which was saying something because the South was, itself, quite problematic.⁵⁰ Southern society was “pre-civilized,” southern food

“uniformly bad,” and southern living was “actually worse than anything [some] had anticipated”—and when allies tried to engage with southerners, they found southerners “[said] the most strange and bizarre things.”⁵¹ These broad, dehumanizing comments, typically delivered to pro-civil-rights audiences, further impeded allies as they engaged southern whites.

Allusions to the Civil War further pigeonholed white southerners as immoral racists. Contemporary “slavery and segregation” was the state of the South, and allies hypothesized that change needed to come from “some force from outside” such as another “Civil War.”⁵² Another issue, “not unlike the Civil War revisited,” was the South’s continually “ignor[ing] the law and [fighting] to the end to defend segregation.”⁵³ Rarely did allies refer to the Confederacy or Confederates, but they unreservedly identified themselves as “Yankees.”⁵⁴ Even Lyndon Johnson—a southerner—alluded to the Civil War when he declared he would “be the president who finishes what Lincoln began.”⁵⁵ Through Lincoln’s powerful moral symbolism, Johnson demonstrated his steadfastness—but also, implicitly, threatened southern segregationists.

And much like post-Civil-War Reconstruction, northern allies located southerners within a social system that limited their free thought and action. Allies recognized “there are white people there who say, ‘Now listen, we’ve got to do this,’” but most “[didn’t] seem to be aware that anything’s wrong”; this made the South “unable...to change within itself.”⁵⁶ Those limits originated in the fundamental sociopolitical structure of the South, and limited Southerners and allies alike. The South was a “caste system,” a “totalitarian enclave,” and a “closed society” in which “all political power is in the hands of the whites.”⁵⁷ One ally wrote an essay comparing the South to the U.S.S.R., suggesting that white southerners could only “live and prosper” by paying “allegiance to the state

orthodoxy”: racism.⁵⁸ Even those “who previously have stood in the middle” would “[go] the other way,” allies reasoned, because the inherent “confusion in the Southern mind.”⁵⁹ Allies took great pains to reserve final responsibility for racism to systems or culture, rather than individuals.

Southerners, then, had some individual potential to escape the region’s legacy. Many northern allies professed their “faith that [southerners] are still basically good at heart” and “really aren’t ‘bad’ in a moral sense”—or “at least not the majority.”⁶⁰ Given this hope, northern allies hypothesized that white and black southerners could “learn to live with each other, if only those in power would let them.”⁶¹ Southerners actually had a “great reservoir of goodwill...for the integration movement,” allies reasoned: it was just “clandestine.”⁶² If that goodwill was public, “the people in the South have the possibility of an 180-degree arc,” and might even “overtake the North as the nation’s core.”⁶³ By lumping “the people in the South” together, allies shifted some of the pressure off the responsible identity group: southern *whites*.

Northern allies also shifted some pressure off southern whites by locating racism within their own regional identity. Non-Southern allies acknowledged that they saw discrimination and segregation as “completely foreign” in “the familiar context of American life.”⁶⁴ “The truth,” allies argued, was “that discrimination does exist” in the North—voting discrimination especially—and northern whites needed to actively work to “avoid the situations which have been allowed to develop [in the South].”⁶⁵ Northern white allies recognized that “there is still much to be done” at home, but most demurred that the North lacked “an organized program through which we can use our skills and our lives to bring some measure of justice.”⁶⁶ Because northern allies also “[bore] responsibility for what happens in Mississippi,” they justified going where the

organization accompanied heightened need.⁶⁷ While this was surely accurate, this “brother’s keeper” logic allowed northern allies to pivot from the racism in their own communities.

In white ally advocacy, then, regional identities were effectively shorthand for both pro- and anti-civil-rights positions. Southerners were synonymized with white racists and given other negative qualities. Northerners were capable moral actors against southern racism, just as they had been one-hundred years earlier. And to some extent, these regional identities were true: after all, as historian Taylor Branch notes, “fully half the Northern members who had opposed the bill met rejection at the polls” in 1964.⁶⁸ Yet the rigidity of these regional identities, as generalized by allies, precluded empathizing and identifying—rhetorical processes which may have enabled white southerners to find their own way to support civil rights.

Political Identity: “Not a struggle to be engaged in by the mere liberal”

Allies could generalize regional identities based on centuries of history, but political identities were both in flux and nondescript. One ally self-identified as a “white liberal” while expressing uncertainty about “what lies below that veneer.”⁶⁹ Some allies embraced ideological signifiers “like ‘militant,’ ‘radical’ and ‘liberal,’” while others rejected them because “they were so glibly used to confuse and mislabel complex attitudes.”⁷⁰ It is also true, though, that political identities—particularly party identities—shifted during the 1960s. “You might just as well take it as fact that the Mississippi Democratic party will work for [Republican] Goldwater openly,” opined one ally about the 1964 presidential election.⁷¹ As southern conservative Democrats drifted rightward,

progressive Democrats moved further left in response to civil rights and the growing conflict in Vietnam.⁷² For these reasons, allies often favored a distinct yet nebulous political entity—“the movement”—to work around the shifting partisan and ideological identities shared by those supporting civil rights.⁷³

“The movement,” allies felt, had no room for strident political identities. Allies eschewed “extremists,” “fanatics,” and “radicals” “from the far left and the far right”: it was moderates that “make a democracy work.”⁷⁴ Partisans were “go[ing] out of their way to give trouble” and, in the process, committing “a disservice to the American people” by opposing civil rights.⁷⁵ In fact, *supporting* civil rights was actually “in the interest of [both parties],” as was “taking the battle from the streets” to slower deliberative venues “where these differences should be settled.”⁷⁶ “The random [Southerner] you meet is a moderate,” said allies—a moderate who rejected “political radicalism of either the right or the left.”⁷⁷ For that reason, allies often invoked “[support] by a lot more moderates than you might imagine” or praised those “in civil rights as [moderates].”⁷⁸

Even as they decried extremists, though, allies constructed liberals as obstacles to civil rights reform. Allies criticized “white liberals,” who behaved “as though they were missionaries” in the South and put a lot of people “in great danger.”⁷⁹ In the North, allies felt liberals “[did] nothing to assure or insure” civil rights despite ardently identifying as civil rights supporters.⁸⁰ Liberals “[couldn’t] be counted on to make the sacrifices required,” allies said, and Johnson himself famously quipped that “there [was] nothing more useless [to civil rights] than a dead liberal.”⁸¹ All this attention to liberals was conspicuously not balanced by references to conservatives, though, or to another political identity aligned against civil rights.

Political identities were clearly salient, therefore, but not stable enough to ground

ally advocacy for civil rights. Both major parties had people on both sides, and Branch observed that all congressmen who supported the law—regardless of party—won reelection in 1964.⁸² Ideological identities might have been more useful markers but they meant such different things to different people—and even if meaning was established, that might become a basis for conflict between supporters. Far more stable was a broad, if hazy, identity that united civil rights supporters internally, and with opponents and undecided people as well: American.

National Identity: “I don’t think it makes any difference...I am an American”

Allies constructed Americans as united across their differences—including race. “American unity does not depend upon unanimity,” allies contended, noting that Americans derive “strength, not weakness; wisdom, not despair” from their differences.⁸³ This unity was so internalized that Americans could see “yours and the country’s cause,” bound together; and those who saw another’s beliefs as “strange and different” “betray[ed] America.”⁸⁴ The civil rights movement, then, “[was] not really a ‘Negro’ revolution” but rather America struggling with “a sense of its own identity.”⁸⁵ In that struggle, Americans could “[learn] something from the other,” “never become friends,” but still “[call themselves] American[s].”⁸⁶ To allies, Americans meant “white and Negro together”—or, alternatively, “Americans, black or white”—coming together “to build an America that means what its Constitution says.”⁸⁷ This oft-repeated duality enabled allies to overlook both other ethnicities and the important, if elementary, point that African Americans were, indeed, *Americans*.

American unity included a broad feeling of responsibility for localized problems. This was partly structural since “[Americans’] basic citizenship [was] in the USA, not a state”—but any local “institution, government, educational system, [and] church” was implicated in anything that might “[get] the whole nation in trouble.”⁸⁸ Overcoming localized problems would be easier if America could just “get rid of” hateful people but, since that was not an option, “Americans of all races and creeds and political beliefs” needed to work “to understand and to respect one another.”⁸⁹ Understanding and respect would enable each American to speak “not as a Texan to Texans, not as a Southerner to Southerners, not as a white to whites,” but rather “as an American to Americans”; and culminate in “a responsible American answer achieved by all of us, at all levels.”⁹⁰ Such a construction admirably federalized responsibility, but improperly assumed that “all of us” had the same capacity to achieve.

But black and white Americans did not have equal power, and allies constructed this imbalance through implication. White Americans’ “forebears created this nation,” allies noted, and that foundational political power had been handed down to contemporary people with white skin.⁹¹ Allies acknowledged, for example, that white Americans drew “the attention of the nation and the Fed’l gov’t” far more than black Americans, which meant “the solution [was] in [their] hands.”⁹² Allies often delineated white Americans as “we,” while positioning black people as the indirect object. White Americans “[brought] the Negro into the main stream of American politics,” or “[asked] that Negroes in Mississippi be able to vote,” or “[said] to these young Negroes that they’ve got obligations as well as rights,” or “help[ed] them prepare” to assume rights “we fought like the devil to get.”⁹³ White Americans could also “let [Congress] know that they...require legislation” and it would get a fair hearing.⁹⁴ Such construction vested

power in white Americans—abstract power over the fate of their black countrymen, whose Americanness allies presumed without explicitly constructing.

In ally advocacy, black and white Americans alike shared certain rights, although the exact rights remained vague. While voting rights were often specified, allies preferred talking about “basic rights,” “unalienable rights,” “equal rights,” or phrases slightly more specific like “constitutionally guaranteed rights.”⁹⁵ Allies equated “rights as Americans” with “rights...as people” or “rights as private citizens.”⁹⁶ As these fragments suggest, allies deftly showed that individual rights (however vaguely conceived) were often excluded from classes of individuals. In such circumstances, “the rights of no single American [were] truly secure, until the rights of all Americans are secure”—and without that security, America would “have failed as a people and as a nation.”⁹⁷ The absence of racial distinctions as allies discussed rights underscored that these were rights rooted in humanity or nationality.

Allies also made protecting other citizens’ rights central to American identity. To allies, “all Americans everywhere” saw protecting rights as “the central moral problem of [the] Republic”—they just had different interpretations of what that meant.⁹⁸ Allies, for instance, felt “injustices to the Negro in Mississippi” were “an infringement upon [others’] rights,” too—and that such infringement would cause “all Americans” to feel “indignant when one American is denied [rights].”⁹⁹ Indignation would, in turn, produce a “palpable” obligation to “give Negro people their right in a democracy” because all Americans had “a sense of commitment in matters concerning basic civil rights.”¹⁰⁰ Americans rejected the idea “that Americans who fight alongside other Americans in war should not be able to work alongside the same Americans,” and “those who care for their country [would] come forward” and “[offer] [their] services—whatever they might

be.”¹⁰¹ Americans, allies believed, could be counted on to “[secure] for all our citizens” equal rights, and to punish those who “[did] violence to peaceful citizens.”¹⁰² In allies’ view, defending rights was simply an action undertaken by Americans as part of their civic behavior.

American civic behavior also meant working for the country’s philosophical basis: democracy, freedom, liberty, equality, and justice. Demonstrations were “civil function,” allies proffered, and “those who [took] an active part in [them] deserve[d] national honor and acclaim.”¹⁰³ Such Americans were part of “a democratic and humanistic movement”—“not a Negro movement” nor “localized to Negro interest,” but touching upon the national identity of all Americans.¹⁰⁴ Americans “[worked for] the democratic idea” because “the fellow armed with the right to vote” is what preserved “American power” and “really [made] democracy work.”¹⁰⁵ Americans also believed that “no one of us is fully free until all of us are fully free,” and did everything they could to “preserve a free society” and “basic ideals of individual freedom and liberty.”¹⁰⁶ “The great promise of opportunity and justice under law” motivated Americans, allies suggested, and would surely cause them to “say, ‘Well, that is not right—that is not fair,’” when confronted with the “unequal history” that “pervert[s the country’s] mission.”¹⁰⁷

That mission originated in America’s founding principles, which allies presumed were universally understood. When the Declaration said, “We the people,” it meant “we the whole people who form this Union”—white *and* black.¹⁰⁸ “The words of the Declaration of Independence [and] Constitution of the United States” also “secured” rights to each citizen” and “impose[d]” an “obligation...to honor and fulfill their meaning.”¹⁰⁹ That obligation had existed “since the inception of this country,” when the

“spirit of the country” was “conceived and dedicated to the purpose that all men are born free and equal.”¹¹⁰ Everyone had constitutional rights, but some Americans needed “help...realiz[ing] what our Constitution means,” “the meaning of the Bill of Rights,” “what civil rights mean,” and distinguishing the three in practice.¹¹¹

These founding documents and the bold principles they contained had made America a world leader. Americans placed themselves before the world “as the greatest champion of men’s rights” and “the saviors of the democratic way of life,” and the dissonance between that and our racism “[hurt] us all over the world.”¹¹² Instead, America should be “an example of freedom and an enterprise of high honor,” “bring[ing] hope to all who dwell in dark places.”¹¹³ Allies felt strongly that Americans “must show the world we are dissatisfied” with racial inequality if they were to remain significant world thought leaders.¹¹⁴

This capacity to overcome flaws in the country and in themselves was a key dimension of being American, allies argued. Americans worked to overcome flaws in the country and themselves. These flaws were rooted in “[themselves] and all of America,” allies reasoned, “because we are Americans.”¹¹⁵ Allies vaguely referenced the “‘wrongs’ in our society” and “the ideals of this country” which were “being so flagrantly violated.”¹¹⁶ When Americans encountered something “diametrically opposed to the American way of life,” they sought to “[affirm] an American society in which [they] believe[d]” and “keep this country pushing ahead.”¹¹⁷ Allies returned to symbolic sickness, comparing these corrective actions to “cur[ing] an illness that infects the country” or “turn[ing] away from...those who pour venom into our nation’s bloodstream.”¹¹⁸ Ultimately, allies felt “nations” should be judged on “how earnestly they

try to recognize the [mistakes] they have made and correct them”—and by that measure, Americans were working to change “the character of an entire nation.”¹¹⁹

But in ally advocacy, “Americans” nearly always meant “*white* Americans”—allies just often omitted that crucial additional adjective. By just focusing on “American,” allies may have thought they were constructing a national identity that could supersede racial animus. Unfortunately, that thought wrongly presumed their audience believed that African Americans were “Americans,” agreed on the basic tenets of being American, and felt those basic tenets should apply equally to every American. Allies failed to appreciate how race derailed each of those presumptions and avoided a—maybe even *the*—central question: was being white a *necessary* dimension of being “American”? Allies’ unifying American identity, sans attention to race, might have enabled moderates to accept civil rights reform, but it also enabled them to continue being consciously ignorant—to avoid (as one ally put it) “really know[ing] about these people and these places and about incidents of terror that occur every day.”¹²⁰

Religious Identity: “Beneath skins of different colours, and prayers in different tongues, all men are brothers”

For allies, American identity included being religious (which was often synonymous with “Christian”). America was founded by “Protestant forefathers,” allies noted, and churches were “the social, as well as religious, center[s] of the town.”¹²¹ Americans “just dying to go to church” would be “wonderfully received in Christian brotherhood,” regardless of where they were in the country.¹²² Religion was often included among examples of America’s diversity (e.g. “equal rights...regardless of race or

religion, regardless of color or creed”).¹²³ In such a culture, the ministers carr[ie]d a lot of weight” and “men of God” were distinctly positioned to “reawaken the conscience” of America.¹²⁴ While not all allies embraced religious identities, they recognized that those identities could bridge between Americans of different regions, political ideologies, and perhaps skin colors.

Christians particularly supported civil rights, allies proposed—or they were not good Christians. That rationale was partly narrative: “the names from the Exodus,” for example, were shared by “black men seeking freedom,” and the Bible was full of “good quotations on equality and we’re all God’s children.”¹²⁵ Underneath those narrative connections, though, was an ideological connection that made civil rights unequivocally a “Christian issue” because it “has to do with the holiness of the dignity of man” and “struggle[ing] to remove oppression from the world of men.”¹²⁶ Christians were “called to invest [their] freedom in [others]” and “demand that the law’s protection be extended equally to all people”; anything less “should be the shame of a ‘Christian’ nation.”¹²⁷ It was sheer hypocrisy, allies said, for a Christian minister to be “a chaplain for the White Citizen’s council”; and allies even took issue with moderate clergy for choosing to “set a responsible example” rather than needed radical action.¹²⁸

Radical action meant engaging segregationists, and allies identified this duty as part of being Christian. All Christians, they reasoned, “[were] involved in the guilt” of those “who sayeth that [they love] God and [love] not [their] brother.”¹²⁹ But “Love your neighbor” cut both ways, and “obey[ing] the injunction” meant “pray[ing] for the oppressor, even as he kicks us in the stomach and knocks our teeth out.”¹³⁰ To remain “on...god’s [sic] side,” Christians needed to collapse the differences “between you and me, and between my herdmen and your herdmen.”¹³¹ As has already been said, scant

evidence suggests allies *actually* collapsed the distinctions between them and segregationists.

These few themes arise from only a sliver of the Christian ally advocacy around the Civil Rights Act. The National Council of Churches lobbied, circulated sermons, and organized their affiliated churches (which were disproportionately located in swing districts). Adjacent to Freedom Summer, faith groups sent volunteers to Mississippi and other southern states to work for civil rights within faith traditions and across religious lines. Allies seemed particularly prone to avoid racial identity; it is worth inquiring whether this was true in specifically religious organizing efforts, too, especially those directed at white northern congregations.

Class Identity: “By appealing to the prevalent prejudices, they are able to play one class off against the other”

Class identities—especially in relation to civil rights—were thorny, multifaceted constructions, adjoining wealth to education, profession, culture, and status. Present throughout was implicit race: allies presumed “black” when they constructed lower-class identity and presumed “white” in constructing middle- and upper-class identity. At its best, ally advocacy recognized and interrogated the exploitative interplay between economic and racial identities; and opened bridges to the poor, white communities in which racism was most virulent. This path went largely untaken, though, with allies favoring broad generalizations over a deep systemic economic critique knitting class identities together across racial differences.

Allies linked first-hand experiences with lower-class living to civil rights support.

Some allies had done “nigger work”—picking cotton, chopping wood, and other menial labors—or lived “in the caste right near the bottom.”¹³² Those from “solid, middle-class type home[s]” were “spoiled” and gained “new perspective” on the need for civil rights by observing “poor, oppressed, and hated [people]”; or by “talk[ing] with the Negroes and see[ing] what they’re up against.”¹³³ The “poverty [was] worse than [they’d] ever experienced before,” and this “valuable experience” enabled people to see how “almost every group in human society tr[ies] hard to convince themselves that they are superior to the other groups.”¹³⁴

Allies, who were often middle- or upper-class, indirectly established their superiority by constructing lower-class identity in undesirable markers. (One ally described this idea “that [they] [were], after all, superior” as a “secret belief.”¹³⁵) Lower-class living, allies described, left “scars,” and meant “[feeling] neither clean nor cool” and wearing that stench as an “earthy badge of courage.”¹³⁶ People in the lower strata “‘feasted’ on bread, mayonnaise and ham, and Kool-aid (thanks to welfare)”; or ate egg sandwiches while “want[ing] the ham and egg.”¹³⁷ White allies would also note deference from lower-class black people (e.g., “‘Yes Ma’am’ and constant agreement with what you say” or “saying ‘Yes Sir’ to everything a white man says—and not really listening”).¹³⁸ Accounts of Freedom Summer feature well-educated volunteers complaining about “ha[ving] to completely re-do press statements or letters written by one of them,” or “mentally correcting their grammar or becoming impatient when they cannot answer...a very simple question.”¹³⁹ These examples capture allies constructing class in largely racial terms, albeit implicitly. Generally speaking, allies would acknowledge such racial fissures via separate markers, but not elaborate on the separating markers (e.g., “in their board shacks,” “in sharecropper shacks or in migrant worker camps”).¹⁴⁰

For one example, allies identified lower-class African Americans as poor, professionally limited, and badly educated. Poverty “attacked [their] dignity” and caused African Americans to feel “humiliated” and “desperate,” with “suffering etched in their worn faces.”¹⁴¹ African Americans were “Negro cooks,” “servants,” and cleaners; or “highly skilled manpower” in laboring fields.¹⁴² While allies aspired to see black people “doing ordinary work”—and often made such work possible—they also noted most white people “can’t understand what it means for a Negro to become a successful writer, or to be able to fly a jet plane, or to be trained to become an astronaut,” or to be “all over government.”¹⁴³ These middle- to upper-class professions were unattainable because black children were not “in contact with well-educated people” who might “teach them” how to circumvent “the hardships that lay ahead.”¹⁴⁴ Black students needed encouragement to “[think] for themselves,” allies reasoned, because “cultural and economic factors” encouraged bad “attitudes...towards education.”¹⁴⁵ Allies articulated feeling an “idealistic crisis” because on some level, they felt lower-class African Americans were “not really qualified to vote.”¹⁴⁶ While allies’ construction certainly corresponded to real circumstances, it remains a bleak, deterministic assessment of African Americans’ class situation.

As if to offset such pessimistic framing, allies effusively praised African Americans’ characters. Allies would refer to African Americans as “practical” or “simple people” leading lives of relative inner peace,” “who have simply accepted the status quo for as long as anyone can remember.”¹⁴⁷ In the face of racist violence, African Americans exhibited “inner peace, love, honor, courage and humor”—“ideal qualities of the soul”—with a “total lack of pretension.”¹⁴⁸ They were “the most joyful group you could imagine” and exceedingly generous: “if they had one cigarette left, they’d offer to halve it with you

before they'd smoke it in front of your face.”¹⁴⁹ To further praise African Americans’ “quality of character,” allies might denigrate white people who “often fail because of their own character.”¹⁵⁰ Such descriptions are positive, but they come across as compensatory when paired with allies’ disempowering construction of African American class identity.

Comparably compensatory was the intensity with which allies saw middle- or upper-class (white) people as sheltered and naively ignorant, despite extensive education. College or some advance degree were common at those levels of wealth, and “[a] diploma [meant] security” by which middle- and upper-class people “[could] make a significant contribution.”¹⁵¹ But security was also “a kind of death,” a “sort of a rut,” or “the manure of...success”; and any way, “humanity [was] so much more basic than education or intellectual achievement.”¹⁵² Middle- and upper-class people missed this because they were “egocentric” in their “middle class luxurious living”; sheltered by “the invisible shield of the law,” they lacked a “concept of violence” and “a simple concept of justice.”¹⁵³ They thought they were “almost totally free of bias” but were in fact “ignorant of one of the great evils of the modern world” and lacked “something to dedicate [their] [lives] to.”¹⁵⁴

The implication, often made explicit, was that middle- and upper-class people’s privilege obligated them to work so that others might enjoy comparable privilege. Allies posited that “rich middle or upper-class whites” with “tremendous advantage” were “bound by the problems of those” without such advantages.¹⁵⁵ That relationship—between middle- and upper-class people and those with less—created an “obligation [for fortunate people] to help people who were less fortunate”—to “[commit] [themselves] to concerns of other men.”¹⁵⁶ This construction applied to celebrities, too, because “people

empower [celebrities] with special rights and privileges” “to declare [themselves] on political issues” for widespread consideration.¹⁵⁷ Celebrities could “get as much ink and TV time as possible” to “focus attention on a problem that bother[ed them]” and ensure those problems were “openly addressed.”¹⁵⁸

Some allies, although unfortunately few, managed to openly address how racial and class identities were conjoined in a system of exploitation and scapegoating. The problem spanned the South and North: those with money and power “stifle[d] the rise of [black people]” and kept them in “real slavery” by making them “sell their [labor]...far below market price.”¹⁵⁹ Even after the passage of corrective legislation, black people would “still be in the cotton fields making three dollars a day [and] in white homes working as maids,” lacking “a fair chance to develop their own capacities.”¹⁶⁰ But “Negroes [were] not the only victims”: “white families...lived in stark poverty” while “the rich white played the poor white and Negro against each other.”¹⁶¹ For poor white people, then, the “problem goes somewhat deeper” than “blockbusting and depreciation of property values.”¹⁶²

Throughout the 1960s, advocacy and organizing tried to bring the conflict between rich and poor whites into the open but were largely unsuccessful. As part of a “White Community Project,” COFO sent eighteen Freedom Summer volunteers “to help poor whites ‘see that their enemy is not the Negro but poverty.’”¹⁶³ These poor whites were “approached with...the idea that segregation is a divide-and-conquer tactic used by the wealthier whites.”¹⁶⁴ The project largely failed, though, as volunteers failed to resolve the class and cultural discrepancies separating them from the poor white southerners. By May 1965, those who remained from Freedom Summer were appealing for, and not receiving, help “in getting the poor white farmer to see that the Negro is not his

enemy.”¹⁶⁵ In the summer of 1964, as the White Community Project floundered, Martin Luther King published *Why We Can't Wait*, in which he opted to change his “Negro Bill of Rights” to be a “Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged.” Historian Taylor Branch argues that King made this change because he felt that “to focus on Negro poverty alone was to invite questions about why the movement ignored the white poor” and their shared class identity.¹⁶⁶ King would increasingly focus on poverty over the remaining four years of his life, but this earlier hope for progress along shared class identity never came to fruition. Johnson, too, was concerned with pan-racial poverty, and by 1965 his efforts on civil rights were conjoining his anti-poverty program which “I think in the long run [will] help Negroes more.”¹⁶⁷ Although that program made inroads against poverty, it did little—and his rhetoric did little—to bridge the gap between impoverished whites and blacks.

Racial Identity: “I think it extremely important that you identify yourself as what you are”

To this point, I have surveyed how white allies used five fields of identity—regional, political, national, religious, and class—in making the case for civil rights. Racial identity also appears alongside these rhetorics; it is secondary even as it was the *primary* issue. Although it influenced the meaning and circulation of those primary identities, racial identity retreated. This retreat indicates something that will become more apparent in how allies engaged racial identity directly: white allies insufficiently engaged white racial privilege. White ally advocacy failed to interrogate roots of racism, and allies’ privileges and powers. Ally advocacy’s failure meant that moderate whites might accept the new law—even support it—without revising their identities in ways that would

eliminate racism and its component parts.

Snapshots from 1963 to 1968 reflect the need to rework “white” racial identity in conjunction with the civil rights movement. On its face, civil rights had ample support among whites: as debate on the Act began, 80% of whites and 60% of southerners said African Americans deserved equal treatment and rights, and those numbers were reconfirmed as the law was signed.¹⁶⁸ Yet southern legislators continued to obstruct the bill, northern moderates continued to hedge, racist violence raged, and a majority of polled white people preferred to resolve things without regularly interacting with black people.¹⁶⁹ These conditions persisted despite new civil rights laws and were re-confirmed when the 1968 Kerner Commission concluded that, “white racism is essentially responsible for the explosive [discrimination, segregation, and violence] that has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II.” The Commission did not differentiate between the North and South, or active and passive racism, or individual and group action, or overt and implicit bias. It clearly indicted all “white Americans.”¹⁷⁰

In contrast, white allies typically limited responsibility for racial tension to white racists and abstract systems. Racists were explicit in their hatred: they believed in white supremacy and hated non-white people “based upon race or color,” which de facto meant “because [they] [were] brown.”¹⁷¹ Allies gave racism historical depth, noting how “the negroes have lost for 150 years” and “[were] freed of [their] chains a hundred years ago, but [still faced] problems brought about by [their] color and the bigotry that exists.”¹⁷² These formulations, though, emphasized the discriminated group; and allies would also shift emphasis from racists by abstracting and disembodiment racism (e.g., “the white power structure,” “white society” or “white man’s laws”).¹⁷³ Allies were, of course, included in such abstractions but vagueness enabled them to avoid directly implicating

themselves.

Even as they constructed themselves as a source for good, allies split over how their identity was distinct from white racists. White people mostly tried to “understand [black] problems partially” but then there were “whites that do care.”¹⁷⁴ *These* white people—allies—“[shook] up the whites” by rejecting “white conveniences”; they were quite “uncomfortable” around neutral and racist whites alike.¹⁷⁵ White allies enjoyed “warm acceptance” from black people, and “[sought] out the Negroes to talk with” who, it was noted, “probably never talked...to a white man before.”¹⁷⁶ Such white civil rights supporters got a “strange feeling” hearing black people “talk about white folks’ injustices” when it was really “these goddamn fellas down there...eatin’ [black people] for breakfast every morning.”¹⁷⁷ Their work was deemed both “noble” and “valuable” by them and by society.¹⁷⁸ Some allies therefore felt they owed no “racial indemnity” because they were “entirely different” from racists, and “[doing work] for the Negro [even] without the [laws]” forcing them to.¹⁷⁹ Some other allies, though, felt all white people were “as guilty as [racists]” because it was “our power” that “[took] their property [and] [took] their lives.”¹⁸⁰ This division among allies was significant and, as I will elaborate, contributed to their insufficient critique of white privilege.

Allies similarly split about how they should go about supporting the black community. Allies collectively acknowledged a need to be “a student,” and try to “learn the nature of [black] experience” and “understand the Negroes’ resentment.”¹⁸¹ Black people “[knew] a lot more about civil rights,” allies conceded: white allies could not “know what it is to be a Negro” and needed to “hear it from you” rather than projecting.¹⁸² With that knowledge, one strain of ally advocacy said allies should “bring love,” “give...faith,” or “contribut[e] in some small measure to the relief of the anguish

and humiliation that black people are made to suffer”—but that “the positions of responsibility should be left to Negroes.”¹⁸³ Another strain, though, saw allies’ role as “assist[ing] the Negro” or “help[ing] the Negro,” or “interest[ing] them in wanting to help themselves”—but “[working in] integrated...groups” alongside “the real workers” and “under Negro leadership.”¹⁸⁴ As allies moved from emotional support to actions, their own judgment could take charge to the point they were “see[ing] a job that needs to be done and...do[ing] it”—deciding “for the Negro community” rather than responding to directions or requests.¹⁸⁵ During Freedom Summer, some white allies were “among the strongest advocates of black nationalism” while others asserted it was “as bad or worse than white supremacy”; but regardless, such debates were “wholly amongst the whites.”¹⁸⁶

Allies also constructed “the whites” as having a stake in civil rights reform. Allies argued that white people were capable of “shar[ing] [black people’s sense of loss and...gain,” “working together as equals,” and making “their cause...our cause.”¹⁸⁷ Given this capacity, white people just needed to realized they were “sick” and “suffer[ing]...from [their] oppression of the Negro”; and that confronting racism could “liberat[e] not only Negroes, [but] white people” as well.¹⁸⁸ While such generalities were common, allies rarely pinned down the meanings of these terms: what were the symptoms of sickness and suffering, or the parameters of liberation? For white racists, these answers were clear, if implied; but for white moderates, and even allies, these answers needed to be elaborated and were not.

While dodging such important particulars, allies also minimized the racial distinctions between black and white people. Speaking for their own experience with black people, some allies noted “no difference” nor “sense of racial difference,” “[nor] an

inability to communicate with one another.”¹⁸⁹ In their communities, “group and race labels...were never very clear” or “the question [of race] didn’t come up,” and laws applied “equally and fairly” “whether [people were] purple, brown, black, yellow, red, green, or whatever.”¹⁹⁰ But with such indistinct barriers, allies could approach the point of seeing themselves, on some level, *as black*. Freedom Summer volunteers referred to themselves as “white Negroes” or “social negroes” because they “live[d] with Negroes, [kept] their hours, [ate] their food, talk[ed] their talk...[and] trie[d] to think their thoughts.”¹⁹¹ As much as “it [was] fruitless...to try to be Negro,” volunteers referred to “our ‘brown skin underneath’” to differentiate themselves from “actual Negroes,” and referred to African Americans in familial terms.¹⁹² With such extreme attempts to symbolically equate white and black people, it is no wonder that allies had trouble mounting a critique of white privileges that extended to *all* white people—not just the racists.

As the discussion so far might indicate, allies split again over how ally identity structured their responses to overt racism. Johnson, for example, frequently *used* racial epithets and stereotypes privately and unrepentantly, while Brando telegrammed a radio station when he heard commentators use the term “Jap,” explaining that the term “is considered by the Japanese as unsavory and derogatory.”¹⁹³ Wherever they fell between those extremes, allies recognized certain constructions of black people as stereotypes, and disagreed with the “the white-is-right-Anglo-Saxon-uber-alles” logic—but also tried to “get away from arguing segregation” or other forms of discrimination.¹⁹⁴ They demonstrated skepticism about “changing the white folks” whose “deeply entrenched values of a certain way of life” stood in the way of civil rights reform—so they “tried to avoid any contact.”¹⁹⁵ Given the violence by extreme racists, such avoidance is

understandable, if counterproductive—but what about white moderates?

There is little evidence that white allies engaged white moderates about their shared systemic white privilege. Allies *did* construct white identity as a “brotherhood” in which “white brothers” had a degree of responsibility to engage “the white community, now!”¹⁹⁶ When they did engage, though, allies adjectivized white identity, functionally handicapping their ability to converse about their shared racial identity. Other white people might be “poor whites,” or “white women,” or “white kids,” or “middle or upper-class whites,” or “white liberals”; and each intersectional identity impeded allies from discussing “racial difference [as] a fact that must be considered if chaos, hatred and violence are to be prevented.”¹⁹⁷ When allies *did* talk about civil rights with other white people, allies wanted them to “know us,” or “know what we are like” so they could understand “our real motives”—all while stressing that “[allies] [were] speaking for [themselves].”¹⁹⁸

White Ally Advocacy: Overlooking White Privilege

White allies drew from their political, historical and social context to facilitate civil rights reform. White allies traded on America’s global philosophical leadership, just as male allies had when advocating for equal suffrage. As in suffrage advocacy, ally advocacy united Americans around their guiding and founding principles, and around their shared responsibility for the whole country. Particularly poignant in white ally advocacy was the stark regional divide, rooted in culture and forged in the Civil War. Southerners were trapped in a social system that limited their free thought and action, with limited individual potential to escape; northerners could, like their Yankee

predecessors, demonstrate an alternative, more-just social arrangement. Region influenced political and religious identity, too, and made those identities increasingly poor descriptors of people who shared the same worldview. Still, allies invoked political and religious identities as though those identities meant the same to differently-situated people. But they did not; and by failing to explore important perspectival differences, allies lost a chance to forge genuinely common ground through these ancillary identities.

What civil rights advocacy required, though, was direct engagement with racial identity; and allies often short-circuited such engagement by *implying* race within other identities. When allies spoke of the south, they negatively constructed southerners as immoral racists with dubious control over their society; in reality, they were talking about *white* southerners. (White) northerners had the moral authority and capacity to intervene in the south, just as (white) liberals were obstacles to civil rights. Allies constructed Americans as protecting other citizens' rights and working to overcome flaws in the country—but *black* Americans lacked the power to do either in a comprehensive way. This avoidance-by-implication was most noticeable in how allies constructed class identities: middle- and upper-class people were privileged and sheltered, with an obligation to serve those with less privilege—and those with less privilege decidedly pro-civil-rights because of lived experience. Allies rarely constructed these class identities as caught in the same tangled web as regional, political, national, and religious identity: race.

When allies did discuss race they minimized distinctions between white and black people. Black and white civil rights supporters worked together in “the movement” and would benefit from civil rights reform, just like black people. White and black people did

not have equal power, but that discrepancy was noted without noting any particulars. Common rights held by white and black people were similarly invoked without specifics.

While minimizing inter-racial differences, allies maximized and often muddled the distinctions between white people. Allies ultimately saw themselves as qualitatively better than non-civil-rights-supporting white people; they also, and often, constructed themselves as more capable of political leadership than their black colleagues. Racism existed in the North, allies conceded, but pivoted quickly back to the extremity of Southern racism. The gulf between allies and racists was large—or maybe it was not, depending who the ally was. Maybe allies needed to actively confront overt racism—or maybe they did not, depending who the ally was. Maybe white allies needed to defer to black people for how they should engage with the movement—or maybe they need not, depending who the ally was. Such extreme divergence among allies—on the very issues anchoring the debate—meant ally advocacy did not present a clear argument to white people about whiteness.

Such opacity, minimizing, and indirectness may have assembled the coalition needed to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but not to seriously cripple the white supremacist ideology that made such legislation necessary. Surely allies (and black movement activists) needed time for their rhetoric to sink in: Bob Moses predicted it would take “fifty years for this to work itself out” and, right or wrong, a majority of white Americans in 1966 expressed that civil rights were progressing too quickly.¹⁹⁹ Pacing aside, though, allies did not provide their white peers with the necessary ingredients for an evaluation of American racial privilege. Instead of sketching how privilege baked into white skin, or linking the economic subjugation of slavery to black peoples’ employment and education, allies demonized Southerners and belabored how different they were from

allies. Allies spent rhetorical energy collapsing tangible distinctions between white and black people rather than extending those distinctions to those who shared a white identity. Exemplary is the Freedom Summer volunteer who presciently identified “white supremacy” as the force that “must be overcome first”—but charged “all Americans” with overcoming it.²⁰⁰ Fragments like this obscured white people’s responsibility for, as Harry Belafonte had put it, “whether this thing is going to end successfully and joyously or is going to end disastrously.”²⁰¹

The insufficiency of this rhetoric can be seen in those years surrounding the Civil Rights Act of 1964. From the Birmingham, Alabama, jail, Martin Luther King wrote that he had “almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block...is not the White Citizen’s Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate,” who suffered from “shallow understanding.”²⁰² SNCC asked white allies to remedy this by “organiz[ing] in your own communities against racism”; but instead of talking to white people, or northerners, white allies instead focused on the extreme racism in the South.²⁰³ By 1968, white allies’ inattention to racial identity and privilege fueled the Kerner Commission to conclude, “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”²⁰⁴ White allies were ideally positioned to help bridge that gap, but they were increasingly preoccupied with the Vietnam War, the student movement, or the women’s movement.²⁰⁵ As the 1960s ended, the rhetorical emphasis on civil rights ebbed and the opportunity for culture-wide conversations about racial identity and privilege lessened. We have been suffering the loss of that opportunity since.

Note

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Campaign Speech” (October 9, 1964).

² Chalmers Roberts, “Johnson in New Orleans... Dramatic Highlight of Campaign,” *Boston Globe*, October 11, 1964.

³ Sylvia Ellis, *Freedom’s Pragmatist: Lyndon Johnson and Civil Rights* (University Press of Florida, 2013), 110.

⁴ Robert A. Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson IV*, Kindle Edition (Vintage, 2012), Location 13724.

⁵ Davi Johnson, “Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 1 (2007): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2007.0023>.

⁶ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963 - 65*, 1. Touchstone ed (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1999), 164.

⁷ Branch, 238.

⁸ Todd S. Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come: Two Presidents, Two Parties, and the Battle for the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Henry Holt and Co., 2014), 135.

⁹ James Baldwin, “Whites Have No Reason to Be Surprised,” *The Decatur Daily Review*, July 26, 1968.

¹⁰ “200 Integrationists ‘Deposit’ Themselves in Illinois Bank,” *The Akron Beacon Journal*, August 16, 1963.

¹¹ Richard Gould, “Gould,” 2013, 91, Archives Main Stacks, SC 3072, Wisconsin Historical Society: Richard N. Gould papers, 1963-1965.

¹² Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 134.

¹³ Historian Sylvia Ellis argues that Johnson’s recorded “conversations provide insights unimaginable from a memo, a letter, or a newspaper column.” Since he assumed they would remain private, they capture Johnson “laps[ing] into racial stereotypes and offensive terminology when speaking to those who did not welcome rapid racial change—but much more often persuading, pressing, cajoling, even bullying politicians to move forward on civil rights legislation and appointments”: Ellis, *Freedom’s Pragmatist*, 7.

¹⁴ Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, 16.

¹⁵ Simeon Booker, *Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 7.

¹⁶ Booker, 62.

¹⁷ *Browder v. Gayle*, No. 142 F. Supp. 707 (U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama June 5, 1956).

¹⁸ Joshua Zeitz, *Building the Great Society: Inside Lyndon Johnson's White House*, 2018, 5.

¹⁹ Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate, The Years of Lyndon Johnson 3* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 859.

²⁰ Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, 112.

²¹ Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (Mariner Books, 2005), xvi.

²² Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, 102.

²³ Clay Risen, *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act* (Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 8.

²⁴ Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, 24.

²⁵ Risen, *The Bill of the Century*, 20.

²⁶ Kotz, *Judgment Days*, 58–59.

²⁷ Booker, *Shocking the Conscience*, xii.

²⁸ Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, 238.

²⁹ Risen, *The Bill of the Century*, 69.

³⁰ Risen, 158.

³¹ Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, 249; 290–91.

³² Kotz, *Judgment Days*, 105.

³³ David Kraslow, "Civil Rights Volunteers to Expand Dixie Project: Negroes Helped in Struggle for Basic Freedoms," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1964; Sandra Hard, "Hard," 2013, 110, Archives Main Stacks, SC 642, Wisconsin Historical Society: Sandra Hard papers, 1964 -1965.

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³⁶ Michael Lydon, “Volunteers for Freedom Scared but Not Quitting,” *Boston Globe*, June 21, 1964.

³⁷ Griswold, “Griswold,” 7; Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 238; Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez, ed., *Letters from Mississippi* (Brookline, MA: Zephyr Press, 2007), 86.

³⁸ Len Edwards to Mom and John, Undated, summer 1964, Personal collection of Judge Len Edwards; Associated Press, “Brando Aids Negro Drive at Gadsden,” August 23, 1963.

³⁹ “Brando Fights for Civil Rights,” *Ebony*, October 1963; Michael Edmonds, ed., *Risking Everything: A Freedom Summer Reader* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2014), 61.

⁴⁰ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 86.

⁴¹ Martínez, 30; Len Edwards to Jeep, July 27, 1964, Personal collection of Judge Len Edwards; Nicholas Von Hoffman, “The Stranger Is the Enemy: A Notebook From Mississippi, Where Every Man Watches This Summer, And Every Man Is Watched,” *Washington Post*, August 16, 1964.

⁴² “Brando Fights for Civil Rights”; Edwards to Jeep, July 27, 1964; Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 187.

⁴³ Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 24.

⁴⁴ Dan Fabian, “College Student Gives His Summer to Help Negro Cause in Mississippi,” *Journal and Courier*, August 29, 1964.

⁴⁵ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 170.

⁴⁶ Martínez, 130.

⁴⁷ Edmonds, *Risking Everything*, 125.

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- ⁴⁸ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 130, 133, 201; Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (Penguin Books, 2010), 82.
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- ⁵⁵ Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*, 7.
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¹⁸³ Gould, “Gould,” 14; Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 27; Martínez, 133; Mizruchi, *Brando’s Smile*, 322.

¹⁸⁴ Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 5–6; Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 27; “Actors Marlon Brando and Paul Newman In Visit To Sacramento CORE Sit-In”; Hard, “Hard,” 194; Hodes, “Hodes,” 58; Edwards to Brothers Two, July 19, 1964.

¹⁸⁵ “Four Marin Students Report on Work with Negroes in South,” *Daily Independent Journal*, July 13, 1964; Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 260.

¹⁸⁶ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 118; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 194; Hodes, “Hodes,” 64.

¹⁸⁷ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 22; 204; “Fifth Hour of Coverage”; Edwards to Ollie, Undated, summer 1964; Kotz, *Judgment Days*, vi.

¹⁸⁸ Gould, “Gould,” 92; Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 32; Hexter, “Hexter,” 94.

¹⁸⁹ Brando and Lindsey, *Songs*, Locations 779 and 810; Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 5.

¹⁹⁰ Heston, “Other Faces, Other Faiths”; Heston, *In the Arena*, 30; Caro, *The Passage of Power*, Location 11877; Zeitz, *Building the Great Society*, 242.

¹⁹¹ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 88; Edmonds, *Risking Everything*, 129.

¹⁹² Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 31; 102; Johnson, “Harmony, Miss., Has One Store, Not Single Telephone”; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 194.

¹⁹³ Mizruchi, *Brando’s Smile*, 315; See, for example: Robert Parker and Richard L. Rashke, *Capitol Hill in Black and White*, 1st ed (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1986), v; 16; 23; 52; Kotz, *Judgment Days*, 94.

¹⁹⁴ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 160; Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 23.

¹⁹⁵ Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 23; Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 160; Hodes, “Hodes,” 72.

¹⁹⁶ Gould, “Gould,” 9; Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 154; Mizruchi, *Brando’s Smile*, 336.

¹⁹⁷ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 236; Watson, *Freedom Summer*, 199–200; 229; “Brando Fights for Civil Rights”; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 107; Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 6; 13; Zeitz, *Building the Great Society*, 98; Hard, “Hard,” 28.

¹⁹⁸ Heston, *In the Arena*, 315; Hodes, “Hodes,” 64; Gould, “Gould,” 12; Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 14.

¹⁹⁹ Branch, *Pillar of Fire*; Zeitz, *Building the Great Society*.

²⁰⁰ Martínez, “Correspondence, Part 2, 1964-1966,” 120.

²⁰¹ United States Information Agency, *Roundtable March Washington* (Washington, DC, 1963), <https://www.c-span.org/video/?314549-1/roundtable-march-washington&start=184>.

²⁰² Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” *Ebony*, August 1963, 26.

²⁰³ Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, xvii.

²⁰⁴ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report*, 1.

²⁰⁵ McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 117.

Chapter 3: Straight Allies and the Movement for Marriage Equality

Introduction

A Wednesday at 2 p.m., was an odd time for the President of the United States to break the news that he supported same-sex marriage. The previous Friday, however, while taping *Meet the Press*, his vice president, Joe Biden, had said that “men marrying men, women marrying women and heterosexual men and women marrying one other are entitled to the same exact rights.” This would have disrupted a president who did not support same-sex marriage regardless—but Biden also pointed out that “the president sets the policy” for the administration.¹ The president planned to set *new* policy but had waited for the most politically opportune time as he moved toward his reelection. (The Obama reelection campaign raised \$1 million in the ninety minutes after his announcement.²) But when his Secretary of Education voiced support for marriage equality on Monday, President Barack Obama had no choice but to accelerate his timeline to Wednesday, May 9, 2012, at 2 p.m. Kerry Eleveld, who had been the first openly-gay reporter at White House briefings, hailed Obama’s support as “everything we could have hoped to deliver to the movement.”³

Despite this valuable contribution, Obama did not deliver—neither in this interview, nor elsewhere—a critique of the basis for heterosexuals’ exclusive marriage rights. These were rights “we take for granted,” but outside this implicit instance “we” primarily referred to Americans. There was one reference to “heterosexual couple[s]” but “couples” were “same-sex” three more times in the brief interview. These couples were barred from marriage because “a lot of people”—

again, implicitly heterosexual people—had “very powerful traditions [and] religious beliefs,” and strong desires to “want to preserve and strengthen families.” Three times, Obama reiterated his respect for them and argued that they were “not...mean-spirited.” But gay people had proven themselves “as committed, as monogamous, as responsible”; “respectful of religious liberty”; and deserving of “their legal rights.” Gay people met heterosexuals’ terms, in other words, rendering mute a conversation about the validity of those terms.

Even without this conversation, heterosexual Americans changed their thinking at roughly the same pace as Obama. After then-President George W. Bush called for a federal constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, voters passed all eleven statewide bans in the 2004 election.⁴ In that same election, Barack Obama won a U.S. Senate seat after campaigning “that marriage is something sanctified between a man and a woman,” even if gays and lesbians “deserve[d] the rights of citizenship.”⁵ Two years later, in his *Audacity of Hope*, Obama “remain[ed] open to the possibility that my unwillingness to support gay marriage is misguided,” but continued to support civil unions over marriage equality.⁶ Right or wrong, he read the electorate correctly: 56 percent of Americans agreed with him about marriage, and 54 percent agreed with him about civil unions.⁷ In 2008, he became president saying he still “consider[ed] marriage to be between a man and a woman”; his words were even repurposed by the anti-gay campaign in California, which won alongside Obama’s lopsided California victory. In his first two years, he signed the Hate Crimes Prevention Act and the repeal of the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy while the public’s support for marriage equality shifted.⁸ Finally, in May 2011, Gallup found “that a majority of Americans, 53 percent, now supported the right of

same-sex couples to legally marry.”⁹ It would take another year for Obama to declare his support but once he did, a battleground-state poll found that one in five voters had come to their support “in the last few years, as President Barack Obama said he did earlier this year.”¹⁰ Three years later, and two months before the Supreme Court declared marriage equality, an ABC / Washington Post poll found that Americans had undergone “a total flip” since 2004, “when a nearly identical percentage opposed same-sex marriage” as now supported it.¹¹

While Obama evolved alongside the public, there were already-evolved straight people working alongside gay people to bring about the flip. Straight allies worked phones, knocked doors, and persuaded friends and family to vote for equal rights in dozens of statewide campaigns. Faith communities played a particularly significant role, where (typically) straight believers advanced (typically) Christian arguments for accepting same-sex people, and same-sex marriage most specifically. Straight allies in entertainment were particularly visible, and used their celebrity as actors, musicians, and athletes to advocate for acceptance and equal rights.

One organization existed long before 2004, helping concentrate, structure, and direct straight allies: PFLAG. Since 1973, PFLAG gathered parents, family, and friends of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, and queer people. The organization calls itself “the country’s original family and ally organization” and boasts “more than 350 chapters across the United States, in a network of more than 200,000 members and supporters.” PFLAG calls the allies in this massive network to “acknowledge and work to subvert their heterosexual privilege” because “[t]hey have a unique power to send the message that inclusion and equality aren’t just things that people in the group affected want.”¹² The national organization spread that message

through internal training documents, press releases, short videos and interviews; and local leaders put their own spin on it with their own videos and interviews, as well as op-eds, blog posts, letters to the editor, and quotations within news articles. A collection of PFLAG fragments, limited to the period between Bush's 2004 speech and 2015's Supreme Court decision, grounds my assemblage of straight ally advocacy.

I also incorporate fragments from hip-hop artist Macklemore. Although many straight entertainers advocated, Macklemore penned the song numerous sources dubbed the movement's "anthem"; he also penned it specifically to support Washington's same-sex marriage campaign.¹³ Concurrent with the song's first fourteen months of circulation, support for marriage equality grew 15%, and the number of Americans for whom same-sex marriage was legal doubled.¹⁴ In the summer of 2013, before and after the Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the song shot up the *Billboard* top-100 from seventy-two to eleven. The song's timely climb was facilitated by pro-gay radio DJs and a powerful music video viewed over seventy million times by September 2013.¹⁵ The song's lyrics—repeated far, far more often than anything else in this project—make it a very significant piece of straight ally advocacy. I also include Macklemore's interviews, videos, and isolated quotations.

Finally, my third source for straight ally advocacy is Barack Obama. When Bush called for a constitutional amendment, Obama was an Illinois state senator who supported the gay community and had passed pro-gay legislation.¹⁶ He would win election to the U.S. Senate in 2004, and the presidency in 2008, by calling for similar federal protections, DADT's repeal, and state-level civil unions with identical-to-

marriage legal rights. Obama would be the first president to host a Pride Month reception (2009), to speak about gay rights in the UN General Assembly (2011), to use the word “gay” in an inaugural address (2013), and “to pass the first positive LGBT legislation in the nation’s history.”¹⁷ Eleveld contends, though, that although “LGBT rights...will undoubtedly be one of [Obama’s] most consequential legacies,” he “needed a relentless, outside-the-Beltway push”—especially to “evolve” to support same-sex marriage.¹⁸ Responding to that push meant he spoke in support of gays and lesbians exponentially more than any previous president, leaving a rich trove of interviews, quotations, proclamations, and speeches to add to straight ally advocacy.

When brought together, these three sources knit a rhetoric around five fields of identity. As with both previous movements, allies deployed regional identity, but straight allies focused on more local communities. Turning nationally, straight allies identified Americans as committed to core values not dissimilar from those proffered by white allies. As with the civil rights movement, marriage equality activists attended to religion, and straight allies constructed a stark divide between inclusive Christians and those who opposed same-sex marriage. The most rhetorical space was consumed by family and sexual identity. Allies sketched ideal qualities for family members, with particular attention to parents. They also located couples at the core of families, linked by commitment, love, and legal rights. The other crux of the debate—sexual identity—was marked by thorough attention to what straight people should and should not do, while almost never saying the word “straight.” Allies used “gay” often, though: they reaffirmed the negative markers of gay identity while trying to widen the parameters of what straight Americans considered gay people to be. This

necessarily meant expanding certain core identities within American society, as allies in both previous movements did as well.

Once again, though, allies failed to thoroughly engage the dominating element of their own privileged identity, and I argue that straight allies did so by spending the bulk of their efforts identifying gays and lesbians into existing rhetorics. Gay people could be parents, siblings, soldiers, spouses, workers, friends, family, believers, Americans, or neighbors—“they’re just like you,” straight allies argued to other straight people. What attention was given to straight identity was given to allies—what straight people should, ideally, be—and straight opponents. Allies largely downplayed the heterosexism that united allies and opponents, shaping the identities they occupied—identities into which they now situated gays and lesbians. By constructing the sameness between straight and gay people, allies cut short a necessary reevaluation of why sexual differences resulted in such disparate rights.

The marriage equality movement was itself situated within a broader movement for same-sex equality from which it drew rhetorical themes. After more than a decade battling AIDS and Republican presidents, gay activists organized politically to support Bill Clinton. Clinton was himself the first president to openly embrace the gay community—but he also *enacted* two of the policies activists would fight for nearly the next two decades: “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (1993) and the Defense of Marriage Act (1996). Against the backdrop of these policies, Matthew Shepard’s brutal 1998 murder—committed because Shepard was gay—would inspire a push for gay-inclusive hate crimes legislation. Gay people’s desire for marriage rights would eventually move to the center of the movement, though, in a series of events beginning in early 2004. From that point forward, marriage equality

commanded the movement's money, energy, and political capital in a series of statewide campaigns first *against* marriage bans, then *for* equal marriage rights. A parallel series of court cases culminated in two Supreme Court decisions which first crippled DOMA (2013), and then extended marriage rights to all Americans (2015).

Toward Marriage Equality

Roughly thirty years before those decisions, the gay rights movement was preoccupied with a threat far more existential. At the end of the 1970s, the movement had been forced to confront a spate of anti-gay local ordinances. But as Jim Darsey argues, after 1980 “the movement’s devil figures became more diverse and amorphous.”¹⁹ Evangelical Christians were local to most communities, largely homophobic, and had become a significant cultural force as they boosted Ronald Reagan to the presidency. Rather than keep a low profile, though, and wait for friendlier political leadership, “gays were forced into the public consciousness by AIDS,” notes Darsey.²⁰ Adrienne Christiansen and Jeremy Hanson argue that, in that public consciousness, gay men were constructed as “guilty of personal and sexual sins,” “socially and medically impure,” and personally “responsible for the American AIDS dilemma.”²¹ As thousands of gay men battled the disease, the movement found itself fighting for its members’ lives and against the apathy of the Reagan and Bush Administrations.²²

This led the movement to do something they had not previously done: collectively back a candidate for president. Gay community leaders like David Mixner told politicians like Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, “I have to know where you stand on...AIDS and our struggle for our freedom,” and attached money and

votes to the answer.²³ Clinton, in turn, actively campaigned to gays and lesbians, telling them, “I have a vision of America—and you’re part of it.”²⁴ This message, Eleveld recalls, “felt like a political spring for gay America” after a winter of two presidents who “denied its very existence even as gay men died of AIDS by the thousands.”²⁵ That visceral horror had warranted abrasive and confrontational advocacy, but the 1990s demanded what Becker calls a “politics of access.”²⁶ Access was tangible, as Clinton appointed an estimated 150 gay people throughout his administration; and symbolic, as Clinton declared the first Gay Pride month, welcomed openly gay guests to the White House, and spoke to gay and lesbian groups.²⁷ Urvashi Vaid, who was then executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, rejoiced to the *New York Times*: “For the first time in our history, we’re going to be full and open partners in the Government.”²⁸

But that partnership quickly soured as Clinton encountered roadblocks to gays serving openly in the military. The military held that being gay was “incompatible with military service,” and Clinton had promised to end this by executive order, both during the campaign and again after his election.²⁹ But in late January 1993, Republicans and conservative Democrats threatened to override Clinton with a law to bar gay people from military service. The debate dragged through Congressional hearings, public speeches, and op-eds until Clinton announced, in July, an “honorable compromise”: the military would stop asking recruits about their sexuality (“Don’t Ask”), and gay servicemembers could serve—albeit keeping their sexuality secret (“Don’t Tell”). Openly gay congressman Barney Frank defended Clinton, saying “people who say that he could have gotten more are wrong,” but Mixner and others saw it as “betrayal.”³⁰ Reflecting nearly twenty years later, journalist Tracy Baim cast

this as the first instance when Clinton “stumbled badly on gay issues and actually moved the community backward.”³¹

The second major instance came three years later when Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act. Congress rushed to pass the act in 1996 over fear that Hawaii would legalize same-sex marriage. To allay that fear, the act allowed states to not recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states, but it also defined, for federal purposes, “marriage” as between one man and one woman, and “spouse” as someone of the opposite sex.³² Clinton did not ask for the bill but only fourteen of one-hundred senators had opposed it, forcing him to sign it or face an embarrassing veto override.³³ Yet even as he reaffirmed his “long oppos[ition to] governmental recognition of same-gender marriages,” he warned against using the legislation as “an excuse for discrimination, violence or intimidation” and urged Congress to “enact anti-discrimination laws.”³⁴

Clinton’s call was vividly justified by the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard. Shepard, a twenty-one-year old student in Wyoming, was brutally beaten, tortured, and left to die by two men, specifically because he was gay. The crime captivated the nation through its extensive circulation on news media and also left its mark on entertainment media: Ron Becker notes a surge of both “affirmative gay content” and “storylines focused on gay teenagers” following the hate crime.³⁵ Clinton fed these flames in his 1999 State of the Union, declaring that “violence because of race or religion, ancestry or gender, disability or sexual orientation, is wrong, and it ought to be illegal.”³⁶ Despite this, the first time a president spoke of gay people in a State of the Union, federal policymakers did not pass the Hate Crime Prevention Act of 1999, and a whopping twenty-five of the twenty-six states that year which considered

adding sexual orientation to hate crimes laws defeated those bills.³⁷ Hate crimes would join military service and marriage as core, unresolved movement issues that would persist into the Obama Administration.

Between Clinton and Obama was George W. Bush, the president who would move same-sex marriage to the core of the gay rights movement. In his 2004 State of the Union, Bush railed against “activist judges...redefining marriage by court order” and threatened a “constitutional process” if they did not stop.³⁸ Two weeks later, the Massachusetts Supreme Court rebuffed same-sex civil unions in lieu of marriage, pointedly noting, “The dissimilitude...is a considered choice of language that reflects a demonstrable assigning of same-sex, largely homosexual, couples to second-class status.”³⁹ Eight days later, on February 12, San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples; another eight days and the clerk in Sandoval County, NM, followed suit; another week, and New Paltz, NY; then, three days and Ithaca, NY; and on March 3, same-sex couples began marrying in Multnomah County, OR.⁴⁰

Amidst these marriages, on February 24, 2004, Bush called for a constitutional amendment defining marriage in heterosexual terms. He linked marriage to familial identities, arguing that it solidified “the commitment of a husband and wife to love and to serve one another,” and to foster “the welfare of children.” Marriage was also “honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith,” and therefore “[could not] be severed from its cultural, religious and natural roots.” Bush also raised the tension between local and federal control “because attempts to redefine marriage in a single state or city could have serious consequences throughout the country”; “the preservation of marriage” in heterosexual terms was therefore “of national importance.”⁴¹ Numerous observers noted that, while

Bush may have been sincere, his statement was coordinated to ensure his reelection—coordinated with the same evangelical groups that had elevated Ronald Reagan twenty-four years earlier amid a flurry of anti-gay local ordinances. These groups placed same-sex marriage bans on eleven states’ ballots, including key battleground states Michigan and Ohio; the resulting voter turnout passed all eleven measures and pushed Bush to reelection.⁴²

The gay movement now found itself recalibrating for a fight it had largely avoided. Leigh Moscovitz catalogued activists’ “resistance, fear, and hesitance over marriage” on both “ideological grounds and tactical grounds.” Some felt the movement should be “challenging family structure” rather than seeking to join it, while others felt like other issues were more urgent to a broader swath of the community; but they agreed that society was just not ready.⁴³ Gay activists also largely lost control over the issue as it “came to prominence not because of our community but because of our opponents.”⁴⁴ Be that as it may, the question had now been called, and the movement needed to “shift priorities in order to dedicate increased energy, resources, and messaging to marriage.”⁴⁵ Major movement organizations also began recruiting non-gay members and organizational alliances in earnest because, as PFLAG’s Jody Huckaby put it, “There are a lot more straight people than LGBT people.”⁴⁶ Columnist Dan Savage also posited that, numbers aside, it was “infinitely more valuable” to have “heterosexual parents lobbying.”⁴⁷

Between 2004 and 2012, the movement battled on numerous electoral, legislative, and judicial fronts. Besides the eleven bans passed by popular vote in November 2004, two more passed in 2004, another two in 2005, another nine in 2006, and another three in 2008. By 2008, only seven states did not have legal framework

banning same-sex marriages. Eleveld observes that “President Obama presided over a tipping point,” and the shift toward equal marriage rights began around his inauguration.⁴⁸ That spring legislatures in New Hampshire and Vermont, and the Iowa Supreme Court, extended marriage rights. New York’s legislature followed suit in 2011, and Maryland and Washington’s legislatures in 2012. In those states, though, the laws were reaffirmed by popular vote in November—the first time voters had passed marriage equality. Maine voters passed a pro-marriage initiative that election, too, bringing the total number of states with same-sex marriage to nine.⁴⁹

During these latter years, the movement began the legal challenges which would eventually resolve the question. The lawyers who had opposed each other in *Bush v. Gore*, Ted Olson and David Boies, filed a case in May 2009 on behalf of two same-sex California couples who had been denied marriage licenses. The gay legal group, Lambda Legal, felt the filing was “risky and premature,” but eventually joined the litigation.⁵⁰ A year and a half later, Edie Windsor took issue with the hefty estate-tax bill she received after her wife died, all because the federal government did not recognize their marriage. Her case was a direct assault against the Defense of Marriage Act and, after initially supporting the Act, Obama’s Justice Department declared it was unconstitutional in February 2011.⁵¹ The two cases were bundled and decided on June 26, 2013, narrowly legalizing same-sex marriage in California but striking down the heart of DOMA. The case which would legalize same-sex marriage across the country, *Obergefell v. Hodges (2015)*, actually began as six separate cases from four separate states, initially filed over three separate years (2012-2014).

In his *Obergefell* opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy brought an end to eleven years of fervent advocacy. Kennedy acknowledged “changed understandings of

marriage” as “characteristic of a Nation where new dimensions of freedom become apparent to new generations, often through perspectives that begin in pleas or protests and then are considered in the political sphere and the judicial process.” Recounting the “years of litigation, legislation, [and] referenda,” Kennedy arrived at the core problem: “the States are now divided on the issue of same-sex marriage.” This division obscured a trend that both Kennedy and Chief Justice John Roberts (in his dissent) noted: a “shift in public attitudes toward greater tolerance,” and the “considerable success” “supporters of same-sex marriage have achieved.”⁵² Those supporters were both gay and straight, and they brought about that shift through their combined arguments.

On the road to *Obergefell*, these arguments furthered other policies advancing broader acceptance. In 2009, Obama signed the hate crimes legislation bearing Matthew Shepard’s name. December of 2010 saw a long legislative battle to repeal DADT, resulting in what Rep. Frank called the biggest piece of civil rights legislation since the Voting Rights Act of 1965.⁵³ Four months after Obama’s Attorney General declared DOMA unconstitutional, his Secretary of Education sought to empower anti-bullying efforts by declaring that gay-straight alliances (GSAs) had the right to form.⁵⁴

Thus, from 2011 on, movement rhetoric shifted focus from winning benefits and rights, to building identification between straights and gays. Gay and straight supporters began to argue that “gays and lesbians wanted to marry for the same reason straight couples did: to commit to one another.” They also aligned same-sex marriage “with core American values” and Judeo-Christian beliefs.⁵⁵ Human Rights Campaign’s Chad Griffin would specifically praise Obama for this identification

rhetoric which he believed “helped the American people get to know LGBT people on a personal level.”⁵⁶ While Obama certainly had, as *The Advocate* said in its 2012 endorsement, “the power to move millions in a way that...no other person could have,” his rhetoric was not substantively different from his fellow allies.

In the next five sections, I will elaborate how straight allies wielded identity rhetorics within this context to personalize the issue of marriage equality. State-specific campaigning and locally-anchored PFLAG chapters encouraged allies to construct regional identities as inclusive, and gay people as neighbors. Gay people were also fellow Americans, and their shared national identity meant common principles, values, and rights with straight Americans. Christianity was also shared between straight and gay people, although certain Christians wrongly rejected the divinity and faithfulness of gay people. In discussing family identity, straight allies focused primarily on the ideal behavior of family members with particular attention to (usually straight) parents (of gay children). Families centered on loving, committed couples regardless of their marital status and genders. Unlike with the other four fields of identity, allies used sexual identity to construct the lived experiences of people sharing a sexuality, minus almost everything sexual. They identified the ideal behavior of straight people toward gay people—essentially defining their own role as “allies”—and reiterated the social parameters demanding such behavior. This final field, though, poignantly demonstrates the argument present in the other four fields: straight allies identify gays and lesbians into existing rhetorics without dismantling the heterosexist origins and basis for those rhetorics.

Regional Identity: “We’re one community regardless of all that”

With statewide marriage equality campaigns, it was unsurprising that allies would invoke state identity as they advocated—but they also deployed identities on a far more local level. Sometimes allies specified political boundaries—school districts, towns, or counties—but more often they spoke of “communities” they shared with geographically-proximate people. Allies celebrated when their regions were welcoming and resigned themselves when their regions were not; but regardless they deployed regional pride to encourage their straight neighbors to support marriage equality. It was also crucially important that allies made straight people recognize gays and lesbians as the neighbors they already were.

There were gay neighbors everywhere because some experiences, allies argued, were shared across distinct regional identities. Gay people lived in “every kind of city and region” “[f]rom Georgia to Ohio and Indiana, from New York to California,” “[f]rom the Rocky Mountains to the heart of the South” “and every community in-between.”⁵⁷ Across these different regions, the same stories “play[ed] out in the living rooms” and the same “kind of program[s] [were] sorely needed.”⁵⁸ One region simply was “not totally different from other[s]”: there was “just as much prejudice,” and “[s]mall-town Christians and New York City skeptics alike” could face discrimination “because of who you are or who you love.”⁵⁹ Even as “different communities [were] arriving at different conclusions, at different times,” they all shared the experience of weighing the issue as a community.⁶⁰

The communities collectively weighing same-sex marriage were typically states, and allies constructed state identity as a relatively uniform experience. They posited that “not every state has the exact same attitudes and cultural mores,” but

internally states had “our own sets of issues” specific to “our state.”⁶¹ Allies argued that “no one understands the issues...better than the people who live here,” and therefore “every family in [a state]” and “every [resident of that state]” could be expected to “feel [something] isn’t a big issue” or agree that it was “monumental...for the state.”⁶² Even when a state was “split down the middle on issues like [marriage equality],” residents could basically agree that their neighbors “deserve[d] the chance to pursue happiness and share their lives with loved ones” in “love, security and stability.”⁶³ Residents also shared a competitive feeling toward a neighboring state and would never want to “becom[e] a second-class state to its neighbors”: their state came “first—gay, straight, whatever.”⁶⁴

In straight ally advocacy, residents of a state or other region likely shared a political identity. Allies might construct a sub-region exclusively by its political identity: it was “a conservative part,” “much more progressive” or “more conservative...than other parts,” or “a little haven of blue in a sea of red.”⁶⁵ Without comparing, a particular region might stand alone as “a really progressive community” or “a conservative area.”⁶⁶ Political homogeneity most often manifested as a region being “conservative”—“definitely not the best climate” for marriage equality advocacy—in which allies “[felt] isolated” and had to “reach out to [straight neighbors] as gently as we can.”⁶⁷ Allies avoided absolutely equating “conservative” with “homophobic,” saying “conservative” meant “a bit provincial,” or “classically conservative,” or approaching issues from “a conservative perspective.”⁶⁸

Small towns and rural areas tended to be especially conservative, and less welcoming and accepting. Allies “admire[d] people who do work...in rural areas” because such areas were “not...friendly environment[s]”: “attitudes [were] slower to

change,” causing gays and lesbians to “struggle with [their] identit[ies].”⁶⁹ Unlike big cities, “where everyone has fifteen gay friends” or “where you’ll have a GSA started and have 10 kids sign up,” “you can’t just walk around talking about that kind of stuff” “in rural communities,” and straight people often “don’t know anybody that’s openly gay.”⁷⁰ Without this “exposure,” straight people developed “a clear distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’”; gay people and allies therefore had to travel from “outlying communities” to urban, large cities to get “the kind of support that [they needed].”⁷¹ No wonder gays and lesbians “[wanted] to eventually move to a big city,” away from “the smaller towns and cities” where “they aren’t public about their lifestyles.”⁷² Allies “[didn’t] necessarily expect too much” from these “little conservative town[s],” where “cattle production was one of the most hotly sought-after courses” and where they would be surprised to “hear a fast food chain...play[ing] a hip hop song about marriage equality.”⁷³

Whether they were from a small or rural area, or a big urban area, allies took pride in their region and tried to demonstrate its centrality in their lives. Allies felt “proud to have been born [in a region]” or to be “a native of [a region],” but were also proud of “my hometown” or “our community.”⁷⁴ This pride grew from the depth of allies’ connections (“my family homesteaded,” “my parents lived in Oklahoma years and years and years”) or from what their region valued (“good government,” “diversity is essential”).⁷⁵ Southerners felt distinct pride in their “Southern hospitality” and “our beliefs of family, religion and country,” even as southern allies bemoaned that “northern people accept gay people a lot better than the [S]outh does.”⁷⁶

In contrast, allies from welcoming regions celebrated the welcoming spirit of their communities. Allies' pride was tied to "liv[ing] in a [tolerant] state" and in "the work we do for teaching tolerance and acceptance."⁷⁷ "It [made] [allies] feel better" to live somewhere "where people live and let live," and where "most [residents] realize that gays and lesbians...are good people."⁷⁸ Residents of welcoming regions "celebrat[ed] the diversity in our community," "embrac[ed] our differences," "combine[d] many different cultural assumptions," rejected "the need for such [labels]," and "[fought] intolerance with tolerance."⁷⁹ Beyond these euphemistic markers, Pride celebrations or "huge gay pride parades" evidenced that a region was "not as uptight about differences" or free of "any issues other communities might experience."⁸⁰ Allies often stressed their region's "reputation for tolerance": their region was "no place for hate" and "that will never change."⁸¹ And when it came to welcoming policies, their region was actually "one of the first," "the role model," or "leading the country in respect and dignity."⁸²

Shared regional pride was a vehicle for allies to standardize welcoming and accepting behavior among residents of that region. "What we're talking about is relevant to you," allies told their neighbors, and "we have a responsibility to ourselves and our community" to "work on this together" and "keep working" until "we [change] as a [region]."⁸³ Allies posited that "[people from a region] shouldn't have to cross state lines" when they want to "marry the people they love in their hometowns"—far better to "reach people in the communities they're in."⁸⁴ If "the [region's] not ready," neighbors should "continue to rationally and peacefully educate our community" to open up the "very closed culture [in the region]."⁸⁵ Even within such closed cultures, there were "many businesses, politicians, community leaders,

and others who are committed to celebrating and supporting diversity and equality,” and “citizens of [the region] [might be] more open and accepting than some of [its leaders]” and disinterested in “continu[ing] to be marred by [their] slime.”⁸⁶

Sometimes, though, whole regions were marred by homophobia. In these regions, people “are told how to think”—that “being gay...was bad”—and there were “no gay activities” or “gay establishments.”⁸⁷ At school “the idea of homosexuality was not very accepted,” and kids were “inundated with homophobic messages” until they developed “[homophobic] attitudes” and gay bullying became “one of the biggest bullying problems.”⁸⁸ Being gay in such regions is “a great personal risk” as it “[can mean] loss and exile from all that has been home” and threats to an individual’s safety.⁸⁹

Such unwelcoming regions were actually harmed by not being welcoming. Often, residents recognized “a real need in the community” to become “more sophisticated” and “put [their region] in the mainstream of American values,” but ultimately just “[didn’t] want to deal with this stuff.”⁹⁰ When a region “lag[ged] many [regions] in its friendliness to the LGBT community,” it had difficulty “recruit[ing] and retain[ing] the highest quality [employees]”—which, in turn, “impact[ed] communities” and hurt “thousands of [residents] and their children.”⁹¹ Allies expressed “embarrassment” “to be living in a state that doesn’t welcome diversity,” and at the “unprofessional and unrepresentative” conduct of homophobic leaders who should be “look[ing] forward instead of backward.”⁹² Unwelcoming regions were also harmed in a metaphysical sense because discrimination cut against “who we are”: “we can’t discriminate like that nor do we want to discriminate,” and such behavior “[was] not a reflection of the [region’s] core values.”⁹³

At the core of allies' regional identity rhetoric was the notion that gay people were neighbors who contributed meaningfully to the region. "We're all members of the same community," allies reasoned, and "wonderful" gay people were "our friends, our colleagues, our community," and "our...neighbors."⁹⁴ Allies often quantified the "large gay community" within their region—there were "lots of gays" or "many gay people," for example—that straight people both needed "to be aware of" and "take into consideration."⁹⁵ These gay neighbors were "hard-working, patriotic men and women" who "care[d] about," "[did] a lot" for, and "contribute[d] so much to our community."⁹⁶ (If they were not already contributing, they "[were] gay and lesbian kids" who "[were] a part of our community," who would "grow into productive adults" and "[become] productive and valuable members of our community."⁹⁷) Straight neighbors should be concerned that these "people in this community" might "have experienced the loneliness and pain of exclusion"; or "[felt] alienated, excluded, shamed."⁹⁸ Around gays and lesbians, there were "families in this community that [were] impacted by their children coming out to them" and who could "utilize" "a support group" that provided them "education and exposure."⁹⁹ Exposure was particularly important, as most people believed in "treating your neighbor the best that you can" but "[didn't] know their neighbors (also) support fairness."¹⁰⁰ Allies called on "the whole community" to "com[e] together to celebrate the diversity in our community."¹⁰¹

This final quote exemplifies how allies use amorphous "diversity" to minimize sexual differences within a region. Allies mused that "the world is smaller, our neighbors are nearer," and that "diversity [increasingly] rules the world."¹⁰² Straight people needed to "realize we're in a diverse [region]," populated by "diverse

members” who occupied “so many diverse identities.”¹⁰³ Allies bargained that straight people would want “to become a part of a diverse community”—even more so if the particulars of that diversity blended together against their regional backdrop.¹⁰⁴

National Identity: “Each American benefits from the further advancement of liberty and justice for all”

There was, however, a larger regional backdrop: gay and straight neighbors were fellow Americans. As such, they shared common principles and values: patriotism, hard work, fairness, freedom, liberty, and justice. They also shared a history—a history which included lofty goals, unmet promises, and analogous struggles toward a better country. That better country emerged as civil rights were equalized between American citizens, regardless of their sub-identity group.

On the most basic level, though, Americans were humans sharing a pluralistic culture and society. Before they were Americans with civil rights, and with “lines of tribe,” Americans were “all human beings” who should be “afforded equal human rights.”¹⁰⁵ “From all across the country,” “out of many,” people “unite[d] in common effort” in “a culture of belonging.”¹⁰⁶ This culture reflected “the diversity that this country upholds”: “we are shaped by every language and culture,” resulting in “no two families look[ing] the same.”¹⁰⁷ President Obama often underscored this to an extreme by listing Americans sub-identity groups, such as “young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican; black, white, Hispanic, Asian; gay and straight; disabled and non-disabled-Americans.”¹⁰⁸ “Different experiences and stories” contributed to these Americans “believ[ing] many different things,” and being “noisy

and opinionated” about their specific beliefs.¹⁰⁹ Despite this, America “evolve[d] as a culture” and “as a society,” as though “culture,” “society,” and “nation” all meant the same entity.¹¹⁰ Sometimes allies denoted “American society” but more often implied “America” when discussing “civilized society,” or speaking of “every single American...in the eyes of our society.”¹¹¹

“Every single American” meant gays and lesbians, too, and allies cast them as distinctly patriotic. On some level, identifying “LGBT Americans” as “Americans” was an important, elemental, and direct reminder that “they’re fully a part of the American family.”¹¹² These Americans “contribute to their communities” and “have enriched and strengthened the fabric of our national life,” as they have “the fabric of communities throughout our nation.”¹¹³ These “patriotic gay and lesbian Americans” were also part of “the bedrock of this country” because, allies reminded other straight people, “most Americans know at least one person who is gay.”¹¹⁴

Despite these acquaintances, anti-gay sentiment divided those who shared American identity and caused gay and lesbian Americans fear. While “good and decent people” “[held] a wide range of views on this issue,” many clung to “old attitudes” based in “fear and conflict and divisiveness.”¹¹⁵ “America,” allies said, “can be scared, fearful, and prejudiced against its own,” generating “hate speech and hateful ideology [that] tears at the fabric of our society” and “divide[s] the country.”¹¹⁶ Beyond simply dividing, such ideology motivated people to “use [their] fists like hammers on the faces of homosexuals” which, in turn, caused gays and lesbians “[to be] afraid to walk the street or down the hall at school.”¹¹⁷ Such fear indicated “America [was] regressing,” and allies called on straight Americans to “turn

back discrimination and prejudice” and “mak[e] our country a safer place for all of our family members.”¹¹⁸

Black Americans were frequently singled out for anti-gay attitudes, even as these attitudes were often attributed to religion. This was especially true after the 2008 election, in which black Californians helped narrowly pass the anti-marriage Proposition 8—motivated in part by an ad repurposing Obama’s own words against same-sex marriage.¹¹⁹ (Four years later, in the days following Obama’s endorsement of marriage equality, African Americans would flip from opposing to supporting it—an eighteen percent jump.¹²⁰) Allies who were not African American pointed to “differences between the black and white cultures around GLBT issues” while suggesting that “stigma associated with being gay” was acutely bad in the African American community.¹²¹ African American allies conceded “homophobia in our community” to the point of “worry[ing] about [gay loved ones’] safety.”¹²² The root, these allies argued, was marriage’s “religious connotation” coupled with “the African-American community [being] more churched” and “still fairly traditional in their interpretations of Scripture.”¹²³ Those interpretations led “the religious black community” to believe “it’s against God, [and] it’s wrong,” which led “most black churches” to reject gay people and embrace “homophobia.”¹²⁴

Civil rights was an active dimension of national identity, and allies cast all American citizens as having the same civil rights. “We here in America believe in civil rights,” allies said, because they were “our birthright” and “preserve[d]” by the Constitution (such that they were often synonymized with “constitutional rights”).¹²⁵ When discussing rights, allies typically avoided specifics (e.g. “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are fundamental rights”), but would also specify freedom of

speech and, unsurprisingly, “the rights and obligations that come with civil marriage.”¹²⁶ Allies argued that no American “is hurt in any way from another person having a right”—but limiting someone’s rights “eventually endangers the rights enjoyed [by all],” even if “most Americans take [those rights] for granted.”¹²⁷ After all, allies proposed, having rights was the marker of “full-fledged American citizens.”¹²⁸

As American citizens, then, gays and lesbians should have equal rights. “Gay and lesbian couples deserve[d] [rights],” allies argued, and they deserved rights because all citizens “[were] worthy of full equal legal standing.”¹²⁹ That meant “[they] [had] a valid claim”—or, at least, as valid a claim as straight people—and should therefore “enjoy the same rights that I do.”¹³⁰ These shifting verbs muddied gays’ and lesbians’ claim on equal rights, and undermined what allies had said elsewhere: gays and lesbians simply *have* “the same constitutional rights as everyone else”—rights common to “every American.”¹³¹ Allies also highlighted when gay people “[did] not have [a] right” and asserted that it “should be provided.”¹³² Ultimately, though, allies felt “no country should deny people their rights because of who they love”—and if it did, “they should get one hell of a tax break.”¹³³

As that comment suggests, Americans permitted unequal classes of citizenship based on sexual orientation. Allies proffered that “it is un-American to discriminate against any class of people,” and by “treat[ing] loving, committed gay and lesbian couples as a separate and lesser class of people” straight Americans perpetrated the “victimization of an entire class of U.S. citizens.”¹³⁴ Victimization was not just for those with “lifelong commitments,” though, but rather all “our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children, family members and loved ones.”¹³⁵ These people were not

“born into the type of person that our government deems as ‘first-class,’” and were thus “relegated to second-class citizenship” which was, allies noted, not “full citizenship.”¹³⁶ In allies’ constructions, relegating was done by “this country,” “parallel separate but equal laws,” “legislation,” and the like, reflecting “how we rationalize the oppression of fellow citizens”: by hiding behind non-human actors.¹³⁷

The inequality inherent in this second-class citizenship ran counter to America’s deep and abiding commitment to equality. Allies often invoked a phrase from the Declaration of Independence—“created equal”—to describe Americans’ “birthright” and “the very fabric which makes our country great.”¹³⁸ Americans could also be “born equal,” “treated equally” “under the law” or “treated as equal, no matter who they are or whom they love.”¹³⁹ Equality could be a “promise,” something “we expect as Americans,” or a “core American [value]” “Americans know is worth fighting for”; and it was both a “fundamental American [principle]” and one of “our most fundamental values as Americans.”¹⁴⁰ Equality was something “[Americans] will not put aside,” something they “strive for,” and something “they deserve”—truly “one of the bedrock principles of America”¹⁴¹

America was similarly committed to fairness, freedom, liberty, and justice, although these occupied less space than equality. Americans had “a core decency” that produced “innate fairness,” or at least “fair-minded[ness].”¹⁴² “Basic fairness” was a belief, a “principle,” a destination to “march toward,” and a way to “[treat] everybody.”¹⁴³ Freedom, like equality, was “the promise of America,” “enrich[ing] all of us” “in a free country.”¹⁴⁴ Freedom was capacity—the capacity to “hold a wide range of views” (including “stupid and often destructive opinions”), or “be who [someone is],” or “live and love as we see fit.”¹⁴⁵ These freedoms should be “the

same,” “individual,” and “preserve[d]” for “all people in our country.”¹⁴⁶ Liberty and justice were “still...indivisible” as “everything that this great nation stands for”—they were joined “right in the Pledge of Allegiance”—and “each American benefit[ed] from [their] further advancement.”¹⁴⁷ Fairness, freedom, liberty and justice were “ideals [to] be heard and felt,” and “values [to be] [held] dear”—ideals and values that “protect[ed] individuals that don’t fit into that perfect mold” and “help[ed] America be true to who we are as a nation.”¹⁴⁸

The core values, foundational to both America and American identity, necessarily covered gay and lesbian Americans. There were clear “principles upon which our Nation was founded,” allies argued—“liberty and justice for all,” “equality and fairness,” and “equal protection under the law”—laid out in “our founding documents” and “our founding doctrines.”¹⁴⁹ “Our Declaration of Independence,” for example, “states that all men—and I’ll put, and women—are created equal,” while “our Constitution” protected “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”¹⁵⁰ Allies avoided articulating “every right, responsibility and privilege afforded by our constitution,” but specified that the document guaranteed “people don’t get discriminated against”—“gay people” particularly.¹⁵¹ As much as anti-gay straight people tried to “writ[e] discrimination” and “[codify] hatred into our beloved Constitution,” allies asserted that “our constitution really does not support discrimination.”¹⁵² Its “founding promise[s]” “extend[ed] to” and “include[d] those who are gay,” and it was “a lame strategy to exclude gay and lesbian citizens” or “deny their constitutional right to equal protection under the law.”¹⁵³

America’s history was nonetheless a struggle, ever striving toward greater fairness, equality, justice, freedom, and liberty. “The larger American story” was of

Americans “experiencing prejudice, bigotry and injustice” and “fighting to build for themselves and their families a nation in which no one is a second-class citizen.”¹⁵⁴ At fault were “people who hate” based on “religion, gender to skin color,” generating societal “conflict and tumult” and causing “the body politic [to take] a wrong turn.”¹⁵⁵ Most often, though, allies obscured the people at fault behind a passive-voiced focus on those discriminated against—“people [who] were not treated equally under the law” and “who’ve been denied the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.”¹⁵⁶ Collectivizing responsibility also helped allies both downplay the complicity of all straight people (e.g. “America is a quilt of many fabulous fabrics and we have a history that has not always respected that”) and abstractly include them in progress (“it feels like our country is finally starting to wake up to equality”).¹⁵⁷ Ultimately, though, America had “come a very long way” to “become more loving” and “a more perfect union”—a change “propelled by the persistent effort of dedicated citizens” just trying to “[move] our country...in the right direction.”¹⁵⁸

This capacity to change the country, and the adjacent ability to advance oneself, are equally part of being American. Allies cast America as “on a journey of understanding” but cautioned that “no law’s gonna change us, we have to change us.”¹⁵⁹ America only changed when “people who love this country” “mak[e] our nation an even brighter beacon of hope and opportunity for all” by “organizing, agitating and advocating.”¹⁶⁰ These people were practicing “the meaning of citizenship”: to “push us forward when we’re doing right, and to let us know when we’re not,” “to create the kind of America that we want for the next generation.”¹⁶¹ After all, Americans were “successful and productive citizens” “who want[ed] this country to succeed and prosper.”¹⁶² Allies bought into “the possibility of the

American dream”: “that, if we work hard and play by the rules,” “you can write your own destiny,” “write your own ticket,” and “make it if you try.”¹⁶³

These hopes for national change and personal advancement were most tangibly embodied in children. Drawing from the language used against gay people, allies argued that “protect[ing] all Americans, especially our children” necessarily meant that “our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender children of all ages deserve laws that protect them.”¹⁶⁴ At root were the “belie[fs] [that] every child is entitled to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” and that “all children deserve the chance to reach their full potential.”¹⁶⁵ Despite the nobility of this belief, the motivation could also be more pragmatic: the country “[was] waiting to follow” “the next generation of American leaders and heroes.”¹⁶⁶

But would straight Americans ever truly share power? Surely allies constructed an American identity that recognized gays and lesbians as citizens and included them as a natural byproduct of the country’s foundational values and principles. Far too often, though, words like “gay,” “lesbian,” and “straight”—words that would explain why allies needed to actively lobby for gays’ and lesbians’ inclusion—were minimized. Entirely absent was a thorough discussion about how it was that a country that prioritized freedom, fairness, equality, liberty, and justice had created a network of policies favoring a particular sexuality, and why it had permitted such policies for so long.

Religious Identity: “Good, primarily Christian people have been holding some of God’s children hostage”

Unlike the uniformity of regional and national identities, allies constructed religious identity as highly divided. There were conservative Christians, whose discriminatory beliefs created a culture of homophobia. Allies, though—and gays and lesbians, too—practiced a more liberal notion of Christianity based on love, justice, and inclusion. Central to this particular Christian identity was the principle that all people, including gays and lesbians, were derived from God. This deeply divine connection helped justify the claim that sexuality was not a choice.

Religious identity—typically Christian—was deeply important to those who adopted it. Religion was “personal,” and both “a big part” and the “core of [their] lives”—and this significance would be present, “in [their] blood,” “for a very long time.”¹⁶⁷ Allies employed domestic language to indicate their religiousness, describing their congregation as “our second home,” “my mother church,” and “like family.”¹⁶⁸ The depth of someone’s religiosity could also be captured in a person’s interactions with their faith: did they “rais[e] children in the church” or “[devote] countless hours”— did they “want something” or “receive something” from their faith?¹⁶⁹ Christians felt “[their] identity as a Christian [was] not only compatible with but...inextricable from” their works as “advocate[s], particularly within the church,” and they wanted “[their fellow] church members to hear firsthand why.”¹⁷⁰

Those church members typically fell into one of two Christian identities: a conservative, fundamentalist identity and a liberal, welcoming identity. The former were also described as “fanatic” or “fundamentalist,” and their theology tracked with “a conservative Bible [interpretation].”¹⁷¹ Conservative Christianity also “[policed]

female and so-called ‘deviant’ sexualities”: it was “anti-gay,” and often “the loudest and most powerful force threatening the LGBTQ community” and “a signal feature of the movement against LGBTQ rights.”¹⁷² Conservative Christians made it “harder for [gay] people to accept themselves,” leaving gay church members “terrified” and capable of “chos[ing] death over the rejection of...[their] conservative church[es].”¹⁷³ This was “at odds with the views of [liberal Christians],” who “[felt] the term Christian has been co-opted” and were “uncomfortable identifying as a Christian because of the cultural baggage wrapped up in this identity.”¹⁷⁴ Liberal Christians were “tired of apologizing” “for the behavior of Christians,” but nonetheless told gay people “we’re sorry for the way Christians have acted toward you.”¹⁷⁵ Liberal Christians “[fought] the good fight with [their] fellow Christians” through questions: “how could [they] miss the mark so terribly,” and “who [gave] [them] the right to speak for God”—and “what [was] it going to take for them to truly repent and become the Christians they deem themselves to be?”¹⁷⁶ Liberal Christians often defined their identity in opposition to the “fundamentalist minority” who lacked “compassion” and “[made] [gay people] wish they had never been born.”¹⁷⁷

The depth and starkness of this liberal/conservative opposition permeates straight ally advocacy about religious identity. Allies spoke of “an ‘us’ and ‘them’ vibe” and complained that the “church saw all things in black and white.”¹⁷⁸ Conservative Christians had sewn doubt that “you could not be both a Christian and gay,” and even allies noted tension between “sexuality and spirituality,” “between my heart and my religion.”¹⁷⁹ This was because “acceptance of my friend [was] in conflict with what my religion teaches me about him,” causing some people to “step away from religion...[and] [step] into the very life Jesus taught and showed us.”¹⁸⁰

Even when they disputed dichotomies, allies reinforced oppositional framing such as you could “be good Christians and support gay rights,” or that “religion and [a gay person’s] rights...[can] coexist.”¹⁸¹ But in the final estimate, especially for family, allies were more than willing to embrace the stark division: “If the church does not have a place for my son, it does not have a place for me.”¹⁸²

The conflict, allies proposed, both originated in and could be resolved by foundational Christian documents and concepts. Jesus, for example, could “[cut] through the bigotry” and “[transcend] the issue” because Christians “follow[ed] Jesus’s law” (the particulars of which were often obscured or omitted).¹⁸³ Christians could “always go back to the Bible,” wherein anyone who “[did] the research” would find “the depth and breadth of Scripture.”¹⁸⁴ Yes, “there were lines in the Old Testament that prohibited gay relationships” but there was also no “passage where Jesus cured gay or even mentioned gay,” and dubious evidence that “homosexuality was biblically wrong.”¹⁸⁵ Allies hoped that “Christians [could get] past their own sensitivities,” stop “hid[ing] behind [scriptures],” and “just start obeying the Ten Commandments” and “the golden rule.”¹⁸⁶

It was far more likely to allies that conservative Christianity and conservative Christians would fuel societal hatred of gays and lesbians. At fault were conservative “Christian bigots” whose leaders “preach[ed] hate at the service” and whose “denominations... demonize[d] homosexuality” and “conditioned [believers] to hold [homophobic] beliefs.”¹⁸⁷ Rather than focusing on such conditioning, allies typically spoke of homophobia as already “exist[ing] in the church.”¹⁸⁸ Moving outward, though, the church “nurtured,” “promoted,” and “perpetuated” hate in society, causing untold “pain” and “hurt.”¹⁸⁹ “Religion [was] a platform for hate and

prejudice,” a vehicle “to legitimize...hate” and “the message that people [who are gay] are inferior beings.”¹⁹⁰ Yet some allies cautioned that this hatred and oppression came from Christians—humans—rather than “[anything] to do with...belief in Jesus Christ” or Christian theology.¹⁹¹ “God does not exclude,” these allies reminded, and humans were vulnerable to “[be] infected with society’s prejudices and predilections and [attribute] them to God.”¹⁹²

More allies, though, argued that religious teachings caused churches to reject gay members. “Many faith communities” were “exclusionary,” “turn[ing] LGBTQ people away” “just for being gay.”¹⁹³ As this formulation suggests, allies typically placed responsibility with institutions (“open hostility and rejection from congregations”) or ideologies (“religious bigotry that demeans LGBT people”)—not people.¹⁹⁴ Allies’ passive-voice construction cast gay people as victims, and minimized the role of straight Christians: “[gay people] [were] rejected,” “discounted, judged, moved aside,” “forced to the margins,” and “alienated from their faith communities.”¹⁹⁵ They were alienated by “harmful doctrines” which said “a gay person does not measure up” and told people to “hide [their] sexuality from other members of [their] church.”¹⁹⁶

They did not have to hide in liberal Christian churches because such churches were welcoming, loving, and supportive of gays and lesbians. Such churches were themselves “allies to LGBTQ people” because they made “gays who want to stay in the church” feel “they have as much place in our [church] as anyone else.”¹⁹⁷ These Christians recognized that “religion is supposed to be something good,” and “gay and lesbian families with their children” should “feel loved and welcomed” “within our congregation.”¹⁹⁸ Welcome, love, and support extended to straight family members,

too, who might be struggling to accept their gay family members, coping with homophobia-driven suicide, or reassessing their faith.¹⁹⁹ When discussing liberal Christians, straight people’s agency returned: “we are supposed to be” “loving and supporting,” and “love them unconditionally”—“especially the least among us.”²⁰⁰ Liberal Christians believed such “open communication and loving acceptance...[could] work miracles.”²⁰¹

The liberal Christian description of “love” derived from the love God shows all people—including gays and lesbians. God was, fundamentally, “a God of Love”—“God is love” was often repeated—generating a “concept of Christianity...based on love, regardless of who you are.”²⁰² Since “God loves [people] as [they] are”—“everyone” and “everybody”—there were simply no “communities of people...not worthy of love”; Christians, then, needed to “do what He would do” and “love them like God does.”²⁰³ This was the “theology,” the “core message” of liberal Christianity: “love and acceptance.”²⁰⁴ Allies made this love slightly more tangible by comparing “God’s unconditional love” to the “the welcome and acceptance shown by a family member towards a struggling child.”²⁰⁵ The “job as a parent and a Christian” was to “go with my son on this one”—to “[love] my/His queer son.”²⁰⁶

All people derived from God, allies said—including gays and lesbians. Allies gave this relationship a wide variety of origins: people could “come from” God, “[be] people of God,” or be “children of God.”²⁰⁷ It also could be specifically “God’s divinity” that “is impressed upon” or “in each of us,” or “waiting to be encountered in me.”²⁰⁸ “Every person you see” was also an embodiment of the “image of God” or the “face of God,” or was a tangible “blessing from God.”²⁰⁹ Often, allies implied that people derived from God were gay by setting them apart in some negative light (e.g.

“A child of God who was not broken or damaged, but lonely and alone”) or through the euphemism “that way” to describe how “God made them.”²¹⁰ Elsewhere, God’s creation of same-sex attraction was (implicitly) “not a mistake,” “a natural part of who we are,” “what he predestined to be”; and “precious, beautiful, wonderfully, and fearfully made.”²¹¹ More explicitly, God could “[bless] [someone] with same-sex affection,” and this “God-given” trait “wasn’t a mistake or a malignancy.”²¹² Allies could also openly identify “all LGBTQ people” as “God’s children.”²¹³

Many gay people were also actively Christian. Allies spoke of “our gay brothers and sisters in Christ” to delineate “people of faith who are also of different sexualities,” but with “equal status in Christ.”²¹⁴ Despite claims by conservative Christians that “[a person] could not be gay and a Christian,” straight people would find “many gay men and lesbian women in [their] congregation[s]” “looking for a way to make the church work for them.”²¹⁵ If “the church [didn’t] really want to know that [a] person [was] gay,” that person might “pos[e] as a straight faithful member”—but he or she was still Christian.²¹⁶ Allies might point to exemplary gay believers in their lives: the gay son with “a good relationship with God,” the lesbian daughter who “was the ‘poster child’ of her home church,” or the friend who “[was] one of the most Christ-like people I know.”²¹⁷

These personal relationships with gay and lesbian Christians were transformative for allies. Allies charted an important progression from straight Christians “recogniz[ing] someone you thought was ‘the other’ is your brother” to “realiz[ing] that [straight people] need to be [advocates].”²¹⁸ When identifying “the major turning point that changed [their] views,” Christian allies often pointed to the “many couples [they knew] who were living out the Christian life,” or the “[gay]

friend of mine who...is also a member of my church.”²¹⁹ By “ask[ing] them obnoxious, personal questions,” allies gradually reached the point where they felt comfortable “[making] [their] support of LGBT people—and their relationships—unabashedly clear in front of others” at church.²²⁰

Allies were also willing to dispute the notion so important to conservative Christianity: that gays and lesbians are sinning. Conservative Christians were “real good about the sin thing,” by which allies meant “show[ing] people how they were sinning”—but “the only two sins [they] ever talked about were homosexuality and abortion.”²²¹ They “may claim that they hate the sin but love the sinner,” but liberal Christians “[didn’t] even bother” trying to explain why that was problematic.²²² Rather, liberal Christians directly asserted “it’s not a sin to be LGBT” or pointed to other “sins” which Christians did regularly: tattoos, fast food, and cigarettes; “eating shellfish, wearing clothing of mixed fabrics or eating pork”; and “shopping on Sundays and women speaking in church.”²²³ Allies occasionally answered the question raised by such lists: conservative Christians “were obsessed with sexual sin because they did not want to confront their own sins,” whatever those might be.²²⁴

Such constructions, common throughout allies’ religious identity rhetoric, minimized the attributes for which these various groups—and gay people, most immediately—were marginalized. Even as they obscured the divisive identity at the heart of the debate, allies refocused straight people on a different divided identity: Christianity. The (implicit) question to straight Christians then became, “What kind of Christian do you want to be, and what kind of theology do you want to follow?” Acceptance thus became quite personal, and potentially a matter of one’s immortal

soul. Such a pivot may have ultimately advanced marriage equality support, but it also cut short the individual reconciliation process necessary for lasting acceptance.

Family Identity: “All committed couples who want to build a life and family...can stop dreaming about marriage and start choosing marriage”

Family identity was unsurprisingly salient in a political debate over the legal recognition of a basic family unit. Allies’ defined that basic family unit along two lines: the social dynamics at play within a family, and the legal parameters that constituted that family *vis-à-vis* the state. America needed to accept and recognize gay families, allies argued, but they also spent a great deal of energy on acceptance *within* families. Straight family members needed to accept the gay people in their family, but (straight) parents especially needed to accept their (gay) children. Allies took particular pains to define roles and responsibilities irrespective of people being gay; then, when allies layered gay or lesbian identity over an existing family identity, it became apparent how little sexuality impacted familial identity.

Allies tweaked “family,” though, by collapsing gay friends and family into the term “loved ones,” and close friends into “family.” Ally advocacy is full of variations on the phrase “our family members and friends” to identify *gay* family members and friends.²²⁵ Since friends and family were “people we love” and “care deeply about,” allies could accurately collectivize them as “loved ones.”²²⁶ Sometimes they were “our gay and lesbian loved ones” or “LGBT loved ones,” but “loved ones” typically implied that straight people “love [the specific gay people in question] and accept [them] for who [they] are” without any sexuality identifiers.²²⁷ Sometimes “loved ones” would shift to refer to “the loved ones of homosexuals,” but such usage only

underscored the sexuality implied elsewhere (e.g. “We need to be vocal to support our loved ones”).²²⁸ “Loved ones” made “family...about more than just genetics” and conceptually extended the term to cover other “people we love...[and] care about.”²²⁹ Family therefore might include “closest friends,” and familial terms might be applied to non-blood relatives (“He asked me and my husband to be his parents,” “he has many lesbian mothers,” “...called ‘Mama Lisa’ by a lot of my gay friends”).²³⁰

Allies also adapted and applied existing family identities to include gay and lesbian family members. When a lesbian daughter married, for example, her parent might refer to “my daughter and daughter-in-law” or “[my] daughter [and] her wife.”²³¹ Allies “felt particularly proud to be” in familial relationships with gay people and so occasionally used terms like “in-law” “even though most of society would not recognize [the relationship] as such.”²³² “Two gay uncles” became “four gay uncles if you count their partners”; and same-sex parents became “two mothers,” two fathers, or just “parents” with markers implying they were gay (e.g., “our parents...deserve to be treated with dignity and respect” or “Her parents are really great people and they deserve to be...a married couple”).²³³

As these examples indicate, allies contended—often through implicit language—that most families include gays and lesbians. Allies specified “adoptive families” and “divorced” families regularly, but with comparable regularity of “different kinds of families” that “[were] diverse in every aspect.”²³⁴ The underlying premise was that “family unit[s] [were] not always the married man and woman” and “[did] not [always] fit the ‘traditional family’ mold”; so society needed to stop labeling families “weird” and start “saying your famil[ies] [are] good” “no matter what [they] [look] like.”²³⁵ One constant was that “most families have queer family

members”: “our brothers, our sisters, our children, our cousins,” “gay parents,” “multiple aunts and uncles,” and “nieces [and] nephews.”²³⁶ In advocating for gay rights, straight allies often “[spoke] as a sister of the gay man” or “a parent of a gay son,” or identified themselves by their “open lesbian sister,” their “fabulous gay daughter,” their “very beautiful queer child,” their “uncles,” or even their “homosexual mate.”²³⁷ Indeed, straight allies could be “the spouses of newly out LGBT people” who “[got] married [to straight people] to be accepted and to have kids.”²³⁸

In orienting themselves to family members, allies often identified healthy families as supportive, accepting, loving, and happy. Partners ideally “supported each other both financially and emotionally,” and “work[ed] together” to become “more supportive, more giving.”²³⁹ They also “genuinely enjoyed each other’s company” and “desire[d] to build a life with [each other].”²⁴⁰ Parents “knew...that there [was] a direct connection between acceptance and positive, healthy outcomes” “in every important area of life”—and anything less than being a “supportive parent” was “anti-family.”²⁴¹ “Love makes a family,” allies argued, and families lived “a good life” and were “much more happy and content” to the extent they “celebrate[d] their family’s love.”²⁴² The end goal was simple, allies suggested: “to live as happy as possible” and “be happy a lot of the time.”²⁴³

Healthy families were also based upon openness, honesty, and communication, especially toward gay and lesbian family members. Family members that “communicated well,” “[kept] that line of communication open and [were] completely honest” with each other were “well adjusted, confident and high achieving.”²⁴⁴ When relationships were not “loving and open,” families could “[get]

better” by “[sticking] with the conversation” and being “more honest and authentic than...in the past.”²⁴⁵ Gay offspring needed the space “to express themselves freely” and needed “loving parents” “to be supportive” and “approve of [them],” and “[provide] unconditional acceptance.”²⁴⁶ When discussing healthy families generally, allies did not name safety as a significant component—but it was significant for gay and lesbian family members.²⁴⁷

Straight family members also needed to advocate for gay and lesbian family members if families were to be healthy. “[Straight people] [couldn’t] be [parents] of [gay kids],” allies said, or people who loved a gay “mother or...father, son or daughter, or husband or wife” without “[feeling] personally invested” and “passionate about the issue.”²⁴⁸ Allies constructed these straight family members as motivated by “an influence,” “a passion,” or a “responsibility” to “defend,” “[speak] up,” “[speak] out,” “advocate,” and get “completely involved” to create “a better world for [their] family.”²⁴⁹ They did this because their family members “[were] worthy” and “deserve[d]” “the same rights and privileges that [they] enjoy[ed] as [heterosexuals]”—but also because their advocacy ultimately advanced “[their] own liberty as well.”²⁵⁰ Straight people might feel “scared” to “advocate for [their] gay [family members],” but joining with other straight people and raising “[their] family voices” together made “the risks [not] seem quite so frightening.”²⁵¹

Within families, parents’ love of children was both obligatory and unconditional. Parents, “out of everyone in the world,” “care[d] for [their child] the most” and “[held] [the child’s] heart in [their] hands like no one ever will”: the child was “[the parent’s] own darling heart outside [their] body.”²⁵² As such, it was a parent’s “job,” “fundamental responsibility,” and “power” to “put [their] relationship

with [their] child and [their] love for [their] child above everything else.”²⁵³ That parental love “happen[ed] instantaneously” at a child’s birth—it was “a real paradigm shift” that “nothing will ever change” “forever”—and was “pure,” “unambiguous,” and “unconditional,” “without caveats or clauses .”²⁵⁴ Allies expressed disbelief that anyone could “get angry at a parent who loves [their] kid”—but also that parents could “throw [their relationship with their child] away” as though it were insignificant.²⁵⁵

The latter, sadly, happened when children came out, but parental love should exist regardless of children’s sexuality. Gay children’s sexuality “shouldn’t matter” to loving parents: those parents should “be there for [their] children whether they are gay or straight,” and “continue to love them too, just as they are.”²⁵⁶ Even if a parent “had a hard time accepting” their child’s sexuality, “[their] special child” was still theirs, “no matter what,” and they needed to recognize that they were “uniquely equipped” to convey “love, especially at this moment.”²⁵⁷ To underscore this point, allies invoked memories of “that little person that you held in your arms”—“the child you have cradled, spoon fed mashed bananas, and dreamed a beautiful future for.”²⁵⁸ “It was your job to look out for [them],” allies reminded straight parents—“she or he is the same person you brought up”—and “nothing change[d] regarding [parental] responsibility.”²⁵⁹

In allies’ constructions, parents took pride in their parental identities and in the accomplishments of their children. Allies self-identified as “unabashedly proud father[s],” “proud mother[s],” or “proud parents.”²⁶⁰ Their pride originated in their children: they were “so proud of [them]” “today, and all you will be tomorrow,” “and always.”²⁶¹ Parents might be proud because their child was “a real bright kid”;

“beautiful, intelligent, [and] ambitious”; “cute[,] adorable, [and] handsome”; “a good person”; or “just because [they’re] there and because [they’re] alive.”²⁶² Parents of gay and lesbian children expressed distinct pride related to their children’s same-sex attraction. The formulation was relatively similar: an ally was the “proud mother of a gay son”; or “the proud father of a gay son, and proud father of a straight son”; or “proud to be a mother, friend and supporter of our sexual minority citizens.”²⁶³ They saw themselves “lucky to have a gay child,” and “proud of [that child’s] courage” and “what [they had] done on [their] own to bring light to the situation.”²⁶⁴ Allies again struggled to see “how once-loving parents can reject a child who is courageous enough to be true to him- or herself” when they “should be so proud.”²⁶⁵

Parental rejection was particularly hard for allies to understand since they constructed parents as wanting safety and stability for their children. Parents would “go through hell” “worr[ying] about [their] children’s futures” “and their welfare.”²⁶⁶ They worried about their children’s “development and well-being” “in a world filled with controversy, complexities and ungodliness.”²⁶⁷ Parents therefore tried to “protect [their] [children]” and provide “for their children’s safety and well-being.”²⁶⁸ Again, these attributes were heightened for straight parents of gay children, who “worried about [their children’s] safety and how the world will treat them,” “[didn’t] want [their] [children] be[ing] alone,” and wanted their children to “[be] mentally healthy.”²⁶⁹ Being gay was “a tough life,” and gay children needed to “[feel] secure” “when they come out.”²⁷⁰ With kids, this often meant parents fought “to turn the tide of bullying” and ensure “a safe environment” at school.²⁷¹

The notion underlying this: parents want their children treated equally and with respect. Among many parental “job[s]” was “rais[ing] [children] and instill[ing]

in [them] the belief that all people deserve to be respected” and “treated fairly,” without “bigotry, intolerance, [and] hatred.”²⁷² Parents with multiple children “know they are equal”—and “equally aware and proud of their sexual essence[s]”—yet “[straight children] have more rights than [gay children].”²⁷³ This was wrong, and “[parents] owe[d]...[their] children” “equal treatment, equal protections and equal opportunities”—in short, “full equality.”²⁷⁴ Parents therefore joined with “thousands of parents just like [them]” to lobby their government and the public for “equality for [their] children.”²⁷⁵

In these and other ways, same-sex parents were no different than opposite-sex parents. Gays and lesbians were “responsible, caring parents,” allies contended, and there were “millions of families in our country” demonstrating that they were “a normal part of life.”²⁷⁶ (Allies sometimes specified that same-sex parents were “foster parents” or that they “have an adopted child,” but the mechanics of how they became parents were usually ignored.²⁷⁷) Gay and lesbian parents were effective because they “care[d] about the schools [their] children go to,” enrolled their kids “in toddler time,” “[went] to Little League games and read [their] kid’s bedtime stories and [took] them to museums.”²⁷⁸ Allies often spoke of same-sex parents by reference to their children, who were “more concerned about divorce than they [were] about their parents being gay.”²⁷⁹ Children “just [want] [their] same-sex parents to be recognized as a married couple,” “as legitimate,” and they “deserve to have [their] voices heard.”²⁸⁰ Allies could be straight children who “grew up with two moms” or were “proud of my Dads,” and emphatic that “the best thing that ever happened to me [was] having gay parents.”²⁸¹ This effusive response accurately reflects just how thoroughly-supportive straight children of gay parents were.

In contrast, straight parents frequently expressed anguish at learning a child was gay. These parents had an “image of what they expect for their child” that could be “instantly shattered” “when [children] reveal they are gay.”²⁸² Even “well-meaning” parents “[had] a hard time” and felt “totally different when it’s [their] own child,” and indicated difficulty “cop[ing] with,” “com[ing] to terms with,” and “accepting their relative’s sexual orientation.”²⁸³ Parents who “had to wrestle with and overcome their own prejudices” could “[feel] fear and anger,” “[become] very depressed” and “[say] things a loving [parent] never should” (things they later “wish[ed] [they] could take back”).²⁸⁴ Allies usually minimized or did not construct gendered reactions for straight parents, but fathers sometimes “just could not handle it”—as though having a gay child (“especially when it’s a son”) “would define their masculinity.”²⁸⁵ Allies also constructed some parents—typically mothers—as thinking their child’s sexuality was the result of them: “the quality of their parenting,” “a failure on [their] part,” or simply that “[they’d] let [their child] down” in some nondescript way.²⁸⁶

Despite such misplaced responsibility, learning a family member was gay could actually destroy family bonds, allies warned. Sometimes allies presented the situation as “confused” families who “shunned” or “abandon[ed]” a family member, or perhaps allies described gay people who “lost their families” or “never experienced good relationships with their families after coming out.”²⁸⁷ For this reason, PFLAG and similar support organizations saw it as their “main goal” to “heal families” and “keep...families together.”²⁸⁸ Of particular concern were parents who could “disown,” “[reject],” or “[sever] their relationship with [their] child” with “horrible, tragic consequences.”²⁸⁹

The flipside was that parental acceptance could also be an incredible stabilizer for gay and lesbian children. Once a child comes out, allies said, “what happens next depends on” parents, who “have the greatest opportunity” to “come from a place of intense love” and “set an example by how they treat LGBT people.”²⁹⁰ Parents were “the gatekeepers” who could “help” “make [a child] feel more comfortable,” and their “support” could generate “inner strength” and make coming out a “[success].”²⁹¹ To do this, parents needed to “cease all hand-wringing, eyebrow-raising or skirt-pushin’”; “lose [their] prejudice”; and “refuse to abandon [their] child.”²⁹² By “be[ing] kind to [themselves] and [their] child,” parents could “remain a part of [their] child’s life” and come away with “a better relationship now than [they]’ve ever had.”²⁹³ That relationship was itself stabilizing, but with that foundation gay children might “have the kind of lives that parents dream[ed] of for them”: “a loving, committed, fulfilling relationship”; and “the fruits of an intimate relationship.”²⁹⁴

Such relationships—between two people who loved each other and committed to be romantically exclusive—anchored society, whether between straight or gay people. Sexuality aside, allies said, people want to feel “beautiful and desired,” and “love anyone [they] [want] to love.”²⁹⁵ “The one they love” was their choice, but it made sense for them to pick “the person that loved [them] the most” and “the person they hold dear.”²⁹⁶ That person might become a “partner in life” if the “two people who love each other” want to make “life-long commitments” “to each other.”²⁹⁷ This act of committing—often publicly, “in front of [their] family and the rest of the community”—was something “we value as a society,” and a key reason why the freedom to “marry the person of their choice” was such a pivotal goal.²⁹⁸ Most importantly, allies noted the presence of “loving, committed same-sex couples across

the country”—couples whom friends and family “couldn’t imagine...in relationship with anyone else.”²⁹⁹ “The commitment to relationship is the same” with these couples, and allies even argued that “there is much we straight couples could learn from them about commitment.”³⁰⁰

Formalizing that commitment might take different forms, especially for gay and lesbian couples, but marriage was most common. Couples seeking to take the “very natural and logical step” of confirming their commitment to each other might opt for “a commitment ceremony.”³⁰¹ Those seeking legal recognition could get “a civil marriage” but, as that was not available to nearly all gay and lesbian Americans, some governments created alternative ways their “relationships [could] be blessed and celebrated,” such as “a domestic partnership [or] a civil union.”³⁰² Civil unions could “give gay couples full rights”—“all the rights”—and all “the benefits that are available for a legally sanctioned marriage.”³⁰³ Marriage, allies agreed, “[was] the highest form of commitment” for “all loving and committed couples” (among the available “legally recognized” commitments).³⁰⁴ Marriage enabled couples who “promised to take care of each other” and “build a life and family” to do so with “status and deference and respect,” from both society and government.³⁰⁵

Allies constructed marriage’s legal framework as protecting, stabilizing, and strengthening families. The phrase “under the law” peppered allies’ discussion of marriage, underscoring that marriage was also a legal institution.³⁰⁶ Marriage was “just too important,” allies stressed, because it provided exclusive “legal rights,” “privileges,” “benefits,” and “protection of...loving and committed relationships.”³⁰⁷ Marriage’s “magic and...power” was the ability to constitute a family through “respect and protection,” but respect and protection came from laws that enabled a

family to “build emotional, physical and financial security.”³⁰⁸ That security was often specified as laws empowering spouses to make medical decisions, and inherit spouses’ estates.³⁰⁹ People “didn’t get married to bring children into the world and *not* have a stable family,” because marriage laws “protect[ed] our children” in “a permanent family.”³¹⁰ “As you enjoy...[this] security and safety net,” allies told straight couples,” you should come to realized that “people in committed relationships ought to have certain basic rights.”³¹¹ It followed, then, “committed gay couples” should have “the same rights and responsibilities” “and have the same type of benefits that we as straight people get by being married.”³¹² This reciprocity would “[benefit] all of us” by facilitating “stronger marriages, more lasting families, and more stable communities.”³¹³

And gay people *wanted* marriage—both the trappings and the institution. Straight allies relayed stories of gay people saying that marriage was “all [they] have ever wanted”—“a happy marriage with kids and a loving partner” —and “the ultimate...recognition” that came with it.³¹⁴ They wanted to be “the same...as hetero-couples”: “quite conventional,” and “play[ing] out their lives in the same way their parents and their friends and their grandparents did.”³¹⁵ Many had already “committed their lives to their partners” and “[built] a life together,” but “just didn’t have a piece of paper to prove it.”³¹⁶ They did not want just any paper, though: they “want[ed] the word marriage” in light of the “stigma associated with not having the same word” to describe their “committed gay relationship.”³¹⁷

But without marriage rights and titles, long-term, exclusive gay and lesbian pairs were “couples” in ally advocacy. Allies described them overtly as “gay and lesbian couples,” “LGBT couples,” or “same-sex couples,” but also implied their

sexuality (e.g., “couples who have long fought for equal treatment” or “couples who are, at last, free to fully participate in every aspect of family life”).³¹⁸ Sometimes, “all loving couples” would be lumped together regardless of sexuality, but more often “same-sex couples” were juxtaposed with “married couples”—an adjectival shift from describing sexuality to describing marital status with implied straight sexuality.³¹⁹ The rhetorical work at play in this shift became more blatant when “gay and lesbian couples” were juxtaposed with “every other couple,” “the majority of us,” and similar expressions.³²⁰ Even as allies spoke openly about homosexuality, they hid heterosexual privilege behind linguistic slights of hand.

Gay pairs might also be “partners,” or “spouses” if married, but rarely “husbands” and “wives.” “Partner” often captured a lengthy (e.g., “he’s been with his partner for 19 years” or “a partner of decades”) or deep commitment (e.g., “My ex-husband and his partner spend the holidays with me and the children” or “I consider his partner my uncle as well”).³²¹ When pluralized, “partners” might underscore missing legal protections: “partners aren’t covered under long-term care insurance,” “are often barred from the bedsides of the partners,” and “partners” heading families at risk of falling apart.³²² This quality was underscored as marriage became legalized, and gay partners became “potential spouses,” or “spouses who fear that you or the person you love will lose a job” or be “denied the chance to comfort a loved one in the hospital.”³²³ The male spouse of a man might be called a “husband,” or the female spouse of a woman was called a “wife,” but allies seemed more inclined to compartmentalize those terms to straight married couples.

Still, those terms could accommodate gays and lesbians without modification, which reflected how allies constructed family identity. There were existing rhetorics

about family, both social and legal, constructed for heterosexually-oriented families and repeated over decades—in some cases centuries—with only slight modifications. Allies did their part repeating such rhetorics while also showing that gay and lesbian people could fit them, too, without much or any modification. This is not to say these heterosexist categories were wholly bad or wholly good, wholly right or wholly wrong—but rather, that allies' use of them was carefully devoid of any challenge to or disruption of them.

Sexual Identity: “They’re not different from other people”

Allies' constructed sexual identity—unlike the other four fields of identity—in a manner almost unrelated to the adjective describing it. In the hands of allies, sexual identities were vehicles for talking about a variety of sexuality-conditioned experiences common to those people sharing a sexuality. For the most part, that meant allies discussed their experiences as straight people and empirical circumstances of gay people—rather than projecting the experiences of gay people. Invariably, though, this became a discussion of what a straight person *should* or *should not be* in relation to gay people rather than a sustained and thorough critique of heterosexual privilege. Allies managed to do this using remarkably few terms like “heterosexual” and “straight,” all the while advancing a semi-paradoxical claim: people of different sexualities were actually the same by virtue of their common humanity.

The love between two people, for example, was the same regardless of the sex or gender of those people. Nowhere was this expressed more clearly and succinctly than in Macklemore's megahit—the “anthem” of the movement: “it's all the same

love.”³²⁴ By treating the “love and commitment between a man and a woman [as] the only valid love,” or “defining gay love as ‘sinful,’” “we [implicitly straight people] tell them [implicitly gay people] that their love is not valid or valued.”³²⁵ Instead of “deny[ing] a significant segment of our society the experience of loving another human,” straight people needed to acknowledge “the love between [two men] is no different than the love [a woman] share[s] with [her] husband” and “recognize any couple that has love for each other.”³²⁶ Ally advocacy was filled with variations on “love is love” and “love is the same.”³²⁷

Gay and straight people were also, apart from their sexuality, the same. These terms were “merely descriptors”—“there is no such thing as [straight] or gay”—and “people [were] people,” “not either straight or gay.”³²⁸ “Except in sexual orientation” and “in all respects but their sexual preference,” “a gay person [was] no different from a straight person.”³²⁹ This sequence—a gay person being listed first in comparison to a straight person—was by far the dominant ordering, and can be found throughout straight ally advocacy. Allies also clarified that “being gay is...as natural as being heterosexual,” normal “just like straight people are normal,” and “[not] a lifestyle any more than your sexuality is.”³³⁰ “We’re all the same,” allies were fond of saying—“special, but the same”—and “whether you’re gay or straight” “did not matter.”³³¹

Straight allies even use the phrase “same people” to link gay people prior to coming out—when they might be presumed straight—and after. Coming out “doesn’t change anything,” allies argued: “it’s still the same person there” as “before.”³³² Gay people “enjoyed the same things”; “had the same talent, and gifts, and dreams”; and “[were] still the same [people] that [parents] welcomed on the day of his or her

birth.”³³³ While some allies observed “it was just the sexual orientation that was different,” others specified that “[gay people] haven’t changed”: “it’s still the same person” as “*before you knew* about their sexual orientation” (emphasis added).³³⁴ A gay person is still “the person [a straight person] respected or loved before they came out,” just now “assigned this different label” and perhaps “need[ing] love, understanding and caring.”³³⁵

Besides being the same as before coming out, gay people were also normal human beings in straight ally advocacy. Allies “[didn’t] like labels” and felt the issue was “not about being gay or straight”: people just “need[ed] to treat all people equally regardless of sexual orientation.”³³⁶ “LGBTQ people have always lived among us,” allies noted—just “everyday people” who are “well-adjusted, happy, and thriving.”³³⁷ “The LGBT community [was] everywhere” and straight people should “[treat] other human beings well,” “with dignity and respect”—especially “our oppressed fellow human beings.”³³⁸ Their’s “was just another shade of sexuality”—nothing “out of the ordinary,” “freakish or depraved”—and “[it was] just basic human rights” to treat gay people like “normal,” “average” people.³³⁹ Allies aimed to “normalize it” to the point where “being straight [wasn’t] the norm,” at which point there would just be “humanity and the masses” and “LGBTQ rights [would be] human rights and the same as anyone else.”³⁴⁰

For any human, sexual orientation was not a choice—but allies constructed that determinism as primarily applying to gay people. People were “born with their sexual orientation”: it was an “innate” predisposition,” a “part of how [someone] was wired.”³⁴¹ This was often illustrated by comparisons to “any other God given characteristic,” such as “[being] born with brown eyes,” “left-handedness,” or even

“[being] born with Down Syndrome.”³⁴² Sexual orientation “wasn’t [someone’s] fault,” nor something someone “[could] help,” nor “something a person “chooses” on a lark—and “sexual orientation [was not] ‘curable’” (both “cannot be and does not need to be”).³⁴³ Most emphatically, “sexual orientation [was] not a choice” as concluded by “the mainstream American medical and mental health professional associations.”³⁴⁴ But more often than these pansexuality constructions, allies said “people are born gay,” “being LGBT is not a choice,” or similar variations that focused sexual determinism on gay people.³⁴⁵ “It just was who he was,” or “who she was,” or “who they [were],” allies argued about gay people, and allies found it “ludicrous” “that anybody would choose” “to have people hate them and look at them funny.”³⁴⁶

But allies made clear that there was nothing wrong with gay people or with being gay. Some allies recalled “[being] raised to think homosexuality was [not] OK”—that “[there was] something wrong with [gay people],” that “[they] had a problem,” and “that being gay [was] wrong and sinful.”³⁴⁷ But “there [was] nothing wrong with being gay,” allies said, and “[gay people] [were] not wrong” and “[not] the one[s] with the problem.”³⁴⁸ A gay person was “not broken,” nor “less of a person,” nor “flawed,” but rather “unbroken and wholehearted.”³⁴⁹

In fact, allies typically cast gay people in glowingly positive terms. Gay people were “a cut above” straight people.³⁵⁰ Sometimes, gay people “were some of the best people I knew”—“some of the kindest, funniest, most compassionate, loyal, wildly creative, and insanely talented people”—or a particularly excellent “segment of society.”³⁵¹ At other points, gay people were the superlative: “the best kind of [people],” “the best people in the world,” or “a role model of the highest

character.”³⁵² Gay people were “great people,” “wonderful people,” “extraordinary people” (or “extraordinary men and women”), “amazing people,” and “nice people”; and a gay individual might be “a terrific guy,” a “terrific young man,” “an amazing man,” “an awesome kid,” or “a true joy.”³⁵³ Allies named a variety of positive attributes but returned to gay peoples’ intelligence again and again: a gay person might be “wise” or “wise beyond her years”; “well-educated,” “very intelligent,” or “brilliant”; or “a perfect student in school.”³⁵⁴

Most often, though, gay people were courageous. Allies stressed the bravery it took to “[come] out and [speak] out,” “to tell their story”; gay “kids” and “students” were especially brave.³⁵⁵ “It [took] a lot of jam” “to open up about this,” “to do it,” “to come and tell me,” “to be true to yourself,” or similarly euphemistic expressions for “com[ing] out as GLBT.”³⁵⁶ Coming out was “a very courageous act” or “a courageous step” that set a “courageous example” of people “be[ing] what they are,” “honest about [their] identity,” “standing up for who they are,” and “own[ing] who [they] are with pride.”³⁵⁷

Nonetheless, ally advocacy constructed “gay” as “different.” On the one hand, difference was the way of the world: people have “different...personalities, talents, and interests”; “different backgrounds and different beliefs”; and “different sexual orientations.”³⁵⁸ On one level, then, “it [was] alright to be different” and people were “better for having [differences] in their lives” since differences taught people to “receive what’s given to me” “[without] be[ing] afraid.”³⁵⁹ But gay people “knew [they] [were] different” “from the majority of the flock” and “[didn’t] fit into a mold” “with everybody else.”³⁶⁰ “Judgment [was] placed” on gay people by straight people who felt “animus” and could not “[tolerate] those that [were] different,” leading some

to “tak[e] their own lives because” of “how different [they] [felt].”³⁶¹ The previous sentence’s convoluted structure reflects how allies’ obscured straight people’s agency over establishing societal norms.

Allies were, though, quite comfortable acknowledging that heterosexuality was the societal norm. Heterosexuality was “our society’s model” or “what certain members of society consider normal”—“what [people are] supposed to be”—while “society says [homosexuality] is bad.”³⁶² Straight people were “the majority” which meant “[they] never really thought” nor “[had] to think about [their] sexual orientation,” nor did they “have to come out” or “have difficult conversations with [their] family members.”³⁶³ Allies’ use of “different” and “other” often raised the question—different from what?—and absence of an overt answer reflected heterosexuality’s dominance. For example, allies argued, “We need to stop [insulting] people of different sexual orientations” and “different sexual preferences” just because of their “different place along the broad spectrum of sexual identity than the majority of others”: “they’re not different from other people.”³⁶⁴

In contrast, though, allies frequently used “everyone” or “everybody” to implicitly refer to gay people—while “everybody else” or “everyone else” encompassed straight people. “Everyone should have equal rights” or “equal rights under the law” or “equal legal rights,” allies said when arguing that “everybody needs to be able to get married.”³⁶⁵ Allies “wanted everyone to feel safe and more comfortable being themselves”—or just to “[be able to] be themselves”—and “everyone should be treated fairly,” “treated the same,” “treated equally,” and “with dignity and respect.”³⁶⁶ “Everyone else,” then, “[was] more comfortable remaining voiceless rather than fighting for humans that have had their rights stolen”; “everyone

else” could only mean straight people in this context.³⁶⁷ Context further clarified the phrase’s meaning when used (as it often was) in comparisons: gay people “[were] human beings just like everyone else,” “people like everybody else,” or “full-fledged American citizens just like everyone else”; who should “have the exact same rights as everybody else” and “be allowed to love freely just like everybody else.”³⁶⁸ If read literally, “everyone else” meant everyone who was not gay, but other elements of context clarified that allies did not embrace a broad-spectrum view of sexuality. There was straight, and there was gay, and “everyone else” was just another way to avoid saying “straight” or “heterosexual.”

Allies argued that straight people can, and should, use their unequal power and privilege to ameliorate inequality. Allies cited numerous examples of privilege: allies “live[d] where [they] want[ed], love[d] whom [they] want[ed], and expect[ed] the basic right to [their] physical safety”; “[didn’t] get fired for being straight”; and “[got] to hang out with [their loved ones]” in public.³⁶⁹ In relation to the marriage equality debate, “it wasn’t necessary for [heterosexuals] to really take a stand”—“it wasn’t any of [their] business” nor “in [their] sights”—and allies conceded that it was also a “privilege that [they] can be silent about this issue” if they wanted.³⁷⁰ “Straight people need[ed] to advocate for gay rights” to “not hold others back,” but the big-picture goal was “funeral-making” and “untangle[ing] the web of heterosexism” (although allies said “heterosexism” rarely).³⁷¹ This began with “apologiz[ing] for [their] role in an unjust system,” accepting “responsibility to try to get rid of some...ignorance” and “raise awareness,” and committing “[their] privileges to end [their] privileges.”³⁷² Making that commitment required straight people to “recogniz[e] the specific power [they] each [had]” “to change hearts and minds” by

“send[ing] the message that inclusion and equality aren’t just things that people in the group affected wants.”³⁷³

As part of this whole process, straight people should strive to understand gays and lesbians’ experiences. Allies described their own efforts to understand as “discover[ing] the struggles” or “know[ing] the struggles,” or “recogniz[ing] themselves in each other.”³⁷⁴ Allies “imagine[d] the hurt,” “the stress,” and “the courage”; “imagine[d] living your whole life a lie,” “being a child who recognizes being gay,” or “losing a job not because of your performance at work but because of your relationship at home.”³⁷⁵ But at some point, allies “couldn’t imagine what [a gay person] actually went through” or “what it’s like suppress[ing] your absolute inner self,” and they acknowledged “hav[ing] a hard time imagining.”³⁷⁶ If imagining did not work, allies might try to “see”—perhaps “through the eyes” or “in the eyes” of gay people—or to “stand in” or “walk in [a gay person’s] shoes.”³⁷⁷

In attempting to understand gay people’s experiences of marginalization, allies analogized to other first-hand or historical experiences. The first-hand analogies could be fairly specific to the individual—an ally recalling “what a hard time I had dating as the only black kid in a small town,” for example, or a single sixty-year-old frustrated by the question, “Do you have kids?”³⁷⁸ But allies often picked analogies that expressed “what it’s like to be a minority,” “out-cast,” or “on the outside”—to “feel that [you] don’t fit in” or “don’t belong.”³⁷⁹ Feelings were central to allies’ anecdotes: feeling “reject[ed] by friends and family,” like someone “[didn’t] respect [their] gift,” “isolation,” or that they “let people that love [them] down.”³⁸⁰ Black people spoke of “being discriminated against” for “being Black” and “[benefiting] [from] the civil rights movement,” and interracial couples reminded people that

limiting marriages during segregation “was wrong then [and] it is wrong now.”³⁸¹

Allies might analogize marriage equality to civil rights or equal rights for women, or gay discrimination to either racial segregation or religious discrimination, concluding that “society always needs someone to discriminate against and now it’s the gays’ turn.”³⁸² Allies’ lessons from these comparisons were usually less specific, though—for example, “it was so nice that they made the effort to understand my situation” or “what a public show of solidarity can mean in the face of adversity.”³⁸³

To avoid the partial understanding that came from analogizing or imagining, allies proffered that straight people needed to educate themselves. “People are still really ignorant,” allies reasoned, and “even...allies fail at times to seriously account for [gays’ and lesbians’] experiences” or to “confront [their] ignorance and unlearn the misinformation offered in Psych 101.”³⁸⁴ But a straight person “could learn,” could “continue to educate [themselves]” and “become a resource” in order to “advocate for others”—this was “the most important thing [a straight person] could do.”³⁸⁵ In some instances, straight people were “vigorously schooled by [gay people]” about “how [they] [are] describing [themselves]” and other “terminology,” or “their experience of discrimination” and “the discrimination [they] still face in America.”³⁸⁶ At other times, allies “educat[ed] straight Americans about gay Americans” (or, with typical evasive phrasing, “educat[ed] people as to this reality” or “educat[ed] people to be understanding”).³⁸⁷ It also might be “all of us,” “we,” or similarly inclusive assemblages that were “here to give support and education” and “describe the beautiful sunset to those who stand behind us.”³⁸⁸

It followed, then, that straight people’s ignorance about gays and lesbians was an underlying problem. “This ignorant world” was full of “untruths about gay

people,” “junk science,” “ignorant information,” “worn arguments and old attitudes,” and “damaging old fictions and profound misunderstandings about our GLBT family members and friends.”³⁸⁹ Ignorance might be caused by “unfamiliarity” or a lack of “understanding of the LGBT issues,” or because straight people actively chose to be “completely uneducated” and “stuck in [their] thinking.”³⁹⁰ Allies were “sure [such people] [were] not [bigots]” but rather “need[ed] to be convinced” because they “[didn’t] know what it’s about” and “[were] not thinking about it.”³⁹¹ They might, like allies, reach a point when they felt “ashamed for all the damage [they] may have done...because of their ignorance,” and “grateful” to be more enlightened on this subject.³⁹² “Still ignorant” straight people, though, “[weren’t] enlightened” and remained part of “an ill-informed public”—“and it [was] in this environment that hate [could begin] to form.”³⁹³

These were the worst type of straight people: those who were overtly hateful, cruel, and bigoted. Perhaps they had “learn[ed] prejudice as they [grew],” but they prescribed to a “hate-filled ideology” and “fail[ed] to see in another our common humanity.”³⁹⁴ To allies, they were “haters,” “extremists,” “mean spirited,” “senseless,” “intolerant,” “small-minded,” “narrow-minded,” and “mind-bogglingly stupid”—all because they were “homophobic.”³⁹⁵ These homophobes did “not [have] a compelling legal argument” but, rather, were “really biased against gay people” and, to allies, “just wrong.”³⁹⁶ They “were given the impression that society condone[d] their” “extreme” demoniz[ing],” “vitriolic hatred[,] and bigotry,” but allies sincerely believed that society saw no virtue in their “bitterness and bigotry.”³⁹⁷ Allies were “amaze[d]” and “baffle[d] as to how someone can hate someone so much,” often reconstructing such hatred as “mental illness”; less emphatically, allies

said homophobes were “narrow-minded” or had “small minds.”³⁹⁸ Such personal, confrontational terms capture just how “divisive and destructive” allies saw “people looking down on other people.”³⁹⁹

This hatred, cruelty, and bigotry contributed to people—straight or gay—being afraid of being gay or being perceived to be gay. In allies’ construction, being gay brought myriad sources of fear: gay people might be “victims of hate crimes” or other “violence,” “harassed,” or “outed.”⁴⁰⁰ Religious leaders might “[lose] their ordination,” youth might be “kicked out of their homes” (or face negative “parental reaction”), and workers might “[lose] their jobs...because of who they love.”⁴⁰¹ “It should not have to be a scary thing to realize you are gay,” allies lamented—but nonetheless “it [was] a fearsome thing” “when your sexual orientation may be different than all the [people] that you know.”⁴⁰² Allies doubted that “[a gay person] could build a meaningful life absent of fear and persecution,” “pressure...and judgment.”⁴⁰³ Straight allies expressed the fear they felt “that opportunities will be closed to their [gay and lesbian friends and family]”: “I didn’t want it to be my daughter,” said one ally, while another said “I was afraid for [my son].”⁴⁰⁴ Some straight allies were even “paranoid” “that [people] [were] gonna judge [them],” and of “how people will view them,” for “be[ing] seen [with gay people]”—that they would “[be] perceived to be gay” and treated as badly as gay people were treated.⁴⁰⁵

And allies consistently and often constructed being gay as being hard. “People often view[ed] these as disposable people,” noted allies—as “synonymous with the lesser.”⁴⁰⁶ Gay people were “not open” about their sexuality and “[didn’t] want people other than their close friends to know” “[their] secret.”⁴⁰⁷ They were “vulnerable” “and lived a life of anguish” as they “struggled with their sexual

orientation,” “their sexuality,” and “their own identity.”⁴⁰⁸ Allies constructed gay people as “oppressed,” “abandoned[,] and isolated,” “alone or apart” “or afraid because they’re gay.”⁴⁰⁹ They were “unhappy,” “lonely[,] and depressed” “about [themselves],” surrounded by “darkness” and “not...true to [themselves].”⁴¹⁰ As “they [went] through hell,” gay people could develop a sense of “hopelessness” that culminated in them “not want[ing] to live.”⁴¹¹

These extremely hard conditions honed gay people into role models for living open, authentic, and true lives. Allies understood why gay people kept their sexuality a secret, but there was “falsity” to that because they were “[lying] to their friends, [lying] to their family” about “[their] true self, [their] beautiful self.”⁴¹² Allies therefore rejoiced about those who “[were] not afraid to truly be [themselves],” “to be who they’re supposed to be,” “to be the [people] [they] [were] meant to be.”⁴¹³ Gay people “[came] into their authenticity” to “[become] who they are”—which was what they “should be,” and straight people should “embrace them for [it].”⁴¹⁴ After all, allies reasoned, “it’s not easy standing up all the time and being who you are,” and allies were “filled with admiration” “for [gay people’s] courage and honesty” in “celebrating one’s true self-identity, regardless of sexual orientation” and living “an authentic life.”⁴¹⁵ Allies told gay people of the joy they derived from “you go[ing] on and liv[ing] your life”—and that they were “my heroes” who “inspire us.”⁴¹⁶

Allies derived inspiration from “out” teenagers, too, but the predominant narrative allies constructed for gay youth was of bullying, struggle, and self-loathing.⁴¹⁷ Allies observed a trend to “announce this part of [oneself]” earlier—maybe “about 14,” “in junior high,” or “middle school”—at the same time they were “dealing with...their own identity and plans for the future.”⁴¹⁸ “It’s hard being a

teenager,” allies noted, but “[it was] even more difficult” “for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered teens.”⁴¹⁹ “Difficult” euphemistically substituted for long lists of particulars, as in “things were really difficult for him,” “how difficult things were for him,” or “having some problems and difficulties.”⁴²⁰ When specified, those difficulties amounted to “kids [being] cruel” “when one of them is different”: straight kids “bullying and harass[ing],” “ranging from incessant verbal abuse to physical attacks,” and gay kids being “shamed, banished, threatened, beaten, and shunned.”⁴²¹ Gay youth were “victims of harassment” or “victims of bullying” at school, and at home they might also face “rejection and isolation from their families.”⁴²² And “when children do not feel safe, they cannot learn,” which meant that gay kids also “drop out or have lowered academic achievement” as they try to “avoid the name-calling, bullying and harassment they face on a daily basis.”⁴²³

The worst repercussion from anti-gay bullying was youth suicide. “We are losing too many kids,” allies lamented, “from being bullied in their everyday lives in and out of school” for “who they are.”⁴²⁴ Allies appealed to studies that showed that, besides “[being] eight times more likely [to commit suicide],” gay kids were “three more times likely to use illegal drugs than their straight peers” and “at greater risk for dropping out of school.”⁴²⁵ At other turns, allies retold stories that illustrated the “deadly impacts upon LGBTQ young people”: the “twelve-year-old who committed suicide over being bullied at school,” or the teenager who “killed himself over something as useless as people’s comments towards his sexual orientation.”⁴²⁶ Of note, though, was allies occasional tendency to obscure the anti-gay root (e.g., “kids killing themselves from bullying” or “teenagers who are bullied to the point of contemplating...suicide”).⁴²⁷ This was further troubling alongside another, more

frequent tendency: to obscure the (straight) bully and focus on the bullied (e.g., “LGBTQ children are more likely to be bullied” or “they were mercilessly bullied...because they were gay”).⁴²⁸ Allies were therefore only partially right to say “there is no way to [address harassment and bullying] without talking about gay people”: there was no way to address it without talking about *straight* people, and far too often they did not.⁴²⁹

Addressing anti-gay bullying, youth or otherwise, began by challenging society’s narrow definition of gay people. Straight agency could, again, disappear in ally advocacy: a gay person could be “treated like a ‘gay guy’” or “known as a gay rapper,” and “some may wish to define [the person] solely by [that person’s] sexual orientation.”⁴³⁰ Still, allies told gay people that “gay doesn’t...define who you are”—that “a change in preference does not define who a person is”—and that “sexual orientation is not a measure of anyone’s humanity or worth.”⁴³¹ Rather, sexual orientation was “part of who [a person] is”—“a small part,” “whether they’re straight or they’re gay”—and certainly “not [their] whole identity.”⁴³² These discussions included an unfortunately infrequent observation: that humans “[had] so many intersecting characteristics and identities,” and to get “sidetracked with who [someone was] sleeping with” was to ignore a person’s “complex[ity].”⁴³³

Allies did not ignore that complexity, but they also failed to map and unpack it—preferring instead to make broad appeals to “diversity.” Allies encouraged people to “talk about diversity...and not hide behind it” even as they hid behind vague generalities: they were “spreading awareness about diversity” because “it’s about diversity,” and people needed a “setting that is respectful of human diversity” and where they could “talk about human diversity.”⁴³⁴ When allies provided more

definition, diversity could mean “culturally accepting” or “a wide variety of people” in “a plural society”— “the various identities of our intersectional humanity” that delineate “the difference between you and me.”⁴³⁵ Allies forecast a “modern, diverse, and beautiful world” “that embrace[d] everyone” “and look[ed] to the hopes and dreams that we share.”⁴³⁶

Straight Ally Advocacy: Fitting Existing Identities

The idea—that gay and straight people shared “hopes and dreams”—effectively encapsulates the central thrust of straight ally advocacy. Gay people shared regional identities with straight people, as well as national, religious, and familial identities. They did *not* share a sexual identity but allies still asserted that generally, people were the same. Straight allies did not mount a sustained investigation of heterosexual power and privilege, nor did they explore the important interrelations between heterosexuals and people of other sexualities. On the contrary, when discussing gay hardships and challenges, allies actually minimized both heterosexism’s instigating and straight people’s abetting roles. Allies then offered a useful array of remediations straight people should do to improve life for gay people.

Remediating actions might seem like the cart going before an absent horse, but straight allies had laid a foundation of sorts. They had constructed gay people to fit various existing identity rhetorics, so it followed that they deserved to “fit” marriage, too. Straight people who feared change might accept this foundation because it assured them that familiar identities would not be lost and might even change only slightly. But there was another possible foundation that allies did not choose: straight power and privilege were unfounded and wrong, and therefore in

need of dismantling. I argue that, by constructing the former and not the latter, allies failed to *truly* undercut the heterosexist ideology impeding people from recognizing their shared humanity.

Such appeals to shared humanity or amorphous diversity had two unintended but insidious biproducts. First, appeals to sameness obscured meaningful identities at “the core of our lives.”⁴³⁷ Because their unequal privilege had been based on an identity difference, straight allies overcorrected and took two incongruous positions: people were the same; but also, as Macklemore sang in *Same Love*, “[they] may not be the same, *but that’s not important*” (emphasis added).⁴³⁸ But people *were not* the same, and differences *were* important—because differences defined who someone was, and how they related to other people. Allies correctly encouraged straight people to listen and learn from gay people, but their adjacent papering-over or abstracting identity distinctions undermined whatever good might come from that listening and learning.

A second related biproduct was that, by constructing gay people into existing identities, allies further normed those identities. In ally advocacy, rivalry toward a neighboring region was common to people sharing a regional identity, regardless of sexuality—and it would therefore be a departure from that commonality to not feel the rivalry. The feeling of otherness felt by *this* departure would probably be innocuous for most people—but when allies did normed, say, certain familial identities, the departure could be far more consequential. What if a family had only one parent, or parents who shunned marriage? Norming along these lines might actually reinforce heterosexist categories and replace one potential roadblock—

homosexuality—with another roadblock—marriage. These more-inclusive identities might actually become hegemonic and determining in their own right.

These two unintentional biproducts arise from a contradictory quality to straight ally advocacy. At turns, straight allies focused on the primary goal and argued that gay people should be able to be married. At other points, sometimes in the same fragment, allies aimed for the goal behind the goal: broad based acceptance for difference and variation, however that might manifest. In successfully arguing the former, though, straight allies actually created barriers to accepting the latter and postponed that broader fight to be fought another day—just as male allies had done advancing the Suffrage Amendment, and white allies had done in advancing the Civil Rights Act. But would allies ever actually fight these fights, given their repeated unwillingness to dismantle the ideologies originating in their dominant identities?

Notes

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² “May 9, 2012,” *The Last Word* (MSNBC, May 9, 2012).

³ Kerry Eleveld, *Don’t Tell Me to Wait: How the Fight for Gay Rights Changed America and Transformed Obama’s Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 257.

⁴ David Stout, “Bush Backs Ban in Constitution on Gay Marriage,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/24/politics/bush-backs-ban-in-constitution-on-gay-marriage.html>; “Voters Pass All 11 Bans on Gay Marriage,” *Associated Press*, November 3, 2004, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6383353/ns/politics/t/voters-pass-all-bans-gay-marriage/>.

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⁷ Jane Lampman, “Religion in Public Life: Americans Yearn for a Middle Way,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 30, 2006, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0830/p15s02-lire.html>.

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¹⁰ James Hohmann, “Poll: Plurality Supports Gay Marriage,” *Politico*, December 9, 2012.

¹¹ “April 26, 2015,” *This Week* (ABC, April 26, 2015), 201.

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¹⁷ Kevin Robillard, "First Inaugural Use of the Word 'Gay,'" *Politico*, January 21, 2013; Baim, Colbert, and Besen, *Obama and the Gays*, 454; Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President" (September 21, 2011).

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- ²⁶ Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America*, 42.
- ²⁷ Baim, Colbert, and Besen, *Obama and the Gays*, xv; The White House: President Bill Clinton, "The Clinton-Gore Administration: A Record of Progress for Gay and Lesbian Americans," n.d.
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Conclusion

Introduction

In the late-2010s, American politics has fissured along numerous identity lines. Americans are excluding Central and South American refugees fleeing violence and poverty. Record numbers of women ran for and won office in the 2018 election on the heels of a volatile public accounting of sexual harassment. Regions have united around their shared experiences with climate change, and young activists have drawn battle lines with older generations over both climate change and gun control. These fires have been fueled by a president, Donald Trump, who has weaponized identity by demonizing immigrants and refugees, Americans of color, Muslims, Democrats, and residents of specific regions (among others). If ever America needed citizen allies—evaluating how oppressive power and privilege vest in their identities and turning those around to eradicate identity-rooted marginalization—that time is now.

This project offers one explanation for how America arrived at this point: by not openly, directly, and thoroughly engaging the ideologies underlying identity-based inequality at moments when those ideologies were optimally vulnerable. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s “arc of the moral universe” bended toward justice through advancements such as the Susan B. Anthony suffrage amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and *Obergefell v. Hodges*. These policies are so significant within American politics that they seem settled and, on some level, they are: no credible activists are trying to disenfranchise women, reestablish segregation, or outlaw same-sex marriages. I have argued, though, that within each of these movements, allies failed to address the underlying, identity-rooted ideology—patriarchy, racism, or

heterosexism—that privileged one identity group over another in the first place. Certainly, allies were not the only activists making arguments in these movements—but they were distinctly positioned to confront identity-rooted privilege and to undermine it among members of the dominant identity group. But allies did not, and those ideologies survived (albeit in modified form), and Americans remained paralyzed and atomized along those very lines in the early twenty-first century.

But America does not only need allies around divisive identities and significant policies. Alliances are foundational to democracy. When people commit to making decisions together, as in a republic, they commit to trying to empathize with their fellow citizens. In the course of governing, one issue affects one group but not others; still another issue might affect others but not the first group. Most issues affect all citizens, but to varying degrees. Because all citizens do not share the same lived experiences, they may not be capable of understanding others' need for political change. For democracy to work, then, citizens must practice hearing others when they express political needs and allying themselves with whatever power they have. These alliances may be as microrhetorical as a single vote, rally, or petition; or they may be as macrorhetorical as broad-based social and political solidarity. Essayist Marilynne Robinson calls this the “essence and genius” of democracy: “imaginative love for people we do not know or whom we know very slightly”—and then, “the more generous the scale at which imagination is exerted, the healthier and more humane the community will be.”¹

In pursuit of healthier and more humane communities, I juxtaposed ally advocacy around women's suffrage, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and marriage equality in search of guidance for scholars and would-be allies alike. My conclusions

fall into three categories. First, in comparing the three eras of ally advocacy, content patterns suggest consistent themes and raise points of consideration for activists and scholars. Rhetorical strategies are more consistent (and, through that consistency, affirm my contention that ally advocacy reoccurs in American history). Finally, contextual comparisons hint at further guidance for allies seeking a more equitable America, and scholars seeking to support their work.

What Have Allies Talked About

While all three movements grappled with different identity fields—gender, race, and sexuality, chronologically—five fields reoccurred. Allies utilized national and regional identities in all three movements; both male and straight allies turned to family identities, and white and straight allies tapped religious identities. A fifth field, class identity, repeated between male and white allies, but its different usage by both groups—and its relative absence among straight allies—deserves further consideration.

National identity was the most consistent across the three groups of allies. All three groups saw Americans as members of a distinct community and agents of a world-leading ideology. Americans shared rights (although allies were typically vague about these) and values, and members of the marginalized groups patriotically exemplified those values. Those values originated in the country's founding, and allies referenced the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution particularly as though their audiences innately knew what each document meant—and agreed about their meanings. Americans protected their country's core values and rights, and could redirect their country if needed—that was the nature of representative government.

The progression of America's "representativeness" across these three ally groups reveals allies becoming increasingly critical of their country, even as their country remained ideologically exceptional. Male allies constructed national identity in the context of World War I foes: Americans were world leaders because they believed in truly representative government. Many male allies took representativeness for granted, but white allies could see contrary visual proof in photos and videos. They incorporated this inconsistency as they constructed national identity in aspirational terms, caught between contemporary reality and founding principles—but fundamentally improvable. Straight allies reconstructed this national identity with one crucial difference: they explicitly, elementally named gay people as fellow Americans. In straight ally advocacy, gay Americans embodied America's failure to live up to its exceptional grounding values.

This move—to explicitly state seemingly-elemental content—was notably more present in straight ally advocacy and should be one consideration for scholars and activists. If arguments begin where an audience already agrees, then advocates must carefully consider what content is commonly agreeable. At numerous points, allies made presumptions that suggest engagement with leaning-supportive audiences—arguing, for example, that Americans shared certain rights while presuming that their audience actually recognized black people as Americans. Allies' presumptions were pragmatic—engage the people most likely to join your cause—but could deepen the divide with those needing a far more elemental starting point. From scholars' perspective, the degree of elementality could signal an ally's implied audience; and allies might profitably weigh how much elementality their goals require.²

I would also encourage scholars and activists to consider allies' insistence that Americans truly believe the ideas they fail to execute. Straight and white allies alluded to previous movements for, say, equality and justice, while bemoaning the continued gap between Americans' beliefs and lived experiences. At some point, it would surely be reasonable to conclude that *all* Americans do not *actually* believe in these ideas. I have shown that some allies concluded and argued this, but that the norm was to construct surmountable inconsistency rather than inherent hypocrisy. I see both sides: surmountable inconsistency enables allies to again avoid a dominating identity-rooted ideology, yet shatter the tacit agreement that Americans are committed to the same beliefs and risk scuttling the whole grand experiment. These three groups of allies illuminated the former course of action, but scholars and activists might consider if and when the latter route is more appropriate.

Regional identity was also consistently salient in all three movements, even as it shifted to fit each distinct political context. Both suffrage and marriage equality were partially state matters, yet male allies favored broad coalitions of states—the West, the East, the South—over the state-specific identities constructed by straight allies. With civil rights, a chasm already existed between the South and the North (even though “North” often meant non-Confederacy states), and allies reconstructed this regional divide as highly consequential. Straight allies offered yet another tier of regional identity, arguing for hyper-local identities based in neighborhoods, schools, towns, and counties. Consistently, though, allies voiced pride in their region, stoked regional rivalries, celebrated welcoming regions, denigrated unwelcoming regions, and constructed regional identity as a totalizing experience (even as their rhetoric betrayed fractures and internal divisions).

Family identity took very different form with male and straight allies, but its purpose was similar. For male allies, family identities stabilized men amidst sweeping cultural change, reasserting (at least symbolically) women's and children's subordination. Straight allies constructed far more egalitarian family roles—constructing parents without gender markers, for example—but the purpose was the same. Gay people were family members, but that did not mean *new* family identities: they fit existing roles, and life continued more or less the same. Also similar between male and straight allies was families' cornerstone place in American society, as structurally important and as symbolically important.

Religion was comparably important and religious identity surprisingly consistent between white and straight allies. Like family identity, religious identity was actually present in all three movements—just not to the point of significance among male allies, which was also the case with white allies and family identity. I described the field as “religious identity” because allies could use language that obscured theological distinctions, but allies were nearly always talking about *Christian* identity. White allies constructed “good Christians” while straight allies constructed “liberal Christians,” but the parameters were the same: people whose belief system compelled them to fight oppression. In contrast, allies constructed bad or conservative Christians as people who used faith to further marginalize black or gay people, respectively.

A fifth field repeated between male and white allies—class identity—but shifted meaningfully between movements. For male allies, class identity cut across gender and, if men were honest with themselves, more accurately captured the source of their malaise than did gender identity. Class aspirations fed white racism, too, but

white allies often inaccurately recast class issues *as* race issues. (Lyndon Johnson was especially frustrated when other white allies conceptualized civil rights as an end itself—a stand-alone goal rather than a skirmish in the War on Poverty.) Fifty-five years later, Americans simultaneously grappled with the economic recession and the marriage equality movement, but news media ignored lower-class gay people who, Moscovitz suggests, “would benefit the most from the institution’s benefits and protections.”³ And such class identity was, as its own force, absent from straight ally advocacy. Why the drastic shift when other aspects of ally advocacy have remained so consistent?

There are many possible explanations, but I would ask scholars and activists to consider Americans’ discomfort with class identity. In his book *What’s the Matter With Kansas?*, Thomas Frank famously argued that contemporary American capitalism “both encourages class hostility...and simultaneously denies the economic basis of the grievance.”⁴ The roots of this denial are visible fifty years earlier with white allies beginning to subdivide class identity and reconstruct it within other identities. Straight allies’ subdivision and reconstruction was far more advanced, producing a rhetoric replete with class markers—just minimized, buried, or obscured inside other identities. With class identity so fractured, it is no wonder that allies (at least) have difficulty articulating class issues—difficulty they do not have with, say, regional or family issues.

America desperately needs allies to construct class identities and fight another long-lasting destructive, oppressive ideology: unregulated capitalism. Numerous indicators, leaders and scholars have noted the egregious economic inequality in contemporary America, brought about by decades of deregulation and the subsequent

concentration of wealth. Millions of Americans are economically precarious and growing more precarious in other dimensions of class (e.g., education, healthcare access, or location). As bad as these conditions are, America has grappled with these issues before—during the Gilded Age, the Roaring Twenties, and the early-2000s to name just three examples. Today, as then, some people with class privilege recognize that unchecked capitalism is, to repurpose Tim Wise’s comments about racism, “a sickness in [their] community, and it damages [them].” These class allies need to step up, just as male allies, white allies, and straight allies stepped up—but unlike those groups, class allies must go beyond policy reforms to deconstruct the oppressive ideology before it deconstructs us.

How Have Allies Talked About It

At the outset of this project, I contested the meaning of “ally” in three ways. First, I proposed that allies were political advocates, and the ready availability of allies’ political fragments proved this claim along the way. Second, I proposed that allies have cumulative impact by distinct allies repeating similar fragments in distinct contexts. Each chapter evidences my claim, but the previous section further demonstrates that fragments accumulate *between* movements as well. Finally, I turned to the allies themselves who, I proposed, occupied a rhetorical role that reoccurred in American history. That proposal might prove true if, across history, allies repeated certain rhetorical moves and, indeed, they did.

Allies always constructed themselves in positive terms, for example, in stark opposition to the bigots with whom they shared an identity. Male allies were noble and chivalrous, while opponents of suffrage had “fallen short of that respect and

honor of womanhood...”⁵ White allies were “whites that do care” as opposed to whites who perpetrated hate crimes and detested black people.⁶ A straight ally was “a better, more compassionate person” for their activism, while a homophobe “[came] across as a narcissistic fromunda stain.”⁷ This rhetorical move reflects how narratives animate identities by, in part, clearly establishing and delineating the good and bad guys.

In all three movements, though, ally advocacy defined marginalized groups, often into existing, accepted roles. Both straight people and men spent more time constructing gay people and women’s identities, respectively, than their own. To male allies, a woman was a wife, mother, daughter, home-maker, tax-payer, teacher, laborer, patriot, citizen, and voter. Gay people, as constructed by straight allies, were also patriots and citizens, but they were also Americans, Christians, children, parents, siblings, neighbors, and friends. Black people were unlikely to be family or neighbors to white allies, and being friends was a stretch, but allies constructed them as Americans, Christians, Southerners, farmers, and laborers. In some cases, allies had to reconstruct the common identity to include members of the marginalized group (e.g., women as voters) but usually they fit group members into existing societal parameters.

In doing so, they defined members of marginalized groups as exceptional but, paradoxically, as having terrible lived experiences. Women were dutiful, politically-savvy peacemakers of exceptional virtues and morals, who modernity forced from their homes and into toil, and who lacked the ability to protect and defend themselves without suffrage. Black people exhibited inner peace, and demonstrated generosity, love, and kindness to even the vilest white people—but were also “simple people”

living in poverty and squalor without opportunities.⁸ Gay people were courageous, gentle, and loving, “at once ordinary and extraordinary,” but also rejected by their families and friends, bullied to the point of depression and suicide, or victims of hate crimes.⁹ The distance between each of these constructions made for compelling narratives, but raised an important question: how could privileged people stand by and watch such horrible things happen to such amazing people?

This exceptional-terrible rhetoric warrants consideration from activists and scholars. The latter half of this rhetoric reinforces the victimization of the oppressed group and, especially from allies, can “reinscri[be] sexual, national, and other kinds of hierarchies,” argues Linda Alcoff.¹⁰ Nonetheless, establishing the need for a change often requires a rhetor to first establish some condition as undesirable. The proper questions, then, are: what needs to be changed, and what conditions are undesirable? As long as allies’ answer in relation to the oppressed group, they will inevitably construct members of that group as victims. The alternative is clear: ally rhetoric must (re)focus on dominant identity and its underlying ideology—both of which are internally undesirable and in need of change, without a need to reference a marginalized group.

Another common move in ally advocacy was to carve out a group between allies and the hateful bigots—moderates, who were defined by their reasonableness. For male allies, moderate men believe in traditional gender roles, but their chivalry would eventually lead them to the conclusion that women should vote. White allies found “white liberals” to be the moderate group, committed to civil rights in principle but unwilling to sacrifice to make racial equality a reality. In the marriage equality movement, the moderate group was routinely described as “decent” or

“uncomfortable”—people who had trouble accepting but who, given time and exposure, could get over it. And each moderate bloc did not hate—a crucial distinction that kept them redeemable.

Allies further boosted moderates’ redeemability—and diminished their own responsibility—by shifting agency away from humans and using passive voice to describe oppression and marginalization. Men’s greed and ambition had not changed women, but rather modernity, industrialization, or perhaps World War I. White bigots clearly perpetrated racist hate, but the less explicit discrimination could be attributed to regionalism, partisan politics, or poverty. Straight allies passed blame for homophobia to conservative Christianity, and bullying and bigotry were problems more frequently than were bullies or bigots. Throughout, allies picked vivid verbs that captured agency and responsibility—protect, ameliorate, force, depend, reject, judge, and alienate, to name just a few—but hid the agents and responsible parties behind passive voice constructions.

By activating these passive instances, it is clear how easily and profitably ally advocacy could (re)focus on allies’ dominating identities. Instead of saying women needed to “be given” something, male allies could have considered man’s capacity to give—where did this come from, and what made them *distinctly* qualified? Instead of concentrating on bad “situations which have been allowed to develop,” white allies could explicate how white leaders and citizens developed those situations. Instead of emphasizing “people [who] were not treated equally under the law,” straight allies could question heterosexuals’ authority to treat people unequally under the law. Allies need to clearly identify actors, clearly identify *themselves* as actors, and spell out how their actions advance or preserve identity-rooted inequality.

Indirectness was already part of ally advocacy, manifest in allies using ancillary identities to shift away from the central identity issue. Note how male allies constructed national and citizen identities as more soliloquies than direct arguments about suffrage. More egregiously, white allies trotted out North/South tension or played upon black lower-class identity to avoid the underlying racial dimensions. Like male allies with national identity, straight allies used family and religious identity in moments as though the two had nothing to do with marriage equality. They simply focused on constructing aspects of identity—say, ideal qualities of parents—in a vacuum, and then connecting it to marriage equality secondarily.

Allies also routinely constructed identity in broad, totalizing strokes. While straight allies were far more likely to specify “some,” “part,” or “a few,” ally advocacy typically eschewed subdivision and gradation. Parents had parental qualities without constructing the distinct experiences of, say, adopted, unmarried, divorced, or even gay parents. White allies noted gradations among Northerners and Southerners but it was cleaner to construct each group as operating in relative lockstep, rather than opening up their rhetoric to consider all the various differences. Male allies were the most absolutist, leaving little room within each identity for deviations or exceptions.

Despite this, ally advocacy is trending toward greater critical appreciation for intersectionality. Allies constructed the same people into multiple existing roles, but over time they increasingly asked “intersectional questions,” as encouraged by Michelle Kelsey Kears—“questions that are central to struggles for and over power.”¹¹ Male allies often cast people as a sum of two identities with little interest for *how* the identities intersected: there were women voters, male laborers, or American mothers, to name just a few examples. White allies attended more to

identities' interactions—class and race, religious and national identity, region and party—and to the power vested to varying degrees. Straight allies routinely blended various identities within the same person, and especially illustrated how sexuality intersected with all other fields of identity. They did so, though, through much *more* rhetoric, raising an important question for would-be allies: how can they craft a rhetoric that both succinctly argues the point, while respecting people's varied intersecting identities?

Finally, ally advocacy functions both instrumentally and constitutively. The former is to be expected when conceptualizing allies as *political* advocates: they will focus their rhetoric on winning distinct political changes. Male and straight allies certainly did, putting a far-secondary emphasis on convincing men and heterosexuals that women and gay people were equal. The white ally advocacy I sampled did not focus narrowly on passing a policy, as the bulk of it occurred in the three months after the Civil Rights Act passed Congress. Thus unburdened, white allies could develop the underlying identity changes that would make the Act successful. None of the three manifestations of ally advocacy, though, was wholly instrumental or wholly constitutive: both had some elements of each that worked in tandem.

This instrumental-constitutive duality, then, must be a key consideration. Constitutive rhetoric can serve instrumental ends, as when male allies constituted women as voters so that men might extend suffrage rights; and instrumental advancements feed new, more equitable identities. But the two functions must work together, and movements need each at different points: after all, advancing equality can be a very long haul. Allies must weigh which function is preferable at any given moment, but allies (and scholars) must also evaluate the instrumental or constitutive

goals. If they evaluate with a focus on oppressed and marginalized groups, they will continue a rhetoric that perpetuates their privileged place in society, and perhaps further marginalizes these groups. I therefore want to reiterate: ally rhetoric must attend to *allies*, identifying instrumental and constitutive goals circumscribed (as best they can) within the parameters of their own dominating identities. Most specifically, I encourage allies to prioritize constituting new identities for their dominant identity groups—something male, white, and straight allies failed to do, to all our detriment.

How Has Context Influenced Allies

Similar content and strategy between ally groups bespeaks contextual similarities that simply did not exist. These three groups of allies operated in very different media environments which resulted in distinct audience dynamics. Each group of allies also engaged different policy contexts due in part to the country's progression toward greater equality. These are but two differences among a plethora of contextual factors, but they raise distinct considerations for advocates and scholars.

First, how do media encourage certain content and strategies? Male suffragists made speech and print arguments to a class of men who had the literacy, time, and finances to consume arguments in those forms. Those men valued chivalry and wished to preserve their class privileges against the rising proletariat, and male allies provided suffrage arguments reflecting both those ends. White allies gave interviews to papers and wrote semi-private letters to people physically distant from Southern white racism. These people needed to be shocked into caring—but also reassured that caring would not disrupt the stability and privilege they enjoyed because they were white. Assured a circumscribed audience back home, white allies gave this

reassurance through a relatively-narrow discussion of whiteness chased with judgments they might not have conveyed to their black Freedom Summer hosts or co-workers.

Digital media, as used by straight allies, simultaneously offer two extreme possibilities. Besides born-digital fragments, straight allies' analog fragments could *become* digital; those fragments were therefore always potentially widely (and uncontrollably) shareable. This probability for a wide audience is hinted at in straight allies' extremely elemental arguments which were, I have argued, distinctly more elemental than in the previous movements. Yet digitalization also enabled a second extreme: arguments honed for a very specific audience. Thus, my composition of straight ally advocacy includes niche arguments by heterosexual spouses of homosexual mates, hyper-local regionalism, and ample nuances about how best to be a straight ally. If digital media splay activists between broad, elemental and highly-specific rhetoric, activists and scholars must consider how best to reach moveable audiences without alienating others.

If media influence content and strategies, so do each movement's policy goals. Federal suffrage was a non-starter for many years, so suffragists and their allies ran statewide suffrage campaigns. This shift toward a more-local goal, but still establishing women as voters, produced a rhetoric rich with more-local identities and explorations of "citizen" and "voter." To win federal civil rights legislation, white allies did not need the whole nation—so they trashed Southerners and constructed Northerners so that their sense of superiority might carry the day. (I also believe white allies' use of class identity might partly reflect a pivot from one policy—the Civil Rights Act of 1964—toward other policies—the Great Society's anti-poverty

program.) Straight ally advocacy reflects not just marriage equality (e.g., spouses and parents), but also hate crimes legislation and anti-bullying measures (e.g., gay teens are bullied and suicidal, and being gay is hard living) being debated within school districts and municipalities.

Ally advocacy *should* engage identities that correspond to policy goals, but therein lies a fundamental problem with allies' political advocacy. Allies do not simply seek new policies (instrumental) but also new *identities* (constitutive). Specific policy goals, though, force allies into narrow rhetorical decisions that shortchange constitutive goals. Exclusionary laws also position movements to advocate for rights for a hitherto-excluded group, which can in turn position allies to make rhetoric about marginalized groups rather than themselves. In sum, allies doing political advocacy are fundamentally handicapped—but that does not mean they should not advocate, nor that America is not better for new civil rights policies. It means that, in the crush of time-sensitive campaigning, allies must pause to think about how to argue in the least circumscribing, most self-constitutive way—and scholars must help them.

Scholars and activists must also consider how the change in power represented by a proposed policy alters allies advocacy. The suffrage question asked men to surrender their absolute power over America's representative government, and it took seventy-two years to convince them to do so. In the end, as I have argued, male allies adopted a rhetoric that symbolically neutralized women's suffrage by re-centering and re-empowering men. The Civil Rights Act and marriage equality threatened white people's and heterosexuals' absolute power less, or at least less directly, so it is unsurprising that neither ally group re-centered their oppressive

identity in quite the same way. Nonetheless, their rhetoric reflects power-related anxieties: white allies implied that diffuse Northern white privilege would survive relatively intact, while straight allies reassured straight people that “family” and “Christianity” would remain symbolically powerful. This former course is not as egregious as male allies’ course, but still problematic; this latter course leaves significant power-related issues untouched, but the campaign resolved far more quickly. Even after this project I remain unsure about the ideal course—aim for big policy and brace for a big fight, or settle for something obtainable while laying constitutive groundwork?—but attention to these dynamics must be part of the conversation.

Another contextual consideration for scholars and activists is circulation. For all it does, my project does *not* trace *patterns* of circulation by which scholars and activists might understand how ideas developed, or trace specific ideas between rhetors and audiences. For example, I observed that ally presidents favored national identity when speaking about each civil rights reform. Noting and tracking such patterns was beyond the scope of this project but has been done well with singular fragments by Stephen Greenblatt, among others.¹² Tracing multiple, distinct fragments in tandem would be extraordinarily difficult, but activists and scholars could benefit from identifying chronological or regional patterns, or patterns between certain types of rhetors or audiences.

Identifying such patterns would help scholars and activists weigh the saturation of various themes. As my endnotes indicate, I had far more fragments from straight allies than, say, white allies. This surfeit produced not simply a longer chapter, but also a more-nuanced portrait of straight ally advocacy than of white ally

advocacy. The ability to discern those nuances might interest scholars but might also have little bearing on whether those nuances registered with audiences or impacted the broader movement. I believe noting such nuances is inherently valuable, but in certain circumstances—especially for activists—ideological saturation is a primary (instrumental) concern.

My approach could be a useful tool for considering saturation and circulation but could be improved along several lines. I read thousands of fragments for each movement, identified and isolated distinct identity-related material, (re)grouped that material by commonalities, and then weighed its relative symbolic weight. The result is strong evidence that ideas manifest in disparate fragments and can be united to illustrate consensus-building. More and broader fragments could bolster scholarly synthesizing and, in their absence—for example, my omission of civil rights advocacy by the National Council of Churches—raise questions about whether a rhetoric can fairly be tied, albeit generally, to rhetors occupying a shared rhetorical role. As I noted, much extant ally research deals with interpersonal communication, and ethnographic methods could enable scholars to incorporate such communication when assembling a rhetoric. Future scholars must also overcome technological hurdles that obscure trends in social media advocacy and overemphasize what is publicly-available. I might be criticized, for example, for including YouTube videos with extremely low viewership: do those videos actually represent ally advocacy, or skew my assemblage of it? Until a larger percentage of social media fragments can be captured, analyzed, regrouped, and weighed for significance, the answers to such question are unsatisfyingly open.

Finally, from male to white to straight allies, allies have grown more fully tolerant and self-aware—but I question whether this has manifested as productively as possible. Some male allies were racist and, despite their goal, fairly patriarchal; they were also un-self-critical about their place *vis-à-vis* the women in the movement. White allies were certainly classist and selectively blind to their racial privilege, but also began critically considering their proper place and behavior. Straight allies exhibited the greatest sensitivity to the point of constructing sexual identity disproportionately about how best to be a straight ally. I was even encouraged to find that behaviors straight allies encouraged—listening and learning, for example—were also among ideal behaviors encouraged by LGBTQ organizations. Such critical attention to how best to be an ally is inherently useful but cannot substitute for a thorough critique *by allies* of their identity group’s oppressive and marginalizing behavior. Straight ally advocacy lacked such a critique and the movement ultimately suffered for it, sustaining a heteronormativity that now especially endangers queer and trans people.

Conclusion

For as long as there have been political systems, identities have divided humans within those systems; in turn, movements have bridged, altered, or abolished those divisions. Allies have also been there, even if society has only begun labelling them “allies” recently. Despite ally advocacy and the work of social movement activists, inequalities persist, and people develop new (or return to old) identity-rooted rationales for unequal power and privilege. I have argued that this is partially because allies failed to deconstruct and reconstitute their oppressive identities—but I

would like to clarify that allies should not be wholly dismissed for this shortcoming. As President Obama observed, “People who do really good stuff have flaws” because “the world is messy.”¹³ Allies are no exception, and America is better for allies’ advocacy.

But allies surely could do better and must never presume that they are doing absolute good. Kerry Eleveld thought highly of Obama, but lamented that he was, “so secure with the fact that he was doing the right thing by gay people that he couldn’t accept the suggestion that he may have done the wrong or hurtful thing.”¹⁴ I do not believe Obama or other allies intentionally want to be wrong or hurtful, but they still sometimes lack the humility and deference to anticipate when they might be hurting. This project has shown allies increasingly developed those qualities, and they can be honed through allies’ study of their predecessors, voluntary redirections by allied parties, and permanent ethos of self-criticism and reflection.

But all that will be for naught if allies constitute themselves as voluntarily, generously, or benevolently assisting marginalized groups. Allies can demonstrate their vested interest by eschewing identity markers of marginalized groups for a rhetoric deconstructing the identity-rooted ideologies which benefit them. Allies can claim ownership by using active voice to clearly name themselves as actors who marginalize, even though they are otherwise ideologically inclined. Allies can advance the cause by helping identity-group peers confront the origins of their malaise and reconstitute their shared identity. This project provides direction along these lines but the final question is one of self-awareness. Allies, can you recognize that this fight is yours?

Notes

- ¹ Marilynne Robinson, "Imagination & Community," *Commonweal*, March 9, 2012, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/imagination-community>.
- ² Edwin Black, "The Second Persona," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 2 (1970): 109–19.
- ³ Moscovitz, *The Battle over Marriage*, 2013, 76.
- ⁴ Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 113.
- ⁵ "Blot on 'scutcheon, Vintage of 1915," *Hartford Courant*, May 26, 1915.
- ⁶ "Fifth Hour of Coverage."
- ⁷ Daybell Anderson, "A Look Inside Your Neighbor's Window"; Kluwe, "An Open Letter to Emmett Burns."
- ⁸ Martínez, *Letters from Mississippi*, 57.
- ⁹ Baim, Colbert, and Besen, *Obama and the Gays*, 113.
- ¹⁰ Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991): 29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354221>.
- ¹¹ Michelle Kelsey Kearn, "'Is Gay the New Black?': An Intersectional Perspective on Social Movement Rhetoric in California's Proposition 8 Debate," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2015): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2014.995684>.
- ¹² Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012).
- ¹³ Obama Foundation, *President Obama in Conversation with Yara Shahidi and Obama Foundation Program Participants* (YouTube, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ioz96L5xASk>.
- ¹⁴ Eleveld, *Don't Tell Me to Wait*, 14.

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