BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA:
BARACK OBAMA AND THE SEDUCTIONS AND ANXieties OF
CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL TALK RADIO

By

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To my sisters and brothers who endure despite odds, obstacles, and age; you have spoken new worlds into being. To God be the glory, forever!
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<table>
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<th>CPTR</th>
<th>Conservative political talk radio.</th>
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<td>PPTR</td>
<td>Progressive political talk radio.</td>
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Research on U.S. Conservative Political Talk Radio (CPTR) is valuable but limited. Much of this work is journalistic or survey-based, critiquing the veracity of CPTR's claims, assessing the characteristics of its listeners, or evaluating its impact on politics, attitudes, and behavior. Research on CPTR would benefit from a social constructionist analysis. Three constructionist questions guide this research: 1) What is CPTR saying to its listeners? 2) How does CPTR build and enact identity? and 3) What kind of social order is being (re)produced on CPTR?

Data for this research consists of 105 CPTR broadcasts from 7 conservative hosts (Tammy Bruce, Herman Cain, Monica Crowley, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Rush Limbaugh, and Michael Savage) and a comparison group of 105 Progressive Political Talk Radio (PPTR) broadcasts from 7 progressive hosts (Alan Colmes, Thom Hartmann, Stephanie Miller, Randi Rhodes, Ed Schultz, Al Sharpton, and Bev Smith). Broadcasts aired between March 2009 and July 2010. Data represent approximately 630 hours of political talk radio. These data were analyzed using case study research, discourse analysis, and analytic induction methods.
From an analysis of CPTR broadcasts three major findings emerged: 1) CPTR hosts, guests, and callers ‘out’ their opposition as different, dangerous, and a threat to an imagined American past, present, and future; 2) CPTR portrays the US as suffering an unprecedented state of political, economic, and cultural crisis; and 3) CPTR social reality constructions (re)create an insider-only, nationalistic, xenophobic, capitalist, patriarchal, and heteronormative social order.

CPTR is a means to cope with a loss of hegemony. On CPTR a social reality is constructed that deposes feared social change through a cleverly marketed and entertaining message that articulates conservative anxieties and seduces listeners with narratives of moral authority, cultural superiority, and ultimate victory over supposed forces of evil. PPTR, by contrast, is presented to its listeners as a means of information sharing and is not aggressively engaged in social reality construction. PPTR assumes a unitary reality of known facts. CPTR creates and exploits “alternative facts” that are true because they are persuasive and persuasive because they fit with story plots created on CPTR.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A bunch of white people who thought electing a Black president would assuage all of their guilt and erase our racial past voted for Obama. They couldn't of cared less what he thought, what he said . . . they were being selfish. They didn't like feeling guilty over our racists past - slavery - and so they thought pulling the lever for Obama would absolve them. It wasn't for his policies, as we are now quickly learning.

—Rush Limbaugh
The Rush Limbaugh Show

Study Overview

Extant research on U.S. Conservative Political Talk Radio (CPTR) is valuable but limited in important respects. Much of this work is journalistic or survey-based with an eye toward critiquing the veracity of CPTR's truth claims, assessing the characteristics of its listeners, or evaluating its impact on politics, attitudes, and behavior. While these studies are valuable, future research on CPTR would benefit from a constructionist sociological analysis that would:

1. Describe routine CPTR meaning- and sense-making;

2. Position CPTR meaning- and sense-making within individual, group, and institutional frameworks; identifying the subjectivities, collectivities, and worldviews to which CPTR contributes and from which it is constituted;

3. Explore taken for granted discourse as a way of understanding why CPTR is persuasive and credible to insiders; that is, theorize how meaning- and sense-making (re)produce social order by making certain understandings comprehensible, certain thoughts rational, and certain actions possible within a network of complex and ever-changing human social (inter)action.

A social constructionist analysis extends the existing research on CPTR by providing a theoretical basis upon which to understand the micro-, meso-, and macro-level fields within which CPTR does its work. The goal of this study has been to achieve such an understanding through an analysis of CPTR narratives, rhetoric, and discourse.
In doing this, more has been learned about a shared conservative construction of reality.

Data

Lyons (2008) reports that 17-18% of the radio audience in the U.S. listens to political talk radio. News, talk, and informational programming are the top radio formats in the Unites States, used by 1,700 stations nationwide and reaching more than 50 million listeners weekly (Center for American Progress & Free Press, 2007, p. 1; Lyon, 2008). The political talk format, as we know it today, started with Rush Limbaugh in 1988 and has grown a startling 2,728% over 25 years (Lyon, 2008).

For this study, political talk radio hosts were selected from Talker’s Magazine (2009) “2009 Talker’s 250,” a ranking of radio and new media hosts in the United States. Data consists of 105 audio-recorded Conservative Political Talk Radio (CPTTR) broadcasts from 7 conservative hosts (4 men and 3 women; 15 broadcasts each; hosts include Tammy Bruce, Herman Cain, Monica Crowley, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Rush Limbaugh, and Michael Savage) and a comparison group of 105 Progressive Political Talk Radio (PPTTR) broadcasts from 7 progressive hosts (4 men and 3 women; 15 broadcasts each; hosts include Alan Colmes, Thom Hartmann, Stephanie Miller, Randi Rhodes, Ed Schultz, Al Sharpton, and Bev Smith) collected between March 2009 and July 2010. In total data represent approximately 630 hours of Conservative and Progressive Political Talk Radio.

Research Questions

Three questions guided this research:

1. What is Conservative Political Talk Radio saying to its listeners?
2. How does Conservative Political Talk Radio build and enact: identity (e.g., subjectivity, selves); social groups (e.g., solidarity, otherness); cultures (e.g., values, beliefs); and social institutions (e.g., family, government)?

3. What kind of social order is being (re)produced in Conservative Political Talk Radio?

**Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

The units of analysis for this study were narrative accounts. Narratives are stories that explain, persuade, legitimate, authorize, and/or sanction meaning- or sense-making. The narrative data included in this research represent topically-delimited segments of talk taken up by hosts, guests, and callers, as well as audio clips and readings from other media, accompanying music, and/or sound effects included with hosts’ commentary. Commercials and public service announcements were not included with these data.

Analyses of data were limited to narrative accounts in the political talk radio broadcasts that relate to the presidency of Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, and/or political issues and policies of the Obama Administration. By focusing on CPTR and PPTR narratives about Barack Obama and the Obama Administration this study took advantage of a momentous ‘natural experiment’ the historic election of America’s first African American president. The presidency of Barack Obama presents a unique opportunity to explore shared constructions of reality in reaction to the unfolding of a first-time ever event that: 1) calls the taken-for-granted into questions; 2) evokes debates; and, 3) exposes the complexities of the contemporary America social order.

Analyses were performed using case study, discourse analysis, and analytic induction methods. Coding was completed directly from the broadcasts. First, a set of 9 broadcasts were selected for intensive case study analysis; these broadcasts were
transcribed in their entirety. From the case study data hypotheses and an analytical framework were developed that guided examination of the balance of the data. The remaining 201 broadcasts were not transcribed but coded directly from the audio files, facilitating the efficient review and analysis of a large body of data. Transcribed segments of narratives from among all the data appear in the study as exemplars for discussion and illustration of research findings.

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter 2 presents the author's reflexive stance: how I came to study Conservative Political Talk Radio and the seeming paradox that spurred my initial thoughts on this topic. Chapter 3 sets the context for the analysis by presenting the history and ideals responsible for the ascendance of the U.S. Conservative Movement. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the emergence and present dominance of CPTR and a review of the social scientific and media studies literature on talk and political talk radio.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the theoretical foundations of this study. Specifically: 1) the tenets of social constructionism; 2) the sociological significance of language, narrative, and discourse; and, 3) the role of narrative in social reality construction, identity, and action. Methods of data collection and analysis are discussed in detail in Chapter 6. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of study limitations.

The analytical portion of the study is presented in chapters seven through nine – each Chapter corresponds to the three study questions. Chapters 7 presents study findings and discussion of research question 1: an analysis of the content of CPTR narrative accounts - what CPTR is saying to listeners. Chapters 8 assesses how CPTR narratives build and enact selves, groups, collectives, social institutions, and culture - the scope of research question 2. Findings on research question 3 are presented in
Chapter 9 which explores CPTR’s place within a hegemonic social order via discourses on nation, race, gender, sexuality, and class. Chapter 10 summarizes study findings, conclusions, and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REFLEXIVE STANCE

Conservatism . . . is the only thing that keeps women truly free. The only thing.

—Tammy Bruce
The Tammy Bruce Show

How I Came to Study Conservative Political Talk Radio

I have strong feelings about Conservative Political Talk Radio (CPTR). Listening to CPTR programs for five years in the southern college town where I lived, worked, and studied, what struck me most was not the pomposity of the hosts, the rants of callers, or the misinformation routinely presented as unvarnished truth. My puzzlement and concern was more basic: Why does CPTR exist? Specifically, what is the purpose of broadcasts whose goals were, it seemed to me, patently partisan and unapologetically geared to fomenting social division and hate? The CPTR programs that I listened to:

- Dismissed as utopian social relations based in racial, gender, sexual, and class equality;
- Flouted political correctness (i.e., civility) and used this rejection as license for the basest name-calling and ridicule;
- Engaged in unabashed white nationalist posturing (e.g., “we’re taking back our country”);
- Earnestly equated being American with being chosen by God for special service to the world;
- Dismissed 400 plus years of North American settler-colonialism, murder, theft and oppression as bad things that happened in the past (i.e., “get over it”);
- Equated difference with threat and fabricated suspicion around a person’s social distance from Christian, white, male, heterosexual, middle-class norm;

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1 Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism whereby foreign peoples move into an area and take possession of land and other natural resources with the intent of remaining permanently. The oldest North American settlement was established in 1565 in St. Augustine, Florida by Spain. The first English settlement was Jamestown, VA, founded in 1607.
• Impugned the intelligence, sincerity, dignity, and sanity of those who disagreed with hosts, guests and callers; and,

• In myriad other ways seriously undercut basic notions of respect, community, and social responsibility.

Not content with writing-off conservatives, white people - particularly White men between the ages of 18 and 65 - Southerners, Midwesterners, suburbanites, rural folk, gun-owners, SUV-drivers, blue-collar workers, and a majority of the middle and upper middle classes as “wackos,” (a derisive term used by CPTR host Rush Limbaugh to describe those who disagree with him) I sought to understand CPTR in a way that made sense within the context of the U.S. economic, social, and political order - historically and contemporarily.

While I rarely agreed with what was said on CPTR programs, over time I recognized recurrent narratives - ways of making sense of the world - that while disturbing in many respects, helped me to anticipate and decode hosts’, guests’, and callers’ arguments, attitudes, values, and all-around conservative standpoint. Clearly, folks were thoughtful, passionate, and searching for answers. I realized, too, that if I were to accept the logics that underlie CPTR narratives - if I could be seduced into reading my life experiences and social interactions (i.e., my race, gender, sexual and class identity, concerns, and desires) through a colorblind, beset-upon, working or middle-class, nationalistic (i.e., patriotic), straight, mother/hot chick (à la Sarah Palin) lens - I too could be a “Dittohead” (i.e., an ardent follower/defender of CPTR host Rush Limbaugh).

It also became increasingly clear to me how critically important the entertainment component of talk radio is to its success and popularity. A ‘spoonful of sugar’ helps to convince listeners that they have successfully digested the facts of complex,
intransigent social and political issues and arrived at the Right (pun intended) solution – no matter whether or how often these solutions undercut highly-esteemd American values like freedom, equality, justice, and humanity. CPTR is first and foremost an entertainment business; a medium of mass communication rooted in oft-repeated rhetorical tricks that - while effective in attracting attention, huge audiences, and assuaging the anxiety that comes from living in a complex world that is increasingly outside of the average person’s ability to control or even understand - are inimical to constructive communication and democracy.

It puzzled me that so few progressive or dissenting voices critiqued CPTR in a systematic and meaningful way. CPTR is often normalized through a process wherein people discount and dismiss its form (e.g., hosts and listeners are rude and crude) without challenging its ‘truths.’ My friends and colleagues were always amazed at my reports of the content of CPTR programs; I could not, however, convince these same friends - active in diverse progressive movements - to listen to CPTR programs so that they might deepen their critique of it. The near unanimous response of friends and relatives with whom I communicated my interests in exploring CPTR was, “Why? I can’t listen to that stuff for more than a few minutes!” This is perhaps what is most ironic and disturbing about CPTR: its co-presence alongside apparent race, gender, sexual, and class progress. CPTR is tolerated and ignored by some of the very people who should be most alarmed by its content and very existence.

This might explain why sociologists have thus far paid so little research attention to CPTR: sociologists may believe conservatives, of the type featured on CPTR, are a nuisance minority beyond change or rehabilitation. Like many progressives, sociologists
may dismiss CPTR as uninformed, unimportant, and of no likely consequence to broad social trends in the United States. I fear such judgments may prove mistaken and, worst yet, seriously out of step with what’s happening on the street in popular (and populist) protests, in workplaces around the water cooler, and in households around the country and next door.

Obviously, I concluded, these reflections on CPTR deserved more systematic analysis. How to explain the presence and popularity of a business activity, conducted on public airwaves (i.e., with taxpayer monies), which combines (mis)information dissemination and strident reinforcement of so-called ‘traditional’ American values, with pointed exclusion of huge swaths of the American public and divisive language bordering dangerously close to hate-speech? What kind of social phenomena is CPTR? Why does CPTR exist in its present form at this time in American history? These questions became even thornier when the historic 2008 presidential primaries and election took center stage in the media and America’s collective consciousness.

**Nothing Fails like Success: Obama and the Paradox of Progress**

Over the course of the first three years of my sojourn into CPTR programming, Conservative and Progressive Political Talk Radio (PPTR) content (my radio fare of choice) appeared worlds apart. This perception can partly be attributed to conservative and progressive hosts’ mutual abhorrence and tit-for-tat styles of claims-making and repudiation. Hosts tell you, every day, they are different from the guys in the ‘black hats.’ CPTR and PPTR are scripted as being as different as night and day. In many significant ways, they are, indeed, very different. However, after listening to dozens of broadcasts I came to suspect that CPTR and PPTR were more alike than different and that each was necessary for the other’s existence; foils if you will, sharing
complimentary, if not common, reality constructions that did very little to deepen debate or render complex current events comprehensibly.

This was a troubling realization, but it explained the oft-repeated low-stakes battles (e.g., over who misspoke, used a non-PC term to refer to an opponent, or committed a faux pas) that predictably broke out between CPTR and PPTR hosts. In sum, political debates on CPTR and PPTR produced lots of heat, but not much light. I concluded: It is not enough to be different - “for” what one’s opponent is “against”; true distinction (and power) resides in the capacity to shape and reshape the social imaginary – “Propaganda 101.” Unfortunately, due perhaps to the exigencies of the mass media business (e.g., corporate influence, the concentration of ownership) PPTR is at a serious strategic disadvantage in the propaganda war: mostly limited to reacting to the coverage and talking points of highly profitable conservative programs that have the numeric advantage in the marketplace of ideas. It took the U.S. presidential primaries and 2008 general election to confirm for me that CPTR and PPTR were engaged in a bizarre “kabuki dance” (Malkin, 2009). Under the penetrating glare of an historic national election, the distance separating Right-Left punditry did not hold in a consistently predictable and convincing way.


Surprisingly, during the campaign, dialog on controversial issues implicating race, sexuality, gender (least we forget Hillary Rodham Clinton’s first nearly successful bid to be the first woman U.S. president) and class (Sarah Palin’s VP nomination) inequality broke through barriers of studied avoidance so typical of U.S. politics, challenging the idea that the United States of America had overcome its legacy of deeply entrenched individual prejudices and institutional discrimination (Bai, 2008, p.38; Frank, R. 2008, p. A2; Frank, T., 2008, p. A25; Herbert, 2008, p. A21; Hitchen, 2008, p.

Witnessing all of this it was difficult for me to reconcile how in the same historical moment when Americans cast their votes in support of “change we can believe in” (Obama’s ‘change’ slogan, 2008), electing the first president of acknowledged African descent2, millions of people across the country tuned-in daily to listen to dozens of CPTR hosts opine on the supposed ‘downfall of America’ and the ushering in of dangerous ideologies. Barely three months into Barack Obama’s first term as president, CPTR hosts and callers labeled him a socialist, a fascist, and hater of all things American (Levin, 2009b; Limbaugh, 2009c; Savage, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e). Conservative commentators accused Obama of disloyalty and lack of patriotism (pointing to his work as a grassroots community organizer) his supposed militant, harpy spouse, the couple’s alleged shared mental health problems,

2 Other U.S. presidents with African ancestry include Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln (who was nicknamed by his opponents “Abraham Africanus the First”), Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge and Dwight Eisenhower (Gage, 2008; Haynes, 2008; Hussain, 2007).
and the Arabic origins of his name, as telltale evidence of the Obamas’ radical, anti-
American beliefs and inappropriateness for the presidency and office of First Lady of the
United States (Beck, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010c; Bruce, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Glen
Beck: Obama is a racist, 2010; Kristof, 2008b, p. WK9; Levin, 2008, 2009a, 2009b,

The conservative political contrivances drew on non-existent, negative, and even
positive information about the newly-elected President; every piece of data on Obama
was subjected to conservative spin on political talk radio. The Birther Movement was
mounted by conservatives on alleged evidence (despite proof to the contrary) that
Obama was not born in the U.S. and therefore ineligible to hold the office of President of
the United States (Frank, 2009, p. A21; Hofstadter, 1964, pp. 77-86; Robinson, E. 2009,
confession of having tried marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol as a teen elicited
characterizations of Obama as “a guy of the street.” Frank Keating, former governor of
Oklahoma and advisor to the McCain campaign, who made the statement on
conservative Dennis Miller’s radio show, argued that drug use had made Obama a
deviant outsider who needed to purge his soul to the American people and otherwise
convince the nation that he understood, “the big picture of America” (Mooney &
Diakides, 2008).

Obama even lost points with conservatives for positive aspects of his personality
and deportment. CPTR callers and hosts, as well as more mainstream commentators,
pointed to Obama’s charisma, success, good looks, and cool demeanor as the source
of his, and masses of his supporters’, ‘Obama-mania,’ or deep delusions of Obama’s
divine, messiah-like significance (Berkowitz, 2009, p. A11; Brooks, 2008, p. A25; Ehrenstein, 2007, p. A13; Gerson, 2009, p. A15; Greenberg, 2008, p. B4; Hannity, 2008; Kennedy, 2008, p. WK18; Limbaugh, 2007, 2010; Rich, 2006, p. A12). The criticisms and name-calling were reactionary, bizarre, and even frightening at times when vitriol led callers and hosts on CPTR and other conservative media programs to opine that violence was the only solution to 4-years of an Obama Administration (Beck, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2010a, 2010b; Limbaugh, 2009d, 2009e; Maddow, 2009; Savage, 2009e). Reports of all of this were featured prominently in the mainstream media, lending an air of authority and legitimacy to what appeared to be a collective conservative nervous breakdown.

Listening to CPTR I struggled with how to reconcile the tone and substance of ugly, irrational, hysterical, and disingenuous comments with the election of the United States’ first African American president. Could I discount CPTR commentary as mere bombast? Was conservative backlash against a Democratic President simply a case of sour grapes at the loss of a prized office? Or maybe the talk on CPTR was only the ravings of a disgruntled minority? Whatever the reasons, might not one have reasonably expected that the election of the first African American to the presidency of the United Stated would have coincided with a greater level of sophistication and intellectual integrity on the part of the American public? Why were conservative voices so loud? Where were the voices of the progressive folks who put Obama in office? Why would CPTR messages be taken seriously by the mainstream media, catapulting CPTR personalities like Limbaugh, O’Reilly, Beck, and Hannity to greater media prominence (Boehlert, 2009; Chafets, 2008, p. 30; Farhi, 2008, p. C1; Fiore & Barabak,

Sadly, the popularity of CPTR and other conservative media during and after Obama’s first election demonstrate that there is not only a mainstream outlet for reactionary political discourse in the United States, but a sizable audience with a taste, and/or tolerance, for racialized, gendered, heteronormative, and class-based ‘code-speak.’ Americans’ pride at having elected their first Black president was tarnished by racist, sexist, homophobic, and classist political talk on the public airwaves. To my understanding, this exposed a profound uncertainty and reluctance to devise means toward healing egregious social wrongs, even during monumental social and political change. Extreme claims made by those on the Right were an indication of just how rooted white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and exploitative class relations are in the American psyche. Difference - deemed essential and consequential - along race, gender, sexual, and class lines ‘just makes sense’ to millions of Americans, and these views appear to play a pivotal role in the everyday social construction of reality.

In my estimation, the election of America’s first African American president had uncovered significant, yet overlooked, aspects of U.S. race, gender, sexual, and class meaning-making that - while not as appalling as fire hoses, snarling police dogs, chain gangs, Jim Crow, violent acts of misogyny and homophobia, unequal access, and
intractable disparities in health, wealth and opportunity - certainly pointed to an
inescapable social fact: white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and capitalism
continue to authorize and legitimate an oppressive and exploitative social order in
America.

Where I Enter, Where I Stand

The election, subsequent re-election, and presidency of Barack Obama
continues to challenge how I understand race, gender, sexuality, class, and my taken-
for-granted assumptions of what it means to be an American (e.g., am I forever an
outsider?), and the obstacles to and prospects for achieving a truly anti-racist, gender
egalitarian, tolerant, inclusive, and economically-just society in America. This research
is a way not only to answer questions about the what, how, and why of CPTR; it is also
a means through which to understand my own place as a kind of ‘halfie’ (Abu-Lughod,
1990) having grown-up in the Civil Rights era and come to maturity in an era
characterized by significant backlash against its many victories.

I was born in the 1960s, another time of “Hope and Change” when, ‘Black is
beautiful,’ ‘Sistas are doing it for themselves,’ ‘Gay Liberation,’ and ‘Power to the
people,’ were not mere slogans, but expressions of a political stance, a deep, reflexive
civic and moral engagement backed-up by hundreds of thousands of black, brown, red,
yellow, white, and queer bodies all around the globe - each willing to fight and die for a
better world. Today, I am witnessing what appears to be bitter resentment of the
promises of that era; revisionism cloaked in a cynical critique of the collective efforts of
legions of folks who, naively in some cases, believed in higher ideals. More disturbing
though is the amnesia or denial among those marginalized by ‘difference’; sadly, we
‘Others’ are being made to fight battles we thought we had won fifty, a hundred, a
hundred and fifty years ago. Seduced by the promise of a dream; weary from fighting on fronts too numerous to name; some of us have become undone, disengaged, hopeless in the realization that the beast we wage war against has grown yet another hideous head. A luta continua. The struggle continues.

It is my belief that if a person lives long enough to witness, firsthand, sweeping social change - for better or worse - she has the responsibility to ‘tell about it’ - to reflect on and interpret those changes in a way that connects the personal with the political, the past with the future (Collins, 2000a, 2000b; DuBois, 1903; Mills, 1959; Williams, 1995). Whether interpretation takes the form of music, poetry, storytelling, or a social science treatise like this, I believe human beings are hardwired to make sense of their worlds - for themselves, those they love, and sojourners yet born. This research is my effort to do just that.
CHAPTER 3
POLITICAL STANDPOINT AND IDEOLOGY

At least 50% of the American people are too lazy to figure out what's going on; so that leaves the burden on the rest of us to know what is going on and try to sound the alarm.

—Herman Cain
The Herman Cain Show

The United States of America is founded on a profound hypocrisy. This is reflected in popular political ideals and the origin stories of the United States and its people. The United States is viewed as a liberal or progressive society, founded on principles of equality, democracy, opportunity, and justice for all. Political precepts, harkening back to the ‘bad old days’ of British rule, that reserve any of the aforementioned principles to those born to privilege, are rejected as anathema to the intentions of the Founding Fathers. As American folklore would have it, European traditionalism was casted-off in favor of civil liberalism, creating a wellspring of individual liberty that naturally produced a “more perfect union.” Or so the story goes.

America is simultaneously a settler-colonial, imperial project, and a reaction to deep-seated social stratification (Bell, 1992; Feagin, 2000; Foley, 2007; Winant, 2001; Zinn, 1980). While American colonists fought to free themselves and their progeny from religious persecution and a thoroughly hierarchical society that afforded few opportunities for individuals to aspire to beyond the station of their birth – colonists also stole the lands of indigenous people, enslaved African people, exploited the labor of poor Europeans, and relegated women and children to the legal and social status of chattel.

How does one reconcile a liberal founding discourse of fairness and equality with unprecedented acts of oppression, exploitation, and genocide intended to secure power
and wealth in the hands of a few White men? One explanation is this: running throughout America’s origin story is a deep vein of conservatism. American conservatism does not fit the classic European model in the sense of a conservatism dedicated to preserving the beliefs, values, and norms associated with aristocratic rule. European conservatism unreservedly limited the prospects of White men not ‘to the manor born.’ Instead, American conservatism grows out of a liberal political philosophy that challenged the aristocracy. Liberal notions of progress and change found pride of place in America; so much so that these beliefs spurred a revolution that irrevocably severed political ties to Europe. Importantly though, while American political liberalism was a rejection of many of the beliefs, values, and norms at the heart of European conservatism, the cultural logics of European conservatism in regards to women, children, and people from other countries and so-called races remained the same and are deeply rooted in American society to this day.

**A Discourse History of the U.S. Conservative Movement**

Several historians credit the rise of the modern American Conservative Movement to a successful backlash against perceived excesses of the 1960s – among which were the cultural, political, and economic changes wrought by the civil rights, women’s, and anti-war movements (Brennan, 1995; Matusow, 2009). While it true that the U.S. Conservative Movement ascended to the heights of national political power in 1968 with the takeover of the Republican Party from moderates and the presidency of Richard Nixon (Lowndes, 2008), the roots of modern American conservatism extend much deeper and several decades earlier than these milestones.

Political scientist Joseph Lowndes (2008) rejects the backlash thesis. Instead, Lowndes locates the rise of the modern American Conservative Movement in the South,
in the states’ rights movement. The states’ rights or state sovereignty movement was
instigated by southern conservative elites who objected to what they perceived as
economic and racial liberalism emanating from the federal government’s New Deal
policies and programs of the 1930s. Conservative opposition to economic and racial
liberalism in the New Deal, and throughout the twentieth century, is what spurred the
growth of the modern American Conservative Movement, informed its political ideology,
and shaped its organizational strategies.

**The New Deal**

Democratic President, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program (1933-1939),
implemented during the Great Depression, is the point in American history when
progressivism obtained its most mature identity and contemporary priorities (Foley,
2007). The New Deal fundamentally changed the relationship between American
citizens and the federal government by “emphasizing modernization, national economic
coordination, and political inclusion” (Lowndes, 2008, p.12). Foley (2007) writes of the
transformed function of the federal government exemplified in the New Deal:

> The role and responsibility of the federal government was in essence
reconfigured into a centre of proactive intervention geared towards
economic management, financial regulation, and social welfare (p. 276).

Notions of free markets, small government, and social Darwinist prohibitions against
interventions on behalf of the 'less fit,' lost their legitimacy in the context of an economic
depression that levelled the prospects of millions of Americans - rich and poor (Phillips-
Fein, 2009).

As progressive as the New Deal was, however, it was essentially a conservative
response to a capitalist crisis, designed to “save capitalism from itself and to preserve
the prevailing structure of private property, free enterprise, and the profit system” (Foley,
Nevertheless, for work-a-day Americans, the New Deal provided convincing proof that a laissez-faire market was less effective, efficient, and beneficial to them than one guided and regulated by the federal government (Phillips-Fein, 2009).

Support for the New Deal was greatest among northern Democrats, white ethnic and religious minorities (i.e., Catholics and Jews), African Americans, poor white southerners, farmers, labor unions, big city political machines, and progressive intellectuals (Roosevelt Institute, 2010; Zentner, 2006). Support, however, was not universal and split predictably along class, political party, and regional lines. Southern Democratic planters and businessmen saw in the New Deal a destructive and intrusive set of government programs that not only threatened free enterprise, but a way of life that would be impossible were it not for white racial privilege.

Built into New Deal policies and programs were the complementary philosophies of economic and racial liberalism. Southern planters and business elites were economic and racial conservatives. According to historian Eric Schickler, “there was a connection between attitudes towards the economic programs of the New Deal and racial liberalism early on” (2010, p. 1). Economic liberalism materialized in the New Deal in the form of programs designed to alleviate unemployment, provide financial subsistence to laborers, and support young workers (e.g., the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)). Also, government agencies were created by the New Deal, like the National Recovery Administration (NRA), that would regulate business practices including minimum wages paid to workers, use of child labor, and collective bargaining. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the
Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) were also created by the New Deal to stabilize banking and oversee the U.S. stock market.

Racial liberalism was most clearly present in the New Deal era in a willingness, at the highest levels of government, to discuss American racism openly. Prior to the New Deal and the Roosevelt Administration, white supremacy and its impact on African Americans had received only studied avoidance. In fact, Roosevelt was the first American president to publicly call lynching murder - “a vile form of collective murder” (Roosevelt Institute, 2010). Additionally, through racial quotas and legal mandates built into New Deal legislation, African Americans were included in the many New Deal programs that benefitted all unemployed workers during the depression.

**Turning Points: The Conservative Manifesto and Whither Solid South?**

What the New Deal achieved for the Democratic Party, nationally, was to create a ‘big tent’ – a coalition of like-minded voters who reshaped the Party’s membership. New Deal support from northern and southern workers, intellectuals, and political figures effectively challenged the privileged position of southern conservative elites in the Democratic Party. Consequently, conservative Republicans in the north and Democrats in the South formed alliances to oppose the New Deal and the Roosevelt Administration. In 1937 *The Conservative Manifesto* was published and cautiously endorsed (some politicians associated with the project refused or were afraid to sign the Manifesto for fear of being identified as anti-New Dealers critical of President Roosevelt) by a group of conservative U.S. Republican and Democratic senators (Moore, 1965).

Written mainly by Josiah Bailey, a conservative Democratic Senator from North Carolina, *The Conservative Manifesto* set out a list of ten demands (aimed largely at creating a stable environment for business through reforms aimed at federal tax
policies, labor regulations, state sovereignty, and limits on social entitlements) that would, Bailey argued, realign the federal government with America’s founding principles of free enterprise and individual liberty. There was widespread public support for the *Manifesto* (Moore, 1965):

The "Address" won endorsements from hundreds of Chambers of Commerce and citizens’ organizations throughout the nation, while forty to fifty business and manufacturing associations reprinted it in lots up to 100,000. By late February 1938, Bailey estimated that almost two million copies had been circulated, not counting newspaper printings. Senators and congressmen were reportedly deluged with petitions from every state in the Union to uphold the policies stated in the declaration. The "Conservative Manifesto" apparently reflected not only the anti-spending sentiments of many senators, but also the conservative temper of influential segments of the population, particularly the business community (Moore, 1965, p. 38).

After reading the *Manifesto* before the U.S. Senate, Bailey remarked:

If there is a thing wrong in that statement, strike it out. If there is anything in it that offends you, condemn it. If you have a better paragraph, write it in. But, in God's name, do not do nothing while America drifts down to the inevitable gulf of collectivism. Stand up for the American system of enterprise and the great American principles which have made enterprise what it is. Give enterprise a chance, and I will give you the guaranties of a happy and a prosperous America (Moore, 1965, p. 17).

The admonitions contained in Bailey’s speech, and *The Conservative Manifesto* itself, were framed as the threat of collectivism. However, these warnings proved not to be enough to turn popular support away from New Deal policies. Support continued for Roosevelt, and the Democratic Party won the presidency in every election between 1933 and 1969 – except for two terms served by Dwight Eisenhower from 1953 to 1961 (see discussion on the Dixiecrats below). Lowndes (2008) concludes from his analysis of these formative years of the modern Conservative Movement that conservatives learned that invoking economic conservatism alone was not enough to secure support for their policies.
Opposition to the New Deal would need to be framed in terms of racial liberalism to shake popular support for Roosevelt’s policies and address the concerns of Southern elites. When conservatives framed New Deal policies and programs to usher in widespread social, economic, and political change that would ultimately establish equality between African and White Americans, conservative Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans regained political traction in the debate. This racially liberal framing was abetted by Alabama lawyer Charles Wallace Collins. In his book, *Whither Solid South?* (1947), Lowndes (2008) argues, Collins merges “economic conservatism and white supremacy” to promote “a realignment of U.S. politics that would link Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans on one side, and New Dealers and racial liberals on the other” (p. 16). *Whither Solid South?* also served the goal of securing “ideological hegemony” so sorely needed among conservatives, North and South, during this period. Collins’ writing helped to consolidate and grow the modern U.S. Conservative Movement by providing a “common sense” understanding of conservative political identity grounded in white racial identity, white supremacy, and white privilege. Fear, crises, and threat were the instrumentalities that Collins used to attract and motivate support. Lowndes (2008) remarks:

Collins thus attempted to show that religion, labor, fraternal, and civil rights organizations, which “otherwise having nothing in common,” were coming together . . . and that they threatened the very basis of the southern system in their attempt to “make the Negro equal to the white man economically, politically and socially” (p. 17).

Collins’ overarching political ideology was liberal in the classic sense: he believed in states’ rights, the free market systems, and deference to group privilege. That Collins was a white supremacist is clear; but it was “white supremacy [as] a political doctrine” (from, *Whither Solid South*, pp. 76-77 as quoted in Lowndes, 2008, p. 20), not as racist
pseudoscience. Lowndes (2008) argues that Collins’ racism was evidence both of his and America’s commitment to a racial politics that transcended mere racial prejudice or preference. What Collins sought to do in *Whither Solid South?* was tap into a centuries-old, uniquely American national identity - one with its own folklore, values, and beliefs - that would supersede individual material interests, regional loyalties, and political differences to serve the interests of elites. Race was the wedge that would help conservatives to reframe the change embodied in New Deal policies as alien, dangerous, and threatening to the racial status quo.

For Collins, and other conservative Democrats, economic and racial liberalism had to be opposed; together these philosophies represented the twofold threat of expansion of African American civil rights and a powerful federal government (Lowndes, 2008). Collins presciently concluded in *Whither Solid South?* that the New Deal would rupture American Party lines causing conservative Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans to ally against racial liberals and proponents of a powerful national government. One year after the publication of *Whither Solid South?* the States’ Rights Democratic Party or Dixiecrats accomplished just that and in the process transformed American politics (Schickler, 2010).

**The Dixiecrat Revolt**

In 1947 the successor to deceased President Roosevelt, Democrat, Harry S. Truman, announced his support for widespread desegregation measures. In, *To Secure These Rights*, a report written by Truman’s *Committee on Civil Rights*, plans were outlined for extending critical civil rights protections to African American citizens in the areas of voting, employment, anti-lynching, and public transportation (Lowndes, 2008).
In 1948 Truman issued Executive Orders 9980, desegregating federal employment, and 9981, desegregating the United States military.

In response to Truman’s embrace of racial liberalism, conservative Southern Democrats, led by South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond, formed a third party, the States’ Rights Democratic Party, popularly known as the Dixiecrats. The immediate goal of the Dixiecrats was to remove Truman from presidential ballots in the South for the 1948 presidential election. While states’ rights were ostensibly the motivation for Southern Democrats’ split from the Democratic Party, what kindled the Dixiecrat revolt was white supremacy. Thurmond was nominated the Dixiecrats’ first presidential candidate, declaring, “There’s not enough troops in the Army to break down segregation and admit Negroes into our schools and into our homes” (quoted in Lowndes, 2008, p. 30 from Fredrickson, p. 242, 2001). In the 1948 presidential election Thurmond lost to Truman and Republican Thomas E. Dewey, receiving only 2% of the popular vote and carrying only 4 states (Lowndes, 2008).

The Dixiecrats regrouped and adopted a political strategy that leveraged mainstream, two-party politics. Four years later, in the 1952 presidential election between Republican Dwight Eisenhower and Democrat Adelai Stevenson, Southern conservative Democrats joined forces with conservative Republicans in support of the Republican candidate. The national Democratic Party sought to reconcile with the Dixiecrats by softening their position on civil rights, however, the Dixiecrats rejected Democratic entreaties and broke from the Party in favor of a Republican platform that supported states’ rights. Importantly, up to this point in the modern Conservative Movement elites had directed movement activity. With the election of Eisenhower as
president, and the progress of the civil rights movement, conservatives began to transition to a more populist approach. Local Citizens’ Councils became the base of conservative grassroots organizing and activism (Lowndes, 2008).

Once again, something important had been achieved through the merger of seemingly divergent conservative political interests. Even amid defeat and compromise, the Dixiecrats had learned a powerful lesson that would be repeatedly used to extend economic and racial conservatism north of the Mason-Dixon line. Conservative elites could stimulate a latent conservative impulse, solely based on white racial identity, and through coalition building give it political teeth. Dixiecrats and their conservative forebears would, throughout the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, repeatedly summon white racial identity, to rally opposition to progressive causes.

The modern U.S. Conservative Movement can be viewed as existing on a historical trajectory; the ideas, actions, personalities, transformations, successes, and failures associated with the Movement help us to understand not only America’s past but the present political moment – and the future. In the sections that follow I will briefly describe significant developments over the course of the last 50-plus years of the modern U.S. Conservative Movement – from Barry Goldwater to George W. Bush. My goal is to identify those discursive elements, between and across major historical events, that are most responsible for the Conservative Movement we see today. I will then end Chapter 3 by discussing a question that usually arises in a historical analysis of the U.S. Conservative Movement: Why does it seem that ordinary, working Americans so willingly betray their material and political interests and align with the Conservative Movement?
Barry Goldwater: States’ Rights Versus Civil Rights

The 1964 presidential campaign of Republican Senator, Barry Goldwater was the first of the modern conservative era to enlist both states’ rights and racial conservatism to woo voters - North and South. In *Conscience of a Conservative*, a book ghostwritten for Goldwater’s campaign, the perspective of the Conservative movement is laid out in simple, inclusive terms: “America is a fundamentally Conservative nation” (Goldwater, 2003, p. 1). Of *Conscience of a Conservative*, Lowndes (2008) concludes: “Its aim was to draw different groups into a shared political identity and to create one sharp cleavage in American politics out of various elements” (p. 56). The “shared political identity” it sought to create would traverse conservative Republican and Democratic lines; the elements Goldwater used to achieve this union were states’ sovereignty and civil rights (Lowndes, 2008).

In *Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater justifies segregated education on states’ rights grounds, concluding that the federal government has no constitutional authority over public education and that desegregated schools were not a civil right. Racism and race relation, Goldwater concluded, were matters for individuals, at the local level, to work out on their own. The federal government should not strong arm local municipalities in civil affairs over which states exercised complete sovereignty. Though Goldwater had previously voted for civil rights legislation in the Senate, he chose to vote against the 1964 Civil Rights Act, citing his concerns with protecting states’ rights and the potential for overreach by the federal government. While Goldwater’s vote on the 1964 Civil Rights Act secured him votes in the South, it ultimately derailed his presidential campaign. Goldwater received 39% of the popular
vote and carried only 6 states - notably, except for his home state of Arizona, the most racially contentious states (Lowndes, 2008).

Unlike his conservative predecessors Goldwater did not equate violation of states’ rights with political and economic progress of African Americans; his rhetorical strategy was more sophisticated than mere incitement of white supremacy. Instead, Goldwater appealed to first principles: states’ rights as a Constitutional check on a powerful federal government. Anything that interfered with a states’ exercise of its autonomy must, in all cases, be opposed. States’ rights supporter was a political identity Northerners and Southerners (and increasingly conservative Westerners) could readily adopt and share. Individual voters’ position on issues involving race, racism, and race relations were beside the point – the issue of civil rights had been discursively sidelined as a barrier to North-South cooperation by Goldwater’s campaign. Identifying as and voting for conservative Republican Goldwater need not mean one were a committed racial conservative (as Northerners may have been concerned) or a racial liberal (as Southerners may have been concerned). Goldwater’s campaign set an important precedent and demonstrated the value of a “colorblind,” implicitly race coded, strategy for extending the Party base (Lowndes, 2008). Goldwater used states’ rights and racial conservatism to at once broaden and narrow the definition of conservatism, while sidestepping a contentious social issue that had divided voters in the past.

**George Wallace: Growth of Populism and The Southern Strategy**

At the 1964 Republican National Convention, response to Goldwater’s nomination speech left no doubt that the conservative takeover of the Republican Party was nearly complete. Delegates to the convention “went wild” (Lowndes, 2008) when Goldwater’s declared: “I would remind you that extremism in the cause of liberty is no
vice! And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!"

(p. 72-73). Lowndes (2008) concludes of Goldwater’s campaign and the southern, conservative, Democratic takeover of the Republican Party:

Opposition to civil rights, intended primarily to bring in southerners, shaped the very character of modern conservatism itself . . . This southern racialization of the GOP was a necessary component of the subsequent rise of the Right, but not a wholly sufficient one . . . while conservatives had found a workable racial language for southern successes and Republican Party control, they had yet to be embraced by American voters (p. 76).

Up to the time of Goldwater’s defeat, the Conservative Movement was still largely supported and organized by wealthy elites. What was needed to grow the Party and win elections was more populist support. George Wallace, Democratic governor of Alabama and staunch segregationist, personified the “everyman” image that, according to Lowndes (2008), “helped push modern conservatism toward eventual political hegemony” (p.78) and populist success.

Oddly, according to Lowndes (2008), Wallace, an arch-racist, would do a lot to reposition conservative political identity beyond that of racist, southern, planter elite. Wallace achieved this by embracing and projecting a producerist identity that generated widespread populist support - outside the south. Producerist ideology breaks society into three classes or categories of people: on the bottom are dependents, e.g., those who receive public financial assistance, criminals, the elderly or infirm; in the middle are productive, honest, hardworking individuals, e.g., the working Joe; on the top of the producerist hierarchy are unproductive freeloaders or parasites, e.g., liberals, subversives, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and those who live off inherited wealth. According to Lowndes (2016):
The Right was ultimately able to generate a populist conservatism by claiming to stand for honest, hardworking whites who were beset by an alliance of liberal establishment elites above and disruptive, parasitic blacks below.”

Wallace positioned himself to lead and grow the burgeoning conservative populist movement.

Populist movements form on the Right and the Left. The distinguishing features of populist movements are generally threefold (Lowndes, 2016) (interestingly, these features mirror the three task of collective action frames). First, a leader who identifies him or herself with the experiences and grievances of those they lead; these leaders position themselves, discursively and otherwise, as go-betweens, bridging the masses of ordinary people and the state. Wallace portrayed himself as an authentic man of the people, willing to take-on the federal government.

Second, in populist movements, the people the leader represents need to be (re)defined and discursively homogenized as “the people” to distinguish them from Others, who are dangerous, alien, or in some other way as problematic. George Wallace immediately adopted the political identity of southern states’ rights advocate: “white southerner under attack from the federal government” (p. 79) and, more generally, protector of “the southern way of life” (p. 80). Over time, however, Wallace shrewdly combined the white southerner political identity with producerist arguments and a softening of overtly racist rhetoric; a highly particular political identity emerged that evolved into the “Middle American” political identity, specifically:

. . . the white middle-class male from every region who is pushed around by an invasive federal government, threatened by crime and social disorder, discriminated against by affirmative action, and surrounded by increasing moral degradation (Lowndes, 2008, p. 79).
Borrowing a move from Goldwater’s *Conscience of a Conservative* Wallace further refined and homogenized “The People” identity by declaring the South as prototypically American:

Wallace, through an inversion, made the South the guardian of the nation’s soul. He understood that America’s racial problem was neither a peculiarity of a region nor a relic of the past, but a fundamental aspect of American politics (Lowndes, 2008, p. 80).

In his 1963 Alabama gubernatorial inaugural speech Wallace strategy is made even more clear:

> And you native sons and daughters of old New England's rock-ribbed patriotism. . . and you sturdy natives of the great Mid-West . . . and you descendants of the far West flaming spirit of pioneer freedom . . . we invite you to come and be with us . . . for you are of the Southern spirit . . . and the Southern philosophy . . . you are Southerners too and brothers with us in our fight.

Thanks to Goldwater and Wallace, not only were all Americans conservative – all Americans were Southerners. Wallace was successful in drawing a circle around diverse Americans, from every region of the U.S.; people who had not been political allies were encouraged to see themselves as sharing similar interests, values, and beliefs.

Violence was also an important part of Wallace’s discursive appeal to the middle of the producerist hierarchy. While Wallace and his supporters preached law-and-order when it benefitted them, they were not remiss in using violence or the threat of violence to punctuate their political message, forge political unity among supporters, or sharpen contrast between ‘them’ and ‘us.’ Lowndes remarks of Wallace (2008, p. 88):

> During his rallies he would build the tension until a clash became all but inevitable. But through the use of humor, he was generally able to keep fights from erupting outright. For the audience, this perhaps provided a cathartic experience, an energetic disavowal of the enemy that deepened their identification with his antigovernment racial populism.
The third defining feature of a populist movement is that a complaint must be articulated to explain the difference between “The People” and “Others” and justify opposition. Wallace owed his success, not solely to crude racial bombast, rather he adopted racial code language – a practice that has endured among conservatives to the present. Wallace would draw on states’ rights arguments to portray White Americans as victims of a hostile federal government – “blacks constituted an absent presence in Wallace’s rhetoric” (Lowndes, 2008, p. 95). Wallace’s infamous 1963 Alabama gubernatorial inaugural address illustrates his deft use of this technique (Wallace, 1962):

Today I have stood, where once Jefferson Davis stood, and took an oath to my people. It is very appropriate then that from this Cradle of the Confederacy, this very Heart of the Great Anglo-Saxon Southland, that today we sound the drum for freedom as have our generations of forebears before us done, time and time again through history. Let us rise to the call of freedom-loving blood that is in us and send our answer to the tyranny that clanks its chains upon the South. In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny and I say segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever (p. 2).

“Jefferson Davis,” “my people,” “Cradle of Confederacy,” “Anglo-Saxon,” “freedom,” “forebears,” “blood,” “tyranny,” “chains,” “segregation”: each word does double-duty – to differentiate Us from Them and to sound the racial alarm. Once again, statism stands in for racial conservatism. In speech after speech Wallace connected African American civil rights protections with working and middle class loss – on the job, in the home and neighborhood, at the ballot box, and as a matter of white skin privilege. In this way Wallace stoked racial resentment and anxiety by creating White victims of African American racial progress (Lowndes, 2008). However, support for Wallace was more than simple racism. Wallace offered disgruntled White Americans what Lowndes (2008,
p. 92) called a “new interpretive framework” with which to construct their reality – a reality he helped to frame for them.

Wallace ran for president of the United States in 1968 as a third-party candidate (American Independent Party) against Republican Richard Nixon and Democrat Hubert Humphrey. Wallace came in third, securing only 13% of the popular vote and five states, all in the South. He ran for president again in 1972 and 1976 as a Democrat and lost the nomination to George McGovern and Jimmy Carter, respectively. In victory and defeat Wallace conveyed important lessons to supporters of states’ rights and racial conservatism. Heavy-handed, extremist appeals to race were counterproductive – racial insinuation – attacking the adjuncts of racial liberalism was the more productive approach. Supporters could feel like they were not racist, or at the very least race neutral (i.e., colorblind), and at the same time uphold a white supremacist racial order.

**Richard Nixon: Silent Majority**

Richard Nixon beat Wallace in the 1968 presidential election, edging out Hubert Humphrey by less than 1% of the popular vote. He did so, according to Lowndes (2008) by continuing one of the most successful strategies of the U.S. Conservative Movement: constructing a political identity, largely for White Americans, based on opposition to racial liberalism. Conservatives defeats in national elections had softened Republican Party opposition to a moderate conservative approach. Nixon, benefiting from lesson learned from prior conservative defeats, chose a political strategy that allowed him to successfully walk a thin line – between uncompromising Southern segregationist and staunch conservative – all the way to the White House.

By the time Nixon’s Administration was in place the use of racial fear of African American progress had mellowed to the point of racial subtext; Republicans found that a
moderate political stance yielded better results – electorally and policywise. As far as New Deal programs and civil rights policies that benefited White American workers, the poor, and African Americans, Richard Nixon made concessions to both; this would allow him a certain degree of plausible deniability against accusations of blatant indifference and intolerance, as well as position him as a leader of many Americans.

Nixon cultivated a moderate, majoritarian conservative image (Lowndes, 2008), through a clever demographic invention: “the great silent majority.” Nixon purported to speak to and for the so-called “great silent majority”: hardworking, law-abiding Americans, people who do not engage in public protests, and were therefore forgotten and left without a voice to speak-up for their needs in the important policy debates of the day. Nixon pledged that he and his Administration would unite the country across race, age, region, and class lines by being the voice of the “great silent majority.” On behalf of the “great silent majority” Nixon promoted law-and-order policies that he promised would bring justice and progress to America; ending programs that, in Nixon’s words, “perpetuate dependency” among African American (Lowndes, 2008, p. 114). By purporting to speak to and for the forgotten, poor, workers, and African Americans, Nixon appeared to be a centrist – opposed to big government and working for racial justice and equality.

Unfortunately, the wheels would fall off of “the great silent majority” construction as Nixon and Administration officials, as well as the media and academics, discovered it was merely a rhetorical creation (Lowndes, 2008, p. 133). Undeterred by statistical proof that no such sector of the American population existed, Nixon invented one. “The great silent majority” would later morph into “Middle America” and with that
transformation became less diverse. “Middle America” was described by Nixon and Administration officials as White, middle class, from the South or West, and as residing in the suburbs (Lowndes, 2008, p. 133). Eventually, “Middle America” became the basis of a “Post-Southern Strategy,” (Lowndes, 2008, p. 134) that would be used to garner the support of traditionally Democratic, Northern, White ethnics who could be wooed to the Republican Party by appeals to law-and-order, a moderate approach to New Deal programs, and a go-slow approach to civil rights – all of which essentially amounted to anti-racial liberalism.

Lowndes (2008) concludes that in Nixon’s 1972 reelection campaign he dropped the pretense of moderate conservative leader and adopted a political stance more reminiscent of George Wallace – openly hostile to civil rights and on the side of White, ethnic, blue-collar workers. Nixon wanted to recruit this “New American Majority” to the Republican Party by stoking their hatred for racial and cultural minorities, the media, government, academics, and the Left. If successful at this strategy, Nixon would draw together Southerners, Northerners, and those in the West. With himself as leader, Republicans would have a huge bloc of voter support.

Nixon won the 1972 presidential election, trouncing Democratic candidate George McGovern, winning 61% of the popular vote and carrying 49 states, including every state in the south. Nixon’s appeals to White, ethnic, blue-collar workers appeared to have worked; for the first time in United States history most Catholic votes went to a Republican (Lowndes, 2008, p. 137). If it were not for the Watergate scandal, Republican ascendancy would not have been postponed until 1980 and the Reagan Administration.
Reagan: Welfare Queens and Young Bucks

The Reagan presidency brought states’ rights rhetoric back to the main stage of national political debate as a tool for conservative organizing. Under Reagan the Republican Party achieved unprecedented national political power. Reagan self-identified as an American patriot and, in the name of patriotism, promoted conservative nationalism (e.g., his “Shining City Upon a Hill” speech). At the same time, Reagan promoted policies that condemned the poor, undercut the role of the government (e.g., protection of women’s and abortion rights), and undermined New Deal, Great Society, and civil rights programs (e.g., busing and affirmative action) (Feagin, 2012).

Reagan was known as, “The Great Communicator”; he perfected a style of speech that endeared him to his supporters and shaped his image as “citizen-politician” and advocate for the rights of ordinary, hardworking, American, middle-class citizens (Lowndes, undated). In important ways, Reagan continued the communication strategy of Barry Goldwater and George Wallace – using racial liberalism to scare-up support for states’ rights. For example, Reagan perfected the narrative of undeserving African Americans who cheat the public welfare system: Welfare Queens who feast on steak dinners and drive around in Cadillacs. Reagan, Lowndes (2008) concludes, “seamlessly combine[d] conservatism, racism, and antigovernment populism in a majoritarian discourse – and with it founded the modern Republican regime” (p. 160). Reagan was adept at race-baiting and used it to gain political support for his and other Republicans’ candidacies for state and national political office.

As the force behind the so-called “Reagan Revolution,” Reagan was responsible for what he called a “rediscovery of our values and our common sense” (Lowndes, 2008, p. 155). This one statement goes straight to the heart of conservative/Republican
political success. The remarkable achievement of conservative politics and the modern U.S. Conservative Movement is its ability to define “the very horizons of credible politics” in America (Lowndes, 2008, p. 155). While conservatives have not controlled the government and social institutions most important to defining American values and beliefs, they have had an enduring influence on the stories Americans construct about themselves, their country, fellow citizens, and the world (Lowndes, 2008).

**Bush I and Bush II**

Both Bush presidencies played a significant role in shaping the Republican Party’s national identity. President George H. W. Bush, Reagan’s Vice-President for two terms (1981-1989), exhibited an elite image, one that played a part in spurring radical, populist activism from Republicans who challenged “country club” Republican sensibilities. Notwithstanding internal political dissension, George H. W. Bush continued the conservative policies of the Reagan Administration, particularly attacks on civil rights programs. George H. W. Bush also used the conservative strategy, honed by his GOP forebears, of implicit racial coding to win White American voter support (Feagin, 2012) in the 1988 presidential election. Infamously, emphasizing a “law-and-order,” tough on crime position, Bush I used images of a released African American murderer and rapist – William (renamed “Willie” by the Bush campaign) Horton in political advertisements to drum-up support for his candidacy. George H. W. Bush’s legacy also includes attacks on minority and women’s studies programs on college campuses and continued support for the so-called “War on Drugs” started by Ronald Reagan (Feagin, 2012).

President George W. Bush responded with a softer approach to racial liberalism and ushered in an era of so-called compassionate conservatism. During the years of his presidency (2001-2009) Bush II sought not to attack or undermine the successes of the
Civil Rights Movement as his father and Republican predecessors had; though critics of his Administration argue that benign neglect fairly characterized his approach to civil rights. Notably though, the Administration of G. W. Bush avoided the use of racial codespeak and race-baiting that had become commonplace in conservative politics. Rather, as Lowndes (2008) argues, Bush II “sought to reclaim and recast the civil rights legacy as something more meaningful than colorblindness” (Lowndes, 2012). What G. W. Bush attempted was to “resignify” colorblindness and the Civil Rights Movement as conservative. For example, Party leaders sought to co-opt the persona and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., labelling him as, of all things, a “great conservative” (Feagin, 2012, p. 134).

Feagin (2012) contends, however, that George W. Bush’s presidency extended conservative polarizing discourse in novel ways. During his years in office, particularly in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center, George W. Bush won support for arguably some of the most authoritarian government structures and laws in United States history. By exploiting the fears of Americans post-9-11, many voters were convinced of the need for intrusive government policies and structures, like the Patriot Act, the FISA Amendments of 2008, and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2001. An increasingly authoritarian government, coupled with a conservative penchant for narratives that construct the U.S. as exceptional, entitled, and divinely-ordained, are a worrisome combination that has, and can very easily again, license U.S. expansionism and capitalistic exploitation around the world (Feagin, 2012).

**Interests Betrayed?**

A question that is often asked by even casual observers of the United States Conservative Movement is whether the ordinary people (often working class, White
Americans) who support conservative candidates and causes (often well-off, wealthy or benefitting elites) are betraying their political interests. Why, observers argue, can’t supporters see that the policies of the Republican Party favor capital over labor, corporations over the poor, and the one-percent over the majority of work-a-day stiffs living paycheck to paycheck? Dozens of books and scholarly articles have been written that argue that backlash theory is responsible. While the backlash theory is reasonable, it neglects the social processes that contribute to political identity construction.

Lowndes (2008) proposes an alternative explanation for working and poor, particularly White American, support of the Republican Party and conservative ideas. He writes:

> Political interests are an artifact of political identity. Who we are determines what we want. And the question of who we are begins with how we experience and interpret the contexts we inhabit. Because we interpret the world through words, it is in language that we must begin the search for both the basis of regime stability and the locus of change. Those who seek to oppose and replace regimes in American politics must articulate interests that can exploit differences, split alignments, create new coalitional possibilities, and discredit the old order . . . regime builders must transform coalitions into more deeply held collective political identities.

In other words, political interests are a consequence of political identity. Conservatives are in the political identity construction business; while progressives typically appeal to political interests. This is unfortunate because political identities, particularly those constructed in opposition to other political identities (Us vs. Them), create social worlds with their own taken-for-granted logic and, critically, political interests. Once an individual has adopted a taken-for-granted perspective on their world and their experiences in it, it is hard to shake that loose with appeals to political interests that,
from the perspective of that political identity, have seemingly very little basis in common sense.

Poor and working class Americans who support the candidacy or policies of a Goldwater, Wallace, Nixon, Reagan, Bush . . . or Trump give that support because it is consistent with their own understanding of their political identity – conservative political leaders understand this and actively exploit it. Political interests “do not reflect preexisting identities such as race or economic class position” (Lowndes, 2008, p. 161). Political interests are constructed in and through political identity. Conservatives have shown, over time, that they are experts at turning political identity to their own political interests. As far as poor and working class supporters of conservatives and conservatism are concerned, their identity lines-up neatly with their political interests; the problem is that their political identity is skewed. If change is to occur – progressive forces must play an active role in constructing progressive political identities, not simply teaching the electorate what their best political interests are. Progressives need to be storytellers; as well as educators.

**Conservative Standpoint and Ideology**

American conservatism is pluralistic, complex, contingent, and contested (Asante & Hall, 2011; Deaver, 2005; Foley, 2007; O'Hara, 2011; Thompson, 2007). Foley (2007) argues that American conservatism is the “dominant force in American political argument” (p. 333) and has “decisively shifted the centre ground to the right over the past twenty-five years” (p. 334). For the purposes of this research I argue that American conservatism represents a narrative standpoint (Collins, 2000a; Smith, 1990): a deeply experiential and constructed means of making sense of the world and deriving meaning. Conservatism, like any other standpoint, is partial, circumscribed, and fraught with
contradiction. That American conservatism is a lived standpoint is evidenced by its many permutations, positions, and ideologies (Asante & Hall, 2011; Deaver, 2005; O’Hara, 2011; Thompson, 2007). Foley (2007) writes:

Self-styled conservatives and their policy solutions have been drawn from traditionalists and libertarians, law-and-order advocates and free-market ultras, corporate financiers and Southern evangelicals, patrician WASPS and tax-cutting suburbanites, and disillusioned intellectuals and blue-collar populist. Such a rich ecology offers breadth of vision and political energy. By the same token, it also generates a confusion of discordant impulses and mixed messages (p. 298).

From this Foley (2007) concludes that conservatism, “amounts to neither a coherent system of thought nor a settled programme of action” (p. 299).

Conservatism can be viewed on a continuum (Aberbach & Peele, 2011; Asante & Hall, 2011; Blitz, 2011; Deaver, 2005; Lowndes, 2008; O’Hara, 2011; Scruton, 2002; Thompson, 2007). Foley (2007) identifies the two poles of American conservatism as: Evolutionary and Fundamentalist conservatism. Evolutionary conservatism is primarily distinguished by a holist, traditionalist stance that coheres around the following constellation of beliefs and values (Foley, 2007).

- Society is a functional system of time-tested norms and values that historically exists prior to and outside of individual subjective experience.
- Society achieves its moral strength and integrity apart from how it functions for the individuals in it.
- The world is an unruly and perilous place that can quickly and easily devolve into chaos; that society has endured, despite this, is proof that dominant social norms and values are responsible for its success.
- Continued progress and survival depend on following established social norms and values and protecting the institutions within society believed to have made survival possible.
- Society is not perfectible; human beings are driven by greed, violence, and destructiveness. There is an ongoing battle between good and evil; utopian
projects that seek to perfect society upset the natural tension between good and evil. Social engineering should be kept to a minimum.

- Social institutions play a central role in preventing people from drifting toward their baser impulses and instincts; this is achieved when social institutions like the family exercise moral authority and promote high moral standards.

- Because of "traditionalism conservatives are cautious, suspicious and fatalistic" (Foley, 2007, p. 300) toward change, which manifests in: a desire to replicate traditional institutions or ideas; historical revisionism; belief in American exceptionalism; and, chauvinism.

- Policies or programs that benefit minority groups over broader public interests have a destabilizing effect on society, replacing "holistic constructions of legitimacy" (Foley, 2007, p. 300) (e.g., family, political parties, church) with diverse special interest groups that undermine overarching "structures of authority" (Foley, 2007, p. 300).

In sum, evolutionary conservatism values, “order, authority, continuity, duty, moral purpose, and social cohesion,” laissez-faire government, a self-regulating social system, and the authority and legitimacy of social institutions like the church, family, and government over the primacy of the individual and his or her unfettered pursuit of personal liberty (Foley, 2007, p. 313).

Fundamentalist conservatism emphasizes the role and responsibility of the individual (not the society) vis-à-vis the state and the market. Three considerations take center stage: 1) personal liberties and government constraint; 2) the free market; and, 3) explanations for unequal outcomes. These considerations are understood as follows (Foley, 2007).

Personal Liberties and Government Constraint:

- The pursuit of happiness is the moral obligation of everyone; government can only play a limited role in sustaining an environment conducive to the exercise of individual liberty, but it is not to interfere beyond this;

- Individuals exist in and for themselves, not as a means to some collective or social end;
Politics is about the preservation and protection of social institutions and structures that maximize individual liberties and freedom;

Freedom and liberty are motivating values. Government is a necessary evil, a means of maintaining and regulating social order, however, “it remains a contingent institution whose role is to preserve and maximize individual freedom to the fullest possible extent within the social setting” (Foley, 2007, p. 307); and

Left unattended, government would exceed its proper authority, usurp individual liberties, and undermine personal freedom. To the extent that government is or is not maximizing personal liberty, it is either working properly or should be dissolved.

The Free Market:

Capitalism reflects the moral imperative to pursue freedom and liberty;

Political freedom is a byproduct of economic freedom – tinkering with one, upsets the other. Humanity’s highest moral ideals are realized through the unfettered operation of capitalism;

The contractual relationship between individual citizens and government is largely generated through the free-market system of laissez-faire capitalism, an objective, self-regulating system that accounts for individuals’ changing demands; exemplified by free competition and freedom to contract without government interference;

Government intervention in the free market, most notably at the level of personal problems and shortcomings, only serves to make problems worse by imposing a subjective assessment of justice and the fair distribution of goods and resources, as opposed to a rational assessment arrived at through the operation of the free market; and

Communism, socialism, or any central planning on the part of the government results in a reduction of individual liberties, totalitarianism, and eventual enslavement to the government.

Unequal Outcomes:

Every individual starts out equal in life. Disparities result from the free exercise of human liberty;

The government has a role to play in protecting equal status; however, it should not and cannot interfere by limiting, restricting, or regulating unequal outcomes that result from the exercise of personal liberty. Accordingly, “all attempts to enhance the claims and responsibilities of the state through pretexts such as social justice, collective rights, or national sovereignty are fraudulent in that they
only serve to disguise coercion and the contraction of liberty” (Foley 2007, p. 310);

- Even actions in the name of collective social justice could be interpreted as “a forcible expropriation” (Foley, 2007, p. 311) or redistribution in opposition to individual personal liberties. Thus, politics is, “an epic encounter and a continual moral struggle between the baseline of liberty and the corrupting force of government” (Foley, 2007, p. 313); and

- History is a great reservoir of time-tested truths, illustrative of a unique “American spirit” (Foley, 2007, p. 313). Nostalgia and sentimentalism are directed towards, “what appears to have been lost, but at the same time . . . what can be reclaimed through the force of human will and moral courage” (p. 313).

Both Evolutionary and Fundamentalist conservatism agree on the right to own private property. Also, both conservative poles agree that justice requires that all men be created equal; however, equality does not extend to outcomes. Fundamentalist conservatism is more materialistic and less concerned with maintaining the social order than Evolutionary conservatism, grounded as it is in a naturalized hierarchy and view of humanity (i.e., all men are equal, but some men – because of hard work, intelligence, and luck - are more equal than others). Both Fundamentalist and Evolutionary conservatism share a deep appreciation for the past and, “challenge the present from a position of wanting to recreate” it (Foley, 2007, p. 314).

Fundamentalist Conservatives can be less pragmatic than Evolutionary Conservatives in their desires for political reform and social change (Foley, 2007). While Evolutionary conservatism emphasizes order, virtue, and the imperfectability of society; Fundamentalist conservatism stresses individual freedom and liberty. Evolutionary conservatism is invested in the status quo and is not perturbed by the erosion of individual liberty caused by progressive policies. Evolutionary conservatism is more concerned with how easily social order (as maintained by the state) can be disrupted. Fundamentalist Conservatives, on the other hand, are far more concerned than
Evolutionary Conservatives with the overreach of the state and take every opportunity to expose abuse and issue warnings of possible government encroachments. Evolutionary Conservatives pay less attention to economics than Fundamentalists, and are less apt to sound the alarm of economic crisis, seeing such reactions as socially destabilizing.

Conservatism is not so clear-cut as to fit into only these two poles; conservatism is further splintered into factions between its evolutionary-fundamentalist poles. Placement along the continuum of American conservative beliefs is influenced by such things as region of the country, class, gender, race, age, sexuality, and religion, as well as prior political commitments. Differences in life experience result in strongly held foundational beliefs and values that produce unique expressions of conservatism. For example, so-called Paleoconservatives (named for their extremely anti-modern or premodern positions), like Pat Buchanan, see the United States as founded on a White social order and believe reform should take the direction of recovering traditional notions of race, gender, and class roles and norms. Policies of Paleoconservatives emphasize: restrictions on immigration, an end to multiculturalism and diversity programs, decentralization, deregulation, economic isolationism, and nationalism (Foley, 2007).

Most widely known are the Religious Right and Neoconservatives. The conservatism of the Religious Right and Neoconservatives “present politics as a series of moral dichotomies,” that, “lend credence to the idea of a deep moral crisis afflicting the nation” (Foley, 2007, p.319). This stance manifests in calls for mass political action and the mobilization of people based on Christian religious beliefs; people are encouraged to push back against the malfeasance and sinister motives of “godless elites” (p. 320).
By rationalizing the social and moral discomfort of modernity with a conflict of interests between secular elites and popular Christianity, the Religious Right has attempted to channel diffuse resentments into a coherent theme of majoritarian liberation. [The Religious Right and Neoconservatives have] clear populist overtones of elite conspiracies, moral subversion, social resentments, and the personalization of interests, issues, and politics... subversives generally include liberals, blacks, pacifists, feminists, federal judges, homosexuals, Jews, and urban sophisticates (Foley, 2007, pp. 322-323).

Religious Right and Neoconservatives work hard to have their values and beliefs represented in national public policy, in electoral politics on all levels, and in the Republican Party. The election of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s marked the beginning of a resurgence in Religious Right and Neoconservative influence and the success of their political strategy (Foley, 2007).

Conservatives of the Religious Right use fundamentalist religious interpretations of Protestant Christianity as a means of inciting people to political activism. Foley (2007) argues that fundamentalism is nascent in all religions and occurs globally. The features of fundamentalism include: 1) the desire to fight against modernism; 2) support for a traditional worldview and identity; 3) use of traditional doctrine and dogma; 4) seeing as enemies those who fight against tradition and a supposed divine social order; and, 5) belief that they are fighting in the name of God. Activism is made meaningful by framing it as integral to “freedom of conscious, moral restoration, and divine authority” (Foley, 2007, p. 323). Foley (2007) concludes that,

The religious right’s ability to infuse political argument with subtexts of moral complaint and ethical critique has been effective in creating a medium of opposition and an alternative channel of political expression (pp. 324-325).

Neoconservatism arose during the 1960s, a time when, as Neoconservatives believe,
America’s social consensus was undermined by excessive expectations of what government could achieve and by an intellectual vogue for new Left critiques and social democratic agendas (Foley, 2007, p. 325).

Neoconservatives have been effective in leveraging moral outrage to produce conservative political change. Examples of Neoconservatives include, Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, James Q. Wilson, and Daniel Moynihan (Foley, 2007). These men were New Deal Democrats who became disheartened with progressive public policies. Neoconservatism, unlike other forms of conservatism, has an intellectual bent. Proponents of Neoconservatism believe that the best way to turn back progressive policies and reform the culture is to create alternative institutions, organizations, and importantly, media and research outlets that champion their perspective (e.g., The Weekly Standard, First Things, The Heritage Foundation, and Project for the New American Century). This strategy has been very successful and is responsible for the prominence of conservatism in American politics, public policy, debate, and media (Foley, 2007).

Neoconservatism is distinguished by several positions that are frequently expressed in political media, including CPTR and PPTR (Foley, 2007, p. 326).

- Progressive programs and policies designed to achieve social justice or remedy social problems do not and will not work, in fact such programs often make matters worse by destabilizing families, communities, schools, and ultimately undermining individual responsibility and self-esteem. For the public funds spent, there is no return in terms of diminishment of social problems.

- There is an elite class of progressive knowledge workers who depend for their livelihood on an ever-expanding, bureaucratic, service-oriented government – chiefly these include journalists, professors, and government administrators. These elites have extensive influence in government and will push progressive programs and policies to line their pockets and increase their status and influence - even though their programs do not work. These people do not, or refuse to, recognize how their work undermines American liberty.
The government is essential primarily when it comes to U.S. foreign relations and the management of foreign policy (including maintaining a superior military). The U.S. is neither imperialist nor exploitative toward other nations or peoples. American exceptionalism - economically, socially, and culturally – is a fair way to view the U.S. in relation to other nations; “America possesses a social and national significance as a historically exceptional moral entity.” (Foley, 2007, p. 332). America must, thus, take an aggressive stance in terms of making the world over in its image in the name of ideological, material, and national security interests - even when this stance interferes with the sovereignty of other nations.

The outlook is bright for America, if conservative values are foremost. The prescription for America is the creation of civic virtue that takes hold of citizens, causing them to reject “the vacuity, decadence, and disintegration of contemporary life” prompting instead “communal ties, social cohesion and moral solidarity” (Foley, 2007, p. 330). Americans are fundamentally good and decent people, who need only to clear away the debris of progressive policies to fully realize their potential.

Conservative identity and ideology is diverse and wide-ranging (Aberbach & Peele, 2011; Asante & Hall, 2011; Blitz, 2011; Deaver, 2005; Lowndes, 2008; O’Hara, 2011; Scruton, 2002; Thompson, 2007). Despite the polyvocality of conservative political standpoint, conservative beliefs, values, and policy positions coalesce in predictable and recognizable ways that distinguish them from their progressive counterparts. In the next section, I will briefly discuss the origins, values, beliefs, and activist stance of progressivism. As progressives are considered a comparison group and not the primary focus of this research, the analysis is brief. The goal is to identify those elements of progressivism that stand in stark contrast to conservatism, to identify the unique features of Conservative Political Talk Radio.

Progressive Standpoint and Ideology

Progressive political philosophy also grows out of American liberal political foundations (Foley, 2007; Lakoff, 2006; Podesta, 2008). For this reason, disagreements over political policy center on the same key issues and themes conservatives attend to, most especially, “the meaning of liberty, democracy and equality” (Foley, 2007, p. 263).
However, unlike conservatives, progressives direct most of their attention to how political ideals translate into and shape social outcomes. That is, progressives are reform-oriented; reformism grows out of the desire to bring the material and social worlds into greater alignment with political ideals. Foley (2007) writes:

The advocates of liberal reform have to proceed on the basis that American society has many sources of imbalance and injustice, and that a reliance upon notions of self-regulation and market dynamics will not assure the creation of a fair or secure social order. Accordingly, liberals have mainly been distinguished by their advocacy of an interventionist state that will widen opportunity, reduce discrimination, provide protection, advance citizenship, and enhance the capital of public goods (p. 263).

American progressivism proposes a positive conception of freedom that, unlike the conservative negative conception of freedom, goes beyond the mere endowment of liberty, justice, and equality to the actual circumstances in a society that produce or constrain liberty, justice, and equality (Foley, 2007; Lakoff, 2006; Podesta, 2008).

Progressives reject - or at the very least don’t found their philosophy upon - folklore concerning the founding of the United States of America and its classical liberal ethos. Progressives believe that American founding folklore obfuscates power and inequality grounded in gender, race, and class inequality. Importantly, however, progressives’ critique of America is not a call for the overthrow of classic liberal traditions and values, rather progressives wish to reform society to better approximate liberal philosophical values. Government planning and intervention, progressives argue, is the means to achieve social justice and equality of outcomes.

All political philosophies are complex, multifaceted, and thus not easily summarized. However, there are assumptions embedded in progressive political philosophy that helps to explain the positions progressives take vis-à-vis social problems and the policies of their political adversaries. Ironically, progressivism is both
a rejection of classical liberalism and a celebration of liberal values. According to Foley (2007) progressivism contends that:

- Traditional American values of equality, justice, democracy, freedom, and liberty are laudable and should not be rejected;
- The social and material world does not function on its own, naturally, as a self-regulating system; social problems, therefore, are a constant feature of any society;
- America’s political system is not designed to work toward the resolution of social problems, at best it accommodates competing private interests but only partially and temporarily;
- The capitalist economic system is functional, while tending toward excesses that need to be balanced against the social good;
- At times, American cultural values legitimize oppressive social and economic conditions; such orthodoxy undermines liberal values; and
- Greater equality in social and economic outcomes can be achieved through popular participation and government reform and regulation.

How do progressive values play out in the history of American progressivism? As Foley (2007) argues, progressives are reformers, not radicals. Rarely if ever do their critiques extend to class interests or an indictment of capitalism. Rather progressives concern themselves with the social disorder caused by abuse of power, government neglect or malfeasance, and unchecked corporate power. Progressive activism is an attempt to reform bad practices (in many respects it is moral reform) within a system that they believe is functional and worth salvaging. Progressive policies facilitate a limited redistribution of wealth and implementation of social programs that make society more orderly, participatory, and efficient.

In Chapter 4, the emergence of political talk radio and, more specifically, the Conservative Political Talk Radio format – it’s content and impact on audiences – will be discussed.
CHAPTER 4
EMERGENCE OF CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL TALK RADIO

Welcome to the end of the week here in the Conservative Coliseum. I am Monica Crowley your mistress of ceremonies fending back the absurdity of socialism, liberalism and of course pure stupidity – as those things run wild across America. And I do it all in leather – that would be summertime leather – leather, high heels and a smile [sound of a whip snapping].

—Monica Crowley
The Monica Crowley Show

CPTR is a critical part of the Conservative movement in the United States. Despite the popularity of more technologically sophisticated competitors “traditional radio remains one of the most widely used media formats in America” (Center for American Progress & Free Press, 2007, p. 1). Ninety percent of Americans listen to the radio each week, averaging 19 hours of listening per week in 2006 (p. 1). The advent of the modern talk radio format can be traced to the 1970s, the result of fierce competition for advertiser dollars among increasing numbers of AM and FM radio stations (Pinkerton & Dodd, 2009; Turow, 1974). In the United States, there are approximately 8,300 FM and 4,700 AM radio stations (Datamonitor, 2004). Unlike Europe and other parts of the world, the U.S. radio market (which is 60% of the global radio market) relies overwhelmingly on advertising dollars for its operation. Ninety-nine percent of the revenue for U.S. radio stations comes from advertisers (Datamonitor, 2004). This heavy reliance on private, business sector support is important to keep in mind; choice of radio program host, program format, style, and content are business decisions calculated to draw audiences for advertisers. Profitability in radio, in terms of market share and percentage of the listening audience requires market differentiation and development of brand loyalty. According to Turow (1974) and other radio scholars, talk radio creates niche audiences that appeal to listeners in three ways, through: 1) program hosts; 2)
discussions of current events; and, 3) the opportunity to interact with the host and other audience members as a caller to the show (Avery, Ellis, & Glover, 1978; Harris, Mayer, Saulino, & Schiller, 1996).

From its inception radio has been used to spread political messages – conservative and progressive. Political talk radio came to researchers’ and political pundits’ attention most recently in the 1990s when it began to be used successfully to leverage political opposition and support public protests against national policies (e.g., gay people in the military, government spending, congressional salary increases) (Barker, 1998; Hollander, 1996, 1999; Rubin & Step, 2000). Lyons (2008) reports that 17-18% of the radio audience listens to political talk radio. The political talk format as we know it today started with Rush Limbaugh in 1988 and has grown a startling 2,728% over a quarter century (Lyon, 2008). News, talk, and informational programming are the top radio formats in the Unites States used by 1,700 stations nationwide and reaching more than 50 million listeners weekly (Center for American Progress & Free Press, 2007, p. 1; Lyon, 2008).

Conservative Political Talk Radio is by far the dominant political talk radio format (Barker, 1998; Barker & Knight, 2000). The Center for American Progress & Free Press (2007, p. 1) report the following in a survey of 257 news/talk stations owned by the top commercial radio owners in the United States:

- 91% of the programming is conservative; 9% progressive;
- Translated into hours of talk, 2,570 hours of programming is conservative; 254 hours of talk (ten times less) is progressive;
- 92% of the five largest commercial station owners (n = 236) do not broadcast any progressive talk programming – Citadel, Cumulus, and Salem broadcast companies have 100% conservative talk/news formats.
Without question, Rush Limbaugh is the king of conservative political talk; he is estimated to attract 15 million listeners to his show weekly – 56% of which don’t identify as conservative or Republican, but rather as Independents (Costello & Ruff, 2009). His rise from AM disc jockey obscurity to present-day dominance is indicative of the rise of Republican, Right-Wing politics in the United States and the maturation of market forces that arose after the revocation of the Fairness Doctrine (Harris, Mayer, Saulino, & Schiller, 1996; Pinkerton & Dodds, 2009).

Questions of Fairness

The success of CPTR illustrates what Madison Avenue and media moguls like Rupert Murdoch have known for a long time: sensory appeal, charisma, and sensationalism trump substance, solemnity, and civil discourse in delivering the news. Hoisted on the petard of journalistic ethics and a Left aesthetic that favors what’s hip, trendy and cool, progressives have been outdone by CPTR; ironically this has led some progressives to ask, “Where is the Left’s Rush Limbaugh?” However, there are other factors, besides market pressures and personalities, which have contributed to the ascendancy of Conservative Political Talk Radio. The repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987 (Schaefer & Birkland, 2007) paved the way for the emergence of CPTR (Center for American Progress & Free Press, 2007; Ruane, 2009).

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Fairness Doctrine required radio broadcasters to give airtime to controversial issues and allow contrasting viewpoints to be presented. Regulation was deemed necessary due to the limited number of broadcasting outlets (Schaefer & Birkland, 2007). At the time of the Fairness Doctrine’s inception in 1941 the FCC viewed radio broadcasters as holding a public trust that required they not use the airwaves simply to editorialize, but rather to present
fair and balanced coverage of controversial issues (Schaefer & Birkland, 2007). Over time, adherence to FCC fairness regulations became the basis of license renewal and regulated “time devoted to a controversy, the issues covered, the viewpoints presented, the appropriate representatives, and the program format and other programming decisions” (Schaefer & Birkland, 2007, p. 78). In 1969 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Fairness Doctrine in Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC. Specifically, this case supported FCC rules that required broadcasters to provide time for rebuttals against personal attacks aired on radio stations and that when political editorials aired for one candidate, opposing candidates be given time to express their point of view.

The Fairness Doctrine proved hard to implement and enforce; in 1970 the FCC scaled back its enforcement activities (Schaefer & Birkland, 2007). Mark Fowler, FCC Chairman from 1981 to 1987 (appointed by Ronald Reagan), spearheaded repeal of the Fairness Doctrine, citing concerns that it inhibited freedom of speech and facilitated improper government control of the media (Center for American Progress & Free Press, 2007; Ruane, 2009). The rest is history: the political talk radio format exploded across the country with FCC deregulation; in 1987 400 radio stations in the U.S. had a talk format, in 1993 the number was 900 (Harris, Mayer, Saulino, & Schiller, 1996).

The power and influence of CPTR has created enemies of progressives, many of whom dismiss CPTR as fringe journalism and its listeners as narrow-minded and bigoted (Political Research Associates). Progressive critics complain that CPTR is merely commercial advertisement for the Republican Party and the Conservative Movement (Media Matters for America). CPTR, according to this line of argument, is an electronic bully pulpit; abuse of the public airwaves to advocate for conservative
political, social, and cultural policies without the ‘inconvenience’ of open debate. There is some truth to these accusations. The influence of CPTR goes virtually unchecked in radio markets where it dominates (Center for American Progress & Free Press, 2007; Datamonitor, 2004); CPTR heavyweights - hosts and media companies - parlay business success into national recognition and political power via ideological support and monetary contributions to the Republican Party and its candidates. Conservative leaders in the Republican Party are grateful for the work of CPTR, even crediting electoral victories to CPTR hosts like Rush Limbaugh and his devoted ‘Dittohead’ fans (Barker, 2002; Bobbitt, 2010; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Democrats, progressive, and those on the Left have not had much success in checking the influence of CPTR. In 1993 the Fairness and Broadcasting Act, also known as the “Hush Rush [Limbaugh] Bill,” was defeated in Congress (Harris, et al 1996). More recently, the success and proliferation of CPTR has led Democratic Party leaders, like former President Bill Clinton and former Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, to suggest the Fairness Doctrine be reinstituted (Eggerton, 2009; Gizzi, 2008). Thus far the FCC has not moved to reinstitute the Fairness Doctrine and conservative dominance in political talk radio continues.

**Empirical Research on Talk and Political Talk Radio**

CPTR is perhaps best understood as spectacle. As with the Roman Coliseum, conservative adversaries are eviscerated in a public arena for sport. Skillful CPTR hosts use the strengths of the radio medium - its aural grab - to hook listeners and deliver public affairs commentary. For the duration of a three-hour show hosts use a variety of stylistic and rhetorical approaches to draw-in listeners and deliver a message that is both persuasive and entertaining. Flippancy, sexual innuendo, rage, conspiracy
theorizing, sophomoric humor, schoolyard bullying tactics, name-calling, displays of pride and false humility, sappy nostalgia for the “good old days,” and appeals to the ‘common man’ on behalf of “God and Country,” are a few of the ways CPTR hosts construct news and current events.

The sections that follow present a review of findings from the social scientific and media studies literature on talk and political talk radio. Three substantive areas are reviewed: listener studies; studies of rhetoric and communication; and, impact studies that assess the effect of talk and political talk radio on particular outcomes. These studies highlight the ongoing scholarship on talk and political talk radio and identify those features of CPTR in need of further exploration and analysis.

**Talk and Political Talk Radio Listener Studies**

Who listens to Conservative Political Talk Radio and why? Turow (1974) found that callers to a Philadelphia all-talk radio station were more isolated, less mobile, older, and of a lower socioeconomic status than the population generally - though not disproportionately alienated. People who called talk programs in Turow’s (1974) study did so for interpersonal contact, that is, to communicate and have their opinions heard. Further, Turow (1974) found that callers were motivated to call shows to express their opposition to (as opposed to support for) issues that were of personal significance to them. In a survey of 181 callers to four talk shows at three radio stations in Cleveland, Ohio, Tramer and Jeffres (1983), too, found that the most frequent callers to talk radio programs were those who expressed a need for companionship through a forum that allowed them to both give and receive information on issues that were personally important.
Avery, Ellis, and Glover’s (1978) quantitative analysis of 30-hours of transcript data from a mixed genre (i.e., non-political, conservative, and progressive) talk radio station in Salt Lake City, Utah found, like Turow (1974), that callers to talk radio programs were motivated by a desire for interpersonal contact and communication. In addition, Avery, Ellis, and Glover (1978) found that callers expressed a need for social and political information, and a desire to make their opinions public. Avery and colleagues (1978) also found that listeners were attracted to hosts whose style fit with their personal disposition. Progressive host were perceived as “more agreeable and less dogmatic” (p. 15) while conservative hosts were viewed as structured, mechanical, and ideological (p. 16).

A more recent set of studies has found evidence that contradicts findings from early talk radio analyses that portray audiences as socially marginalized and in need of interpersonal connection. These studies can be distinguished by their focus on political talk radio stations and program audiences. In a survey of 525 San Diego, California, listeners to political talk radio shows, Hofstetter et al. (1994) found no evidence of social isolation or politically alienation; listeners were not cynical nor were they withdrawn from politics. Instead, Hofstetter and his colleagues (1994) found that exposure to political talk radio was associated with greater political participation, interest in politics, and greater feelings of self-efficacy. Overall, respondents cited information as the greatest motivation for listening to political talk radio. Listeners who called-in to shows felt self-expression was their primary motivation for doing so. In a subsequent study of a sample of 583 San Diego residents by Hofstetter and Gianos (1997), more involved listeners (e.g., those who listen often, talk about content, and/or call-in to shows) to political talk
radio showed greater political involvement, higher socioeconomic status, and greater
social and political integration and interest in politics than less involved listeners.
Further, these involved listeners to political talk radio programs indicated that the
programs provided them with needed political information, an interpretation of reality,
and companionship.

The findings of Hollander (1996) partially contradict, yet extend, those of
Hofstetter and his colleagues (Hofstetter, et al., 1994; Hofstetter & Gianos, 1997). In a
national survey of 1,507 adults, 18 and older, Hollander (1996) found that listeners to
political talk radio programs were more cynical about the federal government than non-
listeners. Specifically, listeners perceived the government as non-responsive to the
needs of citizens; this was especially the case among conservative listeners. Listeners
to talk radio in Hollander’s (1996) study, were younger, expressed greater political self-
efficacy, and were more politically active than non-listeners. Further, the data showed a
positive statistical correlation between more frequent listening to political talk radio,
political conservatism, and identification with the Republican Party. Callers could be
distinguished from listeners and non-listeners by their more extreme or ideological
political beliefs. Hollander (1996) found that political beliefs among callers, in turn,
encouraged political mobilization.

What about listeners’ choice to stop listening to political talk radio? In an
exploration of the reasons for a downturn in political talk radio listenership, Hollander
(1999) found, using national panel data (N = 597), that being female, tolerant of diverse
viewpoints, liberal, and more trusting of the mainstream media predicted a choice to end
political talk radio listening. And why did listeners stay tuned to political talk radio?
Using National Elections Studies data (1996-2000), Bennett (2002) found that an interest in politics and distrust of the mainstream media predicted exposure to political talk radio during a time of shrinking audiences.

More recent studies reinforce and sharpen our understanding of the factors that attract political talk radio audiences. In an analysis of questionnaire data from 235 respondents, aged 18 to 92, Rubin and Step (2000) found that parasocial interaction (i.e., “perceived similarity, friendship, and empathy with media personalities,” p. 643) with hosts who are perceived as exciting, entertaining, credible, informative, trusted, and influential predicted planned and frequent listening to public affairs or political talk radio programs. Interestingly, the more listeners expressed a parasocial affinity towards a host, the less likely they were to say that their attitudes and beliefs were influenced by that host. Conclusions from Rubin and Step’s (2000) study indicate that listening helps to maintain a worldview and imagined community among audience members and hosts and serves as a means of welding emotions and belief and thus reducing ideological uncertainty when values appear challenged.

In an analysis of survey data (N = 937) on listeners’ trust in public versus talk radio as an outlet for local news and current events coverage, Brewer and Pritchard (2008) found that, while respondents trusted talk radio least among news media, conservatives had less trust in public radio and more trust in talk radio compared to progressives. This relationship can be explained by findings from cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey data that indicate that political beliefs motivate media exposure and use patterns; that is, conservatives and progressives choose media that fit their existing political beliefs (Stroud, 2008).
Lastly, empirical evidence indicates that listeners to political talk radio maintain distinct values and beliefs that undergird their choice of conservative versus progressive programming. Lyons (2008) found in an analysis of survey data collected from 367 respondents that people who listen to Progressive Political Talk Radio express more universal values, characterized by broad mindedness, hedonism (i.e., self-gratification and indulgence), seeing beauty in nature and the arts, a desire for social justice, a world of peace, equality, wisdom, unity with nature, and environmental protection. The most cited reasons progressive listeners gave for listening to political talk radio were to “learn how others feel about the issues” (28%) and “to keep up on the issues of the day” (21%) (p. 160). On the other hand, Lyons (2008) found that people who listen to Conservative Political Talk Radio expressed values associated with security, characterized by a concern for tradition, conformity, national security, family security, social order, cleanliness, and reciprocation of favors. Conservative respondents cited, “to keep up on the issues of the day” (38%) and to “learn new things that I can’t find elsewhere” (30%) as the reasons they listened to political talk radio (pp. 159-160).

**Political Talk Radio Rhetoric**

Though CPTR hosts and callers are often critical of Republican Party politics and leadership, CPTR is closely allied with the Republican Party’s mission and vision for the United States (Barker, 2002; Bobbitt, 2010; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). There are several Progressive Political Talk Radio (PPTR) programs on the air that favor the Democratic Party and progressive causes; hosts and callers on these shows routinely bash CPTR, conservatives, and Right-Wing ideology - oftentimes mercilessly. However, no mainstream media phenomenon exists among progressives or on the Left that matches the scope, unity of action, and political power of CPTR (Center for American
Progress & Free Press, 2007). Nor do any PPTR hosts or programs have the direct connections to national politics and access to leaders that elite CPTR programs and hosts do (e.g., Rush Limbaugh) (Barker, 2002; Bobbitt, 2010; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Hosts on CPTR are master rhetoricians who work hard, using every debater’s trick in the book (e.g., ad hominem attacks, appeals to false authority, overgeneralizations, stacking the deck) to present current events through the lens of a conservative political, social, and cultural worldview. CPTR partisanship is facilitated through distinctive rhetorical moves which include use of: the host’s voice (e.g., rants, yelling, and screaming), emotive or culturally coded music (e.g., the National Anthem, country music), sound effects (e.g., Rush Limbaugh’s infamous “caller abortion,” a scream accompanied by the sound of a vacuum, reserved for callers who disagree with him), and audio montages composed of snippets of talk edited together to compose new meanings and situate speakers in an unflattering light. Not only do these rhetorical and prosodic methods appear effective, they seem to grow audiences and contribute to the success and dominance of CPTR programming.

What have been the findings from systematic analyses of political talk radio rhetoric? What factors contribute to CPTR popularity and the persuasiveness of its message?

**CPTR Rhetoric**

The Rush Limbaugh show has been the primary focus of studies assessing the rhetorical qualities of CPTR. In an analysis of Rush Limbaugh’s written work and radio commentary Jacobs (1995-1996) identified 11 rhetorical methods, he argued, were responsible for Limbaugh success and influence over American politics and moral
climate. Termed, “the red flags of persuasion,” Jacobs asserted that these rhetorical methods reduce critical thinking and “trigger mental processes that have more to do with memory, imagery, and emotion than with analytical thought” (p. 376). The persuasive methods used by Limbaugh include:

- Anecdotes, stories, and metaphors;
- Presentation of limited or false choices;
- Use of contingency, wherein two ideas are linked together so that they must be accepted or rejected together;
- Use of positive words to build rapport with one group at the expense of another;
- Building himself up as an authority figure;
- Use of humor, quite often at the expense of another, to grab listeners’ attention and persuade them of facts not based on evidence;
- Use of positive and negative emotion words to, “promote affirmative feelings and responses” (p. 384) or, alternately, “provoke cynical feelings and responses” (p. 385);
- Use of words and phrases that connect a demonstrable premise to a less likely or arguable conclusion; repetition augments the effect of this method, especially when accompanied with name-calling directed at specific outgroups (e.g., “feminazis” for feminists);
- Use of questions and questioning to the effect that: 1) listeners’ intentions appear to be shared with Limbaugh; 2) those being questioned are confused or thrown off balance (particularly by complex questions or questions asked quickly); 3) question are grounded in assumptions that are not easily negated;
- Use of words and phrases, like “clearly,” “simply,” “unfortunately,” that confuse, make false comparisons, or gloss over complexity;
- Use of positive or negative absolutes that, “convey finality and stifle further debate” (p. 390).

Harris, Mayer, Saulino, and Schiller (1996) were particularly interested in Limbaugh’s use of class-based rhetoric. Harris and his colleagues found that Limbaugh “voices a forthright class politics” (p. 550) that favors the interests of the wealthy and
class privileged over the needs of the other ninety-nine percent of the U.S. population. Limbaugh’s class politics manifests in dire warnings against policies that: promote class warfare, askew “personal responsibility” in favor of a redistribution of wealth (e.g., affirmative action programs), support workers’ unions and collective bargaining, undermine or limit big business (particularly government regulation), and guarantee government entitlements (e.g., universal health care). Harris et al. (1996), quoting Paris (1995), conclude in regards to Limbaugh’s class-inflected rhetorical methods:

Limbaugh’s skill is in weaving political alienation and anger into the illusion of common political ground . . . Limbaugh, in fact, preaches a small-government message to an audience largely dependent on Social security, Medicare, home-mortgage interest deductions, unemployment insurance, veterans benefits, civil service pensions, and the like – programs that add up to big government (p. 561).

Shoaps (1999) performed a sophisticated linguistic analysis of Limbaugh’s use of so called “commonsense” rhetoric. Specifically, Shoaps argued that Limbaugh creates commonsense facts utilizing rhetorical techniques that make interpretations of political events and attributions about political personalities appear self-evident and objective (p. 399). Shoaps argues that Limbaugh and his audience achieve this in four ways. First, Limbaugh and his audience “negotiate an understanding” through the “creation of meaning out of layers of ‘shared’ knowledge” (p. 412). This is done with strongly positive or negative words and phrases that become the bases for describing and understanding events and people.

Second, both Limbaugh and callers to his program use “reported speech,” wherein they project their voices into their adversaries’ mouths. In such cases, Limbaugh or his callers are not speaking for or quoting another, rather they are projecting their own meanings and authority onto the imagined speaker, oftentimes
robbing the speaker of coherence, context, and control. The rhetorical function of reported speech is not to relay or share information. Rather, it is a display of possible, but not provable, interpretations of events and attitudes, replete with affective elements that facilitate both distancing from any provocative or offensive speech and a ready soap box from which to comment on what has been ‘said.’ Most important, reported speech competes with the facts as presented or known since it is derived from limited or nonexistent information.

Thirdly, Shoaps (1999) argues that Limbaugh uses cultural resources to achieve an intersubjective understanding between himself and his audience. This is done both on the fly as events present themselves and through the manipulation of stable cultural resources that have a widely known or durable meaning. For example, Limbaugh or his callers invoke the labels conservative, Republican, liberal, Democrat selectively to communicate positive and negative meaning. Also, Limbaugh and his callers pair common words or phrases with distinct prosodic elements of speech (e.g., intonation, stress, and speed (p. 421) to communicate evaluative or stereotyped meanings (e.g., fast speech associated with coercion or lying; stuttering associated with lack of intelligence). Receptivity to all such encoded messages depends on knowledge and manipulation of the unique ideological standpoint of Limbaugh and his audience (p. 423).

The last method discussed by Shoaps (1999) is Limbaugh’s use of prosody, common stereotypes, and cultural resources to characterize a person, their attitudes and beliefs. Shoaps calls this rhetorical method the “evocation of canonized personae” (p. 428). One way Limbaugh enacts this method is through on-air skits that parody
known political policies and figures. While humorous and hyperbolic, these skits nonetheless are intended to disclose the ‘true’ character of those being represented. The advantage of this method is that it allows for distancing from any politically incorrect content or attributions (p. 431). In effect, Shoaps argues, Limbaugh and his callers create and conventionalize stereotypes by “enacting them in the voice of political figures” (p. 431). Using words and prosody that invoke cultural tropes and stereotypes, Limbaugh and his callers connect people, events, and attitudes to a “previous textual biography” (p. 431) that either demeans or valorizes.

Does extreme partisanship amount to propaganda? Swain (1999) performed an assessment of Limbaugh’s use of common propaganda methods and strategies; this study produced mixed findings. Predictably, Swain found that Limbaugh’s radio program was explicitly partisan in that it: “sought to advance a particular bias or point of view on issues” (p. 35); “suggested specific actions or conclusion” (p. 35); and, “did not conceal the source(s) of the information and opinions” presented (p. 38). Swain found further that while Limbaugh did not use most propaganda techniques, he did use some, including: “voice inflection,” “card stacking,” “name calling,” “stereotyping of people,” “reinforcement of an existing point of view,” “creating and relieving tension,” “enforced repetition of behaviors or responses,” and “oversimplification of an issue or choices” (p. 35). To Limbaugh’s credit, Swain (1999) found that the program did not use: experts or sound bites to advance or oppose a point of view; humor to demean or divert discussion; appeals to join in-groups; emotion-laden language; common folk characterizations; testimonials; transfer of characteristics of credibility; appealing to need for belonging, need to compensate for failure or for achievement;
depersonalization; guilt feelings; making someone feel part of a crowd; projected shortcomings; false reasoning; or adoption of cause-based social behaviors. From these findings Swain concluded that Limbaugh’s program was not propagandist, but partisan.

**PPTR Rhetoric**

Far fewer studies assess the rhetorical methods of PPTR. Oravic (2005) studied Air America, a progressive talk radio network no longer on the air. Oravec found that Air America used humor in its programming, centering commentary on dispelling political untruths and giving listeners access to information to make informed political decisions. Comic sound effects, name calling, ad hominem attacks, and sophomoric humor were the rhetorical devices used by Air America hosts to undermine Republican politicians and policies. Oravec argued, however, that these strategies were grounded in sound journalistic standards and referenced authoritative sources. Concluding, Oravec (2005) surmised that in a time of Republican ascendancy, “comedy provide[d] the structures through which Air America hosts attempt[ed] to expose apparent contradictions and fabrications produced by the government and rendered in the news” (p. 201).

Humor is an important element of another popular progressive political talk show, *The Colbert Report*, a mock conservative TV talk show. Though not a radio program, *The Colbert Report* offers insight into the rhetorical strategies employed in the progressive talk show genre. Baumgartner and Morris (2008) analyzed the effect of watching *The Colbert Report* on 885 undergraduate students assigned to experimental and control groups. Baumgartner and Morris found that Colbert’s use of humor backfired, causing young adult viewers to have more positive attitudes toward the conservative politicians, TV, and radio hosts spoofed on the program. Specifically,
derisive humor against progressives and Democratic politicians led to more positive assessments of Republicans. Use of implicit humor with sophisticated, multilayered messages appears to have challenged the political knowledge and confidence viewers had in making informed political decisions. Young viewers, Baumgartner and Morris (2008) argued, respond to the explicit commentary of *The Colbert Report* (as opposed to the implicit or actual message); this was in part attributable to positive feelings of affinity and trust toward the host Stephen Colbert.

**Effects of Listening to Talk and Political Talk Radio**

What is the impact of talk and political talk radio? What effect does talk and political talk radio have on listeners and political processes? Study findings fit into four substantive areas, effects on: political mobilization, attitudes towards democratic processes, perceptions of candidates, and listeners’ information and misinformation.

**Political Mobilization**

In an analysis of national survey data (*N* = 1,507) Hollander (1997) tested the Gamson hypothesis that proposes that political mobilization (described as non-voting participation in politics, e.g., letter writing, contributing money to a campaign) results when individuals possess both high political self-efficacy and low trust in the government – features that prior studies find describes political talk radio listeners. While Hollander did not find general support for the effect of political talk radio, he did find that among conservatives (even when they have low self-efficacy and high trust in government) listening to talk radio predicted mobilization (p. 366). Hollander concluded that this finding shows how talk radio “frames political discourse as a challenge to basic values” (p. 366), spurring listeners to action.
Barker (1999) found evidence to support an association between listening to the Rush Limbaugh Show and voting for Republican candidates in 1994-1996 national elections. Barker’s findings are, however, inconclusive. Listeners to Rush Limbaugh may be strongly partisan to begin with. This study does, however, offer convincing evidence of a correlation between listening to Limbaugh’s program and preference for Republican candidates, controlling for respondents’ political party, conservative or liberal ideology, evaluation of the economy, Protestant religiosity, and whether the candidate is an incumbent.

In a qualitative study of survey data from 583 San Diego residents, Hofstetter (1998, pp. 276-277) found that “active exposure” (talking to someone about political talk radio; taking some action because of political talk radio messages; or calling a talk radio show) to political talk radio was associated with political mobilization (political participation and attention to politics in the media). The direction of this effect remained unclear – radio may influence political behavior or it could be that political behavior influences listening to political talk radio. Hofstetter (1998) concluded that a likely explanation is that political talk radio is a form of “civic entertainment” (p. 273) that politically involved people selectively seek out.

Attitudes Toward Democratic Processes

Studies have also examined the impact of diverse forms of media, including political talk radio, on confidence in democratic institutions and processes. Pfau, et al. (1998) compared the effect of exposure to political talk radio and other media on faith in democratic institutions (e.g., schools, courts, the presidency, Congress, and the news media). Political talk radio exhibited a “negative tone” (p. 740) in regards to democratic institution, but this varied by democratic institution. Content analyses of media and a
A survey of 357 people found that political talk radio contributed to a significant negative impact on confidence in courts, school, and the news media; there was no impact on confidence in the presidency or the U.S. Congress (p. 739). Other studies have qualified Pfau and his colleagues’ (1998) findings. Lee, Cappella, and Southwell (2003) found that after listening to Progressive and Conservative Political Talk Radio, except for the highly partisan Rush Limbaugh Show, low self-efficacy study participants exhibited greater levels of interpersonal and social trust (trustworthiness and helpfulness of people) than a control group of non-listeners.

In a subsequent study using national survey data (N = 925), Pfau, Houston, & Semmler (2005) examined the impact of multiple forms of communication on political awareness and interest, confidence in electoral institutions, and political participation. Pfau and colleagues (2005) found that as election time neared, the impact of political communications media on attitudes and planned participation increased. One month prior to an election, only respondents’ awareness, interest, and knowledge of the presidential campaign exhibited a significant (positive) association with exposure to political talk radio (p. 55). Closer to election day, political talk radio was positively and significantly associated with attitudes toward the democratic process of electing a president and perceived likelihood of political participation (p. 57).

The dominance of conservative forms of political talk radio help to explain its impact on perceptions of electoral fairness. The fiercely contested results of the 2000 presidential election were the subject of Holbert’s (2004) analysis of 2000-2002 American National Election Study panel data. Holbert found that listening to political talk radio was associated with negative feelings toward Gore, the Democratic candidate,
and positive feelings toward Bush, the Republican candidate. Respondents feelings towards the candidates in turn colored their perception of the 2000 election and electoral fairness in predictable ways; positive feeling toward Bush yielded perception of electoral fairness, while positive feeling toward Gore were associated with feelings of unfairness.

**Perceptions of Candidates**

Pfau, et al. (1997) assessed the influence of political talk radio (and four other communication forms including print and television media, conversations, and candidate ads) on perceptions of candidates in the 1996 Republican Presidential Primary. An analysis of 315 respondents found that, among the communication forms studied, political talk radio had the greatest impact on how voters perceived the candidates’ competence, relational communication (honesty, sincerity, warmth, enthusiasm, interest, and receptivity), and their emotional response to him/her. In a subsequent study of the 2000 election campaign conducted by Pfau, Cho, and Chang (2001), these findings were replicated, finding that political talk radio exerted the greatest influence on respondents’ perceptions of the candidates.

These findings were contrary to an analysis of the effect of one program - albeit the most partisan of CPTR programs, The Rush Limbaugh Show - on perceptions of candidates. In an analysis of panel survey data (N = 424 over two consecutive waves), Jones (1998) found no evidence of a “Limbaugh Effect” on listeners (versus non-listeners) to the Rush Limbaugh Show. Perceptions of Pat Buchanan were not negative despite persistent negative commentary by Limbaugh. Jones (1998) concluded that Limbaugh’s negative commentary and failure to voice opposing points of view were
balanced by callers to the show who supported and defended Buchanan and his candidacy.

In an analysis of perceptions of the 1996 presidential election campaign, Hall and Capella (2002) found that among comparison groups of listeners to the Rush Limbaugh Show, other political talk radio listeners, users of other mainstream news media, and non-users of mainstream news media, exposure to the Limbaugh Show was associated with the perception that Bill Clinton won the election against Bob Dole because of media bias, voters' lack of sophistication and political knowledge, and the superficial, celebrity qualities of Mr. Clinton – factors routinely cited by Rush Limbaugh. Respondents rejected substantive explanations for Clinton's victory, like his performance during his first term and the efficacy of his policies and programs. Hall and Capella (2002) concluded that such views on the part of listeners to the Limbaugh Show allowed them to maintain a conservative worldview in the face of defeat; a view that constructs the world in a meaningful or sensible way (p. 348-349).

**Alignment, Antipathy, Information, and Misinformation**

Findings from a panel analysis of regular and occasional listeners to Conservative and Progressive Political Talk Radio conducted by Yanovitzky and Cappella (2001) and Lee and Cappella (2001) confirm the conclusion that listeners' political attitudes and perceptions drive them to the political talk radio hosts whose commentary reinforces their existing views. Further, in the case of listeners to the Rush Limbaugh Show, increased exposure to one-sided political messages increases agreement with the host (Lee & Cappella, 2001). Yanovitzky and Cappella (2001) concluded that changes in attitudes precede exposure to political talk radio and drive political talk radio exposure; people seek out radio programming that aligns with their
political views. Thus, political talk radio’s primary impact on listeners’ attitudes may be in how it shapes and reinforces how listeners make sense of news events and attributions about political leaders’ motives, character, and integrity.

Barker and Knight (2000) find support for the meaning-making work of political talk radio in their examination of the relationship between listening to Rush Limbaugh and political attitudes. Barker and Knight (2000) found that regular listeners to The Rush Limbaugh Show possess political attitudes on issues that mirror the host’s. Further, in regards to issues on which Limbaugh voices a negative opinion, substantial changes in listeners’ attitudes were apparent, manifest in “greater conservatism and antipathy toward Limbaugh’s favorite targets” (p. 168).

In an analysis of survey data from 810 adults, Hofstetter and colleagues (1999) assessed whether listening to political talk radio leads to greater information (knowledge about how the American government is structured and operates) or misinformation (agreement or disagreement with erroneous assertions made by Conservative Political Talk Radio hosts). Hofstetter et al. (1999) found that listeners who tuned in regularly to conservative and moderate political talk radio shows, called-in to shows, and took actions because of what they heard on political talk radio, were more informed than non-listeners. Conservative Political Talk Radio listeners, however, possessed both less accurate information about non-ideological facts (e.g., how the American government is structured and operates) and greater misinformation about ideological facts (e.g., agreement with assertions made on CPTR that are false, like, “America spends more on welfare than on defense”) than non-listeners. Listeners to moderate political talk radio
(e.g., NPR) showed lower levels of misinformation than conservative listeners.

Hofstetter et al. (1999) concluded,

> Individuals appear to construct their own political reality by extrapolating from the incomplete bits of information that are available to them and fitting that information into schemata that are already structured around a particular ideological world view. This inferential reasoning appears often to lead individuals to hold incorrect beliefs with some degree of confidence (p. 366).

An important limitation of Hofstetter, et al.’s (1999) study is that, because the misinformation scale used in this study was constructed using assertions made on CPTR, it is biased toward the most passionately held – though incorrect – beliefs of conservative talk radio listeners.

**Limitations of Extant Research**

Findings derived from scientific analysis of talk and political talk radio are invaluable. These studies represent a great deal of what we know about CPTR and PPTR. However, there are serious limitations to these studies, including:

- A reliance on quantitative, survey-based approaches that place peoples’ experiences of CPTR and PPTR before an examination of the phenomena as a thing in itself;
- Insufficient data and analyses limited to a single program or small amounts of transcript data;
- Failure to analyze conservative and progressive programs, comparatively;
- Quantitative and qualitative methods that parse political talk radio data into small, decontextualized units;
- Use of data codes derived from existing studies and theories and not grounded in an examination of the programs themselves;
- A focus on establishing effects and correlations, disregarding the important work to be done in describing social processes at work in political talk radio, e.g. meaning-making.
Existing studies of talk and political talk radio have pried open some of the puzzles related to listenership, rhetoric, and effect. Unfortunately, these empirical studies, largely quantitative, to a greater or lesser extent overlook the practical or pragmatic aspects of CPTR: why does CPTR exist as it does in its present form? This study systematically addresses these limitations in a qualitative, comparative analysis of 14 Conservative and Progressive Political Talk Radio hosts – nearly 630 hours of broadcasts – using discourse and analytic induction methods that preserve the narrative integrity of the data to explore processes of social reality construction and meaning-making.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework that guides this analysis of Conservative Political Talk Radio. Chapter 5 presents a review of social constructionist, social interactionist, narrative, discourse, and framing theory. These theories ground the approach to methods, analysis, and interpretation of study findings in Chapter 7, 8, and 9.
CHAPTER 5
SELF, SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

Freedom Czars activate! You ready? Time to stand-up and fight for your country. You’re not going to recognize this country; you won’t have anything but stories to tell your children about how America used to be if you don’t stand-up and get involved. Get engaged!

—Laura Ingraham
The Laura Ingraham Show

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge and meaning making (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2003; Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010; Lock & Strong, 2010).

Principally, social constructionism stands for the idea that all meaning resides in the consciousness of human beings. There is no objective truth or understanding that attaches to objects and experiences; at least no truth that is knowable through purely human means. While there is a material reality that exists independent of human consciousness, it is ultimately unknowable because human perception is limited by human physiology and cognitive abilities (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2003; Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010; Lock & Strong, 2010).

Human beings act toward objects, and each other, pragmatically; that is, based on perceived utility, habit, and common understanding (Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010; Mead, 1934). What humans know, is what they perceive; and what humans perceive is shaped by a host of factors – social interaction, emotion, culture, (dis)ability, context, and history (to name only a few factors). As such, human beings possess a very specific kind of knowledge about the social and material world: meaning or sense-making knowledge, built-up through experience (Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010).

While humans’ perceptions of the world converge such that most people feel they occupy a complex, but unitary, reality; it is more accurate to say that reality is multiple
and partial – individual’s perceived realities approximate one another, but are never an exact match. By exploring the dynamic processes that generate meaning sociologists are better able to understand how reality is ‘built-up’ or socially constructed (Collins, 2000a, 2007; Du Bois, 1903/1989; Smith, 1990). This is the work to which social constructionism is dedicated.

**Tenets of Social Constructionism**

The theoretical assumptions of social constructionism make it an ideal theoretical framework for this study. Social construction theory has informed and guided data analysis and interpretation and comprised the scaffolding upon which a substantive theory of CPTR reality construction and meaning-making were built. It is important, then, to define the main tenets of social constructionism. I have combined ideas from several social constructionist theorists (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2003; Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010; Lock & Strong, 2010); also, woven throughout and grounding this discussion, are the ideas of sociolinguist John P. Gee (1986, 1991, 1999, 2011). I include Gee to link social constructionism to a theory of language and language use; a connection I argue is implicit to constructionist theory. The reader will only get a taste of Gee’s (1986, 1991, 1999, 2011) work in Chapter 5; in my estimation, the strength of Gee’s scholarship lies in its translation of a theory of language and language use into a method of data analysis and interpretation. In Chapter 6 I fully explicate the methodological contributions of Gee to this study. The following sections briefly outline the theoretical foundations of social constructionism.

**Social Reality Construction is an Ongoing Process**

Reality is constructed and enacted through “language-in-use” (Gee 1986, 1991, 1999, 2011) that is, through social interactions in everyday life that communicate a
commonsense understanding of the social and material world. Gee (2011) refers to this as the “saying” function of language; human beings essentially speak their worlds into being.

Words, spoken or written, are symbolic representations of “conceptualized things, actions, occurrences, qualities, or relationships” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 28). Every conceptualization – complex or simple - is composed of symbols, and every symbol signifies meaning (Hertzler, 1965). According to Hertzler (1965):

Symbols make possible, within the group using them, a “universe of discourse.” Their significance, their sole raison d’être, depends upon their use as a media of exchange of knowledge, wishes, desires, and expressional urges . . . they are the instrumentalities whereby men [sic] codify experience, or create a “map” of the territory of experience. Their utility depends upon the fact that all group members are conditioned to react more or less uniformly to them (p. 29).

Symbol systems have rules and conventions; without rules and conventions the symbol system would be useless for establishing intersubjective or mutual understanding.

Philosophers of language and linguists have developed taxonomies that parse language into its constitutive parts. These various taxonomies converge on five elements that describe not only the structure but the rules and conventions that govern language as a symbol system (Hertzler, 1965, p. 75 - 91):

1. Phonology and Morphology: organization of units of sound into meaning carrying units or words;

2. Syntax and Grammar: the ordering, relation, and positioning of words into meaningful, standardized, phrases, clauses, and sentences;

3. Vocabulary, Lexicon, or Dictionary; the individual and contextual meaning of words;

4. Logics: the form of reasoning recognized by the language community that allows receivers of a communication to follow the thoughts of the sender; the use of language to establish facts, reality, or truth;
5. Semantics: meaning, abstractions “conceptions, categorizations, and interpretations” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 91) of language based on shared understandings within a language community.

None of these elements of language is static; however, given that language is foundational to all communication and social interaction, changes happen very slowly. Historical traces of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, logics, and semantics from the past are present in each new generation of language users. At the same time, innovations are constantly being introduced and incorporated into language.

Coming to grips with the structure and use of language is the first step in understanding a language community. In the present research, the elements of the taxonomy of language are reflected in the analyses. Phonology, morphology, and syntax are important in identifying and understanding the unique contextual cues that shape language meaning; these elements point to ways users subvert or resist traditional meanings, as well as how language constrains communication. Vocabulary, logics, and semantics exemplify, most clearly, the thoughts, experiences, and conceptualizations of a language community and therefore lie at the heart of this analysis of Conservative Political Talk Radio’s constructions of social reality.

Social constructionism holds that there is no objective reality that humans can know with their ordinary senses; meanings, truths, and knowledge are derived from experience and are thus relative - not universal - even when they reflect the perceptions and understanding of all or most people. Reality construction is an ongoing process – not a once and for all outcome. For example, many things we take as real or essential characteristics of people - like race, gender, sexuality, or class - are better understood as processes or ongoing achievements, accomplished and maintained via social
interactions in which actors are made accountable to audiences for the performance of, for example, White American race, femininity, heterosexuality or working-class status (Deutsch, 2007; Messner, 2000; Messerschmidt, 2009; Nagel, 2003; Smith, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009).

The processes of social reality construction and maintenance are largely invisible and preconscious; reality is taken-for-granted or hegemonic, and so deeply embedded in human consciousness that it takes special effort to distinguish its structure and content. However, processes of reality construction and maintenance become almost immediately visible when an individual is thrust into social interactions and contexts that are even slightly divergent from those to which he or she has become accustomed. One can recover aspects of reality construction by “bracketing” or calling out aspects of a situation, exercising personal reflexivity about the commonplace, and by problematizing, or “making strange,” ordinary, taken-for-granted experience (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

**The Dynamic Tension between Selves and Social Interaction**

In addition to a socially constructed reality, selves, groups, and societies emerge out of social interactions – moment by moment and over long stretches of time (Marx & Engels, 1845). This is not to say that social interaction obviates individual agency (Blumer, 1986). While social interaction constrains and enables selves and actions, it does not determine them (Marx & Engels, 1845). Instability, choice, and change along numerous trajectories is ever-present, making selves, groups, societies, and the realities they construct, contingent and prone to fracture always (Gee 1986, 1991, 1999, 2011). Gee (2011) refers to this tension as the “being” function of language; language is
used to summon, validate, and perform identity (i.e., being recognized as a kind of self) as well as establish relationships and perform social interactions.

Language constructs worldview; indeed, language constructs social reality.

According to Hertzler (1965):

Any language as a “going concern” (as it functions at any given time) is a powerful determinant of what its speaker perceives and categorize, how they think, what they think about among myriad possibilities, and what is important and valuable and real for them (p. 116-117)

Each language is for each speaker a sort of ready-made set of spectacles whereby they see the world, and a ready-made set of formulae whereby they state and interpret and live with what they see (p. 119).

To say that language constructs social reality is to ground analysis of language and language use in the following assumptions (Herztler, 1965, p. 125-134):

- To know a people, you need to know something of their language and what it means to them;
- The meanings of words and phrases are dependent upon the social and behavioral functions they perform;
- A change of language in an individual or a group is a change of world stance;
- Language habits and traditions have a constraining effect on thought and the range of perspectives;
- Translation is a serious problem that arises from differences in experiences and history that result in differences in conceptual and semantic worlds.

Language reflects every day, ongoing life within a language community, and is an expression of community identity. Hertzler (1965) argues that, “In the speech community, intimate and continuous contact among members produces a common usage of linguistic forms and shared speech habits” (p. 33). That is, members of a language community speak from an identifiable standpoint. However, uniformity across all speakers of a given language is unusual, as members of language communities
have different experiences, meanings, and conceptualizations that shape language forms, use, and content.

Within a language community there are subgroups that manifest, for example, along political, cultural, class, racial, gender, sexuality, or professional lines. These subgroups can be large or small, dominate or marginal, cross geographic boundaries or be highly localized, and exercise different levels of influence over what is considered standard language usage, sophistication, or facility with communication. Differences among language subgroups in the application of language rules and conventions can impede understanding. This breakdown in communication is not attributable to differences in language; rather, miscommunication emerges from differences in experiences, meaning-making, and standpoint that serve as a backdrop to common language usage.

Not only does language serve important collective meaning- or sense-making functions, it also plays a role in identity formation. First, language makes one knowable or known as a certain kind of person; that is, language creates subjects and subjectivities. Selves emerge through action and interaction that would be impossible without language (Hertzler, 1965, p. 395-396). In this way, language shapes individual meaning-making about the world, others, and self. According to Hertzler (1965):

The linguistic behavior of the individual is affected by, varies with, and serves as important evidence of his own peculiar personality characteristics, his early and later socialization, his significant group membership and identifications, his social roles and statuses, and others among his social circumstances. When a man [sic] speaks, he is verbalizing a portion of the subjective and objective schematic framework within which he orders his life; he is translating into words his individual propulsions, his innate and acquired abilities, his sociocultural patterns and reactions" (p. 406-407).
Second, language supplies cognitive maps for meaning- and sense-making. By providing individuals with “frames or guides for perception” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 394), language socializes people to the demands of social situations and contexts and facilitates social interaction within them. Language also situates individuals temporally, within an historical period, with all its attendant rules, beliefs, and values. Hertzler (1965, p. 401) concludes, “In general, it is only through language that the individual can live with other people, do their bidding, influence them to do his [sic] bidding and engage in teamwork with them.”

Third, language constrains and facilitates action. Language is used in social interaction with others to “direct and manipulate” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 400) social action. Namely language is used to shame or reward people for their accountability to the rules, values, and expectations that govern social interaction. Language is how we communicate to others the social roles we value. According to Hertzler (1965), through language we learn to “favor actions valued by the community” (p. 400) to which we belong and disapprove of those that do not. From language, we place people in status categories; language then reflects and enforces social order.

Social constructionism holds that reality is an ongoing social construction created in and through social relational contexts and interactions; reality is a contingent (i.e., fluid, always in the making), not a determined, production to which taken-for-granted (common-sense) rules apply. Failure to abide by the rules and expectations of a given social context or interaction leads to misrecognition of the “definition of the situation” which can result in responses from others, groups, and institutions that range from

To speak of identity from a social constructionist perspective is to locate socially situated performances - fluid and shifting subjectivities that inform action in given contexts (Gee 2011). Rather than fixed or stable aspects of personality, identity can be thought of as the self in relationship to others. Human beings are agentic and self-actualizing; however, while humans are free to act in myriad ways, they are not free to do anything they please (Gee 1986, 1991, 1999, 2011; Marx & Engels, 1845); a socially constructed reality both enables and constrains human action. The same can be said for group, society, and global actions; each is constrained and enabled - but not determined - by an authoritative, socially constructed reality.

**The Linguistic Bases of the Social Order**

Language is action (Gee 1986, 1991, 1999, 2011; Hertzler, 1965; Searle, 1971) that generates and/or undermines social order. Gee (2011) calls this the “doing” task of language. Human beings use language to create, set in motion, and legitimate social practices and the political economy of the social order (i.e., how and why tangible and intangible “social goods” (“anything a person or group in a society wants or values,” (Gee, 2011, p. 211) are distributed). To understand social practices and the social order, it is critical that we examine language.

Language not only facilitates social action; language is social action. Language is an ongoing, active social process. To say that language is social action is to say that it is a tool used to achieve goals (Searle, 1971; Weber, 1978; Parsons, 1951). As such, language is a dynamic component of the social milieu that needs to be accounted for. It is vital to appreciate the unique characteristics of language as social act. In the most
general sense, language is the cause of social (inter)action, social formations, and social order. In a subjective sense, language is intentional action.

How is language discernible as action? Through language, people, “identify, objectify, describe, standardize, classify, and universalize” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 39) personal experience and thereby construct knowledge upon which social reality comes to be based in a commonsensical or taken-for-granted way. Language, Hertzler (1965) explains, provides a means:

. . . for locating precisely given kinds of entities, conditions, events, qualities among the infinite variety of [experiences]; separating them from each other, sorting them, and placing them within a given compartment of knowledge, so that they can be distinctively differentiated, comprehended, and utilized. A language may, in fact, be thought of as a language community’s system of introducing and maintaining order in its complex of experience, by codification and classification of its “realities” of existence (p. 40).

Each language community has its own ways of achieving this through distinctive and mundane “linguistic habits” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 41).

Language shapes perception. Language is how human beings perceive reality and communicate that reality to others – language is a way to develop a mental picture of experience. “Brains think with words” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 42-43) and “thinking is never more precise, complex or extensive than the language of the thinker” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 43). Language creates communities of like-minded thinkers. Language is how human beings socially construct facts by using words and concepts to make intangible experiences into things in themselves with particular attributes. Therefore, “The language of a people is the most complete “map” of all that they have factualized. Its words represent, locate, and, in some measure, explain their available and known life-facts” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 46).
Language constrains and facilitates creative thinking including “new potentialities and constructions” (Hertzler, 1965, p. 48); language allows for the manipulation of realities past, present, and future. Reality constructions are sent and received, over time, through language; it is how generations or cultures converse even when they are far removed in time and space. In this way, too, human beings build on the experiences and knowledge of their forebears.

Lastly, language allows us to experience those things that transcend human experience of the social and material worlds. Language facilitates this through abstract, “ethical, aesthetic, evaluational, teleological, spiritual, and supernatural” thought.

According to Hertzler (1965, p. 55):

> With language, we can reason about conduct and build a body of moral principles; we can discuss “causation” and possible “effect” . . . we can reason about the superhuman, the nature of deity, the hereafter and the eternal, and we can develop religious tenets and beliefs; we can develop and consider purposes and remote goals, and can imaginatively contrive programs and plans for their future achievement – all this, quite apart from any actual events (p. 55).

The “doing” work of language is complex and quite often imperceptible in speech. What we hear in ordinary conversation and in the media - including political talk radio – is not normally understood as action. Exploring language as social action requires that we shift gears and adjust our understanding of language to consider how it is “packaged” for consumption and what is meant to be achieved.

In the next section I discuss how stories and storytelling extend the “saying,” “being,” and “doing” work of language (Gee, 2011), such that a shared social construction of reality is achieved using conventional, yet powerful, narratives.

Social constructionism holds that social order emerges from language. Rules and expectations communicated through language form the bases or logics of any social
order (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2003; Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010; Lock & Strong, 2010). Language is, always and in all contexts, fragile, incomplete, and open to unlimited interpretations and challenges. The strength of language is its plasticity, omnipresence, relative stability over time, and its efficient compression of complex social meanings (Gee 1986, 1991, 1999, 2011). Human beings build and enact meaning using language which serves them in their interactions with the social and material world. Through language the meanings we attach to objects, people, experiences, and actions become the thing itself: reified, taken-for-granted, real (Gee 1986, 1991, 1999, 2011). Through close analyses of language, social constructionists deconstruct or “unpack” socially situated meaning-making processes that comprise slices of the social order on levels as ‘local’ as face-to-face conversations to those as ‘global’ as mass-mediated messages.

These three basic tenets of social constructionism explain the processes of reality construction: the “saying-” (content), “being-” (identity and relationship), and “doing-” (action) work of language in building, enacting, and maintaining a socially constructed reality (Gee 2011).

In the next section I identify two additional language processes that create, sustain, and perpetuate a socially constructed reality:

1. Narrative: stories that integrate characters, plots, metaphors, myth, and imagery recognized by audiences (Gee, 2011), to explain, persuade, legitimize, authorize, and/or sanction meaning or sense-making; and,

2. Discourse: a mélange of language and other “stuff” (Gee, 2011) that invoke affective (emotions, beliefs, values) and experiential dimensions of being in the world, such that a ready-made frame is created through which to understand and support a particular “definition of the situation” (i.e., a socially constructed reality) (Gee 2011; Goffman, 1959).
I make the argument that a careful analysis of language, narratives, and discourse uncovers latent or taken-for-granted meaning and sense making. By systematically examining and comparing Conservative and Progressive Political Talk Radio language, narratives, and discourses I can deconstruct the special features of a socially constructed reality. To use Gee's (2011) schema, this exploration of the processes through which CPTR builds and enacts reality will assist in understanding conservative “saying,” “being,” and “doing.”

Narrative

What is Narrative? What Isn’t!

According to Barthes (1977, p. 79), “Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society.” The ubiquity of narrative is perhaps the source of its many definitions. Scholars in diverse disciplines, like the fabled six blind men and the elephant, define narrative based on the distinctive characteristics that they are most in touch with. Definitions of narratives can be either very broad or very narrow. Narratives have been likened to ordinary stories, and set apart as a special category of story (Feldman, Skolberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004; Labov, 1997; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Sandelowski, 1991). Some researchers have suggested that narratives are equivalent to conversations or small ‘d’ discourse (Polkinghorne,1988;1995); others describe narrative as akin to culturally prescribed way of interacting and framing reality, or big ‘D’ Discourse (Gee, 1991, 2011).

Some researchers stress the creative, plot-driven, or fictive aspects of narrative. Smith (2000, p. 328) defines narratives as “oral, written or filmed account[s] of events told to others or to oneself . . . used to refer to accounts of personal experiences, or the experiences of others, or fictional accounts.” Alternatively, Polkinghorne (1988, 1995)
designates all prose as narrative, excepting closed-ended or short answers given during an interview or conversation. Sandelowski (1991, p. 162) opines, “Narratives assumes many forms. They are heard, seen and read; they are told, performed, painted, sculpted and written.” Additionally, researchers have argued that thematic and temporal elements distinguish narratives from non-narratives (Czarniawska, 2004; Labov, 1997; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Feldman, et al., 2004; Mishler, 1991, 1995; Sandelowski, 1991). There are no standard definitions of narrative. What one is left with then is this: narratives are, what narrative do.

Narratives are a social achievement intended to bring about intersubjective understanding (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). While the ‘how’ (i.e., the form and structure of the telling) and ‘what’ (i.e., its content) of narrative deeply affect the communication of meaning and sense-making, it is the ‘why’ of narrative that distinguishes it from others kinds of accounts (Feldman et al., 2004). Specifically: Why was the story told, by this person, in this way, about these things, at this time and in this place? Critically, the ‘why’ of narrative form, structure, and content can only be comprehended within a much broader understanding of the situated, interactional, institutional, structural, and historical features of the ‘scene’ within which a story is produced (Feldman et al., 2004).

In this study, I take a constructionist approach to narrative (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Narratives are defined and identified, not by a checklist of preconceived criteria, but by the roles narrative serve. In a general sense, the answer to the ‘why’ of narrative is this: to bind together disparate facts into a meaningful whole that allows for comprehensibility and sharing. Sandelowski (1991, p. 163) agrees with using a
functional definition of narrative and argues that narratives should be identified by their capacity to bring about order:

In telling, events are selected and then given cohesion, meaning and direction; they are made to flow and are given a sense of linearity and even inevitability . . . The mind is put to rest by the illusion of sequence and order, the appearance of causality and the look of necessity.

The present study, therefore, charts a wide course around definitional debates on narrative. All language use is storied, in whole or in part reflecting familiar and significant constructions of social reality for the speaker. Focus then shifts from parsing narratives from non-narratives, to the forms and functions of situated talk. Taking my lead from Sandelowski (1991), any communications that are positioned to explain, persuade, legitimize, authorize, or sanction meaning- and/or sense-making are considered narratives (or, more prosaically, stories). Defined in this way, narrative retains an emergent quality, grounded in processes of human social interaction and individual experience. As such the features of narrative can be explored to induce a particular social construction of reality or set of meanings.

**Narrative ‘Being’: Stories and Storytelling Grounded in Experience**

Though narratives differ widely in structure, content, and form, they appear, ultimately, to be tools for making sense of experience - past, present, and perceived future (Bruner, 1990; Gee 1986; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Rodriguez, 2002). Experience describes that aspect of human life that is at once omnipresent and unseen; the subject matter of innumerable scholarly, literary, and artistic texts and yet utterly inexpressible. For founding American pragmatist John Dewey, experience is transactional and emerges out of an ongoing stream of interaction between individual human
consciousness and the social and material world (Dewey, 1922; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

In describing what they call a “pragmatic ontology of experience,” Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 44) develop a social constructionist theory of narrative and narrative inquiry that helps us to understand the role narratives serve, how they are deployed, and how scientists might approach studying them. They write:

Framed within this view of experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, and writing and interpreting texts (pp. 42-43).

Narratives are inherently changeable, situated, and context-dependent (Rodriguez, 2002). Stories capture an individual's view of the past, present, and future at the time of the telling and are a joint production of both speaker(s) and listener(s) (Bailey, 1996; Ricoeur, 1981; Riessman, 1993, 2008; Sandelowski, 1991; Williams, 1984). Too, narratives are also always incomplete. The unfinished feature of narratives gives them both vitality and persuasiveness. According to Rodriguez (2002, p. 5),

. . . the incomplete nature of narratives . . . makes continually for new experiences, meanings and understandings. Compelling narratives assume that the world is fecund. [Narratives] never attempt to mirror the objective world.

Rodriguez (2002) argues that what should concern researchers about narratives is not how closely they align with the truth, but rather “the discursive, communicative, and performative practices that make some narratives more compelling than others, and how these practices are promoted” (p. 3). Narratives are profoundly a matter of perspective and are not, nor could they ever be, a reflection of big-T truth (Bailey, 1996;
Feldman, et al., 2004; Reissman, 1993). Truth is emergent in that it is a relational construct that materializes out of being – identity and relationship - in the world (Rodriguez, 2002).

Writing about patient accounts of chronic arthritis, Williams (1984, p. 193) notes that these “narrative reconstructions [are] attempts to account for and repair breaks in the social order,” part of a general “imaginative enterprise” (p. 174) that people use to make sense of their lives as lived, particularly when they perceive a disruption in their taken-for-granted world. Bailey (1996, p. 187) concludes that, “It is the reconstruction of meaning, not truth, that the researcher wishes to understand and then reinterpret theoretically.” Fundamentally, narratives and narrative inquiry are interpretive; interpretation is concerned with meaning, not truth.

In narratives, truth is socially constructed and negotiated between speakers and listeners (Williams, 1984). In other words, truth is an attribute speakers and listeners overlay onto narratives; therefore, narrative can be said to be truthful or true (i.e., persuasive or convincing) if the story makes sense and is consistent with similar stories and past experiences. A constructionist view of narrative sees all truths as social constructions; truth does not correspond to the relation of facts to an objective world ‘out there.’ At a minimum, narratives need only be internally consistent and useful in everyday life to be taken as true. Distinguishing narratives from truth Sandelowski (1991, p. 164-165) writes:

Stories typically reflect a coherence (as opposed to correspondence) theory of truth in that the narrator strives for narrative probability – a story that makes sense; narrative fidelity – a story consistent with past experiences or other stories; aesthetic finality – a story with satisfactory closure and representational appeal. Narrators, in a “remembering moment” strive to achieve the most internally consistent interpretation of the past-in-the-
present, the experienced present and the anticipated-in-the-present future. Tellings are remembrances, retrospections and constructions about the past in a fleeting present moment soon to be past.


Fictions are not opposed to truths in the narrative context, but rather they are truths within the stories that contain them. Narratives are truthful fictions, but fiction is itself linked to interpretation in that all interpretations (even scientific explanation) involves human fabrication; the making out of what happened and the making up of what something means.

Narratives then, express a particular version of self, social reality, and lived experience that the story narrator wishes to convey and propose as truth. Narratives construct truth (and falsehood) not out of whole cloth but based on the intricacies of social interaction within and between people, communities, cultures, and contexts. Chase (2005, p. 657), notes that narratives are “socially situated interactive performances produced for a particular setting, audience and purpose,” a “mode of thought” (p. 656) given to particular social functions (p. 655). Narratives are always perspectival, highlighting aspects of events, experience, and social structure that stand out to the speaker as significant and worth telling. What the narrative researcher is charged with doing is understanding “how experience is endowed with meaning,” not with measuring the validity or reliability of narrative accounts (Sandelowski, 1991).

**Narrative Inquiry Methods**

Narrative inquiry is the study of human experience and represents a significant turn in the social sciences away from explanation (e.g., what is the truth about factor X) to interpretation (e.g., what does factor x mean) (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Dayes, 2007). Narrative inquiry originated in the humanities and was generally called
narratology (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). There are many, many ways to conduct a
narrative inquiry (Feldman et al., 2004; Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 1993, 2008). Narrative
inquiry attends to micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of experience, knitting together the
everyday (e.g., through attention to people’s words and constructed meaning) with
analysis of how self, agency, social interactions, and structure merge (Clandinin &
Rosiek, 2007; Feldman, et al., 2004; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 1993).

First is a move away from notions of objectivity; understanding (co-)constructed micro,
meso, and macro situated meaning is the primary concern of narrative inquiry, not the
discovery of universal laws or transhistorical truths that exist independent of human
subjectivity and contingent action (Rodriguez, 2002).

Second, narrative inquiry emerges from a social constructionist understanding of
human agency that conceives of speech as action or doing in the world; behavior is not
the sole equivalent of action. Humans are “fundamentally languaged beings”
(Rodriguez, 2002, p. 2) and “language is experiential rather than merely
representational” (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 5). Hence, all forms of language and language
use - communication - is active, purposeful, and not merely the passive application of
signs to an objectively real social and material world.

Third, narrative inquiry privileges knowledge of the particular over the general; this
is not to say that narrative research is not concerned with generalizing. The difference
lies in the goals behind the research; while positivist scientists seek generalizable
findings to predict human action, narrative generalizability is directed toward enhancing
our understanding of the “rhetorical basis” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 24) of human
meaning- and sense-making. Narrative inquiry provides a framework for understanding how people construct their view of society, decide among actions, and interact with others.

Fourth, narrative inquiry embraces stories as a legitimate form of knowing and an authoritative foundation of knowledge. Narratives are contextualized knowledge; narratives provide people with guidance and reinforcement for their actions, beliefs, and values from within a community of people “who wish to live in accordance with the narrative. Together, the narrative (or narratives) and community provide a rich context in which claims about the world can be evaluated” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 27).

Narrative, and the work of the narrative inquirer, are evidence that truth and reality are relative and grounded in non-objective ways of knowing.

Rodriguez (2002) argues that narrative inquiry must be seen as more than a method. Narrative researchers must embrace an understanding of narrative that reflects its unique epistemological, ontological, and axiological dimensions. The mission of narrative researchers is multilayered and complex:

In addition to knowing how different narratives shape and constitute us, we also need to know how different discursive, communicative, and performative practices recursively promote or undercut the evolution of different narratives, how different narratives are resisted, contested, and co-opted, and how different narratives bear on the human condition and the condition of the world (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 2).

Sandelowski’s (1991) adds that, “narrative analyses reveal the discontinuities between story and experience” (p. 162). Accordingly, as Bruner (1984) suggests, narrative researchers must be able to bring to the surface differences between: 1) events as lived (i.e., raw data that inform narrative – the ‘what’ question); 2) events as interpreted (e.g., the use of symbols, metaphors, vocabularies, cognitions, emotions, and other aspects...
of sense-making - the ‘how’ question); and, 3) events as storied (emergent, narrative accounts embedded in lived experience – the ‘why’ question). Comparisons made at these three levels of experience are how processes of meaning- and sense-making become less obscure.

Narrative inquiry can be daunting, requiring humility and patience from the researcher. Not only are narratives impossible to define without a focus on their function in the lives of human beings, narrative inquiry is a partial, co-constructed interpretative act, derived as much from the experiences and insights of the observed, as the observer. Narratives and narrative inquiries are both “truthful fictions” (Sandelowski, 1991) whose persuasiveness derives not from ironclad findings supported by sophisticated statistics, but rather from the selective perception and interpretation of socially constructed ‘facts’ (Sandelowski, 1991). Despite their fragility and tentativeness, narratives and narrative inquiries provide deep insight into the unseen and taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life that are the very ground of individual and social being.

**Defining Narrative and Discourse**

Not only is narrative important in itself; narrative provides insight into what Gee (2011) calls “Big D discourse,” that is, “language together with other ‘stuff’ that isn’t language,” (p. 201) employed to enact a recognizable being, identity, or reality for self and others. Narrative inquiry allows us to “focus on discourse: on the tellings themselves and the devices individuals use to make meaning in stories” (Sandelowski 1991, p. 162). Narratives serve Discourse by encoding four critical social processes that (re)produce a hegemonic or taken-for-granted social reality (Sandelowski, 1991). These social processes are:
• Cognitive: narratives encode causal meaning-making; helping people to explain their own and other's actions.

• Historical: narratives set out markers or “retrospective renderings” of experience that situate individuals in a comprehensible social world.

• Moral: narratives frame behaviors, beliefs, values, and attitudes that legitimate or authorize identity and social actions.

• Political: narratives and counter-narratives (re)construct selves, agency, and social action to support or contest taken-for-granted meanings.

Because narratives are, “communal or cultural products with their forms often constrained by the narrative storylines available to communicate them” (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 163), they reveal what people’s taken-for-granted expectations are of the social world. Narratives are especially rich and instructive when they are drawn from circumstances where individuals have experienced some sort of breach in social expectations (Williams, 1984). Gee writes, “narrative is the way we make deep sense of problems that bother us” (Gee, 2011, p. 113); this important function of narrative is both constrained and facilitated through “Big D discourse” - “language together with other ‘stuff’ that isn’t language” (Gee, 2011, p. 201) that helps us to frame social reality. The last section of Chapter 5 will focus on Discourse.

**Defining Discourse**

**Through a Glass Darkly: The Significance of Discourse**

As noted above, this study adopts Gee’s definition of big ‘D’ discourse. Discourse is language and “other stuff” that is not language (culture is a good shorthand way to define this “other stuff”). Discourse allows human beings to construct, maintain, and make recognizable a particular social reality (Gee, 2011). To review: Language enables “saying,” speaking social reality into existence. Narrative integrates individual “being,” or storied experience (i.e., identity) into the woof and weave of the social fabric – the
authoritative social reality. Discourse, through language and the artifacts of culture, (e.g., symbols, dress, use of space, social etiquette, gender, race, and class performances), is an interpretive lens that makes individual “saying” and “being” recognizable as particular kinds of performances that support or frame a taken-for-granted social reality. Socially constructed reality is enacted through saying, being, and doing – language (e.g., words), narratives (e.g., stories that construct identity), and discourses (e.g., action or performances that undergird the social order) – these are not totally distinct or separate, but overlapping, reinforcing, and complementary (Gee, 2011).

Like narrative, discourse is a contentious and ambiguous term, used in myriad ways across multiple disciplines. Linguists were the first scholars to use the term discourse to reference language and speech acts, particularly those occurring in face-to-face conversations (Gee, 2011). These early linguists were primarily concerned with the structure of language, not with its meaning; meaning was considered transparent (Hertzler, 1965; Gee, 2011).

The work of Michel Foucault (1965, 1970, 1972, 1977, 1978) represented a significant departure from a traditional linguistics approach to discourse. Instead of focusing on the structure of speech, Foucault deconstructed the social meaning of language. For Foucault, the meaning of language resided in what language accomplished during human social interaction, historically – not just microsocially within the context of conversation. Foucault’s theory of discourse has been widely adopted in sociology (Allan, 2006; Lock & Strong, 2010).
Foucault approach to discourse highlights the interconnections between language, action, and social structure (Foucault, 1965, 1970, 1972, 1977, 1978). Discourse, Foucault argues, is both a social framework and a process; an institutionalized way of thinking that imparts meaning and helps people, in their everyday interactions, make sense of the world. Discourse is also a process through which knowledge, truth, and reality are socially constructed and sustained. Texts (of various forms) are not discourse for Foucault; texts are rather a means through which discourse does its work.

Through such things as language, ideas, ideologies, attitudes, material creations, actions, and interactions, discourse produces and reproduces ‘reality.’ (Allan, 2006; Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010; Schwandt, 1999). Discourse tell us what is true and what is not, and sets the boundaries of what can and cannot be thought about things in the world (Allan, 2006; Foucault, 1965, 1970, 1972, 1977, 1978). Discourse is a “world maker” (Allan, 2006); through discourse individual, group, and social identities are constructed and anchored within complex networks of social relations and structures. Discourse builds-up, stands-in for, defines and normalizes meanings, interpretations, and explanations of reality, designating some meanings as more salient, accepted, and valued than others. Discourse constrains how we think and what we think about others and the social and material world.

Numerous theorists have built-on and expanded Foucault’s conception of discourse. Postmodernist and feminist sociologists emphasize the multiple, fragmentary, partial, situated (i.e., standpoint), time-, and place-bound features of discourse (Bell, 1992; Bourdieu, 1980; Collins, 2000a; Crenshaw, 1989; Smith, 1990). Other researchers highlight the interpersonal, organizational, and social communicative
aspects of discourse (Giddens, 1984; Martin, 2003, 2004; O'Leary, 2007; Ridgeway, 2009; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Risman, 2004). Further still, convincing theoretical linkages have been worked out that illustrate how discourse works invisibly to support or reject meanings and understandings that come to be constitutive of supposed objective, political, or scientific knowledge of the world (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Harding, 2006; Lorber, 2008; Omi & Winant, 1994).

**Discourse and Power**

By far, Foucault's most important contribution to our understanding of the workings of discourse are the connections he drew between discourse, knowledge, and power (Foucault, 1965, 1970, 1972, 1977, 1978). In his research, Foucault demonstrates how discourse legitimates, upholds, and regulates power in the guise of knowledge, truth, and reality. According to Foucault, knowledge does not merely translate into power, knowledge and power are one and the same (i.e., knowledge/power), and discourse describes its operation. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 54) write:

> The interdependent relationship between knowledge and power implies that oppression operates, in part, by artificially narrowing the range of what counts as legitimate knowledge.

Thus, through discourse, ideas, actions, and social relations take on meanings (often of a binary or dual quality) that canalize social actions as: natural/pathological, ordered/disordered, real/false, normal/deviant, or truth/lie. Discourse naturalizes a vision of a normative social order through its ability to stand in for what is “real,” thus shaping people’s thoughts, expectations, beliefs, identities, and interactions (van Dijk, 1995). This is not to say that discourse is determinative. Discourse is dynamic, variable, contingent, and embedded in lived contexts and experiences. However, discourse is also constraining.
Sometimes, sustaining a taken-for-granted reality through discourse involves coercion – emotional, cognitive, or physical (DeVault, 2006; Gramsci, 1971). But this is not always the case. Passive compliance is generated through everyday social interaction. MacKinnon (1982) argues that discourse is a “strategy of hegemony” that operates through the creation of agenic, speaking subjects (e.g., people who assume certain identities and apply particular interpretative frames to their experiences) who enact and/or resist their place in taken-for-granted social orders.

Communities or collectivities, too, form around discourse (Foucault, 1972; van Dijk, 1995). Members of discourse communities share an intersubjective understanding of reality akin to a social contract or code of conduct (Mills, 1997, 2007). This intersubjectivity is manifest in vocabularies, language use, ideas, beliefs, ideologies, attitudes, material creations, policies, interactions, and actions.

The rules and practices of a discourse community provide a language with which to think, talk, and share within that community (Allan, 2006). To those within a discourse community, outsiders are a curiosity: unappealing, strange, deviant, pathological, or even frightening. Importantly, discourse - in the guise of taken-for-granted knowledge and understandings of how the world works - informs moral stance, designating what is right and wrong, good and bad, permissible and impermissible to say, be, or do (Allan, 2006; Gee, 2011). Discourse provides us with the ethical justifications for our actions and inactions as choices arise in everyday life. As such, the coercive features of discourse often appear subtle, covert, personal, a matter of choice, and voluntary - not as part of a powerful web of meaning-and sense-making that enforces a hegemonic vision of self, others, and society (Gramsci, 1971; Marx & Engels, 1845).
Discourse and Ideology

Hegemonic or taken-for-granted discourse shapes human thought and action in many diverse ways, both positive and negative. For example, in the West, hegemonic discourse concerning children, constructs them as the property of their parents, producing positive (e.g., guardianship, care, and financial support) and negative (e.g., abuse, neglect, and abandonment) consequences for children, parents, and society. Discourse does not exist in a vacuum, nor is discourse transhistorical; discourse is situated in space and time. Also, discourse operates at the practical level of human need and physical survival; that is, discourse serves, and is in many ways subservient to, the everyday social and material needs of human beings. We see evidence of this in the historical variability of discourses as they merge, overlap, and intersect with other discourses, producing variable and seemingly incongruent social realities (e.g., child labor during the Industrial Revolution versus increasingly extended periods of parental dependence among contemporary young adults during periods of economic downturn).

How is a socially constructed reality repaired in light of disparate outcomes; in other words, how does discourse retain its legitimacy and integrity when there is slippage between people’s understanding of a taken-for-granted or hegemonic social reality and what they experience every day? The concept of ideology helps to explain this.

Critical to the maintenance of oppression and exploitation is making social relations, institutions, and structures appear rational and normative. Marxist theorists assign to ideology this cognitive sleight of hand (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Marx, 1872). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007, p. 47) define ideology as:

A system of thought and practice that give[s] rise to false consciousness in individuals and communities. False consciousness is a condition in which a
person acquires habits of thinking and feeling that prevent him or her from noticing and analyzing the real causes of his or her oppression.

In this research, ideology is understood as a largely negative, outgrowth of hegemonic discourse or taken-for-granted saying, being, and doing. However, there are important differences between discourse and ideology. Discourse is dynamic, processual, and incomplete - it is always in the process of becoming something else - making it vulnerable and open to change; in this sense discourse is socially adaptive, though not always just, fair, or even prosocial. Conversely, in every instance ideology is stagnant, rigid, closed, and resistant to change. Ideology seeks to guarantee a particular construction of reality, often to stack the deck in favor of a desired outcome. Thus, White racial identity (i.e., whiteness) is a discourse; however, racism is an ideology meant to guarantee white supremacy; masculinity is a discourse, however, patriarchy is an ideology meant to guarantee male dominance.

Thinking about the connection between discourse and ideology in this way has important implications for understanding meaning-making processes and the social construction of reality. Firstly, we can expect that as discourses change, related ideologies will become both more visible and more entrenched. Ideology is a justificatory framework that provides a limited and limiting set of organizing or orienting principles with which to understand and interpret experience (i.e., a tool for meaning- and sense-making). Change is constructed as a threat that in turn spurs action.

Secondly, while discourse facilitates the social (again, not always prosocial), ideology bolsters and extends the authority, truth claims, boundaries, values, logics, morals, and ethical stance of a particular, highly-idealized social reality. Ideology goes straight to the heart of its holder’s present concerns and fears, in the process revealing
the cognitive dimensions and coordinative logics of both despised and desired social worlds.

Thirdly, unlike discourses, ideologies are explicitly authoritative; ideologies are identified with The Truth. Yet, the truth claims of ideologies and ideologues do not determine what people will say, be, and do. Rather, ideologies identify and construct social ‘facts’ by distinguishing, typifying, and exemplifying aspects of the social and material world and inviting people to draw their own conclusion using a well-defined, accepted, and recognizable framework. Ideologies invite a constrained form of agency, but agency nonetheless. Ideologues do more than “drink the Kool-Aid,” they wrestle with truths and produce knowledge in a way that can be described as rational, thoughtful, interested, and engaged within the meme.

**Social Movements**

Because discourses are produced and reproduced intersubjectively, they are always changing. Discourses project and reflect, in and across time, complex webs of social relations, institutions, and social structures. Discourses manifest, on the one hand, impressive staying power, and on the other, extreme tentativeness. This is because discourse evolves and responds to changes in the ways human beings think, feel, act, and interact – with each other and the material world (Allan, 2006; Gee, 2011).

For example, present day race, gender, sexuality, and class are informed by historical race, gender, sexuality, and class discourses - not determined by them (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995; Feagin, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2004). There is continuity across time; but there is also considerable rupture. White supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, and exploitative capitalist class relations are not once and for all defined; nor are they here today and gone tomorrow. While race, gender, sexuality, and class discourses are
hegemonic (i.e., perceived as part of the natural order; as objectively right or true) and enduring, it is important to account for both human agency and social change.

**Frame Analysis**

Erving Goffman’s frame analysis offers an interesting perspective on identifying the discourses at work in a given social situation. Derived from social interactionism, frame analysis grapples with understanding how shared meaning emerges in human social interaction. Frame analysis is an examination of the rules of social interaction through analysis of individual, everyday experiences (Denzin & Keller, 1981). The primary goal of frame analysis is discovering how people, in everyday interactions, understand the meaning of the situation they are in (Goffman, 1986).

Frames can be thought of as narratives, or stories individuals rely upon to give situations meaning (Denzin & Keller, 1981, p. 57). Interestingly, Goffman proposes that people come to a situation with existing frames and apply those narratives to the situation to achieve meaning- or sense-making. This is not quite what one would expect. Situations do not drive meaning- or sense-making; socially constructed narrative frames drive meaning. As Benford (1997, p. 410) notes:

> Meaning is problematic; it does not spring from the object of attention into the actor’s head, because objects have no intrinsic meaning. Rather meaning is negotiated, contested, modified, articulated, and rearticulated. In short, meaning is socially constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed.

Frames that predate the situation, give the situation meaning. Subsequently, according to Denzin and Keller (1981), frame analysis is not concerned with examining particular texts (i.e., generated from a situation) for patterns of meaning – the meaning is not in the text. Rather, the goal is to find the “worldviews and larger systems of meaning that underpin” narrative frames and hold them together (Creed, Langstraat, & Scully, 2002,
Applying Goffman’s theses to this research, CPTR is what Goffman would call a “subworld” that “is real after its own fashion” (Goffman, 1986, p. 2). Therefore, analysis of CPTR discourse, narrative, and language, from the perspective of frame analysis, is not so much an examination of what is real, true or not, rather how reality and truth are socially constructed.

While Goffman (1986) was primarily concerned with individual level experiences in the development of frame analysis, other theorists have linked individual cognition and broader cultural forces and created a more macro-level version of frame analysis. Van Gorp (2007) argues that frames are stable, shared, cultural understandings that activate individual-level knowledge in the context of every day experience. Van Gorp (2007) proposes that individuals can (and are) manipulated into applying a particular meaning to a situation, by others (e.g., journalist and others in the media) who evoke a cultural frame:

Because these frames often are unnoticed and implicit, their impact is by stealth. Frames may, in that respect, be regarded as a power mechanism in their own right... a frame is an invitation or an incentive to read a news story in a particular way (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 63).

Van Gorp (2007) argues that frames come in “frame packages” that consist of: word choices, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments, and visual images (p. 63). Frames also have opposing frames or “counterframes” (p. 69). Some frames are more impervious to counterframes than others. Strong frames are those that draw on individual interpretations of experience that are grounded in data or information that seem objectively true.

Van Gorp’s (2007) reading of frame analysis draws heavily on social constructionism. He states:
Within a constructionist view, the potency of frames to influence the public lies in the fact that they are closely linked with familiar cultural frames . . . These micro-macro linkages situate journalists and the members of the audience in a context in which they interact with the larger society and many frame sponsors, and it is in that dynamic process where social reality is produced, reproduced, and transformed (p. 73).

Frame analysis makes an important contribution to an understanding of discourse, narrative, and language and how they operate to structure a shared construction of reality. An issue unaddressed by frame analysis, however, is what might be called the life-cycle of a narrative frame or discourse.

Discourses are not fixed or impenetrable, nor are they ever all-powerful. Rather, discourses are shot-through with contradictions. These contradictions encourage both blind devotion and disruptive forms of innovation and resistance. It is also important to note that discourses are interdependent, reference, and intersect with other (sometimes opposing) discourses. This is a necessary condition for making discourses comprehensible, persuasive, legitimate, and sharable. Examples would be gender discourses where femininity – e.g., being considered ‘a lady’ – is defined in combination with class or citizenship discourses where being a ‘normal’ or ‘average’ American is taken to mean white, heterosexual, Christian, and a native English-speaker.

While discourses become things in themselves through a process of reification (Foucault, 1965, 1970, 1972, 1977, 1978) they are human creations, under human control to tear down or build-up. Discourses are deceptive in how they enforce invisible cognitive frameworks that shape individual, group, and social meaning making, knowledge, identity, and interaction. When discourses are shown to facilitate dysfunctional, negative effects on social relations, human beings possess the means – individual and collective – to free themselves through the adoption of alternative
discourses that revolutionize saying, being, and doing (Gee, 2011; Habermas, 1984). Unfortunately, the more embedded discourses are in social relations and social structures, the harder they are to identify as such and eradicate. Precisely because discourses are taken-for-granted, it seems nonsensical and quixotic to question them. Despite these difficulties, scholars argue that discourses can be made visible and comprehensible (Geertz, 1973; Goffman, 1959; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). One way to bracket taken-for-granted reality is through a close examination of a well-defined discourse community or social movement. Through analyses of social movement language, narrative, and discourse, one can examine the constructed features of social reality.

**Collective Action Frames**

Goffman’s frame analysis has been most widely used to understand social movement framing and its impact on movement activities (Snow, Vliegenthart, & Corrigall-Brown, 2007). Social movement frames and framing are referred to as collective action frames and framing. Collective action frames are “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social organization” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). In the context of social movements, framing can be thought of as both a thing in itself (i.e., social movement frames) and as a process (i.e., social movement framing) through which meaning is produced (Broad, Crawley, & Foley, 2004). While frames are well-studied, far less research has been dedicated to studying the process of framing. However, both frames and the process of framing are discernable in social movement texts (Johnston & Oliver, 2000, p. 63).
Social movements are significant because in social movements people can “publically perform a collective identity” (Hart, 2008, p. 121). Participants in social movements use frames to construct and share meaning, create positive group identity, and empower members (Powell, 2011). Within the society that they are a part of, social movements are “signifying agents,” that produce and maintain meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders (Snow & Byrd, 2007, p. 123). Frames are the ‘signifying work” used by social movements to construct shared meaning (Berbrier, 1998). Just as individuals use frames to define a situation, members of social movements do too.

According to Powell (2011, p. 458): “Frames not only help to construct meaning, they also legitimate those meanings as something that ‘good people like us’ do and feel.” People join social movements because the frames that the social movement deploy, resonant with them as true and relevant to their lives.

Collective action frames and framing are “ongoing accomplishments that are renegotiated and changed through collective interaction and discursive processes” (Hart, 2008, p. 124; Jenness & Broad, 1994). There are three components to or task performed by collective action frames and framing:

- **Diagnostic Framing:** defining something as an issue or problem in need of change and identifying who or what is responsible for it;
- **Prognostic Framing:** defining a solution to a problem and the means for realizing it;
- **Motivational Framing:** explaining how people should act towards an issue or problem and justifying action by providing “vocabularies of motives.”

Each component of collective action frames and framing is variable, may be more or less salient to users, and changes over the life-cycle of the social movement (Snow & Byrd, 2007; Snow, Vliegenthart, & Corrigall-Brown (2007)).
According to Hart (2008), collective action frames are “an identity performance; it signals to one’s self and to others cultural membership and affinities” (p. 126). Collective action frames are nested in the culture; frame analysis of social movements is therefore a cultural analysis of social movements. Nevertheless, while there is a cultural basis to collective action frames, it is important to note that collective action frames can sit outside of the cultural mainstream. Social movement actors can be engaged in actions that either shore-up or disrupt hegemonic meaning- or sense-making (Broad, Crawley, & Foley, 2004). What is most important to understand about collective action frames and the framing process is that they are both social productions that emerge from social interaction, the goal of which is to makes certain actions and ideas “rational or morally imperative” (Gillan, 2008, p. 251). Collective action frames and framing provide an opportunity for group members to perform an identity that signifies membership, commitment to the group, and devotion to a set of values and beliefs.

Ideologies are not the same as collective action frames (Gillan, 2008; Johnston & Oliver, 2000; Snow & Benford, 2000; Snow & Byrd, 2007). Ideologies are relatively static knowledge systems that explain how the world does or should operate. While ideologies are social constructions, they are not cognitive structures that define the situation in the same way that collective action frames do. However, ideologies can be a resource for developing collective action frames (Snow & Benford, 2000).

Snow and Byrd (2007) contend that collective action frames come from neither the culture or ideologies. Rather in Snow and Byrd’s (2007) estimation, collective action frames are, “novel blends of the old and the new, the past and the present” that emerge from a “highly agentic, interactive, discursive process” (p. 130) involving frame
articulation and frame elaboration/amplification. Snow and Byrd (2007) define frame articulation and elaboration/amplification as follows:

- Frame articulation "involves the connection and alignment of events, experience, and strands of moral codes so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling way. Slices of observed and experienced “reality” and moral directives or callings are assembled, collated and packaged" (p. 130).

- Frame elaboration/amplification “involves accenting and highlighting some events, issues, or beliefs as being more important than others. These punctuated or accented elements may function in the service of the articulation process by providing a conceptual handle or peg for linking together various events and issues . . . bringing into sharp relief and symbolizing the larger frame or movement of which it is a part” (p. 130).

Frame articulation and elaboration/amplification both operate within contested social contexts. Social, political, economic, and demographic factors affect the development, deployment, and reception of collective action frames. Benford and Snow (2000, p. 628) identify three broad considerations that social movements must negotiate in their use of collective action frames and in the framing process:

- Political: the availability of institutional, material, and political resources;
- Cultural: the available cultural “toolkits” of meanings, beliefs, values, ideologies, myths, narratives, and practices;
- Demographic: availability and characteristics of audiences.

In addition to these potential obstacles, as with micro-level framing and the framing processes, there are counterframes that challenge collective action frames. Collective action counterframes can come from outside or within the social movement. Outsider counterframes challenge diagnostic and prognostic frames and framing. Insider counterframes contest the overall social reality constructed by social movement actors.
A Note on the Place of Race, Gender, Sexuality and Class

Hosts of and callers to Conservative Political Talk Radio (CPTR) programs have been accused of engaging in communicative practices and propagating political, cultural, social, and economic policies that maintain and extend race, gender, sexuality, and class inequality in the United States and abroad (Barker, 2002; Boyd, 1994; Derych, 2006; Hartmann, 2007; Hofstetter, Barker, Smith, Zari, & Ingrassia, 1999; Hollander, 1996; Jacobs, 1995-1996; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Swain, 1999). Implicit in this critique is the idea that such practices are problematic, because they violate American values, repeat historical abuses, and are not reflective of majority American sentiment. Critics characterize CPTR as not only objectionable, but aberrant, as running counter to the American creed of freedom, justice, and equality.

Criticisms of CPTR based on the thesis that it exists outside of the American mainstream evidence a serious misunderstanding of United States history and underestimate the seductive appeal and deep-seated anxiety associated with race, gender, sexuality, and class-status categories that generate inequality and disparate social outcomes through racism, sexism, homophobia, and class exploitation authorized by a white supremacist, patriarchal, heterosexist, and capitalist social order to which we are all subject – conservative, progressive, or indifferent.

Nevertheless, if the claim were indeed correct, if CPTR did in fact support social inequality, one would expect to find that its narratives and discourse practices are dependent upon and accountable to race, gender, sexuality, and class hierarchies. Specifically, CPTR’s commitment to unequal social relations would be reflected in an ideological stance - what Smith (1990) calls “conceptual practices of power” - founded
on the “coordinative logics” of everyday racist, sexist, homophobic, and classist actions, interactions, institutions, and structure (DeVault, 2006; Marx & Engels, 1845).

Important questions arise from these considerations: Is CPTR reflective of contemporary American race, gender, sexuality, and class relations? Are there historical remnants and contemporary elements of racist, sexist, homophobic, and classist ‘action’ present in CPTR narratives? Are race, gender, sexuality, and class focal points of solidarity and collective social action on CPTR? Does racist, sexist, homophobic, and classist meaning-making contribute to the persuasiveness and credibility of CPTR? How do white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, and capitalism order conservative political talk? How does progressive political talk compare?

This study problematizes the work of CPTR by opening it up to a critical constructionist scrutiny that situates its use of language, narrative, and discourse practices within multilayered and complex contemporary and historical social processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Best, 2008; Crotty, 1998; Harris, 2008; Weinberg, 2008). Consideration of race, gender, sexuality, and class is, of course, vital to that task.

**Status Categories, Action, and Social Structure**

In this study race, gender, sexuality, and class are treated as status categories, reified social constructs that need to be unpacked and examined; race, gender, sexuality, and class are not merely surrogates for biological, embodied, or cultural difference/sameness. It is assumed that racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism are central to the work of (re)producing and sustaining social inequality based on race, gender, sexuality, and class; also, that racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism are furtive. Social inequality today does not always emerge as the result of transparent, centralized, or coordinated action. Rather it is through the mundane innerworkings of
myriad actions - individual, organizational, and institutional - that social structures emerge that authorize race, gender, sexuality, and class as categories of difference/sameness that make a difference (Anderson & Massey, 2001; Berbrier, 2008; Collins, 2000a, 2007; Crawley & Broad, 2008; de Beauvoir, 1953; DuBois, 1903/1989; Essed 1991; Harris, 2006; Harris et al., 1996; Lorber, 2008).

This is not to say that today in the United States race, gender, sexuality, and class are not real – that they make no difference in terms of life experiences, access to resources, or important social outcomes (e.g., health, criminal victimization, imprisonment, or education). Race, gender, sexuality, and class matter precisely because society has decided they matter (i.e., that they are real). To repeat: the continuing significance of race, gender, sexuality, and class is based not on immutable biological, physical, and/or cultural difference/sameness, but rather on the persistence of powerful social constructions (e.g., ways of making sense of the world or ‘reality’) that (re)produce consequences for how we live our everyday lives and relate to one another. Inequalities emerge among and within raced, gendered, sexed, and differentially privileged class groups through social processes - at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels - that bestow benefits or penalties vis-à-vis an authoritative/legitimating race-gender-sexuality-class hierarchy wherein white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, and capitalism are the ordering principles (Acker, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 1996, 2009; Collins, 2000a, 2000b, 2007; Crenshaw, 1989; DuBois, 1903/1989; Ferber, 1998; Leonardo, 2002; McCall, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1994).

The Importance of Intersectionality

In addition to being socially constructed categories, race, gender, sexuality, and class are understood to be interconnected through a “matrix of domination” (Collins,
In this vein, this research explores how racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism jointly operate through language, narratives, and discourses as a complex, interlocking system of oppression that undergirds a shared construction of reality. Particular attention is paid to the hegemonic or taken for granted quality of race-gender-sexuality-class; this is especially important in regards to the ways matrices of domination frame political talk and negotiate meaning- or sense-making when difference/sameness is ambiguous, multilayered, or otherwise challenges ‘common sense,’ taken-for-granted knowledge (e.g., bi- or multi-raciality, gender embodiment, bi-trans- sexuality, and betrayal of class privilege) (Foucault, 1972; Gramsci, 1971).

**Sensitizing Concepts**

Methodologically, race, gender, sexuality, and class are employed in this study as sensitizing concepts through which to critically explore CPTR narrative productions, rhetorical strategies, and discourse practices (Blumer, 1954, 1956). Charmaz (2003, p. 259) defines sensitizing concepts as,

> Ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience; they are embedded in our disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities. Although sensitizing concepts may deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it. We may use sensitizing concepts only as points of departure from which to study the data.

In other words, sensitizing concepts earn their way into an analysis or they are discarded (Charmaz, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). No preconceived (i.e., not grounded in the actual study data) race, gender, sexuality, or class theories will be tested in this analysis. Nor is it assumed that racism, sexism, homophobia, or classism is present in CPTR or PPTR; or that CPTR or PPTR adhere to the logics of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, or capitalism. Rather
the goal is to theorize, in a systematic and grounded way, using the data as a starting point; then compare emergent theoretical propositions to the extant literature (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Though race, gender, sexuality, and class are not things in themselves, in the U.S. each is an important indicator of social status that saturates contemporary political and policy debates, as well as everyday meaning-making (Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 1996, 2009; Collins, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Neckerman & Torche, 2007; New York Times, 2005; Scott, 1997; Zweig, 2004). Recognizing the reified quality of race, gender, sexuality, and class, this study situates CPTR within social, cultural, political, economic, and historical fields of meaning to explore whether and in what ways CPTR language, narratives, and discourses map onto a social order governed by the logics of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia, and/or capitalism (hooks, 1989).

In Chapter 6 I discuss the methodological approach and study methods used in this research.
CHAPTER 6
METHODOLOGY

I fear that Obama will stir up a race war. You want to ask me what I fear? I think Obama will empower the racists in this country and stir up a race war in order to seize absolute power. I believe that’s what he will do. It will not be as overt as you may think, but it’ll be a subtle race war on every level imaginable.

—Michael Savage
The Michael Savage Show

Research Questions

What kind of phenomenon is CPTR? This question will be unpacked through research questions that explore and compare CPTR language, narratives, and discourses as they apply to the historic presidency of Barack Obama. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What is Conservative Political Talk Radio saying to its listeners?
2. How does Conservative Political Talk Radio use language to build and enact: identity (e.g., subjectivity, selves); social groups (e.g., solidarity, otherness); cultures (e.g., values, beliefs); and social institutions (e.g., family, government)?
3. What kind of social order is being (re)produced in Conservative Political Talk Radio?

These research questions will be applied to data from 14 Conservative and Progressive Political Talk Radio programs that air locally and in syndication across the United States.

Data

Data for this study consists of 105 digitally-recorded CPTR broadcasts from 7 conservative hosts (15 broadcasts each; four males: Herman Cain, Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage; and, three females: Tammy Bruce, Monica Crowley, and Laura Ingraham) and a comparison group of 105 Progressive Political Talk Radio
(PPTR) broadcasts from 7 progressive hosts (15 broadcasts each; four males: Alan Colmes, Thom Hartmann, Ed Schultz, Al Sharpton; and, three females: Stephanie Miller, Randi Rhodes, Bev Smith). Broadcasts aired between March 2009 and July 2010. Tables 6-3 to 6-16, at the end of this chapter, list for each host: the dates of each broadcast, the date recorded, the length of the recording, and the source of the recording. In total, data represent approximately 630 hours of political talk radio.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is narrative accounts. Narrative accounts explain, persuade, legitimize, authorize, or sanction meaning- or sense-making. For each broadcast (considered a case), the narrative units of analysis reference contiguous, topically-delimited segments of talk taken-up by hosts, callers, and guests, as well as readings from other media, accompanying music, and/or sound effects included with commentary.

Narrative Transcription

Talk radio is a multilayered, aurally rich, and robust entertainment medium. The most popular programs pack three on-air hours with host monologues and commentary, caller feedback and opinion, guest interviews, and snippets of content from print, television, and online media – not to mention numerous product endorsements, public service announcements, and advertisements. Copious use of sound effects, music, parodies, and aural gags hold broadcasts together thematically, producing a signature aesthetic for each show.

Because talk radio is so aurally complex, transcripts were made for only a small subset (9 broadcasts) of broadcast data that were then used for intensive case study analysis. For the remaining data (201 broadcasts) no transcripts were made of
broadcasts; analyses and coding were performed directly from the audio files of these broadcasts. This method of coding and analysis is like procedures used in film or visual analysis (Clarke, 2005). Discussion of study findings, however, include transcribed exemplars. Important methodological considerations were made to capture the complexity of talk radio in transcribed, textual form.

**Transcription Methods**

Too often qualitative researchers approach transcription uncritically. According to Mishler (1991, p. 259), “transcription is not merely a technical procedure but an interpretive practice.” Mishler (1991) argues that the choice between, “different transcript formats both reflect and reflexively support theoretical aims and interpretations and serve rhetorical functions” (p. 255). Transcripts are both realist and constructed data: realist in the sense that they capture real interactions and speech; constructed in that transcripts and transcription are selective, reflecting – often unselfconsciously – the choices researchers make of what to include or exclude from the research setting (Sandelowski, 1994). Above all, transcripts should not be thought of as neutral, objective, or transparent documents; in diverse ways, transcripts grow out of the researcher’s theoretical framework and specific research interests, questions, and aims (Edwards, 1992; Psathas & Anderson, 1990).

Ways of transcribing talk range along a continuum of linguistic complexity. On one end of the continuum are uncomplicated methods that equate spoken language with text without problematizing the complex relationship between language, meaning, and non-verbal elements of talk. On the other end of the continuum are phenomenological (e.g., in Conversation Analysis) approaches that seek to reconstitute the contexts in which speech is produced and the dynamic, fragmentary, ambiguous
links between language and meaning that are open to countless interpretations (Edwards, 1992; Psathas & Anderson, 1990).

The goals of this study require transcripts of exemplary narrative accounts that fall in the midrange of this continuum. The transcription conventions used in this study balance three important considerations: 1) the need to depict important aural features of the broadcasts; 2) the production of transcribed segments that are readable, but do not undercut the complexity of language; and 3) my own skills and training (i.e., I avoided highly technical linguistic conventions and notations that would require a great deal of time to apply, relative to the value it would add to the analysis and goals of this research) (Edwards, 1992; Psathas & Anderson, 1990).

In the transcribed exemplar narrative segments produced for this study, the overall goal is to re-present the elements of speech (lexical and non-lexical) and sound (sound effects and music) that convey the taken for granted meaning, motivations, and mood of speakers on political talk radio. In addition to speech, transcribed segments contain dysfluencies, including pauses or hesitations, silences, false starts, and non-lexical sounds (e.g., um, ah, eh, breathe intakes, tst-tst, pftt). Changes in tone of voice (e.g., whispered, shouted speech), pace, stress, volume, use of discourse markers (e.g., “you know,” “well,” “so”), interruptions by one speaker of another, abrupt breaks, imitations of speech and speech patterns (e.g., the use of accents, imitations of other speaker’s voices or dialect), laughter and other outbursts (e.g., applause, cheers), as well as descriptions of sound and editing effects (e.g., toilet flush, horse neighing, crowd shouting, crowd applause, edited repetitions to produce a stuttering effect) are also
included. A complete list of transcription conventions and the typographic symbols associated with each appears in Appendix A: Transcription Conventions.

All transcriptions were completed by the author. Narrative exemplars selected for transcription were transcribed using Express Scribe (NCH Software, 2009) transcription software. Express Scribe facilitates the importation of digital .mp3 files and provides all the capabilities of a traditional transcription machine (e.g., reversing, fast forwarding and slowing down playback to allow for ease of transcription) through a computer.

Data Collection Procedures

The following section sets out the procedures for data collections, including the criteria used to select hosts/programs for analysis, exceptions to the inclusion criteria, and how hosts’ political affiliation was derived and confirmed.

Host Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for hosts/programs was firstly to select the top six conservative (3 male and 3 female) and the top six Progressive (3 male and 3 female) Political Talk Radio hosts listed in Talkers Magazine (2009), 2009 Talkers 250, a list of the “most important radio talk show hosts in America” (Talkers Magazine, 2009). Talkers Magazine is a trade publication for talk radio and new media. For inclusion in the Talkers Magazine (2009) 2009 Talkers 250, hosts must have been working in February 2009 on programs that aired on terrestrial, satellite, or internet stations. The editors of Talkers Magazine (2009) describe the selection process for the 2009 Talkers 250 as “subjective with the goal being to create a list reflective of the industry’s diversity and total flavor as well as giving credit where credit is due” (Talkers Magazine, 2009). In addition to including the most high-profile hosts, the editors take into consideration
“courage, effort, impact, longevity, potential, ratings, recognition, revenue, service, talent and uniqueness” (Talkers Magazine, 2009).

The 2009 Talkers 250 ranking is not scientific or even representative of political talk radio in the United States; the subjectivity of the editors’ selection criteria points to some of the constructed features of political talk radio that I will examine in this study. No attempt was made to select hosts/programs based on statistical representativeness as this is antithetical to a constructionist methodology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Best, 2008; Crotty, 1998; Harris, 2008; Weinberg, 2008). Constructionists argue that there is no single reality ‘out there’ that social scientists should or can capture for analysis; reality is constructed by human beings in social interaction. Thus, there is no set of observations that can be said to be representative of the truth of how things are. Because human beings construct reality out of their own consciousness, social and material context, and through social interaction with other human beings, it is the perspectival, multifaceted, and situated features of constructed reality that matter most. Constructionist researchers seek theoretical generalizations (abstracted, inductive understandings of meaning and standpoint), rather than statistical generalizations (that facilitate accurate prediction); this is achieved through in-depth case study analysis and ‘thick’ descriptions, often of the least typical or representative cases as these comprise the unique elements about which the researcher wishes to theorize (Bailey, 1996; Charmaz, 2005; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Denzin, 1989; Mitchell, 1983).

In addition to appearing on the Talkers Magazine (2009) 2009 Talkers 250 list, programs selected for analysis had to be public (i.e., free to access) and stream or link to the internet radio site TalkStreamLive.com at the commencement of data collection
(beginning in March 2009). TalkStreamLive.com is a non-subscription, “dynamic directory of internet radio” where one can link to live streaming audio of radio broadcasts from radio stations across the country and new media (e.g., podcasts) on the internet. Because TalkStreamLive.com facilitates national access to live talk radio programs I could quickly and easily record programs at convenient times of the day and evening taking advantage of regional time differences.

Broadcasts recorded for this study aired live Monday through Saturday. In cases where a substitute stands in for part of a broadcast, only the portion featuring the named host is included in the fifteen broadcasts per host. No substitute hosts were included in this analysis. A limited number of rebroadcasts and “Best of” shows were included in the fifteen broadcasts when it could be determined when the original airing occurred.

Most of the CPTR and PPTR programs are 3 hours long, including commercials (though commercials are not used in this analysis). Podcasts (Bruce and Crowley) are shorter - usually two-hours - because they are commercial-free. Two programs (one that aired in the evening and another on Saturdays, Cain and Crowley, respectively) regularly recycled hour-long show segments (e.g., repeating hour-one programming in hour-three) accounting for the shorter length of broadcasts. Exceptions to broadcast recording criteria are noted on the data table for each host (Table 6-3 to 6-16).

**Exceptions to Host Inclusion Criteria**

An exception to the 2009 Talkers 250 (Talkers Magazine, 2009) inclusion criteria was made to include racially diverse conservative and progressive hosts. The 2009 Talkers 250 list includes very few racial minority hosts; among the top 100 hosts (of which the magazines provides pictures on its website) there are five African Americans
– Joe Madison (#12), Bev Smith (#36), Lincoln Ware (#61), Larry Young (#86), and Errol Louis (#99). Only Bev Smith was included in the initial cut for this study. To extend racial representation I selected two additional hosts, Herman Cain (conservative) and Al Sharpton (progressive), based not on ranking or inclusion in the 2009 Talkers 250 list (neither host appears among the 250 named programs), but on each host’s high profile in conservative and progressive politics.

Herman Cain has run for political office in Georgia on a conservative Republican political platform and was an invited speaker at the 2010 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the premier national gathering of conservative activists in the U.S. In 2011, Mr. Cain ran unsuccessfully for the Republican presidential nomination. Al Sharpton is a longtime civil rights activist and founder of the National Action Network (NAN), a social justice organization active across the United States, particularly in urban areas. Both Sharpton and Cain add unique perspectives to the analysis of political talk radio. Sharpton’s program broadcasts on 18 radio stations around the country (Sharpton, 2010) and Cain holds the distinction of being one of very few conservative African Americans hosting a political talk program on terrestrial radio (airing locally on WSB radio, Atlanta, Georgia).

There were other exceptions to the TalkstreamLive.com inclusion criteria. First, two women hosts who appear on the 2009 Talkers 250 (Talkers Magazine, 2009) list, conservatives Janet Parshall and Martha Zoller (ranked 67th and 91st, respectively), were not considered for this study because their programs did not stream or link to TalkStreamLive.com at the commencement of data collection.
Second, Joe Madison, a progressive African American host broadcasting from Washington, DC (from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m., EST, Monday thru Friday) and ranked 12th on the 2009 Talkers 250 list (Talkers Magazine 2009) was not included because his program aired on TalkstreamLive.com at a time when I was normally unavailable to record it. Because Madison’s program was not available in syndication or as podcasts (e.g., airing 2-3 hours later in the Midwest or on the west coast) the only alternative was a paid broadcast via XM satellite radio, thus violating the inclusion criteria.

Third, the Monica Crowley and Michael Savage shows were available but not recorded through TalkStreamLive.com. I recorded the Crowley broadcasts from an archive of free podcasts available on her website (monicamemo.com). I made the choice to record from podcasts because the archive was publicly available at no charge and because The Crowley Show airs only once a week, making the recording of fifteen live programs especially time consuming. Crowley broadcasts included in this study extend from March 2009 to August 2009. The Michael Savage Show was available via a radio station in my town, making it convenient for me to record it in the evening, directly from terrestrial radio.

Hosts’ Political Affiliation

The political affiliation of hosts - conservative or progressive - was derived from internet searches and an examination of the show’s/host’s websites. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of conservative and progressive political beliefs, platform, and policy preferences. After selecting hosts I listened to their programs to determine whether the host self-identified as conservative or progressive. I found that political affiliation was clear. Hosts, callers, and critics all agreed, in the broadest sense, on the political affiliation of each host included in this study. In fact, conservatism and
progressivism are points of pride for each host and an important facet of program marketing, audience appeal, and fan loyalty.

The hosts, their political affiliation and respective 2009 Talkers 250 (Talkers Magazine, 2009) ranking (where applicable) appear below:

Table 6-1. Political Talk Radio Hosts included in Study (Race/Talker’s Ranking)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservative Men</th>
<th>Progressive in Men</th>
<th>Conservative Women</th>
<th>Progressive Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herman Cain (AA/NA)</td>
<td>Alan Colmes (WA/#16)</td>
<td>Tammy Bruce (WA/#1)</td>
<td>Stephanie Miller (WA/#30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Hannity (WA/#2)</td>
<td>Thom Hartmann (WA/#10)</td>
<td>Monica Crowley (WA/#49)</td>
<td>Randi Rhodes (WA/#48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rush Limbaugh (WA/#1)</td>
<td>Ed Schultz (WA/#18)</td>
<td>Laura Ingraham (WA/#6)</td>
<td>Bev Smith (AA/#36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Savage (WA/#3)</td>
<td>Al Sharpton (AA/NA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AA = African American; WA = White American; NA = not applicable. ¹ Tammy Bruce is included in the “2009 Talkers 250” unranked list of hosts listed alphabetically from 101 to 250.

Data Analysis

Three qualitative methods were used to analyze and compare the CPTR and PPTR broadcast data: discourse, case study, and analytic induction analysis methods. However, before presenting the method of analysis, important considerations for achieving qualitative rigor require discussion.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Judging Study Findings

Quality criteria provide standards by which to judge the findings of a piece of research (Schwandt, 2007). Several criteria have been proposed to evaluate the quality of empirical research studies (Bailey, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1988, 2007; Sandelowski, 1991). According to Charmaz (2005, 2006, 2008), study quality criteria are far from neutral and depend on who develops
them and for what purposes. More to the point, epistemological considerations, methodological stance, and the researcher's values and political commitments drive the choice of study quality criteria and its application to data and analysis (Schwandt, 2007).

Criteria for judging positivist, quantitative research - validity, reliability, generalizability - are very different from the criteria used to judge constructionist, qualitative research. Positivist studies that aim to find the objective truth, test theories, or make predictions, value criteria that emphasize rigor in the application of the scientific method. Alternately, constructionist studies designed to understand meaning-making processes on the individual, group, or societal level, propose criteria that tap into what Christians (2007) and Denzin (1989) call “Interpretive sufficiency.” According to Christians (2007), interpretive sufficiency “seeks to open up the world in all its dynamic dimensions,” (p. 202) as opposed to “instrumental efficiency” that Christians (2007, p. 202) associates with experimentalist methodologies which, he argues, evidence “the thinness of the technical, exterior, and statistically precise received view.”

Currently, positivistic criteria dominate standards for judging research quality in sociological research. This has led some critics of qualitative research to argue that interpretive methods of data analysis are arbitrary and unreliable (Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002; Hammersley, 2008). Insomuch as these critics judge qualitative methodologies using positivist criteria, they are correct. However, Sandelowski (1991, p. 165) cautions against the application of positivist criteria to qualitative data; she explains that qualitative data must be, “located in a hermeneutic circle of (re)interpretation.” In other words, the goal of qualitative interpretations is not to reveal The Truth hidden in the world, waiting to be discovered; nor are qualitative researchers concerned with
specifying criteria for correctly predicting The Truth. Rather, qualitative researchers seek to engage qualitative data reflexively to understand meaning-making as a social or shared process embedded in everyday experience (Feldman, Skolberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Sandelowski, 1991).

In the end, Sandelowski argues, all social scientific work - positivist or constructionist, quantitative or qualitative - is a story about a story the researcher creates with the study data. The goal of qualitative research is to render a “life-like, intelligible and plausible” re-telling (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 164). A non-positivist approach to data interpretation and analysis is not an endorsement of non-rigorous research methods. In qualitative research the measures of study quality - reliability, generalizability, and validity - are assessed using different criteria (Bryman, 2006).

**Reliability**

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the degree to which independent scientists can duplicate the findings of a study by following a similar set of procedures. Reliable qualitative studies are a consequence of exacting, thorough, and well-managed data collection and analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988). Qualitative data can change from one moment to the next and are easily influenced by subjective and contextual factors. Interpretation of qualitative data will also vary depending on the background, life experiences, and skill level of the researcher. Despite these challenges, reliable qualitative data is achievable through: 1) systematic data collection methods; 2) sampling from diverse sources; 3) gathering a sufficient quality and quantity of data; and, 4) careful and comprehensive reporting of study findings and how findings derive from interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2005, 2006, 2008).
**Generalizability**

In quantitative studies generalizability refers to the extent to which study findings derived from a representative sample can be applied to a population with similar characteristics. Generalizability is achieved in quantitative research using statistical methods that produce, from a population of interest, a random or non-biased sample whose pertinent characteristics, “reflect those of the parent population within some range of certainty which may be estimated using the assumptions of probability theory” (Mitchell, 1983, p. 198).

Critics of qualitative research argue that because qualitative data are not randomly derived, inferences to populations are impossible. However, this is not strictly so; there are non-statistical bases of inference that qualitative researchers use in their research. While statistical inferences to a population based on single characteristics of samples are more accurate in quantitative studies, inferences involving the relationship between two or more characteristics rely on logic, not statistics (Mitchell, 1983). The ability to make substantive inferences about causality are not so much tied to the generalizability of the data, “but rather upon the plausibility or upon the logicality of the nexus between the two characteristics” (Mitchell, 1983, p. 198). To support inferences in qualitative research it is the job of the researcher to not only show how study findings are grounded in the data but, according to Mitchell (1983, p. 203), to develop an adequate theory that explains processes present in the data and link both the data and the findings to extant research. Generalizable qualitative studies are grounded in “thick descriptions” of the data and exhaustive analysis. The product of qualitative studies is theoretical (not probabilistic) generalizations that, in many ways, exceed the explanatory reach of even the most statistically sophisticated quantitative study.
Validity

In quantitative research, valid interpretations derive from the use of data collection instruments (e.g., a survey or scale) that measure what they propose to measure; that is, there is a demonstrable fit between measures obtained from study instruments and study claims. In qualitative research the researcher is the instrument who interprets the data, not surveys or scales. Valid interpretations of qualitative data are defined as trustworthy accounts that are solidly connected to the study data in a way that is clear to the reader. Miller (2008) argues that valid interpretations derived from qualitative data will be: 1) arrived at using coherent and transparent procedures; 2) based in the evidence; and, 3) persuasive. Riessman’s (1993, 2008) criteria for validity echoes Miller’s (2008), highlighting the unique challenges posed by narrative data. According to Riessman (1993, 2008) valid narrative interpretations will be: 1) believable; 2) recognizable to people intimately familiar with the narrative context; 3) reflective of the lived experiences of narrators; and, 4) useful to those with a stake in the issues raised and the narrative context.

Each of these specific means for achieving qualitative reliability, generalizability and validity were integrated into this study’s design and analysis using quality criteria especially adapted for qualitative data analysis.

Assessing Research Quality

The interpretive challenge for this study of political talk radio narratives is to “study up” and from an outsider perspective. While no attempts will be made to check with CPTR or PPTR hosts, listeners, or callers on the validity of study interpretations, hundreds of broadcasts were listened to and understanding has been augmented by field experience and cultural immersion, including: attending conservative and
progressive national conferences, local meetings and lectures, and reading popular non-fiction conservative and progressive books and magazines.

In analyzing and interpreting study data, I endeavored to be transparent in drawing links between the narrative evidence, study findings, and subsequent theorizing. I realize this is a tricky undertaking and it will be approached with care and consideration for the complexity of the study data, biases that emerge from my own experiences, academic interests and political commitments, the strengths and limitations of the methods of data analysis, and the desire to produce a readable and persuasive final document.

To facilitate a more reflexive study process I incorporated the use of memos throughout the study - from data collection to analysis to final write-up. Analytical and theoretical memos: 1) reminded me of my interpretive contribution; 2) tracked the development of those contributions over the course of the study; and, 3) helped me to remain accountable to the data and the reasons behind my interpretations (Charmaz, 2006).

I have adopted a set of research quality criteria proposed by Charmaz (2005) for grounded theory studies. While this research is not a grounded theory study per se, it does share with a grounded approach similar constructionist epistemological commitments (see Chapter 5) that are reflected in Charmaz’ choice of quality criteria. Charmaz’ quality criteria also point toward the concerns and interests of audiences outside of university settings, including ordinary, interested citizens and policy makers; it is important that sociological research at least attempt to reach out to these audiences.
Lastly, Charmaz’ quality criteria reflect a concern that social research be used for social change; I also share this value.

Charmaz’ (2005) quality criteria are: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. A summary of each follows:

- **CREDIBILITY.** An assessment of the extent to which the researcher has immersed him or herself in the topic, made diverse observations, and gathered sufficient evidence. To the extent that this is achieved, the researcher will be able to make strong, logical claims based on convincing evidence.

- **ORIGINALITY.** This criterion measures the novelty of the work, the analyses, and study findings and is also a measure of the degree to which the research contributes to new understandings of social phenomena that are generally taken for granted. This is the author’s answer to the “So what?” question in connection to study findings.

- **RESONANCE.** The degree to which the study presents “thick” and trustworthy descriptions of phenomena that include both its surface and deeply embedded features, as well as connections to broader social contexts. Individuals connected to or familiar with the studied phenomena recognize their experiences in study findings (i.e., study findings ‘ring true’), gain greater insight into their thinking, or find answers to questions that may have puzzled them.

- **USEFULNESS.** The study is useful to ordinary interested citizens, as well as researchers, who would like to extend study findings to similar phenomena or pursue related work. The study also presents the social justice implications of its findings and suggests ways the work might help to better society.

No study will perfectly reflect these quality criteria. Rather the criteria represent an aspirational ideal (like the criterion of objectivity in positivist research) that will inform and guide research and study-related decision making from data collection to final write-up. At the end of this study, I use the criteria to look back and judge how successful I have been in negotiating the research process and achieving my stated goals. These criteria serve another important purpose: for those unfamiliar with constructionist research these criteria offer an appropriate standard by which to assess the quality of the study’s design and findings (Bailey, 1996; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).
**Analysis Plan**

This section lays out the data analysis and interpretation plan. Analysis proceeded in three phases: Pre-coding; Case Study and Discourse Analysis; and, Analytic Induction. The analysis plan is summarized in graphical form in Figure 6-1: Analysis Plan at the end of Chapter 6.

MaxQDA (Verbi, 2007) qualitative data analysis software was used for data management, analysis, and interpretation. MaxQDA includes capabilities that allow for: document management, coding, memoing, text search and retrieval, and graphical representation of codes and code systems as they appear in and between documents. Pre-codes, analytic memos, and case study transcripts were created in Word software and then uploaded to MaxQDA. Analytic Induction was performed entirely in MaxQDA using analytic memos and transcribed exemplars derived from the corpus of study data.

**Pre-Coding**

Pre-coding was intended to track shifts in the hosts’ discussion of political talk topics during a broadcast; together these codes form a table of contents of sorts for each broadcast. Pre-coding also facilitated study data immersion; a way to become familiar with each host’s style, program structure, and broadcast content. Importantly, the process of pre-coding identifies topically-delimited narrative segments for in-depth analysis using case study and analytic induction.

During Pre-coding I listened to each digital file and recorded: 1) talk topics; 2) the location of topical segments (using the time stamp on the digital audio file); and 3) a ‘Yes’/’No’ code indicating whether the segment is talk commentary regarding in some way the Obama administration. The form used for pre-coding is included in Appendix B: Pre-Coding Sheet.
Case Study and Discourse Analysis

The language, narratives, and discourses of CPTR are “interpretive nets” (Gee 1999). Linguist James Paul Gee (1999) explains why “interpretive nets” are such a powerful frame on reality. “Interpretive nets” are: 1) widely adaptable to different contexts and experiences; 2) becomes reified from repeated use; 3) are enshrined in powerful institutions and social structures (e.g., political parties, families); 4) are taken for granted; and, 5) are self-perpetuating. How do we know “interpretive nets” serve these purposes? Gee (1999; 2011) argues that language is key; there is reciprocity between language and reality: language both reflects reality (i.e., what is seen) and constructs reality (i.e., the way things are seen). More significant for this research, Gee (2011) proposes that it is possible to deconstruct or unravel “interpretive nets” by attending to the specific work of its ‘language-in-use’ (i.e., language in context). To reiterate the discussion from Chapter 5, language does three important kinds of work, according to Gee (2011):

- Saying Work: words, symbols, and knowledge systems;
- Being Work: creation, deployment, and recognition of particular identities, connections, and relationships;
- Doing Work: authorizing certain practices, actions, and social orders.

To understand the “interpretive net” of political talk radio – what it is, how it works, its motivations, aims, and salience – one must closely examine the work of its language-in-use (Gee 1999; 2011).

Gee (2011) proposes the use of a heuristic or thinking device called Building Tools to facilitate analysis of the “saying, being, and doing” work of language (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of the theoretical background to Gee’s (2011) approach).
Gee’s Building Tools (2011) are composed of seven tasks that can be thought of as tools of social reality construction. A brief description of each Building Tool follows below. See also Appendix C: Gee’s Building Tools for a listing of analytic questions Gee (2011) suggests be used by researchers in evaluating discursive data.

- **Significance Building**: uses language to make things significant or lower their significance.

- **Sign Systems and Knowledge Building**: uses language to create, sustain, revise, change, privilege or disprivilege language, sign systems or characteristic ways of knowing the world or making knowledge claims.

- **Connections Building**: uses language to make things connected or relevant to each other or to make them disconnected or irrelevant.

- **Relationship Building**: uses language to create or end social relationships.

- **Identities Building**: uses language to enact specific socially situated identities, to project identities onto others, and/or to privilege or disprivilege particular identities.

- **Practices Building**: uses language to enact specific practices or activities alone or with others.

- **Politics Building**: uses language to give or take away social goods (“anything some people in a society want or value,” (p. 5) e.g., prestige, wealth) or to describe how social goods are or ought to be distributed.

Gee’s (1999) approach to language and reality construction is well-suited to an examination of Conservative Political Talk Radio. Study questions were matched to Building Tools as follows:

- **Research Question One**: What is Conservative Political Talk Radio saying to its listeners?

  Building Tool 1: Significance Building  
  Building Tool 2: Sign Systems and Knowledge Building  
  Building Tool 3: Connections Building

- **Research Question Two**: How does Conservative Political Talk Radio use language to build and enact: identity (e.g., subjectivity, selves); social groups (e.g., belonging, solidarity, otherness); cultures (e.g., values, beliefs); and social institutions (e.g., family, government, religion)?
Building Tool 4: Relationship
Building Tool 5: Identity

- **Study Question Three**: What kind of social order is being (re)produced in Conservative Political Talk Radio?

Building Tool 6: Practices
Building Tool 7: Politics

The seven Building Tools, and the analytical techniques associated with them, were used in an intensive case study and discourse analysis of nine CPTR broadcasts transcripts (n = 9, 719 transcript pages). Two analytic tools emerged from Case Study and Discourse Analysis: 1) a set of hypotheses that described preliminary expectations of study findings; and, 2) a preliminary analytic framework (precursor to emergent theory) that detail processes at work in CPTR. The hypotheses to be tested and the analytic framework connected to each are listed in Table 6-2 at the end of this chapter. The hypotheses and analytical framework form the bases of Analytic Induction.

**Analytic Induction**

Analytic induction was used as the method of analysis in Phase Three. To recap: Phases One and Two were designed to achieve immersion in the data and to produce hypotheses and an analytic framework grounded in the Conservative Political Talk Radio data. In Phase Three the goal shifted to theory development. Analytic induction is a qualitative method of data analysis that moves recursively across three analytical steps with the goal of developing a data-driven, emergent theoretical account. Developed by Florian Znaniecki (1934) in the 1930s (see, W. I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1920/1984)) and refined by Alfred Lindesmith (see, *Opiate Addiction* (1957)) in the 1940s, analytic induction is the first named method for the analysis of qualitative data (Preissle, 2008). An inductive
method of data analysis and interpretation, analytic induction uses case-specific evidence to make theory-based, data-grounded, generalization to social processes. According to Preissle (2008), “Analytic induction asks the following of any event, activity, situation, or attribute: What kind of event, activity, situation, or attribute is this particular one?” Analytic theory is generated by identifying, defining, dimensionalizing, and integrating conceptual categories derived from iterative, comparative analysis of data against hypotheses that suggest particular social processes.

Critics have debated the pros and cons of analytic induction versus traditional statistical methods of data analysis (Hammersley, 2003; Lindesmith, 1952; Robinson, 1951; Turner, 1953; Znaniecki, 1934). Znaniecki (1934) was unequivocal; he argued for the superiority of analytical induction over the inductive use of statistics for making universal (i.e., explain all cases), causal (i.e., explain processes) statements in the social sciences. Znaniecki (1934) appraised the contributions of statistical methods for the social sciences as follows:

All the applications of social statistics for a hundred years have done nothing but formally prove or disprove already existing common-sense judgments of more or less shrewd politicians, business-men, novelists, moralists, public-house or drawing-room philosophers. (p. 228)

Contemporary researchers have noted the benefits of analytic induction (Becker, 1958, 1998; Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). Denzin (1970) cites several strengths of analytic induction, specifically that it: 1) bridges qualitative and quantitative analysis through the development of broad propositions that can be translated into variables; 2) allows the development of substantive theories into more general or formal theories based on a few key concepts; and, 3) produces processual theories that more
adequately match the conception of social life as contingent, rather than linear (an assumption implicit in enumerative methods).

Denzin (1970) also cites three major weaknesses that researchers must be cognizant of in using analytic induction. First, the theories developed using analytic induction are usually descriptive or definitional rather than predictive. However, this is only problematic in quantitative research where prediction is the goal. Description and defining the situation are legitimate goals for a qualitative researcher concerned, as I am, with examining heretofore under- or unexplored social phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000).

Second, Denzin (1970) warns that the descriptions and definitional propositions produced through analytic induction tend to leave out quantitative aspects like degree or extent of some factor connected to a chain of influences. Denzin (1970) suggests that instead of resisting quantification, analysts include enumerative components where needed; Becker (1958) calls these quasi-statistics while Sandelowski (2001; Sandelowski, Voils, & Knafl, 2009) supports what she calls the “quantizing” of qualitative data. Quantification is used in this study.

Third, Denzin (1970) warns that analytical induction is often time-consuming because its methods require extensive data collection and comparison. This is noted and adequate time (and room for adjustments to those estimations) was allotted for analysis of study data.

The first step in analytic induction is to define the phenomena to be examined in a preliminary or tentative manner. In this study the phenomena has been defined as
political talk radio; as a theoretical matter, however, the door was not closed to refining or redefining this phenomenon.

Next, the analyst specifies hypotheses regarding the phenomena under study. Researchers differ on the usefulness of developing hypotheses before a careful examination of the data (Becker, 1953, 1958; Cressey, 1950; Denzin, 1970; Goetz & LeCompte, 1981; Lindesmith, 1957). The study design adopted here allowed for specification of hypotheses in Phase Two: case study and discourse analysis produced hypotheses grounded in in-depth study of selected cases (9 transcripts of CPTR broadcasts totaling 719 pages).

When this work is completed, the analyst applies the tentative hypotheses to new cases. If the case fits the hypotheses, the analyst goes on to another new case and repeats the process. If the case does not fit the hypotheses - called a “negative case” - the analyst has two choices, either: 1) change the hypotheses to include the negative case (i.e., change the working hypotheses so they better fit what is reflected in the data), or 2) redefine the phenomena to exclude the negative case (i.e., narrow the explanatory scope of the hypotheses to ensure that the same phenomena is under study (Robinson, 1951). This is called the “method of difference” (Denzin, 1970). Negative cases are not rare nor are they to be avoided; it should be expected that initial hypotheses and theorizing will not capture the complexity of what is going on in the data. Negative cases are invaluable to data interpretation and should be searched for if they do not appear on their own (Lindesmith, 1952; Znaniecki, 1934). Lindesmith (1952) argues that negative cases are an efficient method of theory development that serves
the same role as random or representative sampling in quantitative methods. According to Brodsky (2008),

Finding and understanding negative cases not only strengthens a good study, but these cases protect against researcher biases in what and how data are seen and reported.

Negative cases are present in outlier data, conceptual categories that offer alternative explanations to processes described in one’s theory, and in data collected from novel or supplementary sources (Brodsky, 2008). Brodsky (2008) concludes,

It is only through actively seeking to test and refute one’s findings and to explain not only the consistent, but also the inconsistent data that one can truly come to a final, rigorously defensible understanding of one's research findings.

In this study both CPTR and PPTR broadcasts are sources of negative cases; through iterative comparisons, the unique features and processes at work in CPTR emerged.

The process of hypotheses testing and development continues until the analyst reaches the point where a good fit exists with the data. At this point an emergent theory has been achieved. Emergent theory is advanced through: 1) theoretical sampling of data (e.g., in terms of diverse populations, events, sources, or time periods) that is selected to “advance conceptual thinking” and “dimensionalize the data” (van den Hoonnaard, 2008), and 2) exhausting negative cases that cannot be explained by the hypotheses.

The analyst may then confidently conclude that the study has achieved theoretical saturation: the properties and dimensions of key conceptual categories have been fully developed and integrated such that the emergent theory captures the complexity inherent in the phenomena. Theoretical saturation is a way to assess the rigor of study findings (Denzin, 1970; Miller, 2008; Sandelowski, 2008). In the original
formulation of analytic induction proposed by Znaniecki (1934) and refined by Cressey (1950), upon theoretical saturation the analyst is said to have arrived at an explanation for the phenomena under study. Scholars today generally reject the assertion that law-like, essential criteria can be developed that describe social reality (Robinson, 1951). In deference to more recent scholarship and critique (Charmaz, 2005; Mitchell, 1983), I define theoretical saturation as a brief stopping point along a long road of continuing study, when the analyst takes time to write-up and present her findings (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Practically, this means that the theory remains open to future reconsideration and revision.

**Study Limitations**

There are three limitations to this study. First, there are no audience member interviews or reflections on the broadcast data included in this analysis. That is, there are no data that directly confirm the interpretations of the political talk radio narratives. To make up for the absence of this information, I have tried to immerse myself, as much possible, in some of the cultural elements of conservative and progressive political activism. To this end, I have read popular political literature, visited internet and blog sites, attended meetings, listened to CPTR and PPTR programs regularly, attended talks and lectures by noted individuals (among them Justice Clarence Thomas, Newt Gingrich, Ann Coulter, Nancy Pelosi, Van Johnson, and Arianna Huffington) and one of the most important events of the year for conservative activists, the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, D.C. I also attended a progressive activist conference, The Campaign for America’s Future. Granted, none of this background work makes me an “insider,” however it does sensitize me to the current concerns, controversies, and cultural frameworks of the American Conservative and
Progressive Movements. I consider this study the very beginning of a long-term commitment to understanding these movements and their supporters’ perspectives and shared constructions of reality.

The second limitation is like the first. In this study, data on the operation of CPTR and PPTR organizations is not included. This kind of insider data would be very difficult to access given my “outsider” status. However, the naturalistic, unobtrusive approach I have taken has much to recommend it. Hosts, station managers, and owners would be very hesitant to reveal what factors, institutions, and discourses influence show content, especially those having to with race, gender, sexuality, or class ideology; not to mention the fact that perceptions and actions are often naturalized and people tend not to think of their beliefs, values, and behaviors in terms of ideology, narratives, or discourses. The best course around these limitations is to infer what those factors, institutions, and discourses are by examining patterns in and across political talk narratives. While this method is imperfect, it is a good starting point for future, organizational analyses.

The last study limitation concerns the scope of the study and study data. Data collection and analyses cover only the period after the inauguration of President Obama to roughly the second year of his presidency. Data on CPTR and PPTR gathered before Obama’s presidency, ideally before he was even a serious contender for the presidency, would have offered a compelling comparison of conservative political narratives, rhetoric, and discourse strategies before and after the election. Unfortunately, this data is not available for the present study. Too, broadcast data collected in the last two years of his presidency would have given additional insights. Both limitations are addressed, at least partially, through comparisons and integration of
insights gleaned from the body of extant social scientific literature. Though language, narratives, and discourses are constantly changing, they contain traces of historic understandings of social reality. One of the goals of this study is to uncover points of continuity and change in political talk narratives; I expected to find – even in the most recent political talk commentary – traces of old conceptions embedded in new narratives, as well as new twists on what might have been thought of as long-abandoned social constructions.

**Organization**

The findings of this research will be set out in three chapters corresponding to the three study questions. Chapter 7: *Obama Narratives* will explore what CPTR is saying to its listeners by its use of words, symbols, and validation (or rejection) of particular knowledge systems. Chapter 8: *Crisis Narratives* will discuss how CPTR narratives build and enact selves, groups, cultures, and social institutions, particularly in regards to stipulating matters of difference and sameness. Chapter 9: *Hegemon Narratives* discuss the social order CPTR (re)creates through its narrative constructions. Chapter 10 is a discussion of study findings, conclusions, and suggestions of future research considering the extant social scientific literature.
Figure 6-1. Analysis plan.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Question 1</th>
<th>What is Conservative Political Talk Radio saying to its listeners?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>CPTR uses narratives to (re)construct the world as recognizable, manageable, and predictable along the lines of a hegemonic or “taken for granted” social order.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Analytic Framework | Processes present in CPTR operate such that language and narrative:  
|                   | • explicitly and implicitly (re)construct a preferred social order.  
|                   | • are persuasive because they are culturally embedded, appearing logical and commonsensical.  
|                   | • do their work through backstage discursive moves that: a) construct social facts; b) render social facts real; c) involve listeners' creative energy; and, d) utilize humor and hyperbole to undercut or temper extreme elements. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Question 2</th>
<th>How does Conservative Political Talk Radio use language to build and enact: identity (e.g., subjectivity, selves); social groups (e.g., belonging, solidarity, otherness); cultures (e.g., values, beliefs); and social institutions (e.g., family, government, religion)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>CPTR uses narratives to build and enact identity and relationships through a set of oft-repeated and reinforced binaries applicable to individuals, groups, cultures, and social institutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Analytic Framework | Processes present in CPTR operate such that language and narrative:  
|                   | • build and enact identity and relationship along a set of ‘good v. evil’ binaries.  
|                   | • a) portray difference as essential; b) create a war or siege mentality; c) supply cognitive maps that dictate relationships; d) encourage simple explanations for complex social issues; e) and, allow CPTR hosts to exploit an entertainer/journalist identity.  
|                   | • prevent cognitive dissonance by creating insider-only imagined social worlds through an “echo chamber effect” whereby communication across difference is discouraged - strengthening the legitimacy of a taken-for-granted worldview. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Question 3</th>
<th>What kind of social order is being (re)produced in Conservative Political Talk Radio?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>CPTR narratives (re)inscribe the relational and structural logics and authority of white supremacy. CPTR operates as a Discourse of Whiteness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Analytic Framework | Processes present in CPTR operate such that language and narrative:  
|                   | • bolster and extend the authority, truth claims, boundaries, values, logic, and moral and ethical stance of an idealized, taken-for-granted, raced, classed, and gendered Whiteness.  
|                   | • comprise a coordinative logic - a set of performative “doings” that narratively link “saying” and “being.”  
<p>|                   | • are authoritative and persuasive without ever having to provide proofs. CPTR works by channeling listeners’ attention to things as facts; then distinguishing, typifying, and exemplifying those facts and inviting listeners to draw their “own” conclusion. CPTR can do this because society, generally, is bereft of language and narrative that contests the current race, gender, sexual, and class social order. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Broadcast (Day)</th>
<th>Date Recorded</th>
<th>Length of Recording</th>
<th>Source</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.31.09 (Monday)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.01.09 (Tuesday)</td>
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<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.02.09 (Wednesday)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1:58:53</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.04.09 (Friday)</td>
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<td>2:03:15</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.05.09 (Saturday)</td>
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<td>2:01:21</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.07.09 (Monday)</td>
<td>9.07.09</td>
<td>2:01:45</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.08.09 (Tuesday)</td>
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<td>1:59:45</td>
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<td>8.27.09 (Thursday)</td>
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<td>2:00:00 ³</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.11.09 (Friday)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.15.09 (Tuesday)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.16.09 (Wednesday)</td>
<td>9.16.09</td>
<td>1:59:33</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.18.09 (Friday)</td>
<td>9.18.09</td>
<td>1:58:44</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.19.09 (Saturday)</td>
<td>9.19.09</td>
<td>1:59:28</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ ‘Best of’ rebroadcast.
Table 6-4. Recordings of Conservative Political Talk Radio Host: Herman Cain

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<th>Date Recorded</th>
<th>Length of Recording</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4.27.10 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>4.27.10</td>
<td>2:50:50</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.28.10 (Wednesday)</td>
<td>4.28.10</td>
<td>0:51:11</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.29.10 (Thursday)</td>
<td>4.29.10</td>
<td>2:49:58</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.03.10 (Monday)</td>
<td>5.03.10</td>
<td>2:51:18</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.04.10 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>5.04.10</td>
<td>2:49:24</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.05.10 (Wednesday)</td>
<td>5.05.10</td>
<td>2:51:06</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.06.10 (Thursday)</td>
<td>5.06.10</td>
<td>2:51:30</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10.10 (Monday)</td>
<td>5.10.10</td>
<td>2:50:23</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.11.10 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>5.11.10</td>
<td>2:40:29</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.20.10 (Thursday)</td>
<td>5.20.10</td>
<td>2:51:04</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.24.10 (Monday)</td>
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<td>2:57:19</td>
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<td>5.25.10 (Tuesday)</td>
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<td>2:49:43</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
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<td>6.01.10 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>6.01.10</td>
<td>2:52:04</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Substitute host for the last two hours of the broadcast.
Table 6-5. Recordings of Conservative Political Talk Radio Host: Monica Crowley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Broadcast (Day)</th>
<th>Date Recorded</th>
<th>Length of Recording</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>3.20.09 (Friday)</td>
<td>8.19.09</td>
<td>2:04:03</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
</tr>
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<td>0:56:33</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
</tr>
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<td>8.19.09</td>
<td>2:57:05</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18.09 (Saturday)</td>
<td>8.18.09</td>
<td>2:52:47</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
</tr>
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<td>8.18.09</td>
<td>2:20:57</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
</tr>
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<td>8.18.09</td>
<td>2:39:45</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
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<td>5.23.09 (Saturday)</td>
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<td>2:53:02</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
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<td>8.17.09</td>
<td>2:39:26</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
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<td>8.16.09</td>
<td>2:57:37</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
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<td>2:58:05</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
</tr>
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<td>7.25.09 (Saturday)</td>
<td>8.15.09</td>
<td>2:53:27</td>
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<td>8.01.09 (Saturday)</td>
<td>8.15.09</td>
<td>1:38:43</td>
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<td>8.22.09 (Saturday)</td>
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<td>2:52:44</td>
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</tr>
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<td>9.19.09</td>
<td>2:53:01</td>
<td>monicamemo.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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5 Repeated portion of the day's broadcast not included.
6 Repeated portion of the day's broadcast not included.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Broadcast (Day)</th>
<th>Date Recorded</th>
<th>Length of Recording</th>
<th>Source</th>
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</thead>
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</tr>
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<td>12.07.09 (Monday)</td>
<td>12.07.09</td>
<td>2:50:18</td>
<td>radioTime.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.08.09 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>12.08.09</td>
<td>2:50:24</td>
<td>talkstream live.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.09.09 (Wednesday)</td>
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<td>talkstream live.com</td>
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<td>talkstream live.com</td>
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<td>Date of Broadcast (Day)</td>
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<td>Length of Recording</td>
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7 Substitute host for the last hour of the broadcast.
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Table 6-11. Recordings of Progressive Political Talk Radio Host: Thom Hartmann

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Table 6-14. Recordings of Progressive Political Talk Radio Host: Ed Schultz

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\[8\] Substitute host for the last half of the broadcast.

\[9\] Substitute host for the last half of the broadcast.
Table 6-15. Recordings of Progressive Political Talk Radio Host: Al Sharpton

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CHAPTER 7
OBAMA NARRATIVES

Chapter 7 presents findings from the first research question: What is Conservative Political Talk Radio saying to its listeners? The hypothesis developed from case study analysis of CPTR and PPTR data was that: CPTR uses language and narrative to (re)construct the world as recognizable, manageable, and predictable.

Building Tasks

Three building tasks (Gee, 2011) were used to explore the research question and help to identify narrative social constructions of reality on CPTR. What is of interest in Chapter 7 are the “saying” functions of language. The first of Gee’s (2011) building tasks used to analyze the CPTR data was “Significance”: how language and narrative are used to increase or lower importance. The second building task was “Sign Systems and Knowledge”: how language and narrative are used to create, sustain, revise, privilege, or disprivilege knowledge claims. The third building task was “Connections”: how language and narrative are used to connect or disconnect ideas, people, or things.

Descriptive Statistics

Twenty-six percent (26%, n = 790) of study narratives were Obama Narratives. Obama Narratives construct Barack Obama (e.g., his family and background) and things related to his presidency (e.g., election, job performance and capabilities, plans, intentions, personality, supporters, and other Democrats). Obama Narratives include three narrative themes: Incompetence Narratives (41%, n = 322), Enemy-Within Narratives (20%, n = 155), and Impairment Narratives (40%, n = 313).

Approximately two-thirds (n = 580) of Obama Narratives were five minutes or less. Among female hosts 32% (n = 452) of all narratives were Obama Narratives
compared to 21% \((n = 338)\) among male hosts. Of all CPTR hosts, Monica Crowley had the greatest proportion of *Obama Narratives* (41%, \(n = 160\)). Among programs hosted by White American CPTR hosts, 28% \((n = 767)\) of all narratives were *Obama Narratives* compared to 8% \((n = 23)\) among the African American CPTR host.

One hundred and eighty-four callers called-in to CPTR programs to compose - with hosts, guests, and other callers - *Obama Narratives*, which represented 25% of all callers \((n = 731)\) in the study as a whole. Among the callers who helped to compose *Obama Narratives*, 66% \((n = 122)\) were male, 90% \(n = 166\) expressed conservative opinions, and 10% \((n = 18)\) had progressive views.

When the ideas, arguments, or characterizations conveyed by a narrative theme are incorporated into another narrative theme (e.g., if aspects of an *Enemy-Within Narrative* – i.e., Obama is deceitful – are present in a narrative about Obama’s competence to perform the job of president – an *Incompetence Narrative*) this segment of narrative data was coded as a thematic segment. Thematic segments can be thought of as subthemes of a larger narrative.

Study-wide there were 2,709 *Obama Thematic Segments* (33% of all thematic segments in the study as a whole, \(N = 8,156\)): 31% \((n = 846)\) were *Incompetence Thematic Segments*; 30% \((n = 812)\) were *Enemy-Within Thematic Segments*; and 39% \((n = 1,051)\) were *Impairment Thematic Segments*. Among *Obama Narratives*, 42% \((n = 1,085)\) of all thematic segments \((n = 2,591)\) were *Obama Thematic Segments*, 31% \((n = 814)\) were *Crisis Thematic Segments* (discussed in Chapter 8), and 27% \((n = 692)\) were *Hegemon Thematic Segments* (discussed in Chapter 9).
Chapter Organization

The three narrative themes that emerged from an analysis of CPTR data – *Incompetence Narratives, Enemy-Within Narratives, and Impairment Narratives* – construct for conservative hosts, guests, and callers the reality of the presidency of the first African American in United States history – setting out its significance, important facts and contentions, and connecting the presidency to ideas, people, or things in the past, present, and future.

After presenting descriptive statistics on each *Obama Narrative*, qualitative findings are presented. The presentation order of the narrative themes is not based on the number of narratives found in the CPTR data. Rather, the narratives are presented to capture the overall story plot or social construction of reality on CPTR. Where appropriate, the narrative claims that support *Obama Narratives* are expressed in the voice of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers. This might seem at times jolting; the goal is verisimilitude - to maintain the narrative standpoint of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers.

**Incompetence Narratives**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that depict Barack Obama as unfit for the presidency, or any high political office. Objections to a sitting president are not unique to conservatives. What is exceptional about CPTR *Incompetence Narratives*, however, is that opposition is framed as concern over supposed predispositions and weaknesses that are constructed as inherent to Obama. These traits render Obama fundamentally unfit.

Progressives on PPTR are, not surprisingly, more supportive of Barack Obama. Progressive narratives on Barack Obama stress his competence, intelligence, pragmatism, fairness, his accomplishments, strength of character, and his being a role...
model and historic figure. When progressives are critical of Obama, it is expressed as
disappointment over his failure to make good on election promises, particularly,
considering what progressives see as Obama’s insistence on being bipartisan in the
face of determined Republican opposition. Progressives celebrate Barack Obama’s
personal and career experiences. Obama’s involvement in grassroots politics signals to
them that he is a ‘man of the people,’ dedicated to social justice, and not an elite, career
politician out of touch with the needs of ordinary Americans. Barack Obama’s
competency is never questioned by PPTR hosts, guests, and callers who consistently
construct him as a pragmatic and brilliant leader.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are not convinced by progressive constructions
of Obama and his presidential performance. Three claims converge to support
Incompetence Narratives. Conservative hosts, guests, and callers on CPTR claim that
Obama is: un-presidential; mediocre; and lacking in substance. A summary of
descriptive statistics on Incompetence Narratives is presented next, followed by
qualitative findings.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Forty-one percent (41%, n = 322) of Obama Narratives (n = 790) construct him
as un-presidential and portray him as unable to perform the duties of President of the
United States. Approximately two-thirds of these Incompetence Narratives (n = 246)
were six minutes or less. Female hosts composed proportionately more Incompetence
Narratives (13%, n = 185) than males (8%, n = 137). Of all CPTR hosts, Tammy Bruce
had the greatest proportion of Incompetence Narratives (16%, n = 94). Programs hosted
by White Americans had the greatest proportion of Incompetence Narratives (11%, n =
306) compared to the African American host (5%, n = 16).
Fifty-seven percent (n = 104) of callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose *Obama Narratives* with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 184), contributed to *Incompetence Narratives*. Among the callers who contributed to *Incompetence Narratives*, 65% (n = 68) were male, 91% (n = 95) expressed conservative opinions, and 9% (n = 9) had progressive views.

There were 846 *Incompetence Thematic Segments* distributed among all study narratives; 31% of all *Obama Thematic Segments* (N = 2,709) in the study a whole. *Incompetence Thematic Segments*, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a host, were most often found in narratives composed by Laura Ingraham (37% or n = 153) and in *Obama and Crisis Narratives* where *Incompetence Thematic Segments* were present in 42% (n = 354) of both narratives. *Incompetence Thematic Segments* were present in only 16% (n = 138) of *Hegemon Narratives*.

**Qualitative Findings**

**Un-presidential**

In CPTR *Incompetence Narratives*, denial and hubris are cited as the reasons for Barack Obama’s election run and presidential victory. How else could Obama believe he was worthy to be President of the United States? Paradoxically, no one knows better than Obama himself that he does not belong in the White House. Unfortunately, however, Obama is driven by a desperate need to assert his importance. Tammy Bruce unpacks Obama’s inferiority complex:

Bruce: Let me just tell you right now it’s hard for me to believe that Barack Obama really believes that he deserves this […] I think they [Barack and Michelle Obama] realize that, this was an error . . . and ah, he really just, prob--- doesn’t believe it so that he goes on TV and get --- and does concerts, because that’s in his life what he feels important people do. ‘kay. He has no sense of the office itself, because he has no sense of himself. ((Mmm hmmm)) (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/15/2009, 00:48:15 – 00:48:48).
Bruce goes so far as to construct Barack and Michelle’s busy travel schedule as evidence of their viewing themselves as trespassers:

Bruce: You know they get to live in the White House . . . The most remarkable building in the country. And they just can’t stand to stay in there, maybe they feel guilty . . . when they’re looked down on by those portraits . . . of the former presidents? Maybe he realizes he shouldn’t be there and that this was an error. And when you don’t feel comfortable in a place ‘cause you’ve maybe faked your way in ((tsst tsst)) saying you can get out, maybe that’s what you do to feel more comfortable. Yeah. (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 01:17:31 – 01:17:58).

Both Michelle and Barack are viewed as engaged in an internal battle against elemental forces that will ultimately ‘out’ them for what they are - unpolished, an embarrassment, and in way over their heads.

First Lady Michelle is often used to substantiate claims made in regards to Obama’s unworthiness and unsuitability for office. Tammy Bruce remarks on a photo of the First Lady:

Bruce: I’ve been debating whether or not I should put the . . . picture of Michelle Obama emerging . . . from the car in her shorts. ((tssk)). Don’t think I want to do that to you though. Just wonder, can she have some dignity? Could she have just a little bit of dignity? Seems a little impossible though (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/01/2009, 00:47:42 – 00:47:58).

The First Lady diminishes the prestige of the presidency. Michelle Obama epitomizes social ineptitude in her bodily proportions, in how she moves, and in her choice of clothing. Michelle Obama is evidence of the kind of man Obama is: one not ready for polite society. *Incompetence Narratives* construct Michelle and Barack Obama as ‘urban,’ low class, mooching interlopers, blithely living off the largesse of the American taxpayer. They just don’t (can’t) fit the presidential archetype. Barack and Michelle Obama should go back to Chicago – where they both belong.
Mediocre

CPTR *Incompetence Narratives* also portray Barack Obama as unimpressive; a man of no reputation coasting to success on a tide of radicalism. Obama is merely a ‘Chicago community organizer,’ an intellectual pipsqueak and ne’er-do-well who’s made a career of denying the greatness of the greatest country on earth. Rush Limbaugh opines:

Limbaugh: But as for Obama, folks, here we have . . . here we have a man who has contributed nothing . . . to the success of this great nation. […] Barack, Hussein, Obama, a man who has contributed nothing to the success, of this great nation. Barack Hussein Obama has contributed, no, greatness himself, he has made no contribution whatsoever . . . that has, furthered, this nation’s advancement, nothing at all. Instead Barack Obama is constantly tearing down this country. He is disrespectful of the American people, all who’ve come before us. He disrespects every president prior to him. He disrespects all who have built this great nation at enormous cost. In his mind everything prior to his presidency, contributed to an unjust and immoral United States of America . . . He’s contributed nothing! He’s a sponge! He simply soaks it up! He is the beneficiary of the greatness --- all the greatness this nation has to offer, and he trashes this country nevertheless, like a spoiled brat, 1960’s radical born of the middle class but constantly seeking to slay . . . ideological images (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/23/2009, 00:12:30 – 00:14:05).

So why did Obama run for election? Drawing on her experience as a former liberal activist Tammy Bruce locates the answer in progressive racial (read: racist) ideology.

Bruce: Liberals, do not do anything in an effort to help other people. It is to reinforce their own identity as victims. And the only way they can do that is point it out all the time, remake victims, in every scenario that they enter […] The Barack Obama presidency will be a prime example […] It is a disaster. He will be seen as the worse apparent ---ah president in American history. The Left will, only really be able to organize its own people on the idea that look, a Black guy became president and look what they did to him. Obviously the evidence will prove otherwise (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/14/2009, 01:16:49 – 01:17:32).
The *Incompetence Narrative* claims that Obama was elected because he is African American; skin color, not skill, explains Obama’s success. For progressives, race is currency; by spinning straw into political gold, progressives can legitimize their existence and win (read: steal) important elections. Progressive race trickery is to blame for the Obama presidency.

President Obama is in over his head – he is pathetic, “clueless, naïve, a neophyte” (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/18/2009, 00:46:00 – 00:46:12). Barack Obama is incapable of performing the job of President of the United States because he does not possess the requisite skills, knowledge, and experience that make a good president.

Case in point: Barack Obama has never run anything before in his life. Rush Limbaugh takes stock of Obama’s career:

> Limbaugh: So, basically we have incompetence on parade, we have indecision on parade, we have in --- inexperience on parade, we got [a] man with a five-minute career, who has no experience running anything but a bunch of community agitators and organizers […] (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/22/2009, 00:44:38 – 00:44:52).

Monica Crowley assesses Obama’s experience and forecasts its likely consequences – “chaos, waste, and stagnation”:

> Crowley: This isn’t leadership, it’s chaos. And it’s a direct result, of electing somebody to the presidency, who has never run anything, ever, before. Not a state, not a business, not a caucus, not the PTA, not even a lemonade-stand. When you elect somebody, who has never run anything, to a job where it’s required to run things, big important things, it usually does not end very well. And so it is, chaos, waste, stagnation, all because our leader, doesn’t know, how to lead. The American people are finally on to this guy, they have seen, at last, that the emperor has no clothes (Monica Crowley Show, 8/22/2009, 00:12:52 – 00:13:44).

CPTR *Incompetence Narratives* conclude that the job of President of the United States overwhelms Obama; “he is just a community organizer. in way, way over his head” (Monica Crowley Show, 8/22/2009, 00:28:28 – 00:29:14).
Michael Savage has a slightly different take; not only does Obama lack the leadership skills every President requires, Obama does not think the way a president should think, specifically, Obama does not believe in “borders, language, and culture” - that is, he is not sufficiently nationalistic.

Savage: The man {Obama} had the hubris of a young man and he became the president, he thought he could do anything, but now he’s stuck without, a compass, without a motor, and frankly I don’t think he has a rudder. And we the people know it, and that’s what I wanted to say to you, we’re in trouble. And so the last thing we want is somebody without experience, on the good ship America, we need somebody with military experience, business experience, but most importantly, somebody who believes in borders, language, and culture and can prove it. Somebody who passes the Savage litmus test, and my friends I don’t know who that might be but we’ve got to keep hoping, because I believe in hope and I believe in change [Savage laughs] (Michael Savage Show, 2/15/2010, 00:58:09 – 00:58:57).

For Savage, Barack Obama’s lack of patriotic zeal is the clearest indication of his inability to steer “the good ship America” in the way it should go.

Michael Savage is not the only host to call into questions Obama’s grasp of America’s fundamental truths. Other CPTR hosts convey that Obama’s ideas and thinking are out of step with a preferred, conservative construction of reality. Obama’s ideas and policies are irrational, illogical, and bound to fail. Why? Because Barack Obama refuses to implement tried and tested conservative policies and, what’s more, he is critical of his conservative predecessors in the White House. For Sean Hannity Barack Obama:

Hannity: [...] speaks ((ah)), you know detached clearly from reality, and ((um)) con--- you know is a chronic blame shifter, in many ways you can say he’s America’s whiner-in-chief (Sean Hannity Show, 12/09/2009, 00:16:05 – 00:16:15).
Obama is an irresponsible and dangerous dreamer with a “utopian vision of socialism where everybody is surrounded by puppies and rainbows” (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/2009, 00:30:06 – 00:30:14). Of Obama, Rush Limbaugh surmises:

Limbaugh: We have, a sophomoric, naive, Leftist, radical little CHILD who we have elected President, who actually has such an ego, that he thinks, this is all about him, that he’s president of the world, his presence is gonna magically result, in all of these utopian, unrealistic dreams … that these pantywaists on the Left have harbored their entire lives (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/28/2009, 00:40:00 – 00:40:26).

According to host Laura Ingraham, Obama’s utopian disposition guarantees only one thing – failure:

Ingraham: At some point, we’ve got to, look at the world as it is, not the as --- as how he thinks it should be remade … in some type of different image. And more Americans, I am heartened to see, find out that, in the end, all of these utopian promises of the Obama Administration, and all of the things that we’ve seen so far, add up, to one big flop! A weakened America, a less influential America, and an America, yes, in decline. And for President Obama last night to say, ‘Im sick of these people sitting on the sidelines rooting for failure,’ no, no, no, no, look in the mirror, President Obama. The only one, looking for failure right now, is you! You are bringing this country, to her knees, with your out of control approach to spending, your lame, wimpy approach to foreign policy, and your inability to make a decision! That is what is (lululul) --- leading us toward, the brink of failure --- economic failure, military failure, foreign policy failure, and a failure of will! Look in the mirror (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/21/2009, 02:14:09 – 02:15:29).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers portray Barack Obama as flaccid, ineffectual, and weak. Narratives are constructed that depict President Obama as an impotent leader, unable or unwilling to aggressively stand-up to America’s enemies. CPTR narratives reason that Barack Obama would go so far as to capitulate to the world’s despots. According to Michael Savage:

Savage: If Obama had been in the White House in 1940 you’d be speaking German or you’d be a lampshade. That’s what I --- I’ll repeat it again he would have said that Adolph Hitler doesn’t mean anything (Michael Savage Show, 1/05/2010, 02:05:53 – 02:06:00).
Monica Crowley warns her listeners that Obama’s impotence exposes America – to “a dangerous world.”

Crowley: [...] While we’re all distracted by healthcare, and the economy, and everything else --- all the other jazz that’s going down in this country, our enemies are sliding closer and closer … taking more and more advantage. It’s a dangerous world out there, and this president, is navel gazing and worse (Monica Crowley Show, 9/19/2009, 00:10:07 – 00:10:31).

Barack Obama’s impotence heralds doom and destruction for America and the American way of life. President Obama is a weak-kneed, directionless coward – not only will he destroy America, he will tear down America’s allies and crush the dreams of freedom-loving people around the world. Rush Limbaugh argues:

Limbaugh: This man, God help us, is the leader of the free world, who doesn’t even stand up for freedom …Who does not even stand up for it. He does not stand up for the oppressed peoples of the world, such as those in Iran who would like to get rid of their oppressive regime. First president in the history, of the United States that does not stand for our own ideals, around the world. The first president in US history, who looks at the United States [sic] --- States as evil and unjust and immoral, until he, came along (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/28/2009, 00:42:32 – 00:43:09).

Barack Obama’s impotency is a threat to the cause of liberty and democracy worldwide.

Bruce: And, we of course note, that the other obscene thing that happened, was the release of, the mass murderer of Americans, the Lockerbie Bomber. Here’s the truth of the matter: various government officials here in America --- and Barack Obama said they’re OUTRAGED, ARGAAH! They’re outraged he said. And it’s ‘disgusting and obscene’. Urkel {Barack Obama} said, ‘you better not give him a hero’s welcome!’ and of course his big manly, HUGE --- he must have A HUGE PENIS --- Barack Obama --- HE MUST BE HUGE! Because ‘whatever he says people are supposed to do’. IT’S GOT TO BE GIGANTIC! You better, you better not give him a hero’s welcome, and ((ah)) you better, put him under house arrest! As opposed to, the normal human reaction, of, you better shoot that bastard in the HEAD (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/01/2009, 00:20:03 – 00:20:55)!

CPTR narratives emasculate Barack Obama; he simply does not have the “testicular fortitude” (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/09, 01:42:05 – 1:42:32) to do the job of President
of the United States – he is too weak, too soft, too intellectual, too effeminate. Barack Obama is not prepared for the real world of rough and tumble, high stakes politics – after all, it’s a man’s world.

As incredible as it is that an utter incompetent would be elected to the highest political office in the nation, what is even more remarkable, according to the narrative, is that Barack Obama does not want the job of President of the United States.

**Lacking in substance**

Obama’s incompatibility for office doesn’t end with his being unqualified and unremarkable. CPTR *Incompetence Narratives* also construct Barack Obama as lacking substance. Obama is an ‘empty suit,’ devoid of presidential gravitas, ephemeral. Monica Crowley repeatedly refers to President Obama as “The Bama,” a rhetorical move that erases Obama’s humanity and neatly transforms him into an object that, in her words, “can be dismissed and destroyed.” In commentary that enlists the plot of *The Wizard of Oz* as a metaphorical backdrop, Crowley describes Obama as a “wispy image,” fashioned and controlled by handlers who ”{wind} him up . . . and {send} him out to dazzle the folks” (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 00:00:53 – 00:01:36):

Crowley: Axelrod is there, the man behind the curtain, while he conjures up the wispy image, of The Bama. ‘THE GREAT AND POWERFUL OZ WILL SEE YOU NOW!’ The wispy *image, booms* at you, the wispy image speaks with the sound of authority. The wispy image looks *big* and intimidating and important. But since the wispy image is exactly that . . . wispy, that is ephemeral, lacking any real substance, and an *image,* meaning one dimensional, flat, distorted, and a sales job. Because a wispy image is both wispy and just an image it can be dismissed and *destroyed* with reality. Sometimes, just like in *The Wizard of Oz*, the truth comes in the form of a little dog, who pokes his nose under the curtain, and exposes the wispy image, as a fake, a fraud, and a phony. It doesn’t take a lot, to shatter the wispy image, because it is built, on a foundation, of sand. And *that* is the Obama presidency, a wispy image, *built* on a foundation of sand. And we, on this program, are pushing our nose under
the curtain, pulling it back, and exposing, the lie (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 00:01:37 – 00:03:17).

According to Crowley, and other CPTR hosts, guests, and callers, Barack Obama relies on his staff to mask his lack of presidential poise and disguise his inability to measure-up to the demands of the American people. As such, even in matters of deception – convincing the public that he is presidential when he knows he is not – Obama is not quite up to snuff.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers maintain that Barack Obama does not even want to be bothered with doing the job of President, it is too demanding; he is not ‘into’ the hard work required of the presidency and does not want to get his hands dirty. According to Monica Crowley, Obama believes his time is better spent smoking, shooting hoops, and on vacation (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 02:38:07 – 02:38:17). Crowley likens Obama’s disposition towards the presidency to a wayward adolescent trying to shortcut his way around unpleasant chores. Crowley reasons:

Crowley: [...] ‘The Bama’ really is not into this job, he’s just not that into it. And so he is like, the kid, in high school, or middle school, who would get the homework for the weekend, and I should say I, was one of those kids [HOST LAUGH AND LAUGHTER IN THE STUDIO] --- you get the homework for the weekend, and you do it all Friday afternoon or early Friday evening, so that you can spend your whole weekend free, right, so you can have the whole weekend off, you don’t have to worry about --- I wasn’t one of those kids who waited until Sunday night, like AJ, [LAUGHTER IN STUDIO] over here --- to do their homework because I didn’t want it hanging over my head. This is ‘The Bama,’ he’s getting everything through in the first hundred days --- let’s jam it all in --- so he can like kick back, and focus on b-ball, for the rest of his term (Monica Crowley Show, 3/20/09, 00:33:56 – 00:34:38).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers use President Obama’s accomplishments in his first several months in office as evidence of his dislike for the job. According to Monica
Crowley, what Obama desires is a return to his old, familiar life in Chicago - ultimately Obama just wants to quickly check everything off his list and move on:

Crowley: [...] And maybe he’s gonna think listen, if I get everything, ((uh)), [LAUGHS] through I I get everything done that I want to do, I don’t have to run again. Maybe he wants to retire [LAUGHTER IN STUDIO] to Chicago. You know he’s spending so much time outside the White House, can’t really stand the job, job is exhausting, he’s partying up a storm every Wednesday night. Getting to Chicago whenever he can or California to, to campaign or appear on the Tonight Show. Maybe he’s not that interested in the job? Maybe he already doesn’t like it so much, I mean he’s complaining that everybody is on his behind, well yeah, you’re the President. Maybe he doesn’t, we’ll see --- maybe Romney is right, if he thinks he gonna, say ‘Hey I checked everything off the list, I’m outta here! Thanks America! [LAUGHTER IN STUDIO] (Monica Crowley Show, 3/20/09, 01:26:47 – 01:27:31).

Barack Obama has no desire to serve America and the American people, only his own vain desires for power and glory. America, President Obama is just not that into you.

**Enemy-Within Narratives**

From the perspective of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers, what is critical to understand about Barack Obama are his secret intentions. In *Enemy-Within Narratives* CPTR hosts, guests, and callers routinely accuse Obama of wanting to destroy America. How? By undermining the fundamental rights of Americans and chipping away at America’s distinctiveness among nations. Obama is a Trojan horse - impressive, but concealing a serious threat. Barack Obama is simply not to be trusted; he is a chameleonic, a trickster, an evil joker, a Manchurian Candidate, and a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Obama’s upbringing and associations are evidence of his devious nature and hatred of America. Curiously, Obama is not only deceptive but self-deceived; so completely dishonest that he manages even to hoodwink himself. There is nothing trustworthy about Obama; absolutely nothing can be taken at face value.
Progressives feel differently. When PPTR hosts, guests, and callers speak of an enemy, they are usually referencing forces opposed to Obama. Progressives identify people or organizations who deliberately undermine justice, fairness, and equality as most threatening to the safety of Americans. CPTR claims that Obama is a secret enemy are ridiculed on PPTR and taken as evidence of conservative extremism.

PPTR hosts do, however, accuse Obama of deception, but there is a difference. Progressive critiques of Obama’s honesty are political, while conservative hosts, guests, and callers on CPTR make their critiques personal – attacking Obama’s integrity, character, and intentions. So, while the harshest progressive critiques of Obama explicitly charge him with manipulation, either of his supporters or of a charged political climate, these progressive critics explain Obama’s tactics as arising from dysfunctional politics, not a dysfunctional man.

Three claims support *Enemy-Within Narratives*: 1) Obama is intrinsically dangerous; 2) Obama’s background, family, and associations are indicative of disloyalty and a deep hatred of America; and, 3) Obama is a fiendishly charismatic manipulator. A summary of descriptive statistics on *Enemy-Within Narratives* is presented next, followed by qualitative findings.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Twenty percent (20%, \( n = 155 \)) of *Obama Narratives* (\( n = 790 \)) construct him as an enemy, deceiver, or evil trickster. Approximately two-thirds of *Enemy-Within Narratives* (\( n = 119 \)) were six minutes or less. Female hosts composed proportionately more *Enemy-Within Narratives* (7%, \( n = 99 \)) than males (3%, \( n = 56 \)). Of all CPTR hosts, Monica Crowley had the greatest proportion (11%, \( n = 44 \)) of *Enemy-Within Narratives*. Programs hosted by White Americans had the greatest proportion of
Enemy-Within Narratives (6%, n = 151) compared to the African American host (1%, n = 4).

Sixteen percent (n = 30) of callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose Obama Narratives with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 184), contributed to Enemy-Within Narratives. Among the callers who contributed to Enemy-Within Narratives, 67% (n = 20) were male, 93% (n= 28) expressed conservative opinions, and 7% (n = 2) had progressive views.

There were 812 Enemy-Within Thematic Segments distributed among all study narratives; 30% of all Obama Thematic Segments (N = 2,709) in the study as a whole. Enemy-Within Thematic Segments, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a host, were most often found in narratives composed by Laura Ingraham (38% or n = 158) and in other Obama Narratives where they were present in 47% (n = 381) of narratives. Enemy-Within Thematic Segments were present in 38% (n = 306) of Crisis Narratives and 15% (n = 125) of Hegemon Narratives.

Qualitative Findings

Thug-for-life

CPTR hosts, guests and callers maintain that Barack Obama derives his political style and tactics from Chicago politics. On CPTR, ‘Chicago’ is used as code for someone from the inner city, someone dark, dangerous, a thug. Too, ‘Chicago’ is made to signify political corruption – no-holds-barred, winner-takes-all, machine politics. That Barack Obama cut his political teeth in Chicago as a community organizer and later as state Senator, is all the evidence CPTR hosts, guests, and callers need to confirm that Obama is a ‘certain kind’ of person, practicing a ‘certain kind’ of politics.
In the following narrative Rush Limbaugh underscores Obama’s Chicago connections. Obama, as Limbaugh describes him, is “out of Chicago.” For Limbaugh and other CPTR hosts, Obama and Democrats like Rahm Emanuel and David Axelrod are vectors transmitting a dangerous liberal disease to the national political stage.

Limbaugh: These people are a team, it’s Chicago, this is Chicago thug politics . . . You’ve got Rahm Emanuel, you’ve got Axelrod, they’re all out of Chicago, you have Obama out of Chicago, this is Chicago machine politics, brought to the national level --- and they all think the same way. They all, ((ah)) have the same agenda (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/02/2009, 01:53:49 – 01:54:43).

Limbaugh pithily sums up his perception of Obama’s thuggish qualities and disposition as follows: “Obama’s not a fun-loving warm, cuddly guy; this is a cold, calculating and potentially very mean guy” (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/22/2009, 01:09:08 – 01:09:20).

Tammy Bruce builds on thug imagery, remarking on President Obama’s “Liberal-Fascist,” “mob” of supporters and their malicious intentions toward the American people:

Bruce: Barack Obama and his mob, do not mean well. I cannot stress that enough to you … he is, the top, of the Liberal-Fascist food change --- ch-food chain, change. (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/03/2009, 00:05:55 – 00:06:11)

Tammy Bruce and Michael Savage explain that President Obama harbors “a certain kind of malevolence,” as someone who is “projecting darkness instead of light”:

Bruce: I noted though on O’Reilly last night that there is a certain kind of malevolence … that this guy seems, to hold, for this country . . . and eventually we’ll find out exactly the details of that malevolence . . . but something’s wrong, because nothing explains, what this guy is doing (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/18/2009, 00:07:27 – 00:07:48).

Savage: It’s darkness --- he’s {Obama} projecting darkness instead of light he’s projecting lies instead of truth, he’s projecting ((ah ah)) a sort of hate instead of love (Michael Savage Show, 12/14/2009, 02:24:40 – 02:24:48).

Laura Ingraham’s thug imagery is less opaque. Enlisting a well-known thug icon, Obama is described as “The Godfather,” a man in charge of a vast criminal enterprise

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who exacts absolute allegiance through his willingness to mete out violence to insure loyalty:

Ingraham: It’s feeling a lot like the Godfather around here don’t you think? I mean when you’re in the family, when you’re in the Obama family, hey, ‘Don’t ever go outside the family’ {imitating Don Corleone from The Godfather}. Don’t ever, go outside the family --- don’t ever question the family --- to the outside (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/29/2009, 00:01:21 – 00:01:45).

Michael Savage unmistakably validates the use of thug imagery by describing Obama as “a gangster running the government”:

Savage: Well what’s going on in the world huh? You got a lying president and a compliant media. You’ve got a gangster running the ((ah)) the government. Gangster? How can you say gangster? Well, what is a gang? What is a gang? Let’s define a gang. Does a gang have to be of a certain race? No. Does a gang have to be, wearing a certain color? No. Can a gang, can a gangster wear a suit and tie? Yes. Can it be a politician? Yes. Can it be a woman? Yes (Michael Savage Show, 1/06/2010, 00:11:00 – 00:11:34).

Michael Savage does not except Barack Obama from the gangster label merely because his being the President of the United States and its chief law enforcement officer. CPTR listeners are warned: you can take the man out of the 'hood, but you cannot take the ‘hood out of the man.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers agree: Barack Obama is not your typical liberal politician. President Obama is variously described in CPTR narratives as a collectivist, socialist, communist, fascist, dictator, and tyrant and is regularly compared to Hitler, Stalin, Osama Bin Laden, and the devil. Obama’s policies and ideology are damaging to America’s values, traditions, and historic role in spreading democracy worldwide. Michael Savage describes Obama’s role and function within the Democratic Party as radicalizing mainstream politics:
Savage: Obama is to the Democrat {sic} Party what Osama Bin Laden is, to Islam. How's that, does that work for you?

Caller: [I agree, I agree]

Savage: [...] I would say that Obama has --- has radically hijacked, the Democrat {sic} Party [...] he hasn't yet done everything he would like to do but he is not a mainstream Democrat, he is not a mainstream liberal, he is radical, and as a radical, he is the same thing to the Democrat {sic} Party as Osama Bin Laden, is to Islam (Michael Savage Show, 1/06/2010, 00:47:00 – 00:48:07).

Rush Limbaugh likens President Obama’s healthcare reform policy to strategies and tactics drawn from the Nationalist Socialist - Nazi Party “playbook” and warns that healthcare reform will “lead up to” a kind of holocaust for the American people:

Limbaugh: I did not call Obama a Nazi. I called him a fascist. I said, Pelosi called all of us Nazis. And what I did was, I compared Obama’s healthcare policies to the Nazi’s healthcare policy. You know the Nazis did a lot of things besides the Holocaust, the Holocaust was the last thing that they did, but stuff leading up to it, I mean Obama ((eh)) could have written the playbook. Healthcare? They tried the same thing, I mean they were National Socialists, that’s what the Nazis were (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/25/2009, 00:02:02 – 00:02:32).

Regarding healthcare reform and the claim that Obama is a fascist, Tammy Bruce quips: “Because you know Stalin, called and he wants his policies back, by the way. Somebody better tell Obama” (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/15/2009, 01:18:49 – 01:18:55).

Barack Obama is constructed as the consummate evil-doer. Obama not only has complete contempt for America, he regards the entire history of America as oppressive, “immoral and unjust” - as one illegitimate exercise of power after another. Because Obama rejects the American popular narrative, he and his minions want to disrupt America’s historical trajectory by “remaking” America.

Limbaugh: The people, who are running the country now, are from a group, that does not believe, in the justness of the founding of this country. They are adamantly opposed to the way the country was founded. They believe, the country was founded by White, Eurocentric, racists, sexists,
bigots, colonialists, and imperialists. They believe, that the United States superpower status, militarily and economically, is the greatest, threat to world peace, and the climate and so forth. And their job, as they see it --- they don’t have a love for this country, as the people on the other side do who cherish the founding, who cherish the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and understand what it is. Understand that the greatness of this country is due to the freedom of its people, to be and do whatever they wish to the best of their ability. They don’t --- that is anathema to them they think that has led to an unjust and immoral country, with racism and bigotry, the majority tramping all over the minority, every day, since we’ve been founded, ((ah)) and it’s it’s they they must fix, they must fix. They don’t dislike America, they dislike America as it was founded, they want to remake it, and they want to rechange it -- or change it.

Caller: Rush, I think it’s an important point . . . [in what you are saying there] ---

Limbaugh: [And that to me by the way] is evil. If, we have people who want to take over the government of this country, via elections, for the the purpose of remaking it, and and and ((ah)) eliminating, all of the institutions and traditions ---

Caller: [-- all of the progress]

Limbaugh: --- that made this the greatest --- then that’s evil to me (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/06/2009, 02:16:18 – 02:17:56).

The goal of Obama’s presidency, according to CPTR narratives, is to impose a kind of civil death on America, only the U.S. Constitution stands in Obama’s way:

Limbaugh: I know it’s hard to believe that this is somebody’s design. But it is. Somebody who thinks that this is an immoral and unjust country. This country deserves, to live like the rest of the world, <rest of the world lives in poverty because of us> --- this is what Obama believes. Obama believes we’ve stolen the riches of the world, that we have used our imperialism to dominate the world and, and we’re unjust and immoral. If he can rip up that Constitution he would do it. He doesn’t like it, it’s an obstacle, it is a problem (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/30/2009, 00:36:43 – 00:37:13).

Barack Obama is intent on circumventing the U.S. Constitution and the hallowed customs that have made America “a city set on a hill” (Matthew 5:14, Holy Bible, New American Standard, 1995), turning it instead into a fascist state.
Michael Savage builds on this claim by drawing a parallel between Obama’s proposed national police force and Adolph Hitler’s Schutzstaffel or S.S.:

Savage: I believe that President Obama is not loyal to the United States of America nor to the U.S. Constitution, and I will continue my argument, as follows: Obama floated the idea some time ago of creating a national police force, something that this country has not had, ever since its creation. We have local police, we have military, we have FBI, we have a national guard. Why would Obama even have suggested that he needs a national police force, that reports only to him? Would you say that that is loyal to the U.S. Constitution? Well there was another leader who needed a police force that was loyal only to him, even though the country had a military, and the country had local police. That leader, was named Adolph Hitler, and he wanted a police force that was a hundred percent loyal only to him and he created the S.S., which was Hitler’s private national police force. Why would Obama even suggest, that he needs a national police force (Michael Savage Show, 2/04/2010, 01:36:30 – 01:37:36)?

Savage further fleshes-out the danger to the nation when an unpatriotic “baby dictator” like Obama is in control:

Savage: And so as I say to you, I believe President Obama is not patriotic. I believe President Obama does not believe in the U.S. Constitution. I believe the President has contempt for American values and traditions. I believe that the President will go all the way to becoming a an adult dictator, rather than the baby dictator that he is right now, unless you the people, speak out, and you the people act out, through Tea Parties and through voting at this time. You must understand the danger we are in. Now that is my premise, that Barack Hussein Obama, has in fact lived up, to the fears, that we had about him, at the beginning of this year and going back even into the campaign (Michael Savage Show, 2/04/2010, 01:39:49 – 01:40:44).

Barack Obama is the enemy-within who will work to destroy America from the inside. President Obama does not see - cannot see - the positive in America. Obama apologizes for America, heaps blame and guilt onto the shoulders of Americans, and encourages the whole world to do the same. Ultimately, Obama wants to instill in all Americans his warped view of this country so that every American might join him in tearing down the United States.
Family pathology and guilt by association

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that portray Barack Obama’s family and events he experienced during his upbringing as indicative of a deep-seated hatred of America. Obama is someone who does not like America because no one important to him has ever liked America. Tammy Bruce concludes:

Bruce: And this is the danger of Barack Obama: Barack Obama has brought both his mother and father with him. Two people who did not like this country. We are all products of how we were raised, no matter what other influences entered our lives as adults. What our experience is up until about eighteen to twenty, is the things --- ((ah)) is the thing that shapes us (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/02/2009, 01:44:44 – 01:45:05).

Family dysfunction lies just below the surface of Obama’s well-crafted and maintained façade, waiting to be dug-out by astute conservatives who “understand where this man’s mindset {is} coming from” (Michael Savage Show, 2/23/2010, 02:38:28 – 02:40:32) and the danger it forebodes.

We need look no further than Barack Obama’s mother for the source of his antipathy toward the United States. Stanley Ann Dunham had a significant influence on the man Obama would become. On CPTR, Dunham is portrayed as a disruptive influence whose choice of sexual partners and boy’s name evidence pathology. Mama Obama raised little Barry to hate America and then abandoned him during his formative years for “Third World men” – Muslims no less. The following extended dialog between Michael Savage and a caller illustrates the narrative logic that leads from family pathology, along a pathway of unresolved Oedipal conflict, to Obama’s deep and abiding hatred for America:

Savage: Let’s go to the callers. WOR, Mike welcome to the Savage Nation, go ahead please.
Caller: Hey Mike I think that we need to look no further if you want to look at the groundwork that was laid for, we don’t need to look any further than his mother. ((Ah)) this woman I believe is laughing all the way from her grave right now?

Savage: Well I know it’s considered impolite to talk about the deceased or the mother of a President but let’s do it because it’s a --- we can do it in a dignified fashion almost in a clinical fashion. Because I actually did it over a year ago when I wrote “Obama Has a Woman Problem.” And it goes back to his mother abandoning him. ((Ah)) on a repeated basis, leaving him with the grandparents, is that sort of what you’re implying in part?

Caller: Yes. I I also believe that, you know he has stated many times that she was a very very (ah) you, know, prominent figure in his life as all mothers are except our mothers --- ((ah)) your mother and my mother --- we were raised to love this country and she raised him with a different belief.

Savage: Yes, that’s correct. We don’t know exactly what she taught him but we know by her actions that she disdained the bourgeoisie mores, she she had contempt for America, she seemed always to be attracted to Third World men, and married two of them as a matter of fact, one a Kenyan and then another an Indonesian. I believe both of them were (um)), Muslims if I’m not mistaken, that’s very interesting isn’t it?

Caller: Yes.

Michael Savage: Why would his mother have married two Muslims men? Does anyone have an answer to to that? ((Ah)) and why did she have a bo--- man’s first name did anyone ever analyze that? Do you know what her first name was, it was a boy’s name, did you know that?

Caller: Yeah, Stanley.

Savage: Stanley. Now who would name their daughter Stanley? Could anyone explain why that was done? I mean I truly --- I mean there’s so much here for a ((ah ah)) a sociologist, who’s fair-minded, not one of the whack jobs in the universities today --- that we have to delve into because if you don’t understand, where this man’s mindset is coming from I don’t think you understand the danger we’re actually in and Mike {the caller} I think that I’m onto the right, course here I think people need to know the danger we are in and I thank you for calling (Michael Savage Show, 2/23/2010, 02:38:28 – 02:40:32).

As CPTR hosts, guests, and calllers delve into Barack Obama’s background and examine his friendships and associations, more patterns surface, revealing a disturbing
psychological profile that hints at Obama’s sinister ulterior motives and evil intentions.

Tammy Bruce connects Obama to “freaks” who do not like America:

Bruce: This is a man who prefers to be in the company, of freaks, of people who do not like this nation. We see that in his past --- Jeremiah Wright and William Ayres alone, Bernadine Dorn. We’ve seen this, this is nothing new. One thing you could ((ah)) props to ((ah)) ‘Urkel’ {Obama} for, he’s consistent (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/08/2009, 00:19:17 – 00:19:36).

Notwithstanding the charismatic figure Obama presents to the world, CPTR hosts, guest, and callers know the real Barack Obama: duplicitous, radical, and dangerous. In the following excerpt Sean Hannity is almost apologetic, reticent in voicing his own damning conclusions concerning Obama:

Hannity: In terms of Obama, listen I don’t know how else to say this, you tell me what ---where I can improve. I think, he is a radical Leftist. I think his radical associations, has certainly, changed who he is or or ((eh)) it’s certainly different from the person he presents himself to be, especially the person he was presenting himself to be during the campaign (Sean Hannity Show, 12/08/2009, 02:41:55 – 02:42:17).

According to the narrative, Barack Obama cannot be expected to be loyal to America or Americans; his own background, family, and associations make that impossible.

**Master manipulator**

Evidence for Obama’s deceptive character can first be found in the 2008 presidential campaign. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers charge that during his campaign for President, Barack Obama misrepresented himself and his intentions towards America and the American people. Obama is accused of actively burying aspects of his identity to get himself elected. Thus: candidate Obama is not President Obama; voters, both those who supported Obama and those who did not, will be surprised and dismayed by Obama’s presidency. A caller to the Laura Ingraham Show
expresses this concern, using racialized vernacular to describe Obama’s strategy to win votes and voters:

   Caller: [...] He takes the word chameleon and just takes it to the tenth degree I mean he he wants to be everybody’s buddy and he wants to be that gangster pimp daddy and that’s not what I want for a president and I know very many --- I know a lot of people who voted for him that can’t stand him now and can’t believe they got suckered into that (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/28/2009, 01:12:03 – 01:12:23).

CPTR narratives encourage listeners to see Barack Obama as always in campaign mode. Whether running for election or ensconced in the Oval Office, Obama is always ‘on’ – always at work deceiving the American people.

   Interestingly, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers also believe Obama is a victim of bad ideas; a virtual robot hardwired by forces outside himself to carry out a program deception. In a response to a caller’s concern that President Obama is a Manchurian Candidate, a “puppet” controlled by formidable anti-American forces, Rush Limbaugh concludes that Obama, whether he is aware he is being controlled by others, is responsible for his behavior. Obama’s actions define him and his beliefs; whether Obama has been told what to believe or not, his ideas damn him.

   Limbaugh: ((Ah ah)) we’ve gone back and forth, ((ah)) on on that subject: is Obama a puppet, is he a Manchurian Candidate, ((eh)) what is he? And whether or not he’s a Manchurian Candi--- you’re --- what you have to understand Susan (caller) is that he believes it {Obama’s talking points, beliefs, ideology} regardless whether he can write it himself. Whether he can put it on the prompter himself, he believes it, this is who he is. Whether he’s a front man, for somebody else, who would it be? George Soros, ((ah)) Rahm Emanuel, Axelrod, they’re clearly, you know ((ah)) I I if if my, sensibilities are quite naïve, if ((um)) if but if ((eh eh)) didn’t take me long to see the reality I think a lot of people bought into this whole post-partisan Obama’s a brand new kind of guy he’s going to get rid of all of the partisan divide, no more blue state, red state, and he had a lot of supporters on that basis, a lot of people joining him in the White House, then --- it wouldn’t have taken me very long to realize, this is not who I thought he was this is not right, this is not, what this country is all about. Government does not run everything that happens here we’re not going to
enact policies, that are gonna destroy the U.S. economy, we’re not gonna do it and yet nobody’s defected. And if you look at the people he has put in there, he’s got child abusers, he’s got perverts, he’s got noted communists, he’s got people who do not like this country at every level of his Administration so you have to assume that’s him too (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/05/2009, 01:39:35 – 01:40:59).

Thus, CPTR narratives simultaneously construct Obama as active and passive, a doer and done to, in charge and out of control, shrewd and a dupe. The net effect is: Barack Obama is an ideologue, a zealot, he cannot be reasoned with or dissuaded, trusted or believed – perhaps pitied, but never respected, and definitely feared for the changes he will affect.

CPTR hosts, guests and callers quite often present what they believe is smoking-gun evidence to support some spectacular claim about Obama. Essential to CPTR narratives concerning Obama is the assertion that he has managed to convince the public that he is a skilled, intelligent, and astute leader. Conservatives disagree; Obama is a fake. Without props, like a Teleprompter, Obama would be exposed as a fool. Consequently, Obama’s speechmaking ability and charisma often comprise the key pieces of evidence of his ability to deceive. In the following excerpt Sean Hannity makes the connection between Obama’s supposed power of deception and his facility with a Teleprompter:

Hannity: The speech {on job creation and economic growth} reveals something about Obama and who he really is, his character, ((ah)) which is --- he’s often misleading, he [is] fundamentally frankly misleading, in in a ton of ways, I mean his whole campaign frankly was based on just a speech that he read from a Teleprompter, that they would, you know, rewrite again and again (Sean Hannity Show, 12/09/2009, 00:15:47 – 00:16:15).
Barack Obama promised the world to gullible voters. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers know better than to believe the Obama-hype. Barack Obama is a fraud; far less talented and capable than he purports to be.

So how did Obama get himself elected President of the United States? CPTR hosts, guests, and callers attribute Barack Obama’s success largely to his skill at manipulation. Barack Obama was elected because of his great acting ability; he is a Svengali, a Pied Piper who beguiles the naive masses. In the following excerpt a caller to the Herman Cain Show attributes Obama’s electoral success to his ability to bait and ensnare his opponents, likening this strategy to a martial art:

Cain: Hello Bert, welcome to the Show what’s on your mind, you’re on Rapid Fire.

Caller: Herman I just wanted to explain the point that I think everybody’s missing about Barack Obama. He is actually the smartest cleverest president we’ve ever had. And we’re not recognizing it because we don’t recognize what he’s doing. He is --- he grew up and is, as everyone knows well that he is certainly a Marxist, he --- he has studied under that, kind of leadership, and he has a goal in mind. As in the sport of Judo, Judo --- most people don’t realize is a defensive sport ---

Cain: [Right].

Caller: --- you don’t make, an aggressive move, you decoy your opponent, into making an aggressive move and you know how to counter it ---

Cain: [Right].

Caller: --- that’s exactly what he’s doing to us now (Herman Cain Show, 05/27/10, 01:27:00 – 01:27:45).

Barack Obama also uses far less illusive means to manipulate the American people. Obama makes false promises to serve his immediate self-interests; according to Tammy Bruce, “Barack Obama lies, it’s that simple dudes, he lies” (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 00:09:05 – 00:09:10). While many Americans fall for Obama’s lies,
conservatives know better. Faithful listeners to CPTR have always known Obama’s true character; they are ahead of the curve and immune to Obama’s charm. Hosts Monica Crowley and Tammy Bruce remind their audiences that, by their faithful listenership, they have been inoculated against Obama’s wiles:

Crowley: I’ll tell you what time it is, this guy {Obama} is a radical, Left-wing nutcase. We knew it here, we reported it here, on this program, on talk radio. His statism, his radical ties, his extreme pro-abortion views --- all of the things that he buried during the campaign --- well guess what? We reported them nobody paid attention, except for us of course who voted for McCain and Palin --- and now we’re reaping the horrors of this (Monica Crowley Show, 7/25/2009, 02:46:35 – 02:47:04).

Bruce: Of course all of us knew that based on who he surrounded himself with before being elected, remember everybody like he’d walk through some portal and changed into somebody else, just not gonna happen. And it didn’t happen and we said it from the beginning. We knew what Barack Obama was before it was popular to know what Barack Obama was (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/04/2009, 01:23:38 – 01:24:05).

Because conservatives are well-informed and astute, they are better situated to lead folks to the truth – indeed only they possess the full truth about Obama. In the following excerpt Monica Crowley uses the dog Toto from the Wizard of Oz to depict conservative opposition to Obama:

Crowley: Sometimes, just like in the Wizard of Oz, the truth comes in the form of a little dog, who pokes his nose under the curtain, and exposes the wispy image, as a fake, a fraud, and a phony. It doesn’t take a lot, to shatter, the wispy image, because it is built, on a foundation, of sand. And that, is the Obama presidency. A wispy image, built on a foundation of sand. And we, on this program, are pushing our nose, under the curtain, pulling it back, and exposing, the lie. [Audio from the Wizard of Oz: “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain.”] Welcome, to the Conservative Coliseum, I am Monica Crowley your Conservative Warrior Princess, reporting for duty, and armed with truth, justice and the American way because Lord knows somebody’s got to fight for them before they go extinct, or before they’re outlawed (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 00:02:35 – 00:03:42).
Barack Obama is a master manipulator who deceives through charismatic appeals, jargon, and rhetoric. Obama’s goal: to confuse voters so that they betray their own interests and the urgent needs of America.

**Impairment Narratives**

CPTR *Impairment Narratives* depict Obama, as well as his supporters and fellow Democrats, as psychologically unbalanced. First, these narratives construct Barack Obama as a man stuck in childhood, unable to cope with the responsibilities of adulthood. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers reason that too much love, acceptance, and support have made Obama a narcissist, convincing him that he is God’s gift to the world. Second, these narcissistic delusions of grandeur render Obama irresistible to supporters and other Democrats. What else would explain Obama’s success? *Impairment Narratives* construct Obama supporters as a mass of crazed fans, out of sync with the real world and in need of conversion – only a complete ideological shift can redeem an Obama supporter and wash them clean of the sullying influences of Leftist politics. CPTR narratives about Democrats and the Democratic Party extend the claims levelled at Obama and his supporters. Democrats are dangerous to the American way of life; radicals, “Obama Lovers,” extremists, unpatriotic. Democrats – like Obama – don’t like America and are at war with the American people.

Progressive constructions of Barack Obama and his supporters could not be more opposed to the claims of CPTR *Impairment Narratives*. PPTR hosts, guests, and callers see in Barack Obama a heroic overachiever, a cool, hip, in-charge, rock star of a president. Obama wins the favor of progressives as much for what he represents, as for what he does not – an uptight, straight-laced, middle- to old-age, white, male aesthetic. Obama is quite simply: “The Man.” Progressives on PPTR portray Obama supporters as
the conscience of the nation - reasonable, thoughtful, tolerant, balanced, and forward-thinking. Far from being a threat to the American way of life, PPTR narratives depict Obama supporters as a hedge against extremes on the Right. What PPTR and CPTR supporter narratives share, however, is a mutual disrespect for the opposition. conservatives and progressive are equally as mean-spirited in demeaning their political rivals.

Interestingly, PPTR narratives converge with CPTR portrayals of Democrats and the Democratic Party. Americans tend not to trust politicians and progressives appear to be no exception. Democrats and the Democratic Party are depicted as inauthentic. PPTR hosts, guests, and callers question whether there is a difference between Democrats and Republicans that makes a difference in government policies. Progressives also describe Democrats as weak, spineless quitters who don’t consistently stand by their principles; Democrats are out for themselves. Importantly, however, while CPTR constructions of Democrats and the Democratic Party cannot be distinguished by the specific criticisms, they can be distinguished by degree. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct Democrats and the Democratic Party as nearly pathological in their pursuit of power, using all manner of deception and dirty tricks to undermine democracy and the rights of the American people. PPTR hosts, guests, and callers, on the other hand, chronicle Democrat abuses, demand change from the Party, yet, for the most part, remain hopeful that an honest and capable Democrat leader will emerge who can make a real difference.

Three narrative claims support *Impairment Narratives*. The first claim is that Barack Obama is a child in a man’s body; an out-of-control narcissist whose enormous
ego undermines his credibility, as it exposes him as a fraud and a threat to America security. The second claim is that Obama’s supporters are his victims; Obamazombies or Obamabots struck with charismania and unable to think clearly or for themselves. The third claim is that Democrats are demagogues who serve only themselves and are bent on self-aggrandizement. Together these claims serve to discredit and demean Barack Obama. Descriptive statistics on Impairment Narratives are presented next, followed by qualitative findings.

Descriptive Statistics

Forty percent (40%, n = 313) of Obama Narratives (n = 790) employ a psychological or emotional interpretive frame through which to construct Obama, his supporters, Democrats, and the Democratic Party. Approximately two-thirds (n = 251) of Impairment Narratives were five minutes or less. Female hosts composed proportionately more Impairment Narratives (12%, n = 168) than males (9%, n = 145). Of all CPTR hosts, Monica Crowley had the greatest proportion (15%, n = 57). Programs hosted by White Americans has the greatest proportion of Impairment Narratives (11%, n = 310) compared to the African American host (1%, n = 3).

Twenty-seven percent (n = 50) of callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose Obama Narratives with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 184), contributed to Impairment Narratives. Among the callers who contributed to Impairment Narratives, 68% (n = 34) were male, 86% (n = 43) expressed conservative opinions, and 14% (n = 7) had progressive views.

There were 1,051 Impairment Thematic Segments distributed among all study narratives; 39% of all Obama Thematic Segments (N = 2,709) in the study as a whole. Impairment Thematic Segments, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a
host, were most often found in narratives composed by Laura Ingraham (43% or n = 178) and in Crisis Narratives where they were present in 43% (n = 455) of narratives. Impairment Thematic Segments were present in 33% (n = 445) of Obama Narratives and 23% (n = 246) of Hegemon Narratives.

Qualitative Findings

Infantilizing Barack Obama

In their narrative descriptions of Barack Obama, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers portray the President as childlike. Obama is a lost little boy - green, naïve, and inexperienced. According to Michael Savage:

Savage: He {Obama} is, the training wheel president. He is actually the first training wheel president we have ever had. He is the man who cannot only catch ((ah)) not only catch the worm, he can’t catch the worm, he can’t catch a break, primarily because the imposter’s been exposed to most Americans. Everybody knows that the guy is faking it (Michael Savage Show, 2/15/2010, 02:12:31 – 02:12:51).

Obama is also casted as a truculent teenager, unable to perform as an adult and, therefore, not to be trusted with grown-up responsibilities. Michael Savage delivered the following commentary set to music from The Platters 1956 song, The Great Pretender. Invoking comparisons between Obama, TV spy Jack Bauer, and Catcher in the Rye protagonist and symbol of teenage rebellion Holden Caulfield, Savage opines:

Savage: [Music: “The Great Pretender”] Barack, Hussein, ‘Obauer’ . . . as Holden Caulfield, the perennial outsider, the adolescent. Everyone is wrong but him. The voters are especially stupid. They don’t just understand it, they don’t get it. He get’s everything because he’s so much more smarter than everybody at least that’s what the, White liberals have told him from the time of his birth in ((ah)) Honolulu Hawaii. And he doesn’t understand that he himself has been victimized by liberalism but that that’s a long story (Michael Savage Show, 2/02/2010, 00:00:42 – 00:01:18).
President Obama is a deluded adolescent; railing against authorities he imagines are doing him harm; an inveterate man-child, according to Rush Limbaugh:

Limbaugh: Do you know what a man-child is? I'll I'll ((eh ah ah)) go look it up in the urban dictionary. I looked it up in the urban dictionary and here's what it says: “A man-child is a fully grown male that acts like a baby; a man-child usually whines, complains and thinks everything is unfair. Man-children in the workplace can be recognized as one who is always complaining about the rules and/or shows too much emotion.” And Obama is constantly whining and complaining about Bush, and what he inherited. He whines and complains about everything. He’s the man-child. I’m proud I said ((ah)) --- shouting it, HE IS A MAN-CHILD (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/02/2009, 00:12:22 – 00:13:00)!

President Obama is also described as a boy trying to do a man's job. Monica Crowley captures elements of this aspect of conservative Impairment Narratives by painting the following word picture:

Crowley: I’m telling you this guy {Obama} is like, a kid wearing his father’s suit, where the collar is too big and the shoulder pads are hanging off the edges of his shoulders, swimming in the suit, swimming in it (Monica Crowley Show, 3/20/09, 01:07:19 – 01:07:30)!

But what is the source of Obama's immaturity? Why hasn’t the man grown-up? Is Obama’s immaturity a permanent, unfixable condition?

CPTR Impairment Narratives trace Obama’s stunted growth to dysfunctional familial relationships. According to Laura Ingraham, Barack Obama is the victim of family pathology that led him to seek solace from people on the political Left.

Ingraham: He {Obama}, just has this, impulse and it's probably the result of, what happened with his own family --- and not to do psych- you know armchair psychoanalysis here but, when you're abandoned not only by your father, but then by your mother … as he was … ((ah)) because she went off to find herself and you know ((ah)) again we all make mistakes in our lives we all go down this road but it's, it's gotta be very scarring. When you you know here your mother was with you, and you knew her, and then she just goes off and, gets in her own VW van and just starts to, head to Indonesia and hook-up with this guy and that guy and, no mom. He needs to be, he needs to be loved. He ((eh)) craves love, and support, and ((eh eh)) I guess in a way it's just, this is kinda textbook stuff. Now these these
were, cataclysmic events that happened to him as a young child now I’m not excusing any of it, but I truly am trying to understand it. And he could have gone ((ah)) a couple of different ways in his life, he decided to go, this hard Left, you know use-these-political-connections-on-the-Left route. He decided if he did that, he was going to be loved by more people, he’d be accepted by more people (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/21/2009, 01:51:41 – 01:52:56).

Interestingly, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers never claim that Obama failed to receive the love and attention of significant others, rather that he received the wrong kind of love and affection from the wrong kinds of people. From Leftists Obama received the care and support he should have gotten from his absent mother and father. Obama’s grandparents and Leftist mentors loved him too much, protected him too much, and cosseted him too much – and now, in adulthood, Obama has come to expect unconditional love and acceptance, without ever having to be accountable for his actions.

Obama’s present behavior evidences a sort of arrested development, argues Monica Crowley:

Crowley: ‘The Bama’ has always been roundly loved, and embraced, and cosseted, by those around him, by the press, by his ah personnel. Nobody’s ever questioned him, nobody’s ever beat him up, nobody’s ever investigated him, probed his past, he never had to handle any of those tough questions, and he’s never had to handle a defeat (Monica Crowley Show, 7/25/2009, 00:42:53 – 00:43:18).

What we see in Obama is a self-centered man dangerously out of touch with reality – the emblematic emperor with no clothes. Tammy Bruce opines that “nutty acceptance” of Obama has not only made him a profoundly self-deceived man, it has made Barack Obama a very dangerous man.

Bruce: He {Obama} walks into the room, and receives applause and and nutty acceptance. While he is setting this country on fire. Wouldn’t it be nice, for some level of reality --- well you know couldn’t it even help his political career, Barack Obama. The reason he’s got such a problem now
is because everyone around him, has protected him, hasn’t told him the truth, and has shielded him from the truth of the matter (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/11/2009, 00:33:11 – 00:33:37).

Unconditional love and acceptance, an inability to cope with criticism, having gone through life never experiencing defeat – these things have produced a broken man, trapped in a web of pathology. And America is made to suffer. However, as is true of many CPTR narratives concerning Obama, nothing succeeds like failure. Like the proverbial phoenix rising from the ashes, Obama manages to move from a broken childhood that seemingly scarred him for life, to Leader of the Free World. How does that happen?

CPTR Impairment Narratives also portray President Barack Obama as someone who deliberately cultivates and encourages a messianic image – that is, Obama sees himself as a divine and anointed leader. Where PPTR hosts, guests, and callers read confidence, poise and charisma, conservatives see only a guy with a messiah-complex. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers claim President Obama wants to be everything to everybody; that he dictates how the American people should or ought to feel about him, his presidency, and his policies. Case in point: anyone who fails to respond to Obama with gushing adoration is accused of racism. According to Laura Ingraham:

Ingraham: He is one of the most thin-skinned presidents we’ve ever had. You thought Nixon was thin-skinned? President Obama, doesn’t understand it if you don’t love him, and not only if you don’t love him, if you’re not obsessed with how wonderful he is. So asking tough questions, that is tantamount to, hating him, and the advancement of all Black people. I mean I really believe that some some of the supporters of Obama believe that --- if you’re not cheering him a hundred percent of the way, then you really aren’t for the advancement of of minorities in politics. It’s it’s so twisted (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/12/2009, 01:27:47 – 01:28:22).
President Obama evokes a kind of mindless support based solely on his ability to woo a crowd into a state-of-being CPTR hosts, guests, and callers dub Charismania.

Charismania facilitates a cult of personality that draws public attention away from important issues. The President uses charisma to sell patent lies and push a Left-wing agenda. Michael Savage describes how Charismania functions in the following commentary where he compares the persuasive power of Barack Obama and other liberals to that of serial kidnapper, rapist, murderer, and necrophile Ted Bundy:

Savage: And then you go on to a guy like Obama who really is the same kind of ((ah)) snake oil salesmen on the Left. You know he reminds me in many ways ((ah)) ---not in his acts don’t get me wrong, don’t take this the wrong way … but I say things in order to get your attention. To me, to me smooth liberals are like Ted Bundy, in other words they’re very good looking many of them they’re very charming and they sway people, by, seducing them, and then after they’re seduced, they --- ((eh)) it’s a metaphor you have to understand is real. ((Ah)) Obama seduced America at every level. He’s raping away our freedom, he’s raping away our tax base, he’s raping away our national dignity (Michael Savage Show, 1/13/2010, 02:23:25 – 02:24:05).

Ultimately, according to Rush Limbaugh, Obama’s goal is to destroy America – utterly tear it apart. The road to America’s destruction will be lined with swooning masses that have believed Obama’s lies and fallen for the hype associated with his presidency. What Barack Obama wants, concludes Limbaugh, is a new world order where, “it is cool to hate” America and Americans.

Limbaugh: I don’t know how I’m supposed to keep my self-esteem up. I don’t know how I’m supposed to continue to like myself, I don’t know how anybody in this country is supposed to feel good about themselves, when this lamebrain we elected as the president running around telling everybody all the faults that we have and all the problems that we created. Of course he hadn’t contributed to any problems, he’s the messiah, he’s the savior, he’s wonderful, he’s great, he’s going to deliver, the United States into a new era, where it is cool, to hate us, cool to rip us, and he’s going to show the rest of the world how to rip us and how to tear us apart – he’s gonna show it how it’s done. And the world’s gonna applaud
[APPLAUDS], they love Obama because, they, hate this country too (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/23/2009, 00:37:09 – 00:37:06).

What explains Barack Obama’s messiah-complex? Not only is President Obama a narcissist, he is a malignant narcissist who needs to insert himself into every national crisis. Everything is about Obama; making everything, wrongly according to Tammy Bruce, about race and racism:

Bruce: This is a guy I am convinced, because every single day he’s gotta open his damn pie hole, HE’S GOT TO HAVE ATTENTION. Because it’s all about him. If a day goes by, when it’s not about him, the malignant narcissism in him, eats away at him. He must make everything about him, he must. Which is why everything is about racism, or people are out to get him. ((Nah huh)) (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 00:25:12 – 00:25:40).

The good news for conservatives is this: Barack Obama believes his own hype. Like Icarus, the ego that has carried Obama to great heights of power and influence will cause him to overestimate his appeal. According to Monica Crowley:

Crowley: […] He {Obama} believed, and he still does, that his personal, popularity is enough to sell, unpalatable, unpopular policies. That it’s enough that he’s Messiah-like, that it is enough that he’s got this personal charm and charisma, that he can ram through, and seduce everybody into accepting these really outlandish and destructive policies (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 00:19:23 – 00:19:48).

By exposing Barack Obama for the self-obsessed, egoist that he is, conservatives have set in motion a chain of events that will end in Obama’s eventual defeat. Rush Limbaugh applauds the actions of conservatives opposed to the President:

Limbaugh: People are finally standing up to this little boy, this little man-child president whose primary I think, whose primary ((ah)) job if you want in life has been leisure. This guy is practiced, at leisure more than anything else (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/27/2009, 00:15:35 – 00:15:52).

Danger remains, however. Because he is a narcissist, Barack Obama will always seek his own pleasure and personal satisfaction; therefore, he will betray and lie to the American people to achieve his own ends. You see: Barack Obama wants what he
wants and he means to get it – even if he throws family, friends, fellow Democrats, or the United States ‘under the bus’ to get it.

**Obamazombies, Obamabots and other abettors**

CPTR hosts, guests and callers contend that Barack Obama has a psychological hold over his supporters who exhibit cult-like devotion to their dear leader. In the following excerpt Monica Crowley compares Americans attending an Obama rally to religious fundamentalists, “a cult of hypnotized crowds”:

Crowley: ((Ah)) By the way if you saw footage of this, {crowds assembled to hear a speech from the Ayatollah – whom Crowley refers to as “the terrorist-in-chief”) on Friday morning where the Ayatollah addressed these throngs of people during Friday prayers, ((ah)) its very bizarre, it’s really weird, I mean it’s just a it’s a it’s a total cult, it’s a cult of hypnotized, crowds. In fact, it looks a little like a Bama rally (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/2009, 02:42:02 – 02:42:22).

The hold Obama has over his supporters is also described as sexual. Monica Crowley maligns Republican civility toward Obama when she suggests such support produces, what she calls, a “Bamagasm” in then Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger:

Crowley: And ((ah)) and we got some other fun stuff for you including the Governor of California, caught in full-throated, toe curling, wow the earth just moved for me, [LAUGHING STUDIO], Bamagasm. All that’s coming straight up (Monica Crowley Show, 3/20/09, 01:16:38 – 01:16:54).

Barack Obama supporters are ‘turned-on’ by the President; they get a sexual thrill from backing Obama. This is more evidence that Obama supporters are a different species of people, not like us – they are out of control, emotional, and morally debased.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers contend that Barack Obama supporters are not interested in political issues and don’t care what is happening in and to America. Some people support Barack Obama in the hope that they will receive entitlements. In this
exchange with a caller, Obama supporters are compared to children, wooed by the
prospect of free ice cream.

Caller: Hey Mr. Cain this is Jerri, I am a new listener and one of those
newly awakened and --- [Cain: Good]! and I have sort of ((um)) an analogy
and a thought on leadership --- [Cain: OK] I actually applaud, many of
those people who voted for Obama, because they voted for --- they they
were voting for something --- [Cain: Yes] they were voting for what they
thought this country needed, they voted for what they thought he was for --
- [Cain: Right] they voted for something that they thought was good ---
[Cain: Yes]. But I don't know if you've heard the analogy of the 3rd grade
class that set-up a mock ((ah)) election --- [Cain: No] and Johnny gets up,
and he tells all the class how he's gonna, fix the cafeteria, or fix the
playground and do all of that kind of stuff. Well Wendy gets up, she says
I'm gonna get everyone ice cream --- [Cain: Yes] and they all go “Wahoo”!
And that's what they did [Cain: Right]. He sold us some ice cream ---
[Cain: Yes] but what he didn’t tell us, is they didn’t tell us that we all get
the same flavor, we all get it whether we like it or not. [Cain LAUGHS] You
gotta pay for ice cream for all those, who can’t pay for ice cream. And
what I'm hopeful of is that the ice cream is melting [Cain LAUGHS]. OK.
And now and now how are we --- now what are we going to do? Now
we're left with just a messy, sticky, pool, of old milk [Cain: Yes] (Herman
Cain Show, 05/28/10, 01:32:55 – 01:34:06).

Herman Cain's caller describes voters who do not like individual choice and want
government to run their lives, they are willing to trade freedom and individual liberty for
a security blanket from the government.

Barack Obama supporters do not share American values; they attack American
founding ideals, religion, and culture and want to destroy America. Obama supporters
don't believe that America is exceptional; they want to make the United States just like
any other country – ordinary. Host Michael Savage argues that Obama supporters are,
in fact, themselves unexceptional. Here Michael Savage condemns Obama supporters
for being useless, whiny, do-nothing, crybabies - young people who stole the 2008
Presidential election via twitter and other social media.

Savage: You got a megalomaniac who knows how to talk {Barack Obama}
and the orgasmic girls and pothead boys loved him so what more do you
want? WHAT MORE DO YOU NEED? The children of America, the potheads the red diaper doper babies elected him. Because they know how to >'twitter,'< as long as they know how to >'twitter'< everything will be good. They don't know how to make ((ah ah ah)) they can't nail put put a nail in a in a board, they couldn’t --- if you gave an average twitterer, a saw and a board, and you said to the twitterer, I want you to saw that board, either he’d break in tears or cut of his his finger. If you gave a average twitterer a hammer and a nail and two pieces of wood, and said that you have to make these two pieces of wood line up, with a couple of nails, they’d probably cry for their mommies, but they can twitter, and they know how to go online, and they know how to text. If you gave an average text messager, at NYU, a ((ah)), pipe wrench, some pipe tape, and you said to him your bathroom, sink, is clogged up I want you to remove the u-joint under the sink in your dorm, he’s probably cry for a Valium, and have to go see the school psychiatrist. But he can, text message, he can twitter, and more importantly, he can vote for, the, incredibly, telegenic, the incredible, magnificent Obama. That’s what’s important (Michael Savage Show, 2/04/2010, 01:07:30 – 01:08:57).

The inadequacies of Obama supporters do not come as a surprise to the well-informed CPTR listener; Obama supporters are the uninformed 50% of Americans who are gullible and drunk on the Liberal Kool-Aid. Rush Limbaugh and a caller describe Obama supporters as “just not wired to understand politics.” Limbaugh and his caller conclude that Obama supporters are ignorant, stupid, and emotional - yet also arrogant and condescending.

Limbaugh: Karl in Blue Island, Illinois welcome to the Rush Limbaugh program, hi.

Caller: Rush how you doing?

Limbaugh: Fine.

Caller: Good listen I just want to challenge your assertion on the you know politicians --- I hear you say once in a while how smart and educated and informed, the American people are. I really don’t think they are. I think that some people are just not wired to understand politics. Obviously sixty-some million wouldn’t of of voted for Obama.

Limbaugh: Well, you know this has comes up periodically and has over the ((ah)) course of my 21 star-studded years here. And ((ah ah)) the
cycle is, Rush you you always, say you’re gonna put your, your faith in the American people to do the right thing at the end of the day ---

Caller: Well that’s a hard thing to do.

Limbaugh: I know I know because people call: Rush, most American people --- they’re not --- they’re stupid, they’re just ignorant, they’re stupid.

Caller: Well listen I ah I’m a political junkie, I have conversations with people all the time. The Democrats and liberals I have conversations with seem to repeat something they heard somebody say, or the talking points or they they see a caption on the bottom of a picture, and then that’s their opinion.

Limbaugh: Well, I know, but you have to understand, liberalism, is not an intellectual pursuit, it’s an emotional pursuit.

Caller: Oh I understand that, I understand that.

Limbaugh: Conservatism is an intellectual pursuit […]

Caller: It’s very frustrating to have con---, the the the conversation that I have with liberals, they always end up when you throw facts and figures in their face, they always end up storming out of the room, I’m constantly being ((eh)) people walking out on me ---

Limbaugh: Well I know ---

Caller: Because you can’t dispute the facts […]

Limbaugh: I know, I know, I know ((ah)) facts get in the way ---

Caller: [Yeah].

Limbaugh: --- they live in an emotional cocoon they’ve constructed for a safe worldview, ((ah)) plus you couple it with the fact that they think they are the smartest people in the room ((eh)) all they are is arrogant and condescending ---

Caller: [Right].

Limbaugh: --- It is frustrating. I ((ah)), I don’t, mean I I have some liberal friends I love to, you know ((eh eh)) tease, and provoke, and toy with, but I don’t, really ever expect to persuade a bunch of them. They aren’t, they’re not a majority of the country. You think they are because of the election returns, but they’re not (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/29/2009, 01:40:04 – 01:42:20).
Despite having elected a president, Obama supporters should not be taken seriously; their support for the President is the clearest indication of the irrelevance of their ideas, values, and political agenda.

According to Herman Cain, the poor intellectual state of half of the American electorate means that conservatives have a special responsibility.

Cain: [...] At least 50% of the American people, are too lazy, to figure out what’s going on. So that leaves the burden on the rest of us, to know what’s going on, and try to sound the alarm (Herman Cain Show, 05/04/10, 00:36:17 – 00:36:28).

Barack Obama supporters are ignorant and don’t know it; unintelligent because they are uninformed; deluded and irrational; victims of Obama’s rhetoric and charisma.

**Democrats and the Democrat Party**

According to CPTR hosts, guests, and callers Democrats major in deception. Rush Limbaugh instructs his listeners thus: “What you have to know is whenever they come up with statistics and whatever, a study – they lie” (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/21/2009, 01:59:23 – 01:59:28). Not only do Democrats lie, they have no ideas of their own and encourage conflict to distract people from this fact. According to conservative host Monica Crowley the tendency among Democrats to lie borders on hysteria, a reflex that causes Democrats to make false accusations and vilify their conservative opposition:

Crowley: Well in yet another example, of the continuing Bush derangement syndrome, which proceeds apace even though President Bush has not held office, for what four or five months? Still the maniacs on the Left cannot let go of Bush and Cheney. They can’t. They’re absolutely defined by Bush and Cheney, the need to create the evil foil, and keep the whole Darth Vader imagery going, because they can’t survive without it, because their ideas standing on their own collapse, and they know it, so they need the villain all the time (Monica Crowley Show, 5/09/2009, 00:26:19 – 00:26:54).
Progressives need to construct conservatives as evil for their own political survival. Through the news and entertainment media, as well as public schools and popular culture (e.g., hip hop music and *Saturday Night Live*), Democrats propagandize and indoctrinate the unwitting public. Rush Limbaugh opines:

Limbaugh: [...] The Democrat Party --- liberalism owns, the entertainment culture, in this country. I mean you go look, at most movies, listen to most songs, particularly in the hip-hop arena, turn on, the video music channels and so forth, ((ah)) *Saturday Night Live*, doesn't matter --- conservatism, Republicans are routinely impugned, laughed at, made fun of ((ah)) and it it even happens in schools. I would consider schools to be part of pop culture ((ah)) because clearly, people in school are not being educated like you and I were (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/02/2009, 01:25:27 – 01:25:57).

The goal of Democratic machinations: to usher in a new America where conservative values and beliefs are maligned and marginalized.

‘Political Theater’ is the tool of choice of Democrats and the Democratic Party: emotional appeals, charismatic speakers, rhetoric, and jargon are all used to sway the masses – the everyday, ordinary working folk of America. Democratic Party victories come through ‘ginning-up’ support for a warped view of America. Democrats achieve this by never allowing crises to go to waste: using difficult problems to win support for their dangerous social programs and reform agenda. Race is one of the primary means by which Democrats garner support, win elections, and implement their horrible policies.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers fight Democrat and liberal narratives that construct conservatives as racially intolerant with counternarratives that argue that the reverse is true - Democrats are the “real racists.” The evidence: racists talk about race; racists acknowledge racial sentiments and concerns; racists won’t let the racial injustices of the past stay in the past. Real racists engage race. Real racists “play the
race card.” In the following two narratives Rush Limbaugh argues that Democrats promote racism outright and through their misguided and politically naïve ideology:

Limbaugh: Your {Bill Clinton} Party has PROMOTED RACISM, your Party has done everything it can to divide people in this country, I don’t care if by race, by gender, by sex, by age. That’s how the Democrat Party survives (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/22/2009, 02:28:10 – 02:28:21).

Limbaugh: Well now they {the Left}, they may be, a little misguided in that they think they’re helping the human condition, by getting rid of racism, sexism, bigotry — but in fact they practice racism, sexism and bigotry in the process, and they simply pollute, the decency of the country (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/06/2009, 02:18:26 – 02:18:40).

All bases are covered; the verdict is in: Democrats and liberals are racists.

CPTR narratives also explain why it is that Democrats fan the flames of racial, as well as class and gender, difference. Democrats practice racism to secure power and influence. Democrats tap into fear, envy, difference, and anger to prey on ignorant, low-knowledge voters. According to Tammy Bruce, when Democrats raise issues of bias and discrimination, particularly when they accuse conservatives of intolerance, what they are in fact doing is projecting their own racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia onto innocent conservatives:

Bruce: [...] All these liberals, all they have is race on their minds. Remember I told you in my first book, The New Thought Police --- racism, sexism and homophobia, all that they accuse you of, is a projection, of their disgusting, immoral PENT. THEY RELY ON THOSE THINGS, to to charge people up (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/14/2009, 00:47:22 – 00:47:42).

Frighteningly, however, Democrats and liberals will not be satisfied with votes, prestige, and holding powerful political offices:

Limbaugh: These people have purposely, set groups of Americans against each other, men versus women, black versus white, minority versus majority, (um) it’s a --- gay versus straight, they’re all by design, to create chaos, never contentment, never happiness --- they’re not happy. Have you ever been --- did anybody --- your professors were they ever happy,
or were they always constantly, wringing their hands and enraged and mad at whatever was going on, even after they’ve won all of the power, they’re still unhappy, they’re still angry, they’re still miserable (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/06/2009, 02:14:22 – 02:14:54).

Progressives are malcontents, psychologically maladjusted people, perpetually miserable, seeking to recruit more people into their unhappy and angry cabal. Psychologically broken people, Democrats and liberals will never be satisfied with the control they succeed in snatching from the hands of the American people. Lastly, Democrats don’t possess the skills and experience that conservatives value; they are elites, experts, career politicians, and Beltway insiders who don’t know anything about the lives of ordinary Americans. Herman Cain bemoans the states of Democratic politics:

Cain: You have, no leaders, in Washington, DC who want to do the right thing for the people. If they were to logically consider it {Fair Tax} it would be a logical solution, to a lot --- a lot of problems, and we talked about it before, they just don’t want to do it Dave {caller} because they don’t care about doing what’s right for the people, they have a political agenda (Herman Cain Show, 05/03/10, 00:43:44 – 00:44:05).

Further, Democrats don’t play fair, they engage in dirty politics: they pander to pet constituencies; refuse to be bipartisan; and, use incrementalism to achieve their sneaky policy objectives. Because Democrats refuse to play fair, Tammy Bruce, like many conservatives, rejects the idea of bipartisan cooperation, reckoning that conservative-liberal negotiation is more like being a passive sexual partner than political compromise:

Bruce: […] You remember what compromise is in Washington, and what bipartisanship is in Washington. It’s conservatives, grabbing, their ankles. There is no liberal compromise in Washington. IT DOES NOT HAPPEN! So we reject, bipartisanship. We reject compromise! Because all compromise is, is the retreat of the conservative position (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/02/2009, 00:16:17 – 00:16:45).
Democrats are, above all else, self-interested; they want to hide real solutions and are unaccountable for the poor outcomes, graft, and waste attached to the entitlement programs they support and implement at taxpayers’ expense. Democrats want to encourage dependence; this is part of their overall plan to move the United States from a representative democracy to communism. Monica Crowley uses healthcare reform to explain to her listeners how Democrats want to “seize more and more of [Americans’] freedoms” to buoy their own privileges:

Crowley: […] They’re not really interested in healthcare. This is not about your colon, or your eyesight, or your heart condition. This (eh) is nothing to do with that. This, has to do, with expanding government control over your life. And all of the big communists, from Lenin, to Marx, to those who are, actually carrying out communism around the world, they all understood this. You control medicine, you control people’s lives, you control, the population. And you, as the government controlling it … are powerful, beyond, belief. Remember guys this is not about healthcare, this is about, the Democrats, seizing more and more of your freedoms, and taking the power for themselves (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 00:47:42 – 00:48:39).

When Democrats, the Democratic Party and liberals are characterized so negatively, it is no great leap to believe that they do not love America or have any kind of commitment to the American people and their wellbeing. CPTR hosts contend that under the leadership of the most radical elements of the Democratic Party (e.g., Barack Obama) Democrats seek to cripple, if not destroy, America to fill Democratic Party coffers, enjoy exalted status, and insure absolute power. Here Limbaugh describes the “governing policy” of the Democratic Party:

Limbaugh: Now folks, knocking, down the United States, from its position of number one has been a Left Wing project for generations. It is an explicit Democrat governing policy whenever they’re in office, they hate, they hate a powerful America, they do whatever they can to weaken us, by any means necessary. We are the problem in the world, from global warming, to executive compensation, the banking and financial regulations ... And make no mistake, this is who they are. They don’t like us being,
supreme. We are immoral and we’re ((ah)) unjust and this, is something Obama believes as well. I think this totally explains the, ideology behind what Obama is doing internationally and domestically for that matter, it’s all purposeful, all of this, is purposeful (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/21/2009, 00:53:54 – 00:54:49).

In addition to creating dependence, stealing Americans’ rights, and undermining U.S. world supremacy, the Democratic Party, according to Monica Crowley wants to take over the private sector to create the “perfect storm” of an economic crisis that will enable Democrats to destroy global capitalism:

Crowley: So, we’ve been talking about ((ah)) the out of control ((ah)) government, being run ((ah)) run by the Democrats here, fact that they’re running the country straight into the ground. It’s amazing that with all of this spending, the Democrats feel perfectly comfortable to go out there and defend it. And I guess it’s not astonishing, I suppose it’s not surprising this is the party of tax, borrow, and spend, so of course they would feel in their element going out there, defending the largest transfer of wealth, from the private sector, to the government. This is their baby this is their perfect storm; this is the liberal’s perfect storm. The perfect economic crisis, to set-up, the perfect takeover of the private sector in huge chunks, by the federal government (Monica Crowley Show, 5/09/2009, 00:49:20 – 00:50:08).

The surest sign that Democrats are untrustworthy and un-American is that the Democratic Party callously betrays the founding principles of the United States. Democrats are Goliath to conservatives’ David – a monstrous, illegitimate, wicked authority. Democrats are trying to take control of this country from The People. They have hijacked the government and force legislation down the throats of Americans. “The Democrats are” according to Monica Crowley, “drunk on their own totalitarianism” (Monica Crowley Show, 3/20/09, 00:03:41 – 00:03:48). Rush Limbaugh sums-up the fears of conservative hosts, guests, and callers: Democrats and the Democratic Party are engaged in a “Liberal Jihad”:

Limbaugh: Let me -- let me try to explain what’s going on this way: you know we have, Jihadists, all over the world, we have Islamic Jihadists and
so forth and right now I think, we in this country face a Liberal Jihad ... We have a holy war against the Constitution of this country being fought by the American Left. And instead of, what the Islamic Jihadist say 'Death to America, death to America!' What the Liberal Jihadists are saying is, 'Death to the Constitution.' If they have to blow themselves up, like the Islamic Jihadists do --- each liberal gets 72 interns in Paradise, that's the promise (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/30/2009, 01:26:32 – 01:27:15).

Of such Liberal Jihadists Limbaugh concludes, "Liberals in power are a threat to Western civilization. They are ruthless in pursuit of power, but they are weak in the face of evil" (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/07/2009, 01:27:05 – 01:27:20).

Limbaugh: The Harry Reid-Pelosi-Obama plan comes down to this: the Democrats are scheming against the American people as they have been all along. The Obama Administration --- starting with the campaign --- was a scheme against the American people and against the traditions and institutions, that have defined this country's greatness. I know I say that like a broken record, but it takes repetition. The Obama Administration is a scheme, the Obama campaign was, a scheme (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/30/2009, 00:34:12 – 00:34:45).

With the election of the first African American president in United States history, the evil machinations of Democrats and the Democratic Party – indeed, of anyone who deeply hates America – have all come to a head.
### Table 7-1. Obama Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUANTITATIVE MEASURE</th>
<th>All Study Data N = 3,051</th>
<th>Obama Narratives n (%)</th>
<th>NARRATIVE THEMES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 790</td>
<td>Incompetent n (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative Themes</td>
<td>3051</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>322 (41)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modal Segment Length (minutes)</td>
<td>≤ 5</td>
<td>≤ 6</td>
<td>≤ 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Host with Most Segments (% of host’s segments)</td>
<td>Limbaugh 612(20.1)</td>
<td>Crowley 160(41)</td>
<td>Bruce 94(16)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narratives by Female Hosts</td>
<td>1398</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>185(41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives by Male Hosts</td>
<td>1653</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>137(41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives by African American Hosts</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16(70)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narratives by White American Hosts</td>
<td>2745</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>306(40)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Callers</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>104(57)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative Callers</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>95(57)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progressive Callers</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9(50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Conservative Callers</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>33(57)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male Conservative Callers</td>
<td>454</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Progressive Callers</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male Progressive Callers</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6(43)</td>
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<td>Thematic Segments in Study</td>
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<td>3321</td>
<td>1056(31)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thematic Segments in Chapter</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1357</td>
<td>420(31)</td>
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Chapter 8 presents findings from the second research question: How does Conservative Political Talk Radio build and enact: identity (e.g., subjectivity, selves); social groups (e.g., solidarity, otherness); cultures (e.g., values, beliefs); and social institutions (e.g., family, government)? The hypothesis developed from case study analysis of CPTR and PPTR data was that: CPTR uses language and narrative to build and enact identity and relationships through binaries that are applied to individuals, groups, cultures, and social institutions.

**Building Tasks**

Two building tasks (Gee, 2011) were used to explore the research question and help to identify the narrative social construction of reality on CPTR. What was of particular interest was the “being” function of language; language processes that facilitated being recognized by others as a particular kind of self. The first of Gee’s (2011) building tasks used to analyze CPTR data was “Relationship”: how language and narrative are used to build, sustain, or undermine relationships between individuals, social groups, cultures, and/or institutions. The second building tasks was “Identities”: how language and narrative are used to enact specific identities, to project identities onto others, to privilege or disprivilege identities, and to get others to recognize identities.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Thirty-five percent (35%, n = 1066) of study narratives were *Crisis Narratives*. *Crisis Narratives* ‘raise an alarm’ by constructing a problem around identity that CPTR hosts, guests, and listeners are asked to respond to. *Crisis Narratives* undergird and
spur conservative opposition and activism. Crisis Narratives include three narrative themes: War and Innocence Narratives (53%, n = 568), Enduring Threat Narratives (10%, n = 108), and Conservative Activism Narratives (37%, n = 390).

Approximately two-thirds (n = 811) of Crisis Narratives were six minutes or less. Among male hosts 38% (n = 628) of all narratives were Crisis Narratives compared to 31% (n = 438) among female hosts. Of all CPTR hosts, Michael Savage had the greatest proportion of Crisis Narratives (50%, n = 128). Among programs hosted by White American CPTR hosts, 36% (n = 983) of all narratives were Crisis Narratives compared to 27% (n = 83) among the African American CPTR host.

Three hundred and ninety-five callers called-in to CPTR programs to compose - with hosts, guests, and other callers - Crisis Narratives; 54% of all callers (n = 731) in the study as a whole. Among the callers who contributed to Crisis Narratives, 69% (n = 272) were male, 90% (n = 355) expressed conservative opinions, and 10% (n = 40) had progressive views.

When the ideas, arguments, or characterizations conveyed by a narrative theme are incorporated into another narrative theme (e.g., if aspects of a War and Innocence Narrative – i.e., America need not apologize for its actions abroad – are utilized in a story about mainstream media bias – an Enduring Threat Narrative) this segment of narrative data was coded as a thematic segment. Thematic segments can be thought of as subthemes of a larger narrative.

Study-wide there were 2,619 Crisis Thematic Segments (32% of all thematic segments in the study as a whole, N = 8,156): 39% (n = 1,013) were War and Innocence Thematic Segments; 25% (n = 651) were Enduring Threat Thematic
Segments; and 36% (n = 955) were Conservative Activism Thematic Segments. Among Crisis Narratives, 37% (n = 1,115) of all thematic segments (n = 3,052) were Obama Thematic Segments (discussed in Chapter 7): 35% (n = 1,075) were Hegemon Thematic Segments (discussed in Chapter 9) and 28% (n = 1,630) were Crisis Thematic Segments.

Chapter Organization

The three narratives themes that emerged from an analysis of the CPTR data – War and Innocence Narratives, Enduring Threat Narratives, and Conservative Activism Narratives - speak specifically to identity, difference, and the instability that flows from multiple, competing perspectives on social reality.

After presenting descriptive statistics on each Crisis Narrative, qualitative findings are presented. The presentation order of the narrative themes is not based on the number of narratives found in the CPTR data. Rather, the narratives are presented to capture the overall story plot or social construction of reality on CPTR. Where appropriate, the narrative claims that support Crisis Narratives are expressed in the voice of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers. This might seem jolting at times; the goal is verisimilitude – to maintain the narrative standpoint of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers.

War and Innocence Narratives

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that portray America as being in the midst of an existential crisis. These War and Innocence Narratives use military analogies and war language to not only frame Obama and Democratic policies, but also to legitimate and valorize conservative opposition. War and Innocence Narratives are made more persuasive when embedded in recitations of U.S. history that utilize an innocence-heroism frame: America sheds blood (its own and others’) only
when morally justified to do so; she is a friend, nee savior, to peoples and nations around the world. CPTR *War and Innocence Narratives* succeed in depicting America as perpetually embattled, but destined to win. conservatives are authentically American, brave, just, and patriotic.

Progressives have a more nuanced read on America – present and past. While PPTR hosts, guests, and callers use bombastic language to describe the issues that concern them, they don’t use military analogies and war language nearly as much as their conservative counterparts on CPTR. Progressives, like conservatives, frame present concerns in a historical perspective; however, on PPTR the historical frame is more comprehensive – both chronologically (conservatives tend to emphasis the founding period of American history) and in terms of the diversity of perspectives included. There is no innocence-heroism frame on PPTR. PPTR hosts, guests, and callers depict an America that lurches in fits and starts towards it highest ideals with the help of ordinary citizens who goad it progressively forward.

Nonetheless CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are confident that America rests on the verge of annihilation. Conservatives see it as their patriotic duty to sound the alarm and rally fellow-patriots to a sacred cause: Take Back America! Three claims support *War and Innocence Narratives*: 1) American history is epitomized by national innocence and heroism, at home and abroad; 2) enemies, domestic and foreign, have caused a crisis in America; and 3) a war is being waged that aims to destroy America and conservatives – true Americans – must join the fight. A summary of descriptive statistics on *War and Innocence Narratives* is presented next, followed by qualitative findings.
Descriptive Statistics

Fifty-three percent (53%, n = 568) of Crisis Narratives (n = 1066) use an innocence-heroism frame to support claims that America is in a serious state of emergency. Approximately two-thirds of these War and Innocence Narratives (n = 427) were six minutes or less. Male hosts composed proportionately more War and Innocence Narratives (22%, n = 367) than female hosts (14%, n = 201). Of all CPTR hosts, Michael Savage had the greatest proportion of War and Innocence Narratives (35%, n = 89). Programs hosted by White American hosts had the greatest proportion of War and Innocence Narratives (19%, n = 520) compared to the African American host (16%, n = 48).

Sixty percent (n = 236) of all callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose Crisis Narratives with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 395), contributed to War and Innocence Narratives. Among the callers who contributed to War and Innocence Narratives, 68% (n = 161) were male, 93% (n = 219) expressed conservative opinions, and 7% (n = 17) had progressive views.

There were 1,013 War and Innocence Thematic Segments distributed among all study narratives; 39% of all Crisis Thematic Segments (N = 2,619) in the study as a whole. War and Innocence Thematic Segments, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a host, were most often in found in narratives composed by Michael Savage (53% or n = 135) and in Hegemon Narratives where War and Innocence Thematic Segments were a subtheme in 36% (n = 360) of narratives. War and Innocence Thematic Segments were present in 32% (n = 327 and n = 326, respectively) of both Obama and Crisis Narratives.
Qualitative Findings

Innocence and heroism

Conservative hosts, guests, and callers have a sentimental longing for a past characterized by homogeneity, predictability, and harmony. This imagined past is threatened by contemporary counternarratives that paint a complex, contentious picture of America’s past, present, and future. Unasked for change, an emphasis on diversity over unity, challenges to dominant beliefs, values, and identities, as well as organized movements that call into question the legitimacy of national as well as global divisions of wealth and resources – all trouble the conservative mythos of a just, faithful, and enduring homeland. In the following commentary on a news article, Laura Ingraham registers her frustration with contemporary retellings of the Christopher Columbus story:

Ingraham: The whole terminology has changed, this is according to the Associated Press piece about the darker side of Columbus in U.S. classrooms. James Kratch the Executive Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Texas A & M, he says this, “You don't hear people using the word discovery anymore like they used to, “Columbus Discovers America,” because how could he discover America, if there were already people living here?” Ah maybe because people living here were like wearing animal skins, and you know weren’t exactly you know at the height of of European or Western culture ah not yet at least, I mean, they were living off the land and ah incredible people but I mean it was a new discovery it was was a wild wild place. Where you know there wasn’t a civilization, that that Europe was aware of at the time so it was a big deal. “In Texas students start learning in the fifth grade about the ”Columbian Exchange” which which consisted not only of gold, crops and goods, but diseases carried by settlers that decimated [Ingraham laughs and guffaws] native populations.”

Ingraham: You know basically what we did to this country when Columbus came here – the settlers, pilgrims, they ruined America, they ruined this place, this beautiful place with their diseases, and their customs, and their and their farming and their – “In McDonald, Pennsylvania 30 miles southwest of Pittsburgh fourth grade students at Fort Cherry Elementary, put Columbus on trial this year,” Oh gee! “Charging him,” are you ready for this? I’d like to put these teachers on trial for impersonating educators. “Charging Columbus with misrepresenting the Spanish Crown and
thievery.” How about teaching them something that’s actually going to carry them into their adult lives, not your tripe that is designed to do one thing, undermine the belief in the foundations of this country. What a nightmare. “They found him guilty.” [Ha!] “They found him guilty and sentenced him to life in prison . . . In their own verbiage, he was a bad guy, teacher Laurie Crawford said” (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/12/2009, 02:10:01 – 02:14:27).

Conservative hosts, guests, and callers on CPTR use history to both contextualize and decontextualize narrative claims. Through historical absences, revisions, and erasures, an American past emerges wherein innocence, heroism, and righteousness are the foremost ideals. Conservative historical narratives emphasize success, not failure, sacrifice, not self-interests, and passion, not greed. Any departure from the innocence-heroism frame is met with outright denial and ridicule.

In the following excerpt from the Monica Cowley Show, the host responds to statements made by Obama on trips he made to Central and South America early in his presidency, where he accepted the historically-grounded criticism that America has not always acted in a morally upright manner. To conservative hosts, guest, and callers, historical contextualization equals apology, and any apology for America is considered unpatriotic:

Crowley: The Bama has constantly, since he became president, has constantly been out there, apologizing for American foreign policy, everywhere he goes! Without taking the opportunity to talk about the greatness of America, the uniqueness of this country, the strength of this country, and the good we have done in the world. We have spent so much in blood, in treasure, in money, in just reaching out to democratic forces in the world and people who have been held captive by the forces of tyranny. I don’t care where they were under the Soviet empire, in Central America, South America, anywhere in the world. And how dare the President, how dare he say that we have been heavy-handed in this part of the world. How dare he do that! This is nothing new this is the same drill, this is the same routine from this guy, constantly, constantly going out there apologizing for America: ‘we’re so sorry we’re so good, we’re so sorry that ah, that ah we were defending democratic forces in the world, we’re so sorry that we liberated countries X, Y, and Z from the jackboot of
tyranny, we’re so, I am so I got to apologize for the forty-three presidents who have come before me’ (Monica Crowley Show, 4/18/2009, 01:06:28 – 01:07:48).

Rush Limbaugh sets the record straight for his listeners: The United States stands alone as the exception to the broad sweep of world history. Once again any deviation from a spotless retelling of American history is condemned.

Limbaugh: The history of the world is torture, rape, mayhem, dungeons, prisons, totalitarianism, thuggery, the exception to the normal human nature that has characterized human beings from the beginning of time, the exception is the United States. And this is what is so saddening to watch it being torn apart, ripped to shreds, criticized and not even understood, because Obama is saying, ‘No there is nothing exceptional about our country, there is nothing exceptional’ – in his view, we are tarnished, in his view we are stained, in his view we have been immoral and unjust and our Constitution, is flawed it is negative, it is, imprisoning, it doesn’t recognize the concept of civil rights and human rights and all these other little bywords that Leftists throw around and don’t even understand the true meaning of (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/23/2009, 01:45:45 – 01:43:52).

Rush’s message to America: Fear not; truth is on your side, America.

When Barack Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 for, "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples" (nobelprize.org), despite the significance of the honor, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers were livid. Here, Laura Ingraham expresses the feelings of many conservatives on CPTR:

Ingraham: We don’t need some bureaucrats in in in Oslo, giving us some, some sense of legitimacy on the world stage. Ah we don’t need that, guess what we have? We have we have the truth on our side, we have history on our side, for those whom we’ve liberated, those whom we’ve helped, the cause of freedom has been advanced and championed by Americans through our blood and treasure and our sacrifice over the ah the entire history. OK so we don’t need, five ah five elites in in in the Nobel Committee, you know ah making this ah grand statement, it’s irrelevant to us, completely irrelevant (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/12/2009, 00:19:00 – 00:19:43).
The following narrative segment from Herman Cain on the significance of civil rights legislation to the resolution of racial injustices in America, illustrates, again, the way conservative hosts on CPTR tweak history to fit contemporary narratives that smooth-out bumps in America’s road towards equal rights for all citizens:

Cain: Closing of the racial divide started in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and as corporations started to embrace people based upon their potential and their performance and less on their color, then people – they started to realize that you know what – this whole color thing has just been an albatross and a red herring all these years and corporations started to look at people and they brought them in and they’ve been moving up in their corporate structures and you now have Blacks who are heads of major Fortune 500 companies etcetera and all of this kind of stuff and all of these kinds of things. The same things gonna happen relative to some of these social and moral issues – OK that doesn’t mean that you don’t abandon that you abandon your position, it simply means that you respect the fact that we have these differences (Herman Cain Show, 05/05/10, 01:45:18 – 01:46:45).

Years of struggle and sacrifice – ceded to corporations who, according to Cain, were unsung figures in the Civil Rights Movement.

But no CPTR hosts has mastered the pithy comeback as well as Rush Limbaugh. Regarding the Columbian Exchange:

Limbaugh: Holocaust. 90 million Indians {killed}. Only 4 million left? They all have casinos. What’s to complain about (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/25/2009, 02:14:48 – 02:14:54)?

Done: an end to progressive griping about the sins of America’s past.

Conservatives and conservatism take on the features of a valorized America by linking conservative individuals and ideas to historic American events, figures, and documents – claiming each as their own, authentic conservative contribution. In the following excerpt Monica Crowley uses several historical buzzwords to connect modern conservative activism to the American revolutionary era:
Crowley: Welcome back. I am Monica Crowley and this is Party Central for the New Conservative Movement. I should also remind you that this is the original home of the second American Revolution of ideas. Join our peaceful revolution, we need all the minute men we can get. Your country needs you. Answer the call. (Monica Crowley Show, 3/20/09, 00:48:24 – 00:48:44)

From conservative historical narratives arise the remnants of a sacred civil society that is the precursor of contemporary conservatism. Today’s Conservative Movement is a continuation of a sinless past; this, in effect, immunizes conservatives and conservatism from accusations of racism, sexism, and class oppression – their retelling of American history simply does not allow it.

In the following excerpt Laura Ingraham highlights the importance of conservatism and its evolution to a more egalitarian ideology; an ideology that is prototypically American and has benefited the world:

Ingraham: The Party left [the] idea of Country Club conservatism and the Party became the most important ideological force pushing conservative ideals of any ideology in the last hundred years: conservatism. The most important influence on the American people and the rest of the world. Much more so than liberalism. (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/14/2009, 02:56:18 – 02:56:36)

The historical connection drawn between a sanitized American history and the United States Conservative Movement imbue conservatism with deep historical significance and moral rectitude.

**Enemies foreign and domestic**

There are enemies – both inside America and abroad – that want to destroy America: Obama, Democrats, liberals, the Left and their supporters, as well as terrorists and leaders of countries that are simply jealous of American prosperity and freedom.

The enemy is single-minded. Conservative hosts, guests, and callers construct *War and*
*Innocence Narratives* that outline the threat of potentially devastating conspiracies at work in an undeclared war on America and the American people.

In the following bumper (a short audio segment promoting a program that is played before or after a commercial break) Monica Crowley reminds listeners why they tune-in to “the Conservative Coliseum,” who she is, and what they are fighting against:

Crowley: Welcome to the end of the week here in the Conservative Coliseum. I am Monica Crowley your Conservative Warrior Princess. Armed with truth, justice, and the American way. For which we fight, three hours a day, every day. Beating back *tyranny*, *socialism*, *unconstitutional acts*, and the pillaging of this great land wherever we see them raising their *ugly* heads.

Listeners to CPTR are encouraged to see themselves as “defending fathers,” protecting the country from clandestine plots to undermine traditional American values:

Cain: We have to be the defending fathers. And all of those people that gave their life to defend this nation in its various wars and all of those men and women that are fighting today and all of those *veterans*, all of those *veterans* . . . that *fought* to defend this country, *we* must now be the defending fathers. But we’ve got to *defend* a different *type* of enemy. They’re not shooting at us or trying to bomb us, the way they’ve done on the battlefield, no they are trying to *destroy* us by *destroying* our *constitution*, *rewriting it*, *destroying our beliefs*, and *destroying our values*. This is the war that we are up against. But it is also a war that *some* of us are going to *fight* with every ounce of energy that we can muster. (Herman Cain Show, 06/01/10, 00:40:29 – 00:41:34)

Clearly, the battle is good against evil, order versus chaos.

*America’s enemies desire a weak America, a dependent America, an America that is no longer a super power, a less secure and more vulnerable America. America’s enemies want to humiliate and denigrate the greatest power the world has ever known.*

Monica Crowley warns listeners that our own government, under the leadership of Barack Obama, is siding with “the head-cutters” to destroy what it took centuries to build:
Crowley: Guys we now have a government, an Administration that cares more about protecting the head-cutters, than it does about protecting you. This Obama Administration can relate more to terrorists that want to take your head off, than it can relate to you. It wants to protect the rights of the head-cutters, before it wants to protect your right to life. World’s terrorists shouldn’t worry their bearded heads about Team Bama because Team Bama is more of a danger to us than it is to them. And that’s what you should take away today as you think about eight years ago this week [9-11 terrorist attack] (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 01:50:23 – 01:51:06).

Fortunately, there is a way to respond to enemies that will effectively eliminate the threat. Monica Crowley outlines a dispassionate approach to America’s enemies:

Crowley: When you are dealing with America’s enemies, there is no such thing as compassion. They don’t have it and they don’t show it to us. Instead they use our values and our morals and our sense of conscience and decency and our compassion – they use all of those things against us – they use them as weapons. The only way to destroy the enemy before it destroys us, is to get to the point where Corporal Upham was at the end of the movie [Saving Private Ryan] – to get to the point where we can demonstrate we will be as ruthless as they are (Monica Crowley Show, 8/22/2009, 01:16:15 – 01:17:02).

No compassion, only ruthlessness: that is the way America should deal with its enemies.

**Waging war**

Contrary to what Barack Obama says, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers see very little hope. Obama has stolen hope and left Americans with a deep sense of loss and dread for the future. According to a caller to the Herman Cain Show:

Caller: In answer to your question from earlier tonight [Cain: Yes] as far as I’m concerned hope has become ah it’s very sad that hope has become now become a truly ugly four-letter word. Um you know they have stolen my hope, they can’t take my joy – God gives me my joy, they can’t take my joy [Cain: Yes] but they have taken my hope. Um and Obama – one thing that I can say for Obama is that he promised transparency [Cain: Yes] and in a small way he’s delivered because what this Administration is doing is very transparent, they are destroying this country (Herman Cain Show, 4/27/10, 02:15:55 – 02:16:50).
The crisis Americans face is to life, limb, and livelihood. Failure to deal with the threat and defend the homeland will result in the end of the American way of life.

In response to a caller’s bleak speculations on the impact the Obama presidency will have on his finances, Rush Limbaugh offers a far direr forecast for his future and the future of his children:

Limbaugh: If you think that all that’s gonna get swallowed up is your raise, is your raises, you are shortsighted, your future will be swallowed up. The opportunity for prosperity of your children is being swallowed up, money they haven’t even earned is being spent, not even taxed, just spent. So it’s much more than just your raises, but the numbers you gave me, yeah, you got to have a health care plan if you don’t you get fined, the Cap and Tax is gonna raise your electricity bill all of these things, the cost of living – and there will be middle class tax increases all across the board in a number of ways. Healthcare is gonna be more expensive despite what they say, so that’s gonna eat up the numbers that you gave me. But it’s also going to prevent you from getting ahead, or even getting even, as more of what you earn is gonna be taken from you. And and which, by the way, is the ah is the plan (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/22/2009, 02:42:27 – 02:43:25).

The war is winner takes all; if they win, we lose, if they lose, we win. Monica Crowley makes it clear what conservatives face and the need to fight back:

Crowley: Welcome back to Party Central for the New Conservative Movement . . . This is the home of the second American Revolution. Our peaceful rebellion against the Bama and all of the socialism he is pouring down on our heads. We are starting today to mobilize against the socialism-victimhood-welfare-state that the liberals and the Democrats want to turn America into (Monica Crowley Show, 5/29/2009, 01:09:10 – 01:09:36).

Still, conservatives must be vigilant and protect the homeland.

The following narratives illustrate how hosts use militaristic language and metaphors to frame conservative opposition to Barack Obama and progressive policies as a war that they must join and fight in:

Crowley: The question is at what point do we revolt. At what point do people get angry enough to say enough (Monica Crowley Show, 4/04/09, 00:21:00 – 00:21:10).
Conservatives are embattled underdogs. Though they have been demonized, dismissed, denigrated, and discriminated against they are unafraid, calm, cool, and collected.

Conservatives are fighters. But this is something that conservatives are accustomed to. According to Monica Crowley, conservatives and conservatism are often the victims of witch hunts carried out by the Left:

Crowley: Since Watergate you have seen an increase in the desire of the Left to criminalize conservatism. Conservatism must be criminalized, it must be demonized and it must be prosecuted. You know you don’t – they believe that you don’t even have the right to believe such things, they believe that you don’t have the right to think down a conservative path or to hold conservative values. Look at what they just did to Miss California. I mean it’s only a matter of time before they try to dredge up something they can try to prosecute her on for saying that she believed in traditional marriage. They have tried to pillory this woman, this this beautiful young woman who had the guts to stand up for her faith and what she believes on on on gay marriage that it shouldn’t be allowed that it shouldn’t be legal in this country and they have railroaded this poor girl. This is what they do in this country and when you’re in a position of power, as a conservative, and we’ve seen this since Richard Nixon on, they will try to demonize first and then they will try to trip you up, criminalize you, and then prosecute you, because they will not be happy until a conservative ends up in jail (Monica Crowley Show, 5/02/2009, 00:30:55 – 00:32:07).

This point is reinforced in the following narrative excerpts that, once again, use militaristic language to build a Crisis Narrative. These narratives frame the commitment of hosts using battle analogies:
Monica Crowley Show Announcer: The princess became the host, the host became the gladiator, the gladiator . . . . [sound effect] Who defied the liberal empire [sound effect] One woman stands against the might of Barackus Obama Caesar, so in the name the republic [sound effect] Tune in to the Monica Crowley Show [music] (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Tammy Bruce Show Announcer: She’s a chick with a gun and a microphone – I’m not sure which one is more lethal. It’s the Tammy Bruce Show (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 01:01:50 – 01:01:58).

Tammy Bruce Show Announcer: Call Tammy Bruce, she has ways of making you talk (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 01:41:38 – 01:41:43).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: The Herman Cain campaign, Take-Back-Our-Government [echo effect]. He won’t give in without a fight, and he won’t give in. Herman Cain is on NewsTalk 750 WSB. (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: The new leader of the new Republican Guard, Sean Hannity will be right back (Sean Hannity Show, 1/13/2010, 02:22:07 – 02:22:22).

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Like a heat seeking missile. Sean Hannity is on the radio now (Sean Hannity Show, 1/05/2010, 02:17:50 – 02:17:58)!

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Firing torpedoes of truth, at a wall of lies. This is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 1/06/2010, 01:21:56 – 01:22:06).


Tammy Bruce even goes so far as to use martial references to describe the Facebook posts of former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin:

Bruce: It’s funny because you know what this is is, she’s {Sarah Palin} like a sniper, she’s a sniper, she’s she’s ah she’s a principled policy-based sniper. And she comes out and does her new media thing via Facebook and then goes back to her vacation, I’m I’m lovin’ it! (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 00:10:13 – 00:10:30)

Bruce also offered the following commentary that rationalizes the formation of militias in response to perceived abuses by the Obama Administration:

Bruce: This day and age where there is no leadership in Washington, this should not be too surprising: militia groups are regrouping across the
country. Well when you have a President and a Homeland Security Department who now apparently views us as the enemy, declaring an ideology as terroristic, conservatism to be specific, attacks on the Second Amendment, despite what the Supreme Court has said, the attempts to remove the availability of ammunition, our ability to defend ourselves and our money, what do you expect? Now they are ah of course, the Associated Press, is declaring this racist and it’s because people are bitter and clingy because they’re poor . . . getting sick and tired of this crap, if somebody feels compelled to gather, it is because the people of this country are under attack financially and their civil rights are under attack as well, in every single way. We have a president, forget complexion, who has insulted us, who insults us around the world, apologizes for this country, drops charges against terrorists, is friends with terrorist nations, and effectively views us as the problem. Why wouldn’t you beef up, why wouldn’t you? . . . You can call it because we’re bitter and clingy and racist all you want, we don’t care anymore! Call us every single name you can manage, when you gotta have people who would rather be having their summer vacation with their families going to Townhalls to yell at people, shame on you! . . . and of course Timothy McVeigh’s name comes up and all this other crap. Do not be dissuaded (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 01:56:00 – 01:58:31).

Despite the forces arrayed against them, conservatives are confident that they will be victorious in this war against America; after all, they’re the guys in the white hats who stand for truth, justice, and the American way.

CPTR hosts are nothing if not cheerleaders for the conservative team – even when there appears to be no end to the challenges America faces. The following bumpers express the certainty that conservatives will win the war being waged against America:


Bruce: Remember, do not blink, do not retreat, don’t stand down, be yourselves and we’ll get this done right (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 01:59:20 – 01:59:27).

Ingraham: Pro-growth, pro-individual rights, ah a pro-American, patriotic, stand-up, be conservative and you’ll see people follow you (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/28/2009, 00:53:58 – 00:54:06).
CPTR hosts, guests, and callers feel that they will save America from the despotic, dictatorial, rogue forces that are attempting to dismantle America, piece by precious piece. And CPTR hosts are leading the charge:

Ingraham: Freedom Czars, Activate! You ready? Time to stand up and fight for your country, you’re not going to recognize this country, you won’t have anything but stories to tell your children about how America used to be if you don’t stand up and get involved, get engaged (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/15/2009, 02:34:59 – 02:35:15).

Conservatives fight this war not only for themselves, but their families, and future generations; everything depends on it.

**Enduring Threat Narratives**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct *Enduring Threat Narratives* that identify the government and the mass media as largely responsible for preparing the ground for the present crisis facing America. Government regulation, entitlement programs, taxation, and irresponsible spending have all driven America into a downward spiral that, if not stopped, will destroy the economy and corrupt traditional American values. The liberal media abet the threat posed by government in their ceaseless bias toward progressive political candidates and sympathy for liberal values, causes, and lifestyles (e.g., multiculturalism, climate change, and homosexuality).

PPTR hosts, guests, and callers agree that the government and mass media exercise considerable influence in American politics and culture. Predictably, however, progressives disagree on the exact nature of the problem. Government is rife with corruption and pork barrel spending. However, where it counts – in programs that benefit the poor and minorities and in regulation of corporations – government is not big enough. The issue plaguing media is corporate media ownership, not its political bent. Corporate media outlets, like Fox News, are biased toward conservative perspectives
because they benefit the rich. Ugly rhetoric on conservative media outlets promotes disinformation, foments disunity and political unrest, and is therefore an irresponsible use of the public airwaves.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers predictably disagree. *Enduring Threat Narratives* underscore the role of government and mass media in the credible risk of America’s ultimate demise. Big government and the mainstream liberal media have warped American values and consequently compromised America’s place at the top of the world’s political, economic, and cultural hierarchy. Only exposure by conservative patriots and reversal of present trends will restore America to her former glory. A summary of descriptive statistics on *Enduring Threat Narratives* is presented below; qualitative findings follow.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Ten percent (10%, n = 108) of *Crisis Narratives* (n = 1066) incorporate a substantial discussion of the risks to traditional American values posed by an expansive federal government and a liberally-biased mass media. Approximately two-thirds (n = 86) of *Enduring Threat Narratives* were six minutes or less. Female hosts composed proportionately more *Enduring Threat Narratives* (4%, n = 55) than males (3%, n = 53). Of all CPTR hosts, Laura Ingraham had the greatest proportion of *Enduring Threat Narratives* (6%, n = 27). Programs hosted by the African and White American hosts had roughly equal proportions of *Enduring Threat Narratives* (3.9%, n = 12 and 3.5%, n = 96, respectively).

Nine percent (n = 34) of all callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose *Crisis Narratives* with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 395), contributed to *Enduring Threat Narratives*. Among the callers who contributed to *Enduring Threat Narratives*,
76% (n = 26) were male, 94% (n= 32) expressed conservative opinions, and 6% (n = 2) had progressive views.

There were 651 *Enduring Threat Thematic Segments* distributed among all study narratives; 25% of all *Crisis Thematic Segments* (n = 2, 619) in the study as a whole. *Enduring Threat Thematic Segments*, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a host, were most often found in narratives composed by Herman Cain (31% or n = 94) and in other *Crisis Narratives* where *Enduring Threat Thematic Segments* were a subtheme in 44% (n = 288) of narratives. *Enduring Threat Thematic Segments* were present in 32% (n = 228) of *Obama Narratives* and 23% (n = 152) of *Hegemon Narratives*.

**Qualitative Findings**

**The enduring threat of the mainstream media**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that portray the mainstream media as biased in favor of Obama and the Obama Administration. The liberal media are cheerleaders who give Obama a free pass; the media choose to be politically correct, knowing that Obama is an incompetent president. Monica Crowley paints a graphic picture illustrative of the mainstream media’s unswerving support for Obama:

Crowley: Newt Gingrich reminding us all that the *Lamestream* {mainstream} Media is so far up the Bama’s small colon, they’re like *Jonah* inside the whale, and that’s why we *exist* to do the job the *Lamestream* {mainstream} Media is too busy kissing the Bama’s rear end to do. The funniest part of the press? They *actually think* they’re *doing* their job (Monica Crowley Show, 5/09/2009, 01:47:50 – 01:48:14).

The mainstream media insulates Obama, other Democrats, the Democratic Party, and progressives, generally, from criticism and rationalize their failures. Of the Associated Press Rush Limbaugh opines:
Limbaugh: We get cheerleading, fascist propagandists, Stalinists, state–controlled media propaganda from the AP (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/07/2009, 00:48:47 – 00:48:54).

The mainstream media are “government tools” – the propaganda arm of the Democratic Party – who collude with the Left to push a radical agenda. The mainstream media cannot be trusted, they are corrupt, predatory, and want to keep ordinary American citizens stupid and uninformed. Limbaugh reassures his audience that:


The job of the mainstream media is to dupe the American public by making Democratic ideology look mainstream, while distorting the conservative message.

   Because the mainstream media are afraid to cover real, controversial stories, they conspire to censor news and information. Sean Hannity promises his audience that by listening to his program they will have the tools they need to see through the media haze and know the truth:

   Hannity: Once you become awakened to media bias, you you just can’t not see it anymore, it’s like the light goes on and you can’t turn the light off (Sean Hannity Show, 12/07/2009, 01:40:30 – 01:40:39).

And the truth will set them free to make clear choices that benefit themselves, their families, and the nation.

   CPTR hosts, guests, and callers also construct narratives where they describe their objections to the mainstream media’s contaminating influence on American culture. In this interchange between Herman Cain and a caller to his programs, the means whereby media warp the culture are laid out:

   Caller: I watch movies and you can see the progression of society foretold through motion pictures and television.
Cain: Oh I agree, Michael when I go – the the few instances that I do get a chance to go watch a movie, or if I watch some movies on- at home on TV – I can see the little subtle innuendos that they put into the texture of the movie itself, OK. You know for example, I talked earlier about this proclamation that Obama did about gay, lesbian, and transgender pride month, well look look the motion picture industry has been promoting the promoting the fact in their minds that that’s OK for decades, little by little. Little by little they sprinkle it in, so if you got some young impressionable young people watching it, they’ll be looking at the movie and without even consciously thinking about it, will then walk away saying oh it must be OK because I saw it in a movie. [Caller: Exactly]. And so I've seen these little subtle and not so subtle nuances in movies and stuff like that.

Cain: How about the movie, what was it, *Brokeback Mountain*, I never went to see that movie because of the premise of the movie. Well what about all of the young impressionable folk that went to see that movie, OK. I'm just saying this is how [Caller: I completely agree with you Mr. Cain] they very gradually try to plant these messages in there in order to make people feel as if, ‘Oh this must be OK’ (Herman Cain Show, 06/01/10, 01:08:56 – 01:10:34).

Referencing the influence celebrities have on society – especially young people and popular culture – Michael Savage plants blame squarely at the feet of the mainstream media for undermining the traditional role of women:

Savage: No wonder the girls wind up the way they are in this country; do I have to spell it out? It’s always the women by the way that shape a nation. Men are always ah wayward and you know by and large men are wayward, women are the homemakers, women have to want to get married, women have to make the family, women have to make the home, women have to create the whole structure. And look at the role models you have here the the celebo-sluts, like the Hilton sisters, they’re held up as role models, every one of them switch-hitters and psychos and drug us- I mean wherever you look, drugs and switch-hitting and puking on themselves in a night club, who’s putting these images out? The the media, the media who’s destroyed America, make no mistake about it. So what are you going to do about it? Create a government-controlled media? Yeah that’s going to be better (Michael Savage Show, 1/06/2010, 02:34:39 – 02:35:28).

The mainstream media are destructive to the American way of life; they appeal to baser emotions and tastes that erode American values, traditions, and ideals.
Americans desire news and entertainment more in line with their values and experiences. This, according to CPTR hosts, guests, and callers, is why Fox News is so popular. According to Laura Ingraham, audiences want to feel “special” not “dark and nasty,” and conservative media understands and supports this:

Ingraham: One of the reasons why people like to watch Fox, is because they they don’t much like watching networks where it seems like all these anchors and these reporters just don’t much like eh a lot of what is America. And and it gets really tiresome, this is the same reason that that liberal talk radio never worked, because most people want to feel good about America, they don’t want to feel like America is always this dark terrible place where, it’s the first time you’re proud when this happens, or needs to be remade so this can happen – no we actually want to believe and want to know that our country is special, we have a special place ah in this world and more often than not we’re trying to do good things for people. Yea we make mistakes, but it’s not this dark, nasty vision that CNN and MSNBC all too often have (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/22/2009, 01:10:58 – 01:11:51).

Despite what the media offer, Americans are far more discriminating than the mainstream media would have us believe.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers also construct narratives where investigative news reporting from mainstream media sources makes America less prosperous and Americans less safe by selling-out to terrorists and hostile regimes around the world – all in the name of exposing so-called abuses of power:

Crowley: Well this ABC News report really takes the cake, yet another disgusting example of the American Lamestream {mainstream} Media ah with their radical, Anti-American agenda willing to throw the United States and our national security right-under-the-bus in order to pump themselves up and promote their own Left Wing agenda. We’ve seen this repeatedly during the Bush years, now we got ABC News, you know all these people are so obsessed with Bush and Cheney, Bush and Cheney who haven’t been in office for four months, they are so obsessed with them, these Left Wingers whether it’s Keith Oberman, Chris Matthews, the New York Times, ABC News – they’re so obsessed with Bush and and they have been so devoured by their hatred of Bush and Cheney, they cannot let it go. They can’t let it go, they cannot move on, they can’t get over it, and that’s why you get repeated stories after stories ah like this, like this ABC
News, where they’re chasing down CIA agents who help to develop some of these enhanced interrogation (torture) techniques, without also saying that they saved your life (Monica Crowley Show, 5/02/2009, 00:28:00 – 00:29:10).

This is nothing new. News coverage in the liberal mainstream media always focuses on the negative; they try to beat audiences down with pessimism and are overly concerned with being politically correct. If it were up to the liberal mainstream media, all we would ever hear and see are depressing stories that make us feel bad about being Americans. The liberal mainstream media pollute Americans’ minds and damage American patriotism. According to Laura Ingraham, the constant drumbeat of the liberal mainstream media is: “America sucks.”

Ingraham: This is really ah, just a horrible country we live in. If you want to feel really bad about America and our role in the world and the way we treat people, here and in our own borders, just watch CNN, on any given night. America sucks (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/23/2009, 02:25:07 – 02:25:27).

The mainstream media never presents solutions; their goal is to undermine and destabilize our country by inflaming audiences and causing dissension.

The liberal mainstream media fear and hate the conservative media and want to destroy it. By contrast, CPTR listeners love conservative media and depend on it for unbiased reporting and information on contemporary issues that matter to them.

Ingraham presents the case for Fox News:

Ingraham: Guess what they can’t control? Fox News, no they can’t. That’s why they are obsessed with Fox, that’s why people like David Axelrod want to talk about Fox and want to still try to demonize Fox because Anita Dunn and company can’t control Roger Ailes and company (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/19/2009, 00:26:29 – 00:26:50).
Conservative media are the underdogs of contemporary modern media; they challenge the mainstream liberal media and present information and stories the mainstream media refuse to cover.

The mainstream media disrespects and dismisses conservative journalists, programs, and media outlets. All conservatives are portrayed as mean-spirited and intolerant by the liberal mainstream media. Nothing could be further from the truth; according to Laura Ingraham, CPTR hosts are passionate and dedicated journalist-entertainers:

Laura Ingraham: This is exactly why people are frustrated with politics in the United States. Talk radio exists to deliver a passionate message, in an entertaining fashion, by the host who believes something. If only we had political figures on Capitol Hill, who had the – brought the, brought the same passion and substance to the table on a daily basis that frankly Rush and I and many others on the radio dial bring, everyday (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/22/2009, 00:14:42 – 00:15:13).

Conservative media take a commonsense perspective and advocate commonsense solutions that preserve liberty and the ideals that have made America great.

Always the iconoclast, Michael Savage departs from the conservative party-line criticizing conservative media giant Fox News:

Savage: It is the voice of America, the real America, The Savage Nation. Not the wimp America, not Republican lite, not the middle of the road of the Fox Network run by Saudi Arabia and their puppets. It is the last of the independents the last of the Mohicans, Michael Savage (Michael Savage Show, 12/04/2009, 01:19:52 – 01:20:15).

Conservative media champions the cause of ordinary folk by dissecting and deconstructing all media outlets – conservative and progressive – to find the truth and uncover misleading reporting.

Audiences want the truth and tune in to conservative media to finds answers:
Cain: A lot of people are conservative and they don’t know it because the media has brainwashed them (Herman Cain Show, 05/24/10, 00:46:44 – 00:46:55).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: He’s dissecting the headlines to get you the real story. You’re listening to Herman Cain on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show, 05/06/10, 00:17:57 – 00:18:16).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: The power of Herman Cain giving you the stories the mainstream media won’t cover, every evening 7-10 on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

In the following narrative segment Herman Cain encourages conservative soul-searching; he wants listeners to consider redefining themselves in a way that is consistent with their values – and not be fooled by the loud "voices" of the liberal media.

Cain: Consistent Gallup Poll results suggest that conservatives outnumber liberals, it’s just that their voices get amplified because they have the aid of the liberal media, whenever the liberals want to try to get a message through it is amplified by the mainstream broadcast media! Whenever conservatives want to get a message through it is turned down so people won’t hear it. But that’s changing because many of you are listening to the alternative voices out there, many of you are listening to the alternative media and you are becoming better informed and more inspired that we have reason to stay optimistic about the future of this great country (Herman Cain Show, 05/25/10, 02:47:40 – 02:48:45).

For Cain, and other CPTR hosts, guests, and callers, conservative media facilitate listeners’ embrace of their hidden conservative self – a self they may not be familiar with because the biases of the mainstream media.

Conservatives view themselves as winners and Happy Warriors, despite the odds stacked against them. Politically, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers view conservative media as a powerful hedge against a complete takeover by their opponents in the Democratic Party. CPTR hosts exploit this narrative. Laura Ingraham poses the following query on her program:
Ingraham: What would happen tomorrow if there were no talk radio and Fox? How well do you think the Republicans would be doing on Capitol Hill (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/22/2009, 01:36:58 – 01:37:09)?

Conservatives – media figures and audiences – make or break conservative candidates and policy. Because of this, CPTR audiences have a duty to know the truth. In the following bumper from the Herman Cain Show, the announcer compliments Mr. Cain’s audience and invites listeners to satisfy important civic responsibilities by listening to Cain’s program:

Herman Cain Show Announcer: You’re too smart to watch TV. That’s why you’re listening to your radio and the Herman Cain Show on NewsTalk 750 WSB.

Cain: When people have the right information, they will make the right decisions (Herman Cain Show, 05/10/10, 00:47:30 – 00:47:43).

In a promotional ad for the radio station that broadcasts her program, Monica Crowley makes the case – fiscal and ideological – for conservative news media and loyal listenership:

Crowley: This is Monica Crowley. I want you to know that freedom of speech is not free. Courageous radio stations like this one need your advertising dollars to pay their bills and be able to bring you my Show and all the others you have come to depend on for real information. Talk radio is in many ways America’s immune system but it needs your support. If you are a business you need to advertise with this station. And here’s the good news, according to Talkers Magazine ads airing on talk stations like this one generate two to three times the response from customers than other radio formats would generate. Why? Because talk radio listeners support, with their dollars, the advertisers that support the radio shows that they love. If you’re a business advertise on this station and if you are a listener do business with the businesses that advertise on my Show and others on this station. Help me guard against those who want to silence America’s voice – talk radio (Monica Crowley Show, 4/04/09, 00:09:14 – 00:10:07).
Conservative media: bulwark against the enduring threat of the mainstream liberal media; “America’s immune system” and “guard against those who want to silence America’s voice.”

The enduring threat of big government

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers reject big government – especially a big federal government. For conservatives, big government translates into bureaucracy, and bureaucracy translates into a loss of individuality, self-determination, and independence.

Big government bureaucracies see people as only faceless members of a crowd; they make heavy-handed decisions and base those decisions on actuarial calculations (e.g., death panels in Obama’s healthcare reform plan), not on the unique circumstances of real people. Michael Savage speaks for many conservatives on CPTR when he concludes that government bureaucracies, “by nature [are] stupid, plodding along, idiotic” (Michael Savage Show, 1/05/2010, 00:23:26 – 00:23:30).

Big government is a threat to liberty and the exercise of free will; government bureaucracies interfere in the lives of citizens in the most intimate. Conservative hosts, guests, and callers warn that people should never look to the government to satisfy any of their needs. In the following narrative excerpt Sean Hannity suggests a more responsible and reflective approach to satisfying personal needs:

Hannity: Look I think, I think the message I would take out of what you’re saying is, Lady {caller}, every- eh everybody listening to you and us right now I would say don’t count on the government for anything. You know you live in freedom, you have liberty, you have choices and with that comes a a huge responsibility, I know we’ve catered to peoples’ desires to be taken care of and we’ve conditioned people to look to the government to be the answer, I’m I would urge people to look within themselves and find the answers (Sean Hannity Show, 1/05/2010, 02:39:24 – 02:39:50).
Be warned: anything you receive from the government is designed to achieve your total enslavement to the state. Rush Limbaugh calculates the costs and consequences of government-supported healthcare in the following narrative:

Limbaugh: Make no mistake about this, this is all aimed at robbing you of your humanity and forcing you to bow down to the State. If you feel sick, you need a procedure, your need a prescription, you’re gonna be thinking about the government – who do I see, what do they want me to do for it, where do I go, what do I have to do to have my treatment approved? In other words you are going to be relying on government for your survival. That’s never happened before in this country, outside of national security and natural disaster contexts, this has never happened before. From now on you’re going to need your government’s permission to get well. Even if there are people who can medically help you, even if there are technologies, drugs that can help you, you’re still going to need permission from the government, some bureaucrat, before you can make use of them – a bureaucrat going to tell a doctor somewhere or a hospital whether or not you qualify for treatment. This is the ultimate power over you and your family. You will do anything that your government says, you will do anything that you must if it is a life and death scenario, and especially if it involves your kids, your kids have a sickness, you’ll do anything, your government asks you to do. The road to serfdom, to steal the title of a great book by Frederick Von Hyack, the road to serfdom is paved in Obamacare that they want on his desk for signature by next week. It’s not going to be a matter of you can or cannot pay, it won’t be a matter of whether you have coverage or don’t have coverage, what will matter is all of us will be slaves, we’ll become slaves to the arbitrary and inhumane decisions of distant bureaucrats working in Washington where there is no competition, nobody you can go to if you don’t like to hear from the ah bureaucrats that you have to deal with (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/30/2009, 00:38:14 – 00:40:08).

Governments don’t facilitate life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – quite the opposite; governments are a threat to the enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Racial, gender, and sexual minorities face an especially serious threat to their freedom from the government. According to Tammy Bruce, minorities need government ‘off their backs’ if they are ever to achieve “real, true freedom”:

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Bruce: Now there’s many of the gays of us who are not Obama Zombies, that we get it ah that being independent as a woman or as a homosexual or as person of color or whatever your, mi- minority framework is in America – we get it as conservatives that our only real true freedom comes by having government out of our lives, out of our beds, out of the doctor’s office, out of our heads, and out of our pants, and out of our wallets, and out of every other place big stupid, dumbass government wants to be. That’s a good thing for everybody but especially for minorities, we do not win when we have to ask for permission for things. Nobody does who is not a part of a majority. Now you can get gathered up and collected with other minorities if you want, but as long as your effort is to make government bigger, we’re gonna get screwed. The only way women and minorities will ever be truly free, and the only ones who are truly free are the ones who have enough money to live where they want, to send their kids where they want, to have security, to make choices about where they’re gonna eat, that they don’t need to rely on the government for a check or anybody else. Those are the free people. And only conservatism brings that to you. Everybody loses under big government, and everyone has a chance to win when we’re left alone (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/19/2009, 00:07:35 – 00:09:17).

Big government is intrusive, clumsy, and awkward and should never be allowed to interfere in the private lives of Americans. Nothing good comes from ceding to government what should be an individual’s free choice and right.

Despite what the so-called experts and progressives would have you think, the government is no better at making decisions than ordinary individuals. Government – big or small – needs to be kept firmly in its place. According to Michael Savage:

Savage: The fundamental difference between Michael Savage and the people on the Right who see what’s going on, those of you who are drinking the Leftist Kool-Aid so to speak, you don’t understand that the government is not better equipped to make choices than the country’s own citizens are. You don’t understand that a government is not entitled to our earning and da wha- what we get back is simply ah ah ah let’s say a gift from them. You think that the government knows best how to spend it, not us. You think we don’t know how to spend the money we make, even though we’re the ones who made it not these dummies in Washington? Every time your government gets control of another right that we have and another choice that we have whether it be on healthcare or finance or family or ah how we worship, it takes the life out of each one of these particular rights and choices, eventually the entire ah ah all of our
freedoms decay. And as their power increases our freedom decreases, it’s in inverse proportion don’t you understand that. The more power that Obama aggrandize to himself – and believe me it didn’t start with him, the imperial presidency didn’t start with Obama but I’m telling you where we’re going now is a frightening tomorrow. It’s not a far far better place that we have ever gone, believe me ‘tis not a far far place that this country has every gone (Michael Savage Show, 2/22/2010, 02:35:15 – 02:36:42).

Big government is threatening because it is run by elites; insider politicians and academics who are out of touch with the lives of ordinary American citizens. Michael Savage suggests that Americans adopt a new definition of America that is less elitist – “We the People”:

Savage: The government is not America, do you understand that? How about for a seminal definition: we are America, the government is not America. They make it sound as though they are America. I don’t think that you understand how important that definition is the one that I just came up with, it’s the second best to my border, language, culture. We are the government, they are not the government, we- excuse me, we are America, they are not America they are the government, it’s different. When the government represents the will of the governed, then they’re America, but when you have a government that has hijacked the principles of America number one, and the will of the people number two, then what does that tell what your government is? Huh?

Savage: You want to go down the list, you want to talk again all over from ground zero, about the lies, the deceit, the socialism, communism, Marxism, Leninism of Obama and his czars? The fact that climategate, the scandal, the fraud is known all over Europe but not in America because the newspapers which are in cahoots with the government won’t touch climategate. Cap and Tax, the man wants to push it down your throat. The mention of a bankruptcy and they won’t stop the illegal aliens from pouring across the border. No no no no none of that matters to you, all you think that he is is the Robin Hood that you’ve been waiting for all your life, to ah rob from the rich, greedy pig Republicans and give to the poor.

Savage: Because you were raised on the sixties nonsense, the myth the mythos of the sixties the mythos of the sixties, still plays in the head of the drug addicts of the Liberal Movement. I don’t care if they’re seventy, the myths of the sixties live in the heads of the seventies, that’s right, the myths of the sixties, the myths of the sixties – every business owner is a crook, every worker is a prince, yeah the myths of the sixties. All the little Mugabes in Mitubishis in the United States of America all the little Mugabes and the little petit Marxs’ in their Toyota Priuses riding around
waiting for the revolution, thinking it won’t touch them. Well here we are I am the eye in the sky of the good ship America, I see all (Michael Savage Show, 2/22/2010, 00:07:40 – 00:09:49).

Big government elites want to change how we think, what we believe, and who we are.

Big government elites propagate radical ideas, promote group-based loyalties, and intergroup tensions that foment hostility toward American traditions, history, and founding ideals.

Big government is the first step to socialism. Big government is a form of soft tyranny, unrepresentative of and unresponsive to ordinary people. Monica Crowley warns in regards to healthcare reform:

Crowley: They’re not really interested in healthcare. This is not about your colon, or your eyesight, or your heart condition. This is nothing to do with that. This has to do with expanding government control over your life. And all of the big communists, from Lenin to Marx to those who were actually carrying out communism around the world, they all understood this. You control medicine, you control people’s lives, you control the population and you, as the government controlling it, are powerful beyond belief. Remember guys this is not about healthcare, this is about the Democrats seizing more and more of your freedoms and taking the power for themselves (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 00:47:42 – 00:48:39).

Big government is uncontrolled and uncontrollable and, at its most insidious, big government keeps ordinary citizens in the dark – uninformed, and vulnerable. Big government is unaccountable and rife with fat, waste, and corruption.

Big government would have us trade our freedoms and individual liberty for a ‘Nanny State.’ Crowley advises her listeners not to fall for the bait:

Crowley: But again the Bama needs the chaos. He needs a high unemployment rate, he needs eh ta eh people to be clamoring for for the government to help them. They need – he needs people to turn their searching eyes toward him and and Pelosi and Reid and the democrats with handouts and giveaways. Government dependence that is what this is about. And that is what the healthcare thing is about as well. This is about a massive expansion of government power over your life and more and more restrictions on your freedom . . . Guys, wake up let’s deal in
reality here – this is all of a piece. This is all part of his grand strategy to take over as much of your freedom and your assets, i.e., your money, your personal property, what you’ve worked hard for, as possible (Monica Crowley Show, 9/12/2009, 00:31:32 – 00:32:50).

Government officials feign or even fan chaos to make citizens believe they need big government control over their lives.

Warning: big government undermines productivity and personal responsibility through entitlement programs that encourage dependence and punish achievement. The goal of big government is to have those who have succeeded take care of those who have failed. Big government seeks to redistribute wealth from deserving, hardworking, middle class Americans to undeserving, irresponsible people who, having made poor choices in life, depend on the government to supply their every need, want, and desire.

Crowley: He {Obama} really pressed this utopian vision that he has in mind that everybody should have access to healthcare, everybody would be able to pay their mortgage, everybody should be able to get a job and he – because he’s the government – is gonna be able to make that happen (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/2009, 00:28:26 – 00:28:42).

Big government seeks to be our god and government officials want to convince us they have the power to create heaven on earth.

Lastly, big government is not what the Founders intended; the Constitution stands for limited government, maximum freedom, and unfettered enjoyment of the blessings of liberty:

Crowley: And it is true that those of us who have come out for the TEA PARTIES and Town Halls and this weekend’s march, do stand against something, we do stand against this rogue government. We oppose the ever bigger government that they are inflicting on us. The government takeovers of big sectors of the economy. The takeover of the free market. The proposals to control our healthcare and our energy, higher taxes, eye-popping spending that cannot possibly ever be paid for, astronomical deficits as far as the eye can see and a national debt that is exploding so
fast under this guy {Obama} that he is now asking Congress to raise the debt limit to 12.1 trillion dollars because under this dude 12.1 trillion just isn’t enough. So yes the Lamestream {mainstream} Media does have a point; we do stand against something, we do stand against all of that.

Crowley: But there’s something else going on here that they do not want to recognize, something that they’re dismissing and pretending isn’t isn’t real. We do stand for something big and important and irreplaceable the country we have known and grown up in and fought for and died for and the country we love. The country that once had fidelity to its founding principles of limited government and maximum freedom. The country that has a Constitution that has for over two centuries proven durable and sturdy and a powerful example, especially when it was under threat from enemies abroad and we’re gonna get into that point in just a second. And now we face an enemy-within and that enemy-within is an out of control government that is moving this nation further and further away from that vision. We stand for the restitution of those principles, we stand for the Constitution, we stand with the Founding Fathers, we stand for the country we once knew and we stand for it before it’s too late (Monica Crowley Show, 9/19/2009, 01:12:28 – 01:15:05).

The proper role of government is to remove barriers to the pursuit and enjoyment of the American Dream; nothing more.

**Conservative Activism Narratives**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct *Conservative Activism Narratives* that stress the importance of grassroots conservative engagement. In the face of challenges posed by Barack Obama’s presidency, Democratic policies, and foreign powers that wish to see America on her knees, it is imperative that conservative patriots fight for the America the Founding Fathers intended. Conservative activism is grounded in everyday, common sense truth; a rejection of abstract, intellectual theorizing, and social engineering schemes. Conservatives are principled truth-tellers – even if that truth appears at times to be intolerant. Every American must fight for what is right, and decent, and true. Conservative activism is a winning cause, but its work continues with no end in sight. Progressive abuses have awakened a sleeping giant – Americans
normally too busy working and taking care of their families to get involved in politics. But, conservatives are Happy Warriors, fighting a peaceful revolution to take America back; America’s future is worth fighting for.

Progressive, too, are committed to activism to see their ideals realized. A significant difference, though, is that PPTR hosts, guests, and callers promote grassroots activism as a means of fighting for the interests of people, rather than a nation that is quite often transmogrified into an imperiled female figure. Also, progressives portray the government as an ally, tool, or conduit through which to reach progressive objectives – not an amorphous, Goliath-like enemy that requires perpetual vigilance. PPTR hosts, guest, and callers rip-into their activist opposition; as do conservatives. Specifically, progressive narratives on PPTR portray conservative activism as an anti-people, corporate-supported movement. Whether known to conservatives or not, so-called grassroots conservative activism is ‘Astroturf’ – fake activism that is merely a front for the interests of mega-corporations and the super-wealthy (e.g., the Koch brothers).

No, say CPTR hosts, guests, and callers; the fight is real. If progressive do-gooders have their way, all Americans will eventually become slaves to the federal government or foreign enemies. Conservative Activism Narratives construct conservative ideas and conservative activism. These narratives are most often framed as counternarratives meant to challenge unfavorable characterizations of conservatives and their goals and recruit those who want to know the truth.

Descriptive Statistics

Thirty-seven percent (37%, n = 390) of Crisis Narratives (n = 1066) stress the importance of conservative activism. Approximately two-thirds (n = 297) of Conservative
Activism Narratives were six minutes or less. Male and female hosts composed proportionately equal Conservative Activism Narratives (13%, n = 208 and n = 182, respectively). Of all CPTR hosts, however, Tammy Bruce had the greatest proportion of Conservative Activism Narratives (20%, n = 115). Programs hosted by White American CPTR hosts had the greatest proportion of Conservative Activism Narratives (13%, n = 367) compared to the African American host (8%, n= 23).

Thirty-two percent (n = 125) of all callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose Crisis Narratives with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 395), contributed to Conservative Activism Narratives. Among the callers who contributed to Conservative Activism Narratives, 68% (n = 85) were male, 83% (n= 104) expressed conservative opinions, and 17% (n = 21) had progressive views.

There were 955 Conservative Activism Thematic Segments distributed among all study narratives; 36% of all Crisis Thematic Segments (N = 2,619) in the study as a whole. Conservative Activism Thematic Segments, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a host, were most often found in narratives composed by Sean Hannity (44%, n = 211) and in Hegemon Narratives where Conservative Activism Thematic Segments were a subtheme in 45% (n = 431) of narratives. Conservative Activism Thematic Segments were present in 29% (n = 276) of Obama Narratives and 26% (n = 248) of Crisis Narratives.

Qualitative Findings

Conservative ideas and activism

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that identify conservative ideas and encourage conservative activism. Above all, conservatism is constructed as a politic grounded in commonsense, everyday wisdom – experiences gleaned from the
real (as opposed to a utopian or wished-for) world. In the following excerpt Herman Cain, like other CPTR hosts, uses bumpers to communicate to listeners that he values commonsense and speaks from years of real world experience (i.e., in government and the corporate world):

Herman Cain Show Announcer: All this experience and all this commonsense. Herman Cain. Listen you just might learn something every weeknight 7-10 on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Political rhetoric is contrasted with facts and commonsense to show that Mr. Cain is a man of the people, in touch with the real, every day world of his listeners.

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Breaking through the rhetoric with facts and commonsense. It's Herman Cain every night on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Conservatives see through political rhetoric to the Truth.

CPTR narratives construct conservatism as rational, logical, and objectively true; a clear-eyed assessment of how the world works. While progressives pander to base emotions, conservatives tell it like it is and don't pull any punches. Conservative activism is the “right thing” – whether the opposition understands or eventually comes around to a conservative way of thinking is no reflection on the correctness of conservative ideas. Tammy Bruce explains in the following narrative segment why “conservative instincts” must drive conservative activism:

Bruce: You know, the thing that is keeping me excited, are you conservative protesters and Independent protesters. It may eh look I don’t know what the end result will be or why God’s doing it, we never know that. We can only know it at the end. All we know is that we have to follow our instincts and do – here’s your best scenario your best case scenario about what to do when: do the right thing, do the right thing in knowing that, our being Americans is a gift, do the right thing get involved, people like us, people like the Obamas will never understand because they’re – you know it’s funny there’s nothing they’re willing to fight for except their own enrichment. You’ve got to feel sorry for people like that too, most politicians are out there only fighting for themselves, and they do not
understand the concept – this is why at first they thought you were manufactured or it was fake – they don’t understand the concept that you care about something bigger than yourself. It is foreign to them! Well he’s gonna do what he’s gonna do with the rest of his life, our job is to make sure that he stops pissing on this country. He can do wee-weeing all he wants, but that’s our job, our job is not to make him understand, they never will – malignant narcissists {like Obama} never will – our job isn’t to make him see the light – doesn’t matter! Our job is to stop people from hurting this country . . . it is our divine system established by President Washington, is meant to do just what we’re doing, it’s meant to be able to facilitate a change without violent revolution, it is meant to facilitate a change without people getting hurt, that’s the genius of our system (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/01/2009, 00:50:57 – 00:52:59).

Conservatives must expect that the opposition will never understand their perspective; conservatism is an unpopular truth – a revelatory gospel that will save America and the world. Conservatives must keep the faith.

Because people have been biased against the conservative label, they don’t understand who conservative are and what they are fighting for. In this narrative Tammy Bruce outlines the “common threads” that link “Independent conservatives,” undergoing the beginnings of progressive “recovery”:

Bruce: Here’s whose been lying to you, you – for for the Zombies listening and it’s many I I keep hearing, I hear from maybe one or two a week, it’s not a flood of Zombies who are going into recovery, and look I’m not asking you to, believe what I believe or what others who listen to this Show or contribute on the website believe. All ah all you need as the common thread to fit in here as as an Independent conservative is wanting to be able to be yourself, without being threatened, being able to be different and to be safe within that difference, ah wah with liking to be different, being suspicious of power, being suspicious of politicians, and loving this country because it allows you to be yourself without risk. That is what we all have in common. And maybe you are ah a recovering Zombie or you’re a Classical Liberal and you’re realizing you have stuff in common with us because you see the crap that coming out of Washington and you too are shocked (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/03/2009, 00:09:35 – 00:10:42)!

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers argue that most people are conservative and don’t know it (i.e., that America is a Center-Right nation). Upon impartial reflection people
discover that they agree with the tenets of conservatism. In the following excerpt

Tammy Bruce alludes to her own conversion experience and thanks the audience for accepting a former Leftist into their “radical” ranks:

Bruce: I am, just let me say again, deeply honored to be considered a part of what it is you’re doing and to be considered an Independent conservative. I know many of you have had to come along the road to consider someone with my background, as a conservative, and um I’m honored and it’s true I am. When it comes to look – conservative is is being conserving ah the foundational principles of this nation, and let me just say that those Founding Fathers and those ah principles were radical and remain radical to this day. So if you are a Classical Liberal or a young person and you are romanced by the idea of being radical, welcome to the club man. All of us are! What’s it like to, be out there screaming at power, you never thought you’d see an old guy who maybe served in the first Gulf War in a polo shirt doing what you always imagined doing. Mmmm. The most radical thing you can do is be yourself, even and especially if it’s risky. So don’t be ah freaked out at the idea that you’re hanging out with conservatives or you’re liking the Show or you’re finding something out that you didn’t expect. There’s not ah first of all it doesn’t mean your politics are any different, it reinforces the truth (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/03/2009, 00:08:10 – 00:09:34)!

CPTR hosts, like Bruce, blur as well as highlight conservative distinctives. For listeners to Bruce’s program who may think that conservatism is for ‘old guys in polo shirts,’ Bruce assures them that conservatism is “radical,” “risky,” and simply, the truth.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives in which conservative activists must contend with aggressive, unrelenting political enemies – progressives want to discourage, bully, and intimidate conservative activists. But this cannot be allowed to succeed. In the following excerpt Bruce uses wind as an analogy to make the point that conservative victory is unstoppable:

Bruce: As a former Leftist here’s what I know and what changed me: simply getting to know you. Be yourselves, make the commitment but be there, be there! That’s why the Left wants you to retreat, that’s why Obama and his gang want you to be afraid, go back, retreat, be quiet, surrender because if you’re simply present you’re like the wind, there’s a house of cards, you’re the wind, Barack Obama and his ah thugs are the
house of cards, they’re desperate to keep themselves protected from the wind. The wind’s not after the house of cards. The house of cards is vulnerable because it’s built on nothing. And the wind [cheh] over and out. The house of cards can’t convince the wind that it’s strong, it just isn’t (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/15/2009, 00:16:02 – 00:16:56).

Conservatives are a force of nature – all they should do is be themselves; by their very nature conservatives will beat their enemies, who are cleverly described in this excerpt as a “house of cards.”

One of the more controversial accusations levelled against the Conservative Movement is that they are Astroturf - a fake grassroots movement sponsored by wealthy individuals and corporations. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers object to this claim from progressives. Conservatives on CPTR portray themselves as truth-tellers and truth seekers; problem solvers, sober, and precise. Most importantly, conservatives think for themselves; they do not have vested interests; they are principled, not political. Laura Ingraham squashes accusations that conservatives are unintelligent or politically unsophisticated and then outlines the critical role conservative voters play in contemporary American politics:

Ingraham: This is the future of the educated voter in the United States. They call you unsophisticated, they say that you’re a bunch of yahoos, you’re hayseeds. Town Hallers, Tea Partiers, laugh at you, scoff at you, call you names. But this is your moment and this is your time. Change has indeed come to America (Laura Ingraham Show, 11/05/2009, 01:02:29 – 01:02:50).

Borrowing a phase made popular by Barack Obama during his first presidential campaign: “Change has indeed come to America,” CPTR hosts, guests, and callers frame their activism as part of an historic, grassroots social movement.

The Conservative Movement exemplifies an organic and spontaneous outpouring of a spirit of resistance, bubbling-up, from the ground up. Sean Hannity posits that the
Conservative Movement signifies a desire for freedom bred into the bones of every real American:

Hannity: I think inherently, it’s almost in the DNA of Americans that we believe in freedom, it just is, and it eh it just at the right time it always seems to reemerge (Sean Hannity Show, 1/06/2010, 02:38:08 – 02:38:17).

Tammy Bruce and a caller to the Herman Cain Show explain that conservative activism is not organized in the same way that activism is planned among progressives. Conservative activism is a response – the waking of a sleeping giant – to government and other abuses that force ordinary people to step out of their everyday lives to oppose their enemies:

Bruce: In other news today Americans aren’t morons and appear to be sick and tired of all the hypocrisy, arrogance and incompetence still oozing out of Washington, DC . . . conservatives, you’ve done just an extraordinary job. And not because you set out to do a job, or because you were organized or whatever. It’s because you’ve had enough! And this is what Americans do (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/31/2009, 00:10:19 – 00:10:45).

Caller to the Herman Cain Show: These are just people who want to be responsible, they kind of wanted to be left alone but they saw that that was not working for them [Cain: Right] so they had to come out you know – come out into the streets and and protest over a government that wanted to take over every aspect of their lives [Cain: Unbelievable] (Herman Cain Show, 05/28/10, 01:07:07 – 01:07:22).

Conservative activists are peaceful revolutionaries - a rag tag, leaderless, grassroots army of underdogs battling a progressive Goliath.

Herman Cain explains to his audience the significance of being a grassroots movement, representative of “the mood of the majority of the people in this country”:

Cain: And so this Movement, that’s taking place is a grassroots up Movement, and yes some of the Tea Party people are backing certain Republican candidates but what the media want you to try – wants to try do is to try and label the Tea Party people, you know those Astroturf, unpatriotic, crazy people that Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid has labeled us,
and I say us because I have proudly spoken at nearly 20 Tea Party events in the last year and will continue to do so. They're not crazies, they are not racists, they are not Astroturf, they represent, the mood of the majority of the people in this country and it's bubbling-up from the bottom up. That's what has the media upset, that's what has the liberals upset, they keep trying to make it appears as if it's something coming from the top down so they can cut the head off. They're not going to be able to cut the head off of this Movement because it is real, it is real (Herman Cain Show, 05/28/10, 00:07:55 – 00:09:09)!

Conservatives are the people – “We the People”: in charge of this country; representative of the founders of this country; and responsible for its greatness.

Conservatives are citizen-activists, intelligent thinkers, patriots, ordinary, independent folks, tireless, trusty and faithful, Happy Warriors, Defending Fathers and Mothers of the Constitution and the American way of life, gladiators, superheroes, the great silent majority, prophetic judges issuing a dire warning to America: wake-up!

Crowley: You know in the past ah ah we have been called the “great silent majority” my former boss President Nixon coined that phrase, “the great silent majority” and in that context it was the war in Vietnam. Now we're facing a different kind of war this this you and me, the Town Halls, the Tea Parties the march on Washington, you know what we are? We are the new counter-culture, we are the answer to the sixties radicals, that the original great silent majority reacted to back in the Vietnam era. We are the reaction to that because those folks are now in power taking this country off the cliff. We’ve been called the great silent majority because in the past we had the numbers but we were reluctant to raise our voices. Well you know what those days are over – I've got news for Team Bama and peachy face Robert Gibbs his buffoon of a Press Secretary and all of the clowns running around the Bama and all of the clowns in the Congress. And here is the news, here is the headline: those days when the great silent majority were silent are over – we are America and we have only begun to roar (Monica Crowley Show, 9/19/2009, 01:15:04 – 01:16:36)!

Conservatives support America, they are not critical of America; they do not apologize for America. Conservatives stand with the Founding Fathers; they are authentic Americans. Conservatives do not compromise the founding ideals of America;
Conservatives are patriotic. Tammy Bruce and Rush Limbaugh agree with Crowley’s assessment; conservatism and conservative activism are ascendant:

Bruce: *We* are the ones changing this nation for the better and this is not, you know arrogance or or anything else it’s simply the fact (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/19/2009, 01:50:17 – 01:50:26).

Limbaugh: We {conservatives} are for liberty and freedom, a colorblind society, we are for economic growth, we are for tax cuts, smaller government . . . and our agenda is based on optimism and good cheer and having a positive loving attitude about American exceptionalism and all the people who live and work here and make this country work (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/02/2009, 01:22:56 – 01:23:16).

Conservative beliefs and values are what have and will make America great again.

Quite often the claim arises from progressive media and callers to CPTR programs, that CPTR, and conservatives more generally, are intolerant – racist, especially. This accusation is rejected by CPTR hosts, guests, and callers – often based on anecdotal evidence. Conservatives portray themselves and their conservative ideas as reflecting the highest moral standards - generosity, fair-mindedness, colorblindness. Race does not matter to conservatives who judge people by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin. In the following extended excerpt Herman Cain – in response to a progressive caller to his program who claims the contrary – insists that the Tea Party Movement is not racists:

Cain: OK Jean I got ah you threw out so much that I couldn’t get it all in in the last I segment need to respond to one other thing that you said when you talked about the Tea Party people and racism. I am sick of that – cover the ears of the kids folks, cover the ears of the kids for about three seconds, cover the ears of the ears of the kids – I am sick of that crap and that’s exactly what it is. I – the Tea Party people that go to Tea Parties are not racist, the liberal media wants you to believe that, so you have obviously drunken, drunked the Kool-Aid. I’ve been there, they’re not racist. Because you don’t see a lot of Black faces out there you wanna label them as racist, why? To try to silence and intimidate them. These people care about liberty, they care about the government not shoving legislation down their throats – obviously you’re OK with that since you
say you like the Obama healthcare plan shoved down the throats of the American people – and they care about being heard by their government – that’s what this is about. There was no racism at any – I have been speaking at Tea Parties since April 15, 2009. I've seen no racism, I've heard no racism, I have felt no racism – now your response will probably be that’s because Herman Cain is an Uncle Tom, he is a sellout – go ahead and call me whatever you want to call me – I does not care! Because you are just dead wrong, along with everyone else that wants to play the race card, because you don't have any logical argument against what the Citizen Movement, the Tea Party Movement, or whatever you want to call it, you have no logical argument against it because they are right and they’re exercising their right to express their view and opinions. So you want to try to intimidate people – well it’s not gonna work.

Cain: So I get sick of this stuff about racism is involved, just because they disagree with President Obama, because he happens to be Black. And another thing, the people who play the race card, aren't the conservatives, it's the liberals, when you're defenseless for a bad idea or a bad policy, liberals play the race card, so that’s why they’re attacking the Tea Party people based upon calling them racist. No, Jean with all due respect you’re the racist for calling people racist, for being willing to express their opinion and I've said that before, I've written an article on it because you know I just get sick of the same old argument because they don’t have any facts or logic to basically back up their opinion (Herman Cain Show, 04/29/10, 01:23:19 – 01:26:49).

What conservatives on CPTR want known about them is that they are hardworking taxpayers: self-made individuals who are family-oriented, self-reliant, and responsible, humble, ordinary folk, real people, working- and middle-class Americans who have built America and keep her running, every day. Salt of the earth. Conservatives are the backbone of America.
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CHAPTER 9
HEGEMON NARRATIVES

Chapter 9 presents findings from the third research question: What kind of social order is being (re)produced in Conservative Political Talk Radio? The hypothesis developed from case study analysis of CPTR and PPTR data was that: CPTR language and narrative (re)inscribe the relational and structural logics of a hegemonic nation, culture, race, class, gender, and sexuality social order.

Building Tasks

Two building tasks (Gee, 2011) were used to examine the research question and help to identify the narrative construction of reality on CPTR. What was of interest was the “doing” function of language, or how language and narrative work to legitimate the social order and reproduce the status quo. The first of Gee’s (2011) building tasks used to analyze the CPTR data was “Practices”: how language and narrative enact practices, actions, or activities alone or with others. The second building task was “Politics”: how language and narrative are used to define what counts as a social good and how those social goods should be distributed or withheld, used to reward or punish.

Descriptive Statistics

Thirty-nine percent (39%, n = 1,195) of study narratives were Hegemon Narratives. Hegemon Narratives police vectors of difference and reproduce national, cultural, race, gender, sexuality, and class hegemonies. There were three Hegemon Narratives: Affinity Narratives (84%, n = 1,009), Status Narratives (12%, n = 146), and Power Narratives (3%, n = 40).

Approximately two-thirds (n = 876) of Hegemon Narratives were two minutes or less in length. Among male hosts 42% (n = 687) of all narratives were Hegemon
Narratives compared to 36% (n = 508) among female hosts. Of all CPTR hosts, Herman Cain had the greatest proportion of Hegemon Narratives (65%, n = 200). Among programs hosted by the African American CPTR host, 65% (n = 200) of all narratives were Hegemon Narratives compared to 36% (n = 995) among White American CPTR hosts.

One hundred and fifty-two callers called-in to CPTR programs to compose - with hosts, guests, and other callers - Hegemon Narratives; 21% of all callers (n = 731) in the study as a whole. Among the callers who contributed to Hegemon Narratives, 78% (n = 118) were male, 89% (n= 136) expressed conservative opinions, and 11% (n = 16) had progressive views.

When the ideas, arguments, or characterizations conveyed by a narrative theme are incorporated into another narrative theme (e.g., if aspects of a Status Narrative – i.e., America is a Judeo-Christian nation – were utilized in a narrative about the free market – a Power Narrative) this segment of narrative data was coded as a thematic segment. Thematic segments can be thought of as subthemes of a larger narrative.

Study-wide there were 2,828 Hegemon Thematic Segments (35% of all thematic segments in the study as a whole, N = 8,156): 57% (n = 1,623) were Affinity Thematic Segments; 31% (n = 871) were Status Thematic Segments; and 12% (n = 334) were Power Thematic Segments. Among Hegemon Narratives, 42% (n = 11,061) of all thematic segments (n = 2,513) were Hegemon Thematic Segments, 38% (n = 943) were Crisis Thematic Segments (discussed in Chapter 8) and 20% (n = 509) were Obama Thematic Segments (discussed in Chapter 7).
Chapter Organization

The three narratives themes that emerged from an analysis of the CPTR data – Affinity Narratives, Status Narratives, and Power Narratives – speak specifically to the logic, legitimacy, and authority of a hegemonic or taken-for-granted social order.

After presenting statistical data on each Hegemon Narratives, qualitative findings are presented. The presentation order of the narrative themes is not based on the number of narratives found in the CPTR data. Rather, the narratives are presented to capture the overall story plot or social construction of reality on CPTR. Where appropriate, the narrative claims that support Hegemon Narratives are expressed in the voice of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers. This might seem jolting at times; the goal is verisimilitude – to maintain the narrative standpoint of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers.

Affinity Narratives

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that enact a community of authentic conservatives that can be readily set apart from progressives. Bumpers (short promotional segments before and after a commercial break) reinforce the differences between Us and Them by: 1) specifying the basis of listener loyalty (e.g., join the movement, fight back); 2) highlighting the conservative bona fides of program hosts (e.g., simply brilliant, ahead of the curve); and 3) indicating how listeners should self-identify (e.g., intelligent thinkers, committed conservatives) and assess the benefits of listenership (e.g., get informed, sober-up from the Liberal Kool-Aid). Ultimately, Affinity Narratives form a set of talking points that construct a rational, storied basis for a conservative political identity.

Nothing like CPTR Affinity Narratives appears on PPTR; this may be what makes PPTR so much less competitive. Very little time is spent on PPTR defining who
progressives are and what they (should) believe; it is assumed. Progressives are a diverse lot; PPTR hosts, guests, and callers embrace difference, nuance, and complexity, but at the price of virtual kinship. Still, community does form on PPTR, if loosely, around a set of pet principles and issues. The single-most unmistakable sentiment that melds PPTR listeners and hosts together is near unanimous loathing for conservatives – particularly those of the variety featured on CPTR.

Conservative hosts, guests, and callers on CPTR believe it’s Us vs. Them; only one side can win. Affinity Narratives align CPTR hosts and listeners in opposition to progressives. This tension is sustained in three distinctive ways. Firsts, by creating a reason to join the community. Second, by designating the benefits of community. And third, by giving new members the language they need to define and understand themselves within the community. A summary of descriptive statistics on Affinity Narratives is presented next; qualitative findings follow.

Descriptive Statistics

Eighty-four percent (84%, n = 1009) of Hegemon Narratives (n = 1195) build affinity through listeners’ and hosts’ narratives that define ‘Them’ and ‘Us.’ Approximately two-thirds of these Affinity Narratives (n = 761) were one minutes or less. Male hosts composed proportionately more Affinity Narratives (36%, n = 590) than females (30%, n = 419). Of all CPTR hosts, Herman Cain had the greatest proportion of Affinity Narratives (52%, n = 159). Programs hosted by the African American CPTR host, Herman Cain, had the greatest proportion of Affinity Narratives (52%, n = 159) compared to the programs of White American hosts (31%, n = 850).

Thirty-two percent (n = 49) of all callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose Hegemon Narratives with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 152),
contributed to *Affinity Narratives*. Among the callers who contributed to *Affinity Narratives*, 73% (n = 36) were male, 88% (n = 43) expressed conservative opinions, and 12% (n = 6) had progressive views.

There were 1,623 *Affinity Thematic Segments* distributed among all study narratives; 57% of all *Hegemon Thematic Segments* (N = 2,828) in the study as a whole. *Affinity Thematic Segments*, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a host, were most often found in narratives composed by Michael Savage (63% or n = 163) and in *Crisis Narratives* where *Affinity Thematic Segments* were a subtheme in 39% (n = 632) of narratives. *Affinity Thematic Segments* were present in 38% of *Hegemon Narratives* (n = 617) and 23% (n = 374) of *Obama Narratives*.

**Qualitative Findings**

**CPTR programs**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that depict CPTR programs as a virtual community for sharing news, ideas, observations, and political analysis. However, it is important that this virtual community be portrayed as fun and exciting; after all, conservatives are “Happy Warriors,” not intense and serious like progressives.

In the following bumpers host Monica Crowley refers to her program alternately as the “Conservative Coliseum” and “Party Central” – a youthful, entertaining venue, but clearly political.

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: 58 million people said ‘No’ to The Bama [No, no, no you doing it all wrong] Those people now fill the Conservative Coliseum, cheering on their Warrior Princess [Mon-i-ca! Mon-i-ca!]. Where there can only be one Monica Crowley, all clad in tight leather and swinging a battle axe [Do not touch her, it is dangerous] [It’s good, it’s good] The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).
Monica Crowley Show Announcer: [music playing in background] You love one happy hour. And with Miss Crowley. [Echo: Miss Crowley]. You get three. [Cool yea we'll stay and hang around with ya]. You've just crashed Party Central for the Conservative Movement. The Monica Crowley Show [music; beats] (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: It's Party Central time, baby [This calls for a celebration] we're not here to be uptight about the culture. We're not here to ignore the culture. We're here to FIGHT the culture, with culture And whether you love or hate her politics [You've gotta go gawk at this]. We are the culture. A three-hour session, every day. Proving that conservatives can be young, smart and naughty. [A completely unique experience] The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley is unique among CPTR hosts. She goes to great lengths to appeal to her listeners based on her sexual availability and physical attractiveness. Audiences are reminded, especially in bumper narratives, that she is both astute and the ready object of their sexual fantasies.

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: You tune in every day not just for the laughs, not just for the brains, oh no, no, you tune in to salute your conservative pin-up girl.

Caller: Ah yesterday my wife and I put our son on the airplane – he’s headed for Okinawa and Afghanistan he’s in the Marine Corp – we had a really interesting conversation. He said you know Dad during World War II we had pin-up posters, we had the pin-up dolls the girls that motivated us, he said I would love to have a Monica Crowley pin-up photo for his barracks. [Crowley laughs].

Crowley: Not out of the question.

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: Three hours a day romancing America. And breaking hearts. The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Crowley uses this same strategy of sexual innuendo to call into question the gender performance of President Obama:

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: The Bama is the first president devoid of manhood [sound effect] Welcome to the Conservative Coliseum where you’ll find your favorite gladiator, Monica Crowley, armed to the teeth three
hours a day -- with a smile. It’s the Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

By shaming the President’s gender performance, Monica Crowley has increased her legitimacy with her audience.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct CPTR programs as an integral part of the larger Conservative Movement to “Take Back Our Government.” Each program is charged with keeping watch over the opposition:

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Watching every move they make and standing up for your freedom. This is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 12/08/2009, 00:15:47 – 00:15:58).

Programs also keep conservatives honest and authentic; focused on the goal, committed to victory and, according to Monica Crowley, hot (i.e., relevant, something to be desired):

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: This Show carries water for no one [sound effect] Not for The Bama, not for the Congress, and not for the RNC [sound effect]. We don’t need access. [Sound of men grunting] We need LIBERTY [No retreat, no surrender]. Out with the old and busted. Old and busted. And in with the new hotness [crack of a whip]. The Monica Crowley Show [Music: Stevie Wonder – Very Superstitious] (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Programs are also a means of organizing the Conservative Movement, rallying support for political action, reporting on successes, and dissecting setbacks.

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Turn it up and learn. This is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 1/13/2010, 00:22:16 – 00:22:22).

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: This is Conservative Victory 2010 radio. The stop Obama, Pelosi and Reid express is chugging through your town – the Sean Hannity Show starts right here, right now (Sean Hannity Show bumper)!

Hosts send the message that, clearly, there is no future for the Conservative Movement in America that does not include CPTR.
CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct CPTR programs as a place to find mutual support, respect, and appreciation for conservative ideas, values, beliefs, and policies. The following bumper narratives pithily restate conservative principles; with repetition, hyperbolic declarations lose their irony and become facts:

Monica Crowley: Welcome to the end of the week here in the Conservative Coliseum. I am Monica Crowley your Conservative Warrior Princess. Armed with truth, justice, and the American way. For which we fight, three hours a day, every day. Beating back tyranny, socialism, unconstitutional acts, and the pillaging of this great land wherever we see them raising their ugly heads (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: This is the Monica Crowley Show and we’re rooting for Barack Obama to fail [Yay!!!!!!] (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers assert that most people don’t have a factual understanding of conservatives and conservatism. Only on CPTR and other conservative media can conservatives see themselves and their ideas portrayed accurately and positively.

The world has gone mad; CPTR makes the world recognizable to conservatives and anyone else who wants to learn the truth. For Sean Hannity, understanding conservatism is no more complicated than parsing out right from wrong, appeasers, from patriots:

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: This isn’t a Right versus Left show; this is right versus wrong. Sean Hannity is back on the radio (Sean Hannity Show bumper).

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Appeasers on the Left [Barack Obama: We are an imperfect people]. Patriots on the Right [Never retreat, never surrender]. Standing up for the United States of America. This is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show bumper).

If anyone were to doubt the importance of patriotism to conservative principles, Sean Hannity is ready to remind them that Conservativism is synonymous with nationalism:
Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Red, White and Blue. And proud of it. Sean Hannity is on your radio, right now (Sean Hannity Show, 1/05/2010, 02:49:03 – 02:49:21).

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Made in the USA, this is the Sean Hannity Show, on the air now (Sean Hannity Show, 12/03/2009, 02:49:13 – 02:49:25)!

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Broadcasting from the land of the free and the home of the brave and saluting the men and women who keep it that way. This is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 12/09/2009, 02:23:16 – 02:23:30)!

Listening to CPTR is an act of patriotism.

CPTR programs are a valuable service to listeners: dependable, authentically conservative, independent, and in-demand. The following bumpers highlight the benefits of tuning-in daily to hosts Sean Hannity and Michael Savage:

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Conservative to the core, this is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 12/07/2009, 00:20:24 – 00:20:31).

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Warning, warning, warning, warning. This Show is not approved by the Obama White House. Sean Hannity will be right back (Sean Hannity Show, 12/07/2009, 01:21:43 – 01:21:55).

Michael Savage: Welcome back ah to the true voice of America, The Savage Nation (Michael Savage Show, 12/04/2009, 00:34:04 – 00:34:07).

CPTR Shows provide facts, logic, and common sense; they are not emotional, partisan, or out of control – like the opposition.

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Government healthcare, government daycare, government housing, government cheese. Whatever happened to choice for the American people? This is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 12/09/2009, 01:20:24 – 01:20:43).

Tammy Bruce Show Announcer: Putting more common into commonsense. It's the Tammy Bruce Show. Yeah kicking some more ass here, welcome back (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 00:33:43 – 00:33:50).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Sobering you up from all the Liberal Kool-Aid you've been served. Herman Cain every night 7-10 on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).
CPTR Shows present uncompromising commentary, news, and information often ignored by the mainstream media – filling-in the blanks and connecting the dots:

Sean Hannity: You can’t always believe what the other side claims, that’s why there’s the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 12/04/2009, 00:34:49 – 00:35:10).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: This is the Show that gives news analysis you won’t hear anywhere else [from Brave Heart: They may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom!] The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: The power of Herman Cain, giving you the information and stories the mainstream media won’t cover. Herman Cain on NewsTalk 750 WSB. Listen, you just might learn something (Herman Cain Show bumper).

CPTR Shows are crucial to an accurate understanding of the world; an indispensable tool for deconstructing the intentions and behaviors of the opposition.

**CPTR hosts**

CPTR hosts aggressively cultivate a distinct brand for themselves; designating a set of characteristics that comprise their unique contribution to the listening audience. The hosts’ brand sets them apart from the competition – on both sides of the conservative-progressive political divide – and is usually constructed around particular skills and attributes that audiences have come to construct as important in conservative commentators. The following bumper narratives illustrates some of the traits that are most often embraced by CPTR hosts.

- **Fearlessness:**

  Tammy Bruce Show Announcer: Tammy Bruce doesn’t try to cause trouble, she does it effortlessly (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 00:21:24 – 00:21:29).

- **Loyal and unapologetic:**
Monica Crowley Show Announcer: Bush was right [sound of a bell dinging]. The lady’s name is Monica Crowley [sound effect] She’s not here three hours a day because she wants to be liked [You’re not just telling us what we want to hear] She’s here to fight liberalism, full-time. [sound effect] For you! The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

- Tireless, beautiful, feminine, available:

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: Have no fear because for three hours a day your trusty Conservative Caped Crusader is on the job. And it’s not a HE fighting liberal super villains . . . [Monkey, screeching, jungle sounds] . . . it’s a SHE! [Well hello beautiful!] The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

- Sexy and aggressive:

Monica Crowley Show Announcer [sound effect]: Meet the new girl on the block. [MUSIC] She’s firmly planting a four-inch heel into anyone who needs it [And on that note]. You better listen . . . better listen. To the Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

- Fighter:


- Inspires fear:


- Punishes the guilty:

Rush Limbaugh Show Announcer: They used to get away with it. But not anymore. Thanks to Rush and the EIB Network. (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/21/2009, 01:17:25 – 01:17:32)

As extraordinary as CPTR hosts appear to be, they also construct narratives where they depict themselves as ‘ordinary Joes’ – not elites or experts, just every day folk. CPTR hosts are ‘one of the guys,’ someone listeners can trust; a person who shares listeners’ interests and is concerned about the things that concern them. In the
following excerpt, Savage explains to audiences what makes him distinctive among other CPTR hosts:

Savage: It is the voice of America, the real America, The Savage Nation. Not the wimp America, not Republican lite, not the middle of the road of the Fox Network run by Saudi Arabia and their puppets. It is the last of the independents the last of the Mohicans, Michael Savage (Michael Savage Show, 12/04/2009, 01:19:52 – 01:20:15).

Herman Cain outlines the experiences that make him a native son, as well as a tried and tested politician, corporate leader, and one of the guys “working the night shift”:

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Herman Cain – raised in Georgia, graduate of Morehouse College, and now on Atlanta’s legendary radio station. NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: He’s run a company, he’s run a campaign, now he’s running the night shift. You’re listening to Herman Cain on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

CPTR hosts are insightful and know how the minds of the opposition work. Hosts possess a special capacity to deconstruct the intentions, actions, and speech of progressives – they make the complex understandable. The following bumpers demonstrate the intellectual skills and integrity CPTR hosts want their audiences to know they possess:

Rush Limbaugh Show Announcer: Know Rush and you’ll know the truth. On the EIB Network (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/02/2009, 00:54:04 – 00:54:11).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: He’s dissecting the headlines to get you the real story. You’re listening to Herman Cain on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: Time for the lightweights to get in the fight or get out of the way [smashing sound] You’re here for three hours for one reason . . . one reason - Monica Crowley [whirring sound] Not to hear a guest do the host’s job, not to hear meandering personal stories [lounge music] You want entertainment and analysis - Not babbling [Shut up!, Shut up!] You are the Monica Maniacs. This is the Monica Crowley Show [Whirring noise then a Guitar riff] (Monica Crowley Show bumper).
CPTR hosts can identify and interpret the facts, reveal deeper truths, and alert audiences of imminent danger. CPTR hosts have commonsense and deal in facts and logic; they are knowledgeable, opinionated, ahead of the curve and the news cycle, trailblazers, leaders not followers, innovative.

As mentioned earlier, some CPTR hosts want to project attractiveness, fearlessness, youthfulness, honor, sex appeal, and power – all in the same package. Monica Crowley wants to draw fresh blood into the Conservative Movement by promoting an entertaining, inviting, celebratory conservatism. She constructs narratives where she is the life of the party – desirable and stimulating:

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: Congratulations your dial is fixed upon talk’s radio’s next generation. Get ready because The Monica Crowley Show is . . . The confessions of a dangerous blonde [So much love yet also so much information] [sound effect] The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: Spend all three hours here with Miss Crowley and she just might blow you a kiss [sound effect] [Oh Yea!] [sound effect] Live from New York City. The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: You have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into . . . Lipstick, glitter, high heels . . . [sound effect] and yes . . . War paint! [Holy mackerel!] The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley: Welcome to the end of the week in the Conservative Coliseum. I am Monica Crowley your Conservative Warrior Princess. Decked out in full martial regalia: war paint, gladiator stilettos and a smile. Because on this program, we’re ‘Happy Warriors’ (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: [Whirring sound] At long last you have her . . . [You have her] Time to ditch those old gals . . . [Old gals] And get with Miss Crowley. For a great time call 877-876-2520 [Music: Shaft] Caller montage: [God bless you Monica you’re the only voice of reason out there.] [Hello Monica you’re a lot easier on the ears than that Hannity fellow.] [Monica I listen to your show, I’m 50 years old I have been listening to talk radio for four years, where have you been all my life,
Rush Limbaugh employs a similar strategy to Monica Crowley, where he projects a masculine image in narratives that construct him as skilled, one of a kind, without intellectual equal, powerful, and, yes, “hot.”


CPTR hosts circulate narratives of themselves that construct them as ethical vigilantes who keep politicians and government officials honest. The following bumper narratives illustrate these kinds of narratives constructions:

Tammy Bruce Show Announcer: Tammy Bruce, making clear issues of right and wrong (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 01:01:31 – 01:01:35).

Tammy Bruce Show Announcer: Because someone has to teach the Left what free speech means. It’s the Tammy Bruce Show (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 00:21:49 – 00:21:56).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Exposing government waste, warning you of new taxes, keeping the politicians honest, at least as much as possible. Herman Cain is on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: [Music: “Doctor, doctor”] Dr. Crowley is taking patients now [Sound of bell ringing] [sound effect] Curing America
of liberalism . . . [liberalism] [sound effect] One kook at a time [Sound of a man yelling/babble]. The Monica -- Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Driving liberals crazy. Three hours a day, every day. The Sean Hannity Show is back on the air (Sean Hannity Show, 1/06/2010, 01:35:33 – 01:35:46).


Rush Limbaugh: Here is Teresa Hartford County, Maryland. Welcome to the EIB Network.

Caller: Hi Rush.

Rush Limbaugh: Hi.

Caller: You are a gift from God. Literally (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/04/2009, 02:51:02 – 02:51:12).


CPTR hosts are conservative role models that loyal listeners want to emulate.

Hosts exemplify authentic conservatism:

Herman Cain Show Announcer: A man opposed to more taxes, and more government and in favor of more individual responsibility. You’re listening to Herman Cain on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).


Sean Hannity Show Announcer: The liberal Democrats are bankrupting our future, one day at a time [Barack Obama: Spend, spend.]. But Sean’s here with a better solution. This is the Sean Hannity Show (Sean Hannity Show, 1/11/2010, 00:22:29 – 00:22:49).

Much like members of their listening audience, CPTR hosts are grassroots conservative activists who make themselves and their programs vehicles for promoting the aims of
the Conservative Movement. CPTR hosts are dependable, accessible, supportive, and in solidarity with their listening audience.

**CPTR listeners**

Far fewer Affinity Narratives are constructed about CPTR listening audiences than about programs and hosts. Nonetheless, there are strong narrative themes that make an important contribution to social reality construction on CPTR. Bumper segments are where narratives about CPTR audiences are most often constructed. Three narrative themes about CPTR audiences emerged that construct listeners and listening as: active; political activism; and the litmus test of genuine conservative commitment.

CPTR bumpers construct listening to CPTR as having consequences for both thought and action. Listening to CPTR programs creates change in the listeners’ lives. No one is the same after hearing the truths revealed on CPTR. In the following bumper excerpts, the program announcer for the Herman Cain Show associates achieving conservative goals and membership in the Conservative Movement to listening to the Herman Cain Show:

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Step one for taking back our government – get informed with Herman Cain every evening 7-10 on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Intelligent Thinkers, join the movement, to take back our government. Sign-up now at WSB RADIO.com and listen to Herman Cain every night on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Besides, changing the listeners’ thoughts and actions, bumpers also construct listening to CPTR as thought and action. CPTR is not a passive endeavor or merely
entertainment. Listening to CPTR is portrayed as political action – as much as voting for a candidate or participating in a street protest.

CPTR listeners play an active role in programs and this spills over into aspects of the broader Conservative Movement. CPTR programs are a conduit through which to express approval or disapproval for different conservative personalities. CPTR hosts and guests stay in touch with listeners through the CPTR medium and use programs to influence theirs and others political careers. In the following bumper excerpt, a well-known and widely respected CPTR host vouches for Herman Cain, a relative newcomer to CPTR, noting that listeners “asked for” him to have his own program.

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Hey Neil Boortz here, you’ve come to know Herman Cain when he fills in for me in the morning. Now because you asked for it, he’s hosting his own Show every night at 7 on NewsTalk 750 WSB. Depend on it (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Herman Cain Show Announcer: Don't you wish he were running for office? Herman Cain here and every night 7-10 on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).

Cain announced plans for his presidential campaign on May 21, 2011.

Listening to CPTR programs is also constructed as political activism – proof of authentic conservative commitment and solidarity. Monica Crowley invites listeners, with a wink and a kiss, to declare their allegiance – to Caesar (Barack Obama) or herself (their “Conservative Gladiator”):

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: It's the Monica Crowley Show.

Crowley: Yes it is and welcome back to the Conservative Coliseum. Before the break I described The Bama as Caesar playing to the coliseum, well he’s not playing to this Coliseum, that’s for sure. So here is the question for you. Are you with Caesar or are you with your Conservative Gladiator? Your Conservative Warrior Princess, moi (Monica Crowley Show bumper)!
The following bumper excerpts from the Rush Limbaugh Show demonstrate how listening is not mere passive assent to the ideas presented on CPTR programs. For loyal listeners who share the views expressed on CPTR, listening is membership – an easy and legitimate means to join the Movement:

Rush Limbaugh Show Announcer: Listen, learn then spread the word. Rush, on the EIB Network (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/29/2009, 00:54:50 – 00:54:59).


CPTR listeners can also demonstrate their conservative bona fides and loyalty via their listenership. Loyal listeners are special and treated differently from casual listeners:

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Listen to this Show one time, and you’re Hannitized. Sean Hannity is back on the radio. (Sean Hannity Show, 1/05/2010, 01:34:10 – 01:34:21)

By listening, audiences become “Hannitized” (sanitized?): conversant in conservative political ideology and talking points. Devoted CPTR listeners are then inspired to spread the word to their families, coworkers, and in their communities.

**Status Narratives**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that (re)create a taken-for-granted social order along the lines of nation, citizenship, gender, sexuality, culture, and race. *Status Narratives* begin with the assumption that America is exceptional, a “shining city on a hill.” That America’s experiment in liberty is right, moral, and just is evident by its longevity. There is no need for guilt or recriminations. Counternarratives that would have the American social order viewed as anything but fair are ridiculous. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers concede, yes, mistakes have been made – in the past; however, on balance, condemnations levelled against America are unmerited and
designed merely to exploit the good nature of God-fearing Americans. No status hierarchies exist here! Individuals are free to succeed or fail based on their own skill and effort. Unfortunately, there are progressive opportunists – ‘race hustler,’ ‘feminazis,’ those who desire a culture of dependency – who want to draw attention to problems and differences among people. Progressives want to gin-up gender and class warfare and exploit White guilt as a means to a fat paycheck. Fortunately, conservatives have become immune to such entreaties. Conservatives see people, not groups; opportunity, not inequality.

As one would guess, PPTR hosts, guests, and callers readily unpack inequality in the American social order on the basis of nation, citizenship, gender, sexuality, culture, and race. Conservatives are portrayed on PPTR as hypocritical, anti-intellectual, and intolerant, based chiefly on their resistance to evidence progressives feel clearly identifies status-based inequity in America. Issue after issue is marched out for inspection on PPTR, not because – as PPTR hosts, guests, and callers insist – progressives hate America, rather the opposite is true; critique is meant to insure progress toward a more perfect union.

*Status Narratives* can be divided into three subtypes: nation and citizenship, gender and sexuality, and culture and race. For each status, there are a set of narrative claims that together (re)produce the hegemonic social order. A summary of descriptive statistics is presented next, followed by qualitative findings.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Twelve percent (12%, n = 146) of *Hegemon Narratives* (n = 1195) classify the social order along nation and citizenship, gender and sexuality, and culture and race status. Approximately two-thirds of these *Status Narratives* (n = 114) were seven
minutes or less. Female hosts composed proportionately more *Status Narratives* (5%, n = 75) than male hosts (4%, n = 71). Of all CPTR hosts, Laura Ingraham had the greatest proportion of *Status Narratives* (13%, n = 56). Programs hosted by the African American CPTR host Herman Cain had the greatest proportion of *Status Narratives* (10%, n = 29) compared to programs hosted by White American hosts (4%, n = 117).

Fifty-five percent (n = 84) of all callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose *Hegemon Narratives* with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 152), contributed to *Status Narratives*. Among the callers who contributed to *Status Narratives*, 79% (n = 66) were male, 92% (n = 77) expressed conservative opinions, and 8% (n = 7) had progressive views.

There were 871 *Status Thematic Segments* distributed among all study narratives; 31% of all *Hegemon Thematic Segments* (N = 2,828) in the study as a whole. *Status Thematic Segments*, as a proportion of thematic segments produced by a host, were most often found in narratives composed by Michael Savage (47% or n = 120) and in other *Hegemon Narratives* where *Status Thematic Segments* were a subtheme in 42% (n = 367) of narratives. *Status Thematic Segments* were present in 33% (n = 291) *Crisis Narratives* and 24% (n = 213) of *Obama Narratives*.

**Qualitative Findings: Nation and Citizenship**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives in which the United States is portrayed as exceptional - unique among all the nations of the world and, according to the following narrative by Tammy Bruce involving an imagined conversation between Jesus and God, favored by God:

Bruce: God’s sitting back there right now looking at the short bus of Earth and he’s saying to His Son, look it’s been the short bus we knew it was the short bus, but even this is too much {release of the Lockerbie bomber}. 

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How many more signs do we need to give those Americans to just get their act together! I would have a feeling that God wants to just blast us with another comet, you know it worked for the dinosaurs, might work for the humans. And maybe it’s Jesus whose saying, “Dad just give them another chance, they’ve been good up to now, I don’t know what’s going on, but just give them a little bit more time” (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/01/2009, 00:22:03 – 00:22:39).

For Sean Hannity, America has an important role to play in the world and that role is ordained by the creator:

Hannity: I view part of America’s mission – and one of the reasons we’ve been so blessed – we we have a responsibility I think to advance the natural state of mankind if we’re if we believe we are endowed by our creator which is to be free. And I think ah I think America is – has played a pivotal role in that and will continue to play it (Sean Hannity Show, 12/11/2009, 01:20:09 – 01:20:26).

At the core of America’s exceptionalism are the ideas of the Founding Fathers. The ideas of America’s Founding Fathers, set out in the nation’s founding documents (e.g., the Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution) include: the rule of law, states’ rights, empathy tempered with reason, self-defense and self-reliance, respect for religion, majority rule, and individualism. America’s founding ideas and founding documents have made America an exceptional country and invigorate the American Dream, now and into the future. In the following excerpt Rush Limbaugh outlines how idea(l)s – not the exploitation of resources, land, or labor – are what is responsible for the United States’ distinctiveness:

Limbaugh: There are nations, populations, groups of people, been around for who knows thousands of years. We’ve been around for less than 250. In less than 250 years, less than 300 million people, have produced a lifestyle and a country of roaring opportunity and prosperity. The living standard, the likes that the world has never seen before. And we have shared our greatness, the things that we have learned and done with, everybody around the world, we have shared our prosperity, we have shared our abundance, and I ask myself how did this happen because in terms of DNA, we are no different, than any other human beings on the planet, just because we’re born here, and just because as a result of being
born we’re Americans doesn’t mean that as human beings we’re better, we’re not healthier, we’re not fitter, I mean just coming out of the womb we’re not – there’s nothing special about us. There’s not a special American gene that God decides to implant in people before they’re born and it’s not that way. So how is it that if we for for for really no different, how did this happen? And the answer to me is very very simple, and it’s what leads to the concept of American Exceptionalism, and the whole notion of American Exceptionalism is that we are an exceptional people because we we’re founded under principles that allow individuals to achieve the best they can, we have freedom and we acknowledge the source of our freedom is God and it’s a ah is these inalienable rights life, liberty, pursuit of happiness – they come from God they’re part of our creation ah our our freedom and the yearning to be free is – that’s that’s our spirit, our soul. We’re all born with it, all around the world but the rest of the world has never, been invested with that responsibility and freedom (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/23/2009, 01:40:49 – 01:43:52).

Naturally, America is resented for her greatness; envied because of her super-power status, the high standard of living enjoyed by her citizens, her global competitive advantage, and military might. CPTR, hosts, guests, and callers accuse the Democratic Party and President Obama of wanting to undermine America so that it is just like any other “mediocre” nation in the world

Limbaugh: Now folks, knocking down the United States from its position of number one has been a Left-Wing project for generations. It is an explicit Democrat governing policy whenever they’re in office, they hate they hate a powerful America, they do whatever they can to weaken us by any means necessary, we are the problem in the world from global warming to executive compensation, the banking and financial regulations. And make no mistake this is who they are. They don’t like us being supreme, we’re immoral and we’re ah unjust and this is something Obama believes as well. I think it totally explains the ideology behind what Obama is doing internationally and domestically for that matter. It’s all purposeful, all of this is purposeful (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/21/2009, 00:53:54 – 00:54:49).

Cain: The United States is exceptional. Some people call it American Exceptionalism. But the current Administration and this Congress are trying to destroy American Exceptionalism. They want to pass enough punitive legislation that has in it enough penalties that it will cause the United States of America to become just another mediocre country (Herman Cain Show, 04/28/10, 00:11:28 – 00:13:58).
The enemies of America – foreign and domestic – have a blind hatred for her; they do not see America’s greatness. America is so clearly exceptional, failure to acknowledge her unique place among nations is a blindness indicative of a deep and abiding hatred:

Crowley: Last week in Europe the Bama struggled to say whether he believed in American Exceptionalism. He searched high and low for an answer to the question about whether or not he believed in American greatness and Exceptionalism.

Audio clip of Obama: I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism, and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.

Crowley: Hey Bama, you don’t have to search for an answer. It’s all around you. But he doesn’t see it because he doesn’t want to see it, because he can’t see it (Monica Crowley Show, 4/11/2009, 02:26:00 – 02:26:39).

While there have been many sad chapters in the history of the United States, America has evolved, over time, into a bastion of liberty, justice, and equality. America’s superpower status is built from hard work and determination; not class, race, and gender exploitation, imperialism or the like. America has sacrificed blood, sweat, and treasure on behalf of peoples around the world to secure liberty, justice, and equality on their behalf. America is a beacon of hope for people all around the world struggling against oppression. In the following excerpt Laura Ingraham expresses the sentimentality CPTR hosts, guests, and callers feel when they think about America:

Ingraham: The idea of America, should choke, should choke us all up. I mean the sacrifice, the blood, the the toil, the the risk, the risk that people took to make sure we actually became a Republic, with our freedoms. I eh I get choked up every time I hear The Star Spangled Banner, I do I’m just a – call me nostalgic, I’m nostalgic for that kind of a feeling about this country (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/19/2009, 02:53:05 – 02:53:28).

Furthermore, America cannot in any way be blamed for the actions some have argued are a response to U.S. abuses abroad – specifically, terrorism:
Bruce: The fact of the matter is the world exists because of our generosity. The evil that still prevails, prevails because it’s evil unto itself. Our generosity to this entire planet eh eh as we have saved it from self-annihilation at least twice, ah is something that even allows the sloppy and the genocidal and the psychotic to exist. To blame us for their attitude or for what they’re doing of course is in and of itself sick. There is nothing to understand about why people do this anymore than I need to understand why Ted Bundy did what he did or why Son of Sam did what he did . . . you know there is no reason to need to understand that, alright, that is a level of moral relativism that none of us – if you listen to this program, none of us subscribe to (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/11/2009, 00:08:29 – 00:09:32).

Sean Hannity: You {Caller} sound like a bitter, angry, foolish liberal that you are. And you know what for you to say, for you- for you to suggest that I Sean Hannity am responsible for terrorism and that America is responsible, you have no clue what you’re talking about. They they orchestrated this war against us – it’s not a war America wanted, but they were at war with us for years, for an entire decade and we did nothing. They well apparently want to kill us because of what we’ve done? No they kill us and hate us because of what we stand for, which is the antithesis of what they stand for. We actually believe in freedom for women, for children, equal rights for every citizen, we actually are a society that that has a moral justification where individuals are responsible and able to pursue their God-given right that that every aspect of their life is not controlled by ah by a fanatical religion. Anyway so well you’re wasting my time so goodbye (Sean Hannity Show, 1/06/2010, 02:46:28 – 02:47:27).

Despite its past problems and some weaknesses, Americans need not apologize for what America has achieved; success is the result of hard work, sacrifice, and ingenuity – a model for others to emulate if they so choose. America is number one because it deserves to be; critics, inside or outside of the U.S. are jealous - everyone wants what we have. It is okay, according to Laura Ingraham, to be proud of America’s superior status among the nations of the world; no one should make Americans feel guilty about their advantages:

Ingraham: So, so they’re {Obama Administration} lowering our expectations about what America is going to be able to do in the future. And that’s why people are saying wait a second, well well well what’s wrong with our being number one? What’s what’s wrong with our aspiring to be the number one economic, military and frankly cultural super power.
We like being number one and we like the idea that we’re gonna stay number one through hard work, merit and you know the usual sweat of ourbrow and and occasionally the sacrifice of people you know who don’t get the ah, they don’t get the attention (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/12/2009, 01:20:04 – 01:20:59).

After all, America is a force for good in the world.

American citizenship is a privilege. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives where to become a U.S. citizen, immigrants must pass tests of allegiance and patriotism that include: agreeing to be drafted into military or civilian service, mandatory mastery of English, tests of knowledge of U.S. founding principles and documents, a promise to respect authority, and learning a useful trade or skill.

Citizenship status turns on documentation of legal immigration. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers create narratives in which punitive measures are the desired response to illegal immigration; no sympathy can or should be extended to those who violate the law.

Congressman Luis Gutierrez speaking at a rally: Today, we’re here to tell Washington, that we will not rest until the raids stop and our brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers are no longer torn apart by the government of the United States of America.

Ingraham: That Congressman, Luis Gutierrez, should be censured for that comment. You know why? Because, while speaking through what sounded to be a toilet paper roll, he is clearly, pegging the U.S. government as the enemy. “The U.S. government tearing our families apart!” No. People tearing families apart are the individuals who showed no regard for U.S. law when they crossed this border illegally and decided to work their way into the system without following the rule of law. Those people are personally responsible for what happens to their families. OK. We’re trying to figure out what to do with our country, let alone solve all of Mexico’s problems. Luis Gutierrez, what an outrage (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/15/2009, 02:23:12 – 02:24:30).

Cain: The liberals want amnesty. Conservatives want a fence [cheering and applause] . . . I was debating a guy from L.A. this attorney you must have heard that and he was saying they tried the fence and it didn’t work and I said put me in charge of the fence. First of all that sucker would be
electrified [cheers] I ain’t, this isn’t being cruel and then on the other side if they make it through the electrical wire I’d have a hundred-yard trench filled with alligators – now if you can swim across that and get here, God Bless ya’ [cheers and applause] (Herman Cain Show, 05/25/10, 00:55:43 – 00:56:42).

A binary exists that pits documented citizens/Americans against the pejorative “illegals”; “Illegals” are a source of contamination, filth, disease, and disunity that threatens to rend the American social fabric and lead to utter chaos.

Crowley: Well you know commonsense in this country is really in short supply. What is wrong with this country. 9-11 wasn’t enough to close the border, so we could get a full accounting of who was here and what they were doing in this country. The drug wars on the border weren’t enough to close the border. The gun running on the border weren’t- that wasn’t enough to close the border. And now we’ve got Mexico being a virtual Petri dish of viral nightmares spreading into the United States and now this is not enough to close the border . . . Here’s the point and I have not heard anyone else say it – which is why you come to this radio show because I’ll say what nobody else wants to say. In the late nineteenth century and the early 20th century when the United States had big waves of immigration, mostly from Western and Eastern Europe – the Irish the Poles and so on – they were sequestered at Ellis Island, they were thoroughly examined by doctors, they spent days if not weeks there being evaluated for any and all medical issues. They were screened for TB, they were screened for any and all contagious diseases. Why? Because back then we reserved the right to block anybody from coming into this country who was gonna make our citizens sick. Anybody who was gonna spread disease to our people. We were protective of Americans. Well, not anymore, come on in ya got the swine flu, no problem. You got TB, be our guest. You got HIV welcome. You got Ebola, hey step right up (Monica Crowley Show, 5/02/2009, ~ 01:20:42 – 01:23:19).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers also construct narratives in which undocumented aliens are depicted as law breakers, a burden on society, unskilled and unwilling to assimilate. They will destroy the nation from within by undermining American culture, values, and laws, bankrupting the government, and transferring wealth to their home country. Michael Savages explains how amnesty to Mexican
Savage: Millions of you know what is at stake, millions of you know that if they legalize 30 million illegal aliens and their kin it’s all over, you will have the equivalent of the wrecked socialism state of Mexico, we will have the most melted down country it’s over it’ll never come back from the hell that they will drag us into. And that is worth fighting for, let me tell you that. That is worth fighting for because if they do that they will have a perennial vote for socialism in this country. Let me explain that again to you, if they get those 30 million illegal aliens in here they’ll vote one socialist Left Wing government after another for the rest of your life and probably your children’s lives. You know there was a time that Mexico was a semi prosperous nation, and then what happened was is that it became totally corrupted in the 1930s and socialism crept in and the country truly never recovered from that and now they’re going to import this mentality to this country?

So there I say to you I’m not making a prediction but I’m saying to you as I sit here if I’m going to make any kind of political prediction, that if this gang tries to pull that one off on the American people, and I can guarantee you as I stand here, as I stand in front of this microphone, that this is not just a Republican thing, this is not just a Democrat thing, I’ve seen every poll, this is a American thing. Most Americans want the illegals, not only stopped they want them thrown out of the country, let me go a step further, they don’t want another passive let’s get the – let’s sit here and wait for the next radical Muslim to attack and then we’ll see what mistakes we’ve made. They’re tired of it they want them kicked out they want them out of this country.

They are sick of it, they don’t like the demographic change if I may be very blunt about it, they don’t like the cultural change, the social change, they don’t like any of it. But worse than that they don’t like the political change that came with the illegals. How do you think people like Barbara Boxer, Hillary Clinton, Diane Feinstein and Barack Obama get elected? How do you think it happens? And see you say, ‘How did this happen, how did this happen?’ You’ve seen nothing yet, if you let them get away with granting amnesty to the 30 million illegal aliens, you may as well leave the country because you’re not going to be as – you will be a stranger in your own land. So that’s all I’m going to say on this today but I already got more excited than I wanted to get (Michael Savage Show, 1/05/2010, 01:54:00 – 01:56:22).

On CPTR, citizenship is constructed with a selective reference to history and experience, privileging the perspective of a conquering majority; competing
perspectives or loyalties only ‘fans the flames of difference.’ Hosts Herman Cain and Laura Ingraham construct narratives that reflect this perspective on citizenship and diversity in their own lives:

Cain: And for people who may not have ah listened to me on the radio program, my position is quite simply, I am an American first. I just happen to have roots that go back to African heritage, but I’m an American first. And as an American I have certain rights and privileges – and one of the privileges and one of the rights that I have is to disagree with anybody that’s in elected office that I don’t agree with, regardless of their color and people who want to use color to divide us – I don’t have a lot of respect for. Because color should not be used to divide us. We are the United States of America and some of us want to keep it that way, we want to keep it as the United States of America. Yes we have different ethnic groups, that’s fine, and we all respect and we all honor and celebrate our ethnic differences. But our first label should be American, the second label ought to be patriot! And then if you want to get into some of that other stuff that’s fine – but don’t let it get in front of being an American first – a United States of American and a patriot second. That’s what built this great country and that’s what’s going to bring this country back together (Herman Cain Show, 05/27/10, 01:46:22 – 01:47:50).

Ingraham: See I’m just always going back to the thing that we’re Americans. And I don’t ever call myself a Polish American. I happen to be of Polish decent. I’m American. We always eh eh are separating ourselves, from each other and to me at some point we have to just say, look we’re we’re, obviously people from all over the world have come here and it’s great, and we love having the different folks who have different traditions – I have no problem with that, I think it’s wonderful. But at some point we just have to stop, the hyphenation you know hyphenated American approach to issues, that’s my concern (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/15/2009, 01:09:31 – 01:10:07).

Americans must be American first. Unity is achieved through sameness; difference disrupts and challenges sameness.

**Qualitative Findings: Gender and Sexuality**

In CPTR narratives differences are assumed to exist between genders. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers implicitly reference what are acceptable performances of gender and sexuality. In CPTR narratives men are far more restricted in their
performance of masculinity than are women in their performance of femininity. Hosts are careful to cultivate and exemplify stereotypical gender performances. In the following bumper narratives, hosts highlight their traditional masculine credentials: leader, determined, powerful, intelligent, fearless, experienced, and, yes, sexist:

Sean Hannity Show Announcer: Like a heat seeking missile. Sean Hannity is on the radio now (Sean Hannity Show, 1/05/2010, 02:17:50 – 02:17:58).


Herman Cain Show Announcer: There are some men who have accomplished so much in their lives you just want to listen to them and learn. Herman Cain is one of those men. Listen you just might learn something, on NewsTalk 750 WSB (Herman Cain Show bumper).


Women have room to play with and transgress feminine gender performance and sexuality; importantly though, female gender or sexual transgression must be performed for the amusement or titillation of men. One of the goals of a bumper is to declare the host’s talents and capabilities. Female hosts face a dilemma: how to convince a mostly male audience of their skills, without alienating them. Tammy Bruce and Monica Crowley use bumpers to juxtapose traditionally feminine and masculine traits, but use slang, humor, or sexual innuendo to soften gender or sexual transgressiveness:
Tammy Bruce Show Announcer: She’s a chick with a gun and a microphone – I’m not sure which one is more lethal. It’s the Tammy Bruce Show (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 01:01:50 – 01:01:58).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer [sound effect]: Meet the new girl on the block. [music] She’s firmly planting a four-inch heel into anyone who needs it [And on that note] You better listen . . . better listen, to the Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: 58 million people said No to The Bama [No, no, no you doing it all wrong]. Those people now fill the Conservative Coliseum, cheering on their Warrior Princess [Mon-i-ca! Mon-i-ca!]. Where there can only be one Monica Crowley, all clad in tight leather and swinging a battle axe [Do not touch her, it is dangerous] [It’s good, it’s good]. The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: You have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into. Lipstick, glitter, high heels. [sound effect] And yes. War paint! [Holy mackerel!] The Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Crowley: Welcome to the end of the week in the Conservative Coliseum. I am Monica Crowley your Conservative Warrior Princess. Decked out in full martial regalia: war paint, gladiator stilettos and a smile. Because on this program, we’re Happy Warriors (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

In CPTR narratives men and masculinity are linked to: body over mind; being proactive and aggressive; competition and competitiveness; business, logic or rules-based accomplishments; leadership, bravery, and courage. Violations of normative gender performance are constructed to ridicule, undermine the esteem of another, or call into question another’s sexuality. In the following excerpt, Laura Ingraham, a working single mother herself, implicitly critiques Obama’s “touchy-feely” gender performance as President of the United States when he expresses support for working women – suggesting that maybe the explanation for his support is domestic abuse by Michelle Obama:

Ingraham: Barack Obama giving a touchy-feely, sensitive interview to NBC and specifically about this idea of women in the workplace and balancing. You know what I find odd about this? Why is the President of
the United States, with everything that he has to do, why is the President of the United States, feeling the need to chime in on balancing work and family – why don’t you leave that like to the women’s magazines to talk about. How is this in any way helping America, for President Obama to go on and on about this?

Audio Clip Obama: What I’ve tried to do is learn to be thoughtful enough that ah I wasn’t always having to be told that things were unfair and that once and a while I’d actually voluntarily say that you know what let me relieve this burden on you, let me make some sacrifices in terms of how I’m using my time . . . .

Ingraham: Well, isn’t this strange? Pakistan on the brink, Afghanistan still looking for a strategy, dollar collapsing, oil above $80 a barrel, China surging, the narrative of America in decline is now basically taken as gospel in most quarters. Unemployment in most states in the United States have has soared since the Stimulus Bill was passed, and he’s talking about, “well I thought well back then just ah I wanted to kinda snap to.”

Audio Clip Obama: Our family like a lot of families out there [Ingraham: uh please] were ones in which ah the men ah are still a little obtuse about this stuff and need to be need to be knocked across the head every once and a while in terms of ah of you you know making sure that everybody is is ah treated fairly . . . .

Ingraham: Well, she’s well you you almost wonder with that response if he has been knocked across the head a few times by ah by the First Lady. So so what if if he’s not diapering the kids and and taking them to ah parent-teacher conferences then he’s not an enlightened male? Does anyone else find this just eh ah bizarre?

From the Studio: Let’s remember that Michelle did brag about having a mean right hook.

Ingraham: Oh good point. They used to joke about Hillary throwing lamps in the White House when ah ah all the bimbo eruptions would occur. The lamps were flying, the Tiffany breaking all over the place. I’m telling you what, the way she moved with that hula hoop, I’d look out (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/22/2009, 00:23:29 – 00:26:32).

In this excerpt, Crowley constructs Democratic opposition to President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney as a secret same-sex crush, using gay congressman Barney Frank as “proof”:
Crowley: They’re all living with with ah Bush and Cheney because they can’t survive without them. They need these two guys as a foil because otherwise they wither up and die, they die on the vine. Because they know their liberal policies can’t stand on their own two feet, this country is still a center-Right country, liberalism fails in America. The American people reject liberalism. So they know they can’t ah peddle their wares straight on the merits so they got to turn the other side into demons – angels and demons so to speak and that’s why they they keep going after Bush and Cheney and keep living in the past. So I’ve got a theory that since the Left is so obsessed with Bush and Cheney they must be secretly in love with them and my proof here is Barney Frank and this is not I guess this is not ah really out of the question that Barney ah Frank might secretly be crushing on Bush and Cheney (Monica Crowley Show, 5/23/2009, 01:03:26 – 01:04:20).

Monica Crowley is also fond of using male genital imagery to support her assertions that a political figure is not quite the man he should be:

Crowley: Well, how much we have fallen, huh? We’ve fallen from that, that’s called testicular fortitude in an American president {referencing George W. Bush} to the current guy and his sidekick The Biden and his lame Secretary of State The Rod Ham (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/2009, 01:42:05 – 01:42:32).

Crowley: “If only the American president would grow a set” (Monica Crowley Show, 4/11/2009, 00:17:40 – 00:17:43).

Monica Crowley Show Announcer: The Bama is the first president devoid of manhood [sound effect]. Welcome to the Conservative Coliseum where you’ll find your favorite gladiator Monica Crowley armed to the teeth three hours a day. With a smile. It’s the Monica Crowley Show (Monica Crowley Show bumper).

Alternately, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives where women and femininity are associated with: mind over body; being receptive and passive; service and emotional or moral support; government, empathy, or care-based service; a supporting role, submission, and morals keeping. In the following excerpt Laura Ingraham exiles Michelle Obama back to the White House garden and more traditional First Lady duties for suggesting social reforms for women should be a national priority:
Audio Clip Michelle Obama: If we want women to be able to take care of their families and to pursue things that they could never imagine, then we have to reform the system, we have to reform the system. The status quo is unacceptable.

Ingraham: Go back to the -- ah just go back to planning -- you’re really good at the whole sweet potatoes and the green beans and the I love what you’re doing with the White House menu – all that’s cool and you you – that’s cool, that’s the kind of cool First Lady stuff that you’re good at, but what you’re really bad at is giving us analysis about how we need the government for us to be sacrificial to other people (Laura Ingraham Show, 11/05/2009, 01:19:08 – 01:19:55).

Challenges to the gender and sexual social order are constructed on CPTR as an indication of dangerous changes that forebode future insecurity. In the following excerpt, Michael Savage blames the media for destroying the traditional role of women – and ultimately America:

Savage: No wonder the girls wind up the way they are, in this country. Do I have to spell it out? It’s always the women by the way that shape a nation. Men are always ah wayward and you know by and large men are wayward. Women are the homemakers, women have to want to get married, women have to make the family, women have to make the home, women have to create the whole structure. And look at the role models – what you have here the the celebo-sluts, like the Hilton sisters, they’re held up as role models. Every one of them switch-hitters and psychos and drug us- I mean wherever you look, drugs and switch-hitting and puking on themselves in a night club. Who’s putting these images out? The the media. The media who’s destroyed America, make no mistake about it. So what are you going to do about it? Create a government-controlled media? Yeah that’s going to be better. So, here we are I’m glad that I have a forum and I have a microphone and I can, you know tell you like it is, the way I see it. But then again it’s one man’s opinion, I mean that’s all it is is one man’s opinion. I’m a older guy, I admit it. Maybe I’m a throwback. Maybe I’m out of touch with America. Maybe I don’t see it the way that America should be seeing things, you know diversity and after all I said diversity is perversion a long time ago, course I was right doesn’t mean I should still see it that way. I mean that could be illegal for all I know. I was against im- illegal immigration to 1994 I started sounding the alarm like Paul Revere. They called me every name under the sun, protested, you name it, banned me from Britain, all because I said it like it is (Michael Savage Show, 1/06/2010, 02:34:39 – 02:36:18).
CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are clearly attuned to the rules and routines of the hegemonic gender and sexual order. While CPTR narratives are rarely as explicitly sexist as Savage’s above, they do support traditional gender performance and sexuality in three important and interrelated ways: 1) by reproducing and reaffirming the gender and sexual status quo; 2) by constructing supposed violations of the rules of gender and sexual performance to invite scrutiny, disrespect, and criticism of their enemies, and 3) by shaming gender and sexual nonconformity.

Qualitative Findings: Race and Culture

Culture and culture wars

Culture is the basis upon which difference is most freely discussed on CPTR. American culture is distinguished by a set of dominant values and beliefs – American traditions and founding principles that make the United States distinct among the nations of the world. In the following excerpt, Herman Cain rails against attacks on the First Amendment; for Cain, and other conservatives on CPTR, America is defined by its Judeo-Christian identity:

Cain: So I sat **down** and thought about **five** reasons that we ought to be optimistic. Number one. On every piece of currency we have, it **says in God We Trust.** In God We Trust. The Founders put it on the currency for a **reason,** the Founders believed in God for a reason. When the Founders said “we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator” they said that for a reason! And now there are those who want to **cut it out of our culture.** Our **culture** is under attack. Our Christianity, our Judeo- Judeo-Christian values are under **attack.** And as Jews and Christians we have got to fight back. Because the element that is trying to rip that from our culture wants us to be **politically correct** to the point that we **submit** to their desire to **change,** the fundamental religious basis of this country.

Cain: And they **start** with misinterpreting the First Amendment. That’s where they start. The First Amendment simply says that the government cannot **dictate** a religion, the government cannot **dictate** what faith you basically believe in. No no, it does not say that you cannot have **symbols**
of our faith in government places, government institutions like there are on the outside of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, doesn’t say you cannot have a the Bible or the Ten Commandments displayed in public places. It does not say that! Those who want to fight this ridiculous fight of political correctness relative to the First Amendment and separation of state that’s what they’re doing but the Christians have to fight back . . . We cannot sit back, and buckle to the criticism of this nation, in terms of, our fundamental religious freedom, that’s what this is about!

Cain: President Obama, doing his first apology tour around the world made the statement that we are not a Christian nation – what an insult. Let me rephrase the statement a different way, Mr. President. The majority of Americans believe in their Judeo-Christian beliefs. That’s why most of us believe that we are a Judeo-Christian nation. And for you to denounce the fact that we are a not a Christian nation, in order to appease the Muslim community around the world, we categorically reject that – we are a Judeo-Christian nation that respects the freedom of those who want to practice another form of religion – but how dare you declare that we are not a Judeo-Christian nation when the majority of the American people, the majority, overwhelming majority of the American people are Judeo-Christian! And that’s how, the Left is trying to gut our fundamental right of freedom of religion. And there are those of us who will not let it happen.

Cain: That’s one of the reasons we should be optimistic about America’s future. We should be optimistic about America’s future because of the belief and the faith of our Founding Fathers and the belief and the faith of patriots today in that same faith and belief (Herman Cain Show, 05/25/10, 02:11:03 – 02:16:20).

Culture is important to conservatives and important to the country.

For Michael Savage, a nation’s identity can be summed-up in three things: borders, language, and culture – by these a nation either thrives or is destroyed:

Savage: I define nation by its borders, language and culture – nobody has beat me on that definition. I’ve never read a better definition, I never saw one written, ever. A nation is defined by its borders, language, culture – by that definition our politicians are fighting against our nation, they’re working for the enemies of America. Am I right or wrong? They’re breaking the borders, they’re breaking the language, they’ve destroyed the culture. They’re not our friends, they’re not our representatives (Michael Savage Show, 1/06/2010, 02:28:02 – 02:28:28).
CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives that support the idea that a culture war is raging in the United States. American values and culture are under threat of extinction by those opposed to American traditions.

How? Political correctness, influence by foreign interests, and a cabal of enemies who are collaborating with the White House to destroy the United States. Conservative on CPTR are always on the watch for anything that might undermine American cultural dominance. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers agree: While it is reasonable to tolerate others’ culture, tolerance should not in any way lessens the importance of American culture. Conservatives must fight back against attacks on American culture.

Cain: Politically [sic] correctness is a tool being used by those who want to fundamentally change this country, to basically destroy this country from within. Because in order to destroy a country from within you first destroy its religious foundation, which destroys the foundation of the family and once you destroy its religious foundation and the foundation of the family you begin to destroy the culture of that nation and that’s what’s happening in this country and those of us who believe otherwise must fight back (Herman Cain Show, 05/25/10, 02:25:36 – 02:27:50).

Anything that mitigates aspects of dominant U.S. culture, compromises American authority at home and around the world.

Ingraham: Here’s what we need to remember here. We need to remember that every time we get ah tied-up with one of these international institutions – you can bet this: they’re coming for our traditions next. They’re going to come for what we believe in whether it’s the right to self-defense or our free exercise clause of our Constitution – whatever it is that they don’t like about us they’re gonna try to change. That’s why this whole outreach to the international community and organizations and courts and bodies and ruling, you know, ruling commissions – all this has to be resisted by the people of this country. I I mean they’re resisting it in liberal Europe, they’re trying to do this in schools in in this debate in Spain now, and and in Italy we’re seeing this in other places. I mean try you try this with the Muslims, you you try taking their symbols out of their classrooms, I don’t care that these are public schools these are a long-standing tradition that the crucifix was hung in these classrooms and in these schools and no one’s offended by it excepts these elites who never much liked religion in the first place and certainly never liked Christianity. And ah
it this is a war against Christianity – that’s what it is – a war against Christian tradition (Laura Ingraham Show, 11/05/2009, 02:46:41 – 02:47:50).

If you do not embrace American traditions and what Americans hold sacred – you are at the very least suspect, and at worse an outright enemy. There is no room for compromise or nuance.

The enemies of American cultural traditions are both invisible and visible – an enemy-within and without. Michael Savage uncovers a hidden menace in the following narrative:

Savage: Gangster criminals in the White House, who are in the hands of ah let us say hidden forces, wanted to destroy America’s sovereignty and they did so first by taking out our manufacturing base and de-industrializing this country. At the same time they flooded us with illegal aliens to make certain that English no longer became the cohesive force of the nation. At the same time they conducted a culture war against America, in order to break down the remnants of the family. At the same time they brought bogus lawsuits against the Catholic church in order to destroy the church. Do you understand that this is been a war going on, for at least thirty years in this country, 25 to 30 years?

Caller: Oh definitely, without a doubt, I’m just a little bit . . . .

Savage: OK and Obama is not the beginning of this war, but he could be the end of the war, he could be the final ah let us say, he – well just let us say that he could be the final one let’s put it to you that way (Michael Savage Show, 3/02/2010, 00:14:49 – 00:15:46).

President Obama: the final solution in a culture war that has been raging for nearly thirty years in America?

**Race and the threat of difference**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers have a lot to say about race; often, however, they are reluctant to weigh in because they don’t want to be perceived as racist. A caller to the Herman Cain Show voices her frustration with the race concept, preferring instead culture to describe group differences:
Darlene: I was wondering how drastically thing have changed when I grew up . . . there was two races – human and non – and if you were Italian or you were Jewish, which is what I am [Cain: Yeah] it was culture it wasn’t race, if you were Black and you were White it was culture [Cain: Right] not race [Cain: Yes]. Am I really that old that Black has become a race, Mexican has become a race, everything is now a race – am I really that old?

Cain: No you’re not Darlene and you know what you have – that is a very very compelling point that you have made because we’re all members of the human race [Darlene: Exactly] we just have different cultures, but you see the media and the race hustlers they can’t get enough media attention if they become culture hustlers they have to be race hustlers – OK? That’s a very good point I am going to use that Darlene and no you are not that old, because that’s the way I grew up and that’s the way we ought to look about it – that is a new way just to frame this whole debate. Thank you Darlene and thank you so much for listening. Think about that folks. Different people with different skin color, different family practices – it’s culture (Herman Cain Show, 05/06/10, 01:27:27 – 01:29:14)!

Framing race as culture allows a margin of freedom to breach the barriers of political correctness.

From a conservative perspective, the real danger of race is difference, which CPTF hosts, guests, and callers see as a barrier to unity and solidarity. Difference competes with and undermines political and cultural allegiance. Difference is disruptive and a source of distrust and suspicion; difference is dangerous. Limbaugh explains the importance of a colorblind perspective where we all agree to forgive and forget – wishing racism away will make it so:

Limbaugh: My point is I’ve – I make the mistake of assuming – I live it, we live in a colorblind society and I assume that that’s what everybody wants when they say they want a colorblind society. I don’t believe Reverend Wright wants a colorblind society, I don’t believe President Obama wants a colorblind society, I don’t believe they want a post-racial society whatsoever, they’re carrying around too many grievances here and now now when I listen to this man I understand why to this day there’s still so much anger, it’s because it’s being stoked, it’s being fuelled from pulpits (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/03/2009, 02:41:42 – 02:42:15).
On a lighter note, even when racial differences in cultural performance are pointed out – as in a CNN report on ‘swagga’ (a slang term meaning style or self-presentation) – it is interpreted as racist on CPTR. For Monica Crowley, merely noting that White people ‘swagga’ differently is racist:

Crowley: Correct me Matt if I’m wrong but wasn’t that whole report vaguely racist?

Matt: Ah, I’d say so.

Crowley: Ah you know when they talk about “Ay the White presidents weren’t down like this, they weren’t hip and cool like this Black president.” And then Kyra Phillips going, “Hey check out the White cameraman” [Clip: Alright our White cameraman is trying to swagga other there].

Crowley: Our White cameraman is trying to swagga? I can’t even believe that this hit the airwaves on CNN this is unbelievable (Monica Crowley Show, 5/02/2009, ~ 00:56:58 – 00:59:59).

To be a patriotic American one must reject the idea of difference and embrace the ideal of unity; unity is achieved when difference does not challenge the underlying American cultural framework and both identity and interests converge on a generic ‘Americaness.’

**The plague of political correctness and the ‘real racists’**

Above all, conservatives on CPTR see themselves as truth-seekers and truth-tellers. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are concerned and frustrated that it has become politically incorrect to talk about social problems in an honest way. Some conservatives are throwing off the yoke of political correctness; no longer will fear of accusations of racism stop them from speaking truth to power:

Bruce: **Look**, you conservatives, as I’ve told you before, the race card has been used so many times now, they’ve found out with that Gates and Crowley situation, that arrest in Harvard, that screaming race does not work! A callous has been created on us at that accusation, and I’ve mentioned to you before, whenever you hear that piece of crap being thrown at you, imagine yourself being called a cocker spaniel, because it’s
as true and as ridiculous. It has it’s, it’s over (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/05/2009, 00:35:13 – 00:35:47)!

Crowley: Accusing somebody of racism as a kneejerk response is destructive and frankly racist in and of itself (Monica Crowley Show, 7/25/2009, 00:34:06 – 00:34:13).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are turning the tables on anyone who plays the race card.

Accusations of racism are always unreasonable and irrational. “Playing the race card” puts conservatives at a considerable disadvantage; to discuss race opens a Pandora’s Box of intransigent problems that is not easily closed. Conservative reluctance to talk about race and racism reflects their fear of losing the moral high ground.

People who make money and a name for themselves by policing the lines of political correctness are always ready to label as racists those brave enough to point out racial hypocrisy and cultural dysfunction among minority groups. These people are the ‘real racists’ – race baiters and race hustlers. These racial opportunists ignore actual deficits between cultures to grow rich and powerful; they certainly do not help those they pretend to care about, because their work keeps those they purport to support in a culture of dependence.

CPTR narratives construct certain minority groups as getting unfair advantages (evidenced by affirmative laws and entitlement programs) because of their minority status. While unmerited advantage is a problem in itself, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are more concerned to construct narratives that assert that a culture of dependency and victimhood has emerged among racial minority groups, in particular, because of the unfair advantages and treatment they have received. In the following
narrative segment, Rush Limbaugh explains how one additional consequences of dependency and “perpetual minority status” is racism on the part of the unworthy beneficiaries of public entitlements support and preferences:

Limbaugh: Well we do {have racial quotas for ethics violations} you see you have to understand these people are perpetual minorities and as Dr. Hutchinson wrote in his hot column about me, this is a perfect illustration of the minority thought pattern which is, the White guy has made me a perpetual victim. And the minority thought – and Dr. Hutchinson developed that theory and he’s Black, he’s African American – and it perfectly fits what is happening here . . . that’s the minority thought pattern, you’ve got perpetual victimhood status – perpetual minority status, because you see, having that attitude allows you to be racist without being racist because it is said you don’t have the power to implement or act out your racism so really aren’t racist, that’s one of the brilliant theories of the ah Reverend Jackson (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/03/2009, 02:27:05 – 02:27:28 and 2:29:25 – 2:29:46).

For CPTR hosts, guests, and callers, racist minorities exist; however, when racism is used to support claims of discrimination, racism becomes a chimera that racial groups have gotten too used to relying on to explain their experiences. Tammy Bruce explains that narcissism is at the root of minority accusations of racism:

Bruce: Maybe overly sensitive, maybe even paranoid to the point of seeing it {racism} where does not exist. Maybe as narcissists believing that everything that happens is because of you, and when your only identity point is your race, then you consider racism. I don’t think she’s {Edie Bernice Johnson, Texas state representatives mentioned in an article she references} making this up. But my goodness this women and others who think all of this is racism need to get some help. It’s classic. Narcissists believe that everything happens happens because of them and if they have one identity point – which is race – then everything’s about racism. It’s that simple. Yeah (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/14/2009, 01:50:30 – 01:51:12).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives where they argue that Democrats and other progressives talk about race and racism only to pander to people of color so that they can secure votes and power.
Cain: Part of the Democrats’ strategy to pander to Mexicans and Hispanics and Latinos in this country so they can get millions of cheap votes, that’s all it is (Herman Cain Show, 05/20/10, 00:25:25 – 00:25:44).

Conservatives know that Democrats and other progressives are the ‘real racists’; their accusations of racism are a cynical play for power, a move to meant to intimidate and silence their opposition – not to help in the cause of racial equality or help, so-called, victimized minorities.

Bruce: Look, there’s gonna be a legacy and it’s a shame, that – this is what the liberals do though because they do definitely want victimhood. They really can’t have by the way, people of color do well, because there goes the argument that the Left is needed to control things for them (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/05/2009, 01:35:38 – 01:35:51).

The ‘real racists’ want simply to silence conservative opposition to Obama and those who benefit, unfairly, from minority dependence:

Cain: And it’s unfortunate that some people cannot separate criticism of Obama’s policies and programs, from criticism of him so they want to play the race card. They want to play the race card whenever someone criticizes it. You know I just don’t understand this thinking, because I’m not gonna be a ‘sheeple.’ and just because Obama said it I’m supposed to believe it and I’m supposed to support it and I’m supposed to be excited about it. No. No. And all they’re doing is basically trying to capitalize on that (Herman Cain Show, 04/29/10, 01:36:19 – 01:37:54).

Crowley: When they call us racists for opposing what Obama wants to do to this country, when they warn us of violence and acts of domestic terror, that’s what they’re really doing here, they’re trying to silence us. They’re trying to bully us and intimidate us, into staying quiet. Well not on this program, we don’t play that game, we tell the truth, we don’t brook in political correctness, we don’t brook in lies, we only tell the truth. That’s what the Founding Fathers would want y’all and that’s what we’re here to deliver (Monica Crowley Show, 9/19/2009, 00:54:22 – 00:55:03).

Thanks to the courage and steadfastness of conservatives, screaming racism is not working any more, and in fact has begun to backfire, explains Tammy Bruce:

Bruce: This is all all they have all the liberals have is the one thing that has worked, and now it doesn’t work and they have no Plan B – is the scream of racism. That’s all they have. It’s pretty fascinating and it’s also ah not
working anymore, that’s the other thing that’s perplexing them. But Obama found out – you realize after the Harvard-Crowley-Gates situation
Obama’s realized that the race thing isn’t working, have you heard him use it in any other context since? No, because he knows it’s done. He knows, he’s been a victim of his own success, he has transcended race. One of my favorite signs over – for the weekend, the 9-12 March – poster of Martin Luther King with Barack Obama, Martin Luther King the words eh they wrote down the words, “He had a dream” and then next to Barack Obama, “We got a nightmare.” Mmm hmm, look this is one thing about incompetence and greatness, it truly transcends complexion. Horrible things transcend race and gender, great things transcend race and gender. Wh- we’re getting another lesson about this.

Bruce: And shame on the Democrats for putting up an incompetent freakish loser to be the first Black president. Shame on them. You want the racism! It’s in setting this up, allowing an incompetent to take this position. George W. Bush was the first president to give Blacks in this country, authentic, legitimate positions of power. Uh huh – up until then the Democrats had to rely on Mister Pink, Bill Clinton, as the first Black president. I mean come on. Right that was their little acknowledgement of perhaps what I just said which was, how one lives one’s life etc.. The bottom line is that the racism is on the Democrat side, in allowing Barack Obama to be this first representative – they couldn’t and they didn’t dare get somebody who knew what he was doing – they rely on failure. My God – they rely on did- on this kind of disaster. This is gonna feed the money machines – this disaster and wa- supposed victimhood because this guy will be he’ll will not be a second termer, they’ll rely on the cause of racism for another generation and they will become as relevant as the Whigs (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/14/2009, 00:48:35 – 00:51:18).

**Race trickery**

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives where they voice their objections to Barack Obama’s manipulation of his own racial identity to win the election.

Obama presented himself to the American people as someone who could heal all of America’s racial woes.

Crowley: Barack Obama sold himself as a transcendent figure. Somebody who was half-African American, half-White and that because he was biracial and because he was a 21st century dude, he was gonna be able to deliver a post-racial America, that’s how he sold himself. Now whether you bought that or not I don’t know, I certainly did not buy it, but he peddled himself that way and he packaged himself that way and said, “Listen I’m the only one who could deliver a post-racial America because
look at me, I am biracial, I’m half Black and I’m half White and I can do it.” And I think that all of the lapdogs, all of the government tools in the Lamestream Media believed him when he said that. And they believed him unquestioningly and a lot of voters did the exact same thing (Monica Crowley Show, 7/25/2009, 00:06:06 – 00:07:36).

While the election of the first African American president demonstrates that most Americans have moved past race (i.e., post-racialism), Obama has not delivered on the promise of his presidency. Here Herman Cain explains to a caller how the first African American President has made race relations worse in America:

Caller: Ah the reason I called I was not, am not an Obama supporter far far from it. However trying to make lemonade out of a lemon I’m thinking that – I thought that the fact that he was a Black guy and was elected president would potentially help heal the race divide and and so that regardless of color regardless of background that virtually anything is possible in this country. I’m not as convinced that that benefit has come from his presidency and I wanted to get your opinion Herman.

Cain: My opinion is, it has not made race relations better, it has actually exacerbated race relations for two reasons. Number one, there’s some Black people who try- who like to flaunt the fact – flaunt the fact that the president of the United States is a Black man, as if that gives them some sort of special privilege because he’s Black – that’s wrong and and also not true and it’s not the case. Secondly, because he is Black, many of his supporters will selectively play the race card whenever he is criticized because of bad policy in order to try to give him a pass on things that he – things that are bad policy or things that he should not do. And so I think that ah instead of his very presence as President of the United States who happens to be Black being a factor that brings things together ah unfortunately it has caused some resentment (Herman Cain Show, 05/06/10, 01:53:29 – 01:55:26).

In fact, Obama’s embrace of his African American race points to his disloyalty, rejection of racial neutrality, and inability to see the world outside of a racial lens. Referencing the Crowley-Gates incident in Massachusetts where Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates was arrested by the police for breaking into his own home, Monica Crowley deconstructs Obama’s unconscious racial psyche:
Crowley: Well now, Mister guy who was supposed to transcend race, just step in a big honking pile of race. And he did it instinctively, he did it viscerally, and he did it in knee-jerk reaction, all of which is very revealing indeed (Monica Crowley Show, 7/25/2009, 00:01:33 – 00:02:19).

Obama is being disingenuous; race matters – too much – for him. Or does it?

Some CPTR hosts, guests, and callers claim that race does not matters to Barack Obama:

Bruce: Barack Obama is so White it's amazing. You’re looking at issues of race. This man has achieved the highest office in the country, he’s one now one of the richest men in the country. You know this is – when we talk it’s not just about complexion is it? It’s about how you live and how you’re treated, what opportunities you have – all those things (Tammy Bruce Show, 9/14/2009, 00:47:50 – 00:48:13).

A man who has obtained Obama’s level of success no longer has to worry about race – he is, in fact, a White man by virtue of his achievements

The Tea Party is not racist?

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers insist: The Tea Party Movement, as well as the larger Conservative Movement, is not racist. The Tea Party Movement rejects racism. Conservative support for African American conservatives, like Herman Cain, is evidence of Tea Party anti-racism. Here Cain explains why there are so few African American people at Tea Party rallies:

Cain: A reporter asked me last week when I was at the Atlanta Tea Party, “So where are all the Black people?” I said, “They’re working!” Ah duh! Maybe you don’t have a lot of Black people who have their own business or that are retired and they can go to a Tea Party so they tried to turn it into a racist thing. Remember only 12% of the population is Black anyway! So at best you would see 12% of the people that are . . . you ought to be glad that that they’re not trapped into that 15 million people who are not working right now. That simply are not working (Herman Cain Show, 04/29/10, 01:36:19 – 01:37:54).

Cain explains still further to a caller to his program why there is such a notable absence of African Americans at Tea Party rallies:
Caller: Well I’ve heard you say several times that there are a lot more Black conservatives out there than we realize or are aware of and I just haven’t seen the evidence of that. Ah you know you go to Tea Party meetings and you see mainly ladies a few white men and you don’t see Black men there [Cain: That’s not true] and I just I just wonder um you know whether you figures have been verified. [Cain: Alright, alright]. And I’d like to verify that there is indeed ah [xxx] [Cain: OK, OK Sam].

Cain: OK first of all don’t make a silly statement like it’s mostly ladies. I have been to a lot of Tea Parties and there are ladies and men. Now where do you get this idea that it’s mostly ladies. Now yes it has been mostly Whites because a lot of Blacks that might be conservative they can’t get off from their jobs, they’re working or secondly they don’t own a business where they can get off. So don’t make these generalizations, it’s mostly ladies . . . Now let me answer the other part of what you raised, I have made the statement that there are more Black conservatives that are out there than the media’s gonna basically say, than polls are gonna pick up because I talk to them, I meet them, I have them send me emails, they just don’t want to have to put-up with the intimidation that they might be subjected to so I happen to believe that they’re out there, so my evidence is anecdotal, it’s not a survey, it’s anecdotal, and I have said that and that gives me confidence that there are many more. Now do you have a problem with there being a lot of Black conservatives out there (Herman Cain Show, 06/01/10, 01:22:31 – 01:24:28)?

To attract the much-needed support of African American, Latino, and Asian conservatives, the Conservative Movement must be race neutral. Progressives want people to believe that the Tea Party and Conservative Movement are racist; only racists would suggest that. More people of color need to stand up for conservative principles. conservative ideology benefits people of color.

**White America in crisis**

For CPTR hosts, guests, and callers, opposition to Barack Obama is built on narrative constructions that portray the U.S. as no longer recognizable as their country; conservatives on CPTR feel they have no stake or say in what kind of country the U.S. is, what it stands for, and how it is run. The familiar has become strange and the world does not make sense anymore.
In the following excerpt, Herman Cain relates of an airplane conversation where he counsels a young woman who plans to leave the country should things grow progressively worse under the Obama Administration:

Cain: I was on my way to New Orleans and on the plane I sat next to a ah young woman, she was a young woman because she was younger than me, I think she was in her forties, and she was a six – she is a sixth grade teacher. And we got to talking about, just coincidentally, what was going on in politics in Washington, DC and she said to me during the course of the conversation that she was looking for another country that she would move to because she was so afraid of the direction of this country. And she asked me she said, what country are you considering moving to if things continue in the direction that they are moving? And I said to her, I’m focused on Plan A, not Plan B. she said what’s Plan A? Plan A is I’m not going to allow this country to go down, I’m gonna fight with every ounce of my body, my brain, my energy and everything else to change the direction that we are going into (Herman Cain Show, 4/27/10, 02:11:45 – 02:14:00).

Conservative White Americans on CPTR feel that they are a particular target of Barack Obama. Barack Obama is out to “Get Whitey.” Referencing a Department of Homeland Security report on the threat of domestic terrorism, Monica Crowley explains to her audience how simply being honest, hardworking, White Americans makes them potential enemies of the state in the eyes of the Obama Administration:

Crowley: Anyone of us who raises our voices, well we’re considered a domestic terrorist that might burst into flames and start doing violence at the drop of a hat. That DHS Report this spring remember, anybody who goes to church, ah enjoys the Second Amendment, has a gun, is pro-life, or has just come back from Iraq and Afghanistan we were all tarred with that domestic terrorist label, remember we might burst into violence at a moment’s notice? . . . This goes right along the lines with what they’re trying to do to us by calling us all racists if we disagree with Obama and the objective here of calling us racists, by warning about political violence it’s all intimidation tactics to silence us, to get us to shut-up to get us to not express ourselves to not oppose what they’re doing. That’s what this is about, that’s what this is always been about (Monica Crowley Show, 9/19/2009, 00:52:07 – 00:53:18).
The implications are clear: conservatives who oppose Barack Obama are an embattled minority; their needs, wants, and desires are no longer considered mainstream. Rush Limbaugh and Monica Crowley lament this sad state of affairs:

Limbaugh: The arrogance and the condescension in what used to be a representative republic, is now turned into a nation of one Party rule where the biggest enemy that the leaders of this country think they face is their own people, not Mahmud Akmadenajhad, not Hugo Chavez, not Daniel Ortega, not Khadafy, not the Russians, not the Norks (North Koreans), not the Chinese – the biggest enemy, the biggest enemy Obama faces, the biggest enemy Pelosi and Reid face – the American people (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/28/2009, 01:14:34 – 01:15:03).

Crowley: What we’ve seen so far is that the President has actually being nicer to the world tyrants and dictators and terrorists, like Mahmud Ah Madenijhan in Iran and Hugo Chavez, and Vladimir Putin and Kim Jan II, because he’s willing to run around playing ah duck-duck-goose with them and ring around the poesy or whatever with them, but conservatives we need to be singled out as enemies of the state, don’t you know (Monica Crowley Show, 4/18/2009, 01:10:15 – 01:10:45).

Clearly, Obama – like other Democrats and Leftists – will use White guilt, political correctness, the race card, race hustlers, and racism against White Americans to both silence dissent and achieve a sham equality that means White Americans are all worse off.

**Power Narratives**

CPTR *Power Narratives* constructs capitalism and the free market system as rational means to create and distribute wealth. Not only are the exigencies of capitalism applied to economic matters, the principles of the free market system are also extended to social, cultural, and political matters, to judge merit, worth, or deservedness. While capitalism is roundly embraced by CPTR hosts, guests, and callers, it is also viewed as a potential source of conflict that can disrupt markets and destabilize the social order. Instigating class warfare – pointing out differences between classes and how those
differences shape access to resources, political identity, or interests – is construed as a favorite tactic of progressives. Conservatives on CPTR, on the other hand, prefer to separate the material and ideological basis of class in *Power Narratives*. Thus, one can be a blue-collar billionaire or a working-class capitalist; it is all a matter of individual choice and affinity.

Conservatives and progressives have decidedly different perspectives on capitalism. PPTR hosts, guests, and callers – except for Thom Hartmann and his audience who appear more schooled in the principles of capitalism and the free market system – talk less about capitalism than they do the economy. Very few hosts, guests, and callers on PPTR express hostility toward capitalism as such; most want the economy to benefit more poor, working, and middle class people. Abuses and unethical behavior – as in the financial sector and corporate scandals – are discussed, but almost never in terms of a critique of capitalism. Progressives on PPTR want a kinder, gentler capitalism and express little or no desire for an alternative economic system.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are unequivocal – capitalism and the free market system are what have established America as a giant among nations. Anything that modifies or attempts to restrain the capitalist system threatens to undermine American greatness. A summary of descriptive statistics on *Power Narratives* is presented next, followed by qualitative findings.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Three percent (3%, n = 40) of *Hegemon Narratives* (n = 1195) celebrate free market capitalism and apply its principles and logics to social, cultural, and political life. Approximately two-thirds of *Power Narratives* (n = 30) were six minutes or less. Male hosts composed proportionately more *Power Narratives* (2%, n = 26) than female hosts.
(1%, n = 14). Of all CPTR hosts, Herman Cain had the greatest proportion of Power Narratives (4%, n = 12). Programs hosted by the African American CPTR host Herman Cain had the greatest proportion of Power Narratives (4%, n = 12) compared to programs hosted by the White American hosts (1%, n = 28).

Thirteen percent (n = 19) of all callers who called-in to a CPTR program to compose Hegemon Narratives with hosts, guests, and other callers (N = 152), contributed to Power Narratives. Among the callers who contributed to Power Narratives, 84% (n = 16) were male, 84% (n= 16) expressed conservative opinions, and 16% (n = 3) had progressive views.

There were 334 Power Thematic Segments distributed among all study narratives; 12% of all Hegemon Thematic Segments (n = 2,828) in the study as a whole. Power Thematic Segments were most often found in narratives composed by Laura Ingraham (16%, n = 68) and in Crisis Narratives where Power Thematic Segments were a subtheme in 46% (n = 152) of narratives. Power Thematic Segments were present in 31% (n = 105) of Obama Narratives and 23% (n = 77) of Hegemon Narratives.

Qualitative Findings

The beauty of the free market

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct narratives wherein the Free market is sacrosanct.

Limbaugh: And the results are in, free market capitalism has never let us down. From time to time we let the system down because we are all human after all. But there’s no evidence of a better system than free market capitalism operating in a country which values individual liberty (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/28/2009, 01:44:56 – 01:45:21).

Free Market principles increase a society’s and its peoples’ health, wealth, and happiness.
In the following excerpts, Herman Cain and Sean Hannity link the Free Market system to freedom, liberty, and American Exceptionalism:

Caller: That is why America is the biggest power in the world [Cain: Exactly] we did it on a freedom not anarchy, not bureaucracy, not a king or queen or whatever, it’s freedom.

Cain: Exactly, America became great because of freedom and because of the free market system. And unfortunately there are those who want to reduce our freedom and reduce the flexibility of the free market system so we can gradually fold into this “New World Order.” I don’t want to go there (Herman Cain Show, 05/11/10, 01:20:01 – 01:20:34).

Hannity: This is a philosophical divide that the country now finds itself in – a great divide. And that there are those who believe in the Keynesian model of economics which says that the government has got to spend our way out of this, historically it didn’t work for FDR, historically it didn’t work for Japan. The only thing that has led us to the road of prosperity is greater freedom and more individual liberty and actually a component that’s known as individual responsibility. That is what has led us you know to to be the envy of the world. That’s why compared to other industrialized nations America has grown so far so fast. And now we’re about to reverse that great trend. If we’re not careful (Sean Hannity Show, 2/08/2010, 02:46:15 – 02:46:52).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers regard the Free Market capitalist economic system as more than a means to regulate production and the distribution of goods and services. The Free Market is a moral calculus; a knowledge system that reflects certain natural or universal laws. As such, business sense – knowledge of and experience with the operation of the Free Market – is applicable to a wide array of social, political, and economic policies and problems.

Crowley: There is not a single member of The Bama Cabinet who has been a CEO or, or, who has actually run anything in the real world. They all come from academia, they all come from Harvard, or wherever in their Ivory Towers, spitting out their theories on the economy. But none of them have had to actually run anything in this economy (Monica Crowley Show, 3/20/09, 01:17:55 – 01:18:18).
To have turned around a business is an indication of great leadership skill, intelligence, and ingenuity.

CPTR narratives construct President Obama, a man with no business experience, as a threat to the “beauty” and promise of the American Dream – made possible by the Free Market system. Referencing a speech Obama made to the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast, Monica Crowley digs out subtext for her audience:

Crowley: Now what he doesn’t tell you there {Obama speech praising the achievements of then Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor} is that yes that is beauty of America or I should say, was the beauty of America, that anybody through sheer hard work and ambition and will could succeed in America. They got the drive and the dedication they could succeed, they could pull themselves up and achieve great dreams. What he doesn’t tell you is he is systematically dismantling that America. He’s taking away incentives to work hard. He’s giving all of the power to the government, taking it away from the individual and transferring it to the government. So that the biggest dream any child might have eventually is to grow up – not to be President – but to be a bureaucrat in his new agency of consumer protections – there’s a real dream for ya, huh (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/2009, 00:21:31 – 00:22:25)?

Capitalism, the greatest expression of the Free Market at-work, is one of the driving forces that has made America exceptional and will help to maintain its super power status in the future. According to Rush Limbaugh, its simple: what the world needs is more capitalism:

Limbaugh: Well there you have it and now this is one of Obama’s buddies {Evo Morales} – “what hurts this planet is capitalism,” what hurts this planet is the unequal distribution of capitalism, not enough nations have capitalism, that’s what hurts (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/22/2009, 02:23:34 – 02:23:48).

Capitalism makes society, and a host of freedoms, possible.

In the following excerpt, Laura Ingraham reforms the image of the greedy, monopolistic capitalist, replacing it with “business owners” who just want to be a part of making the American Dream come true for their workers.
Ingraham: I think that most business owners who have employed people, they like employing people. The idea that people love laying people off, “Oh I take great delight in chomping my cigar like some fat cat in my big stuffed, over-stuffed leather chair and just in my silk robe and I’m so thrilled to be throwing people out on the streets.” Most business in this country, they love to employ Americans, they love the idea that they’re part of these American dreams for families and individuals and they want to be part of the American Dream. The government is making their dream turn into a nightmare. That’s that’s what’s going on here – this is what The Chamber and the Business Roundtable and all of you listening now who have small businesses have to get out – you have to get this word out to your Congressmen and Senators. These people are not going to destroy this country, not if I can do anything about it (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/27/2009, 01:42:26 – 01:43:19).

Anything or anyone who interferes with the Free Market is framed as threat.

Governments, unions, presidents, politicians, legislation, ideas, or ideology – all must make way for the unfettered operation of the capitalist free market system.

Accordingly, Barack Obama is no friend of capitalism or American business:

Hannity: The problem is Obama is ah not actually the biggest friend of the private sector. Remember liberals, socialists, those that support redistribution, remember profit is an evil word. Ah that means that capitalism is about raping and pillaging the planet for for profit (Sean Hannity Show, 12/04/2009, 00:16:58 – 00:17:15).

Crowley: I know under the Obama Administration anybody in the private sector is a villain. Anybody who wants to turn a profit is an evil, anti-Christ villain. This really takes the cake – so now the insurance companies along with all the autos, finance guys, ah banks, you name it they’re all bad guys, villains (Monica Crowley Show, 8/01/2009, 01:10:52 – 01:11:14).

According to Laura Ingraham, “This Administration is at war with business in America (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/27/2009, 00:53:30 – 00:53:34). Obama’s crimes against capitalism: new ideas, “socialized medicine,” and corporate bailouts.

Limbaugh: We don’t need any new ideas. We have an idea that has worked better than any idea in world history Mr. President, it is called capitalism. Just so happens he doesn’t believe in it. He doesn’t like capitalism, capitalism allows for too much freedom, my friends (Rush Limbaugh Show, 11/02/2009, 00:39:54 – 00:40:17).
Savage: And you’ll come to understand that it’s about socialized medicine, socialization of the economy, the takeover of business through the back door under the guise of saving them, they’re controlling them, it is the demise of the free enterprise system all conducted right in front of your eyes with a sleight of hand by this megalomaniac Barack Hussein Obama who we warned you about (Michael Savage Show, 2/04/2010, 01:03:12 – 01:03:32).

Hannity: This president doesn’t understand seemingly where the greatness of this country comes from and that is its people. It comes from freedom, it comes from capitalism, it comes from entrepreneurialship [sic], it does not come from some bureaucrat handing out whatever you know loose crumbs or spare crumbs they may have from the government by some entitlement program and and and redistributing wealth and destroying incentive and punishing success and punishing the effort of success (Sean Hannity Show, 12/04/2009, 01:13:50 – 01:14:19).

President Obama is a collectivist with a bias against the wealth-producing sectors of the economy.

In the following narrative excerpt, Herman Cain numbers Obama among “seven deadly problems,” the nation faces:

Cain: We got these seven deadly problems that we are not solving and it’s gonna take some sacrifices. The President talks about shared sacrifice but he does not talk about shared sacrifice in a genuine way that would cause most people to say, “OK, I’m willing to give up a little bit of this if somebody else gives up a little bit of this.” What we’re seeing is he is partial toward union labor, he’s partial toward certain organizations and has shown absolutely no regard for those people who work for private companies which are basically bringing home most of the bacon in terms of job creation and tax revenues (Herman Cain Show, 05/24/10, 01:43:07 – 01:43:40).

Obama is clearly bad for business.

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers also construct narratives opposed to government interference in the Free Market. Laura Ingraham sums up the sentiment best: government should keep its hands off the Free Market.

Ingraham: The free market cannot tolerate this type of heavy-handed involvement by the federal government. I mean I don’t think these people in Washington are gonna be happy until we lose all competitive edge –
competitive edge in the United States. It it seems like everything they're doing, from what I can tell almost every act they ah they make here – action they take is designed to make sure America isn't as competitive as she should be (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/23/2009, 00:11:10 – 00:11:38).

Individual citizens suffer, too, when the government tampers with free market forces.

Monica Crowley explains to a caller how taxation “penalizes achievement”:

Crowley: Well you know this is, this is the tax structure, under the Bama. This is this is all about penalizing achievement, penalizing success and disincentivizing you, Jeff {caller} from working harder, growing you business or or growing whatever you do for a profession and, and striving to achieve more because if you do, you’re gonna get taxed more. So it’s all about disincentivization, Jeff you’re absolutely right (Monica Crowley Show, 4/18/2009, 00:18:57 – 00:19:22).

Interestingly, while government can be effectively used to support the operation of the Free Market, through aid, set asides, and tax policies that benefit private sector businesses; public entitlement programs for individuals in need of support are frowned upon because they violate Free Market principles and encourage dependence.

Government-supported healthcare is an example of a dependence-creating mechanism. According to Laura Ingraham, sinister motives lie behind public programs:

Ingraham: President Obama wants you on the Public Plan (Healthcare Reform) and on the public dole – that’s how he can amass the most power for himself and his radical agenda (Laura Ingraham Show, 11/05/2009, 01:12:50 – 01:12:59).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers construct individual recipients of government aid as parasites – a drain on the system. Here Tammy Bruce specifies how stimulus money given to the poor backfires:

Bruce: The first tax he raised was the tax on cigarettes, which people who make under $30,000 a year and are on the dole make up 80% of the people who smoke. If you give $200 per kid, to everybody who’s on food stamps and welfare, which they did yesterday, in New York, what do you think those people are going to go buy? The stuff with massive taxes. They’re going to go buy cigarettes . . . and they’re going to buy booze. It’s just the fact of the matter. That’s what they’re going to do. They’re not
going to go buy – you get it for 3 to 17 year olds – you got a 3-year-old, you got a 5-year-old, you’re an illegal alien Mexican you got a 3-year-old, you got a 5-year-old, you got a 6-year-old, you got a 10-year-old maybe, Don {in studio}, you got a 12 and a 14-year-old too. What ah we’re putting $1,200 in the hands of an illegal alien Mexican who’s on food stamps already on the dole sucking this country blood ah ah dry. $1,200 in the hands of an illegal alien Mexican. What you think they are going to go buy their kids, backpacks? That what they – they’re using stimulus money for this (Tammy Bruce Show, 8/27/2009, 00:27:52 – 00:29:12)!

Fortunately, capitalism is the corrective for society’s parasitical citizens; capitalist economic incentives encourage people to act in their own and society’s best interests – “rising tides lift all ships.”

Caller: I basically have one question for you: Do you think capitalism could ever reduce poverty rate in in the United States to 5% of below?

Hannity: I already had- cap – yes, ah the answer is a rising tide lifts all boats. Now I gotta tell you with freedom comes responsibility, Steve {caller}, there there is there is a part to be played by every citizen, every individual, and that is the the for those that are able-bodied and of sound mind they’ve got to get up in the morning and they’ve got to contribute, they’ve gotta, they gotta find motivation within themselves, they got to desire to be great, they’ve gotta desire to find their god-given talents, and they’ve got to be willing to put the work in. Without that component, you know what ah eh em, once you open up free markets, once you create an opportunity society, I’m saying that even in this bad economy, I don’t think that anybody can fail, you because – those that will find a way, find it and that’s what I will urge everybody, don’t let any government determine the outcome of your life (Sean Hannity Show, 1/04/2010, 02:22:46 – 02:23:42).

In the following narrative, Sean Hannity describes how the economy would be turned around if the non-producers in society adopted a business perspective on the world and became producers, investors, and inventors:

Hannity: And for some ah, as for some demonstrably good ideas that might spur ah you know job growth if you’re looking for them Mr. President, I’ve I’ve got some ideas. You know how do you create jobs, you create jobs by encouraging people to invest, to expand, to invent to produce, and when you for all those things they create goods and services that people want, need and desire and in the - as a consequence of those actions that creates jobs. Is it really that complicated? If your goal is to
redistribute wealth, if your goal is to massively increase the size of government, if your goal is to tax and regulate the private sector to death, then it’s complicated because you can’t institute policies that kill jobs and then claim that you want to create jobs – which is what this President’s doing (Sean Hannity Show, 12/04/2009, 00:14:50 – 00:15:37).

The problem is not income inequality; rather, America’s poor and working class, living paycheck to paycheck, just need a business plan.

**Class warfare**

Class warfare is another important theme in CPTR *Power Narratives*. Oddly, CPTR hosts, guests, and callers cannot quite figure out what side of the class war Obama is on. In the following excerpt from Rush Limbaugh, Obama is portrayed as a wily collectivist whose goal is wealth redistribution and the takeover of major sectors of the economy:

Limbaugh: These Leftists, these Democrats don’t give a rat’s rear end about the democratic process or what you want, this is all about the advancement of their agenda. And don’t be fooled, don’t be fooled they’re gonna try to *ram* something through by any means possible, they’re gonna conceal the true nature of it. If they get away with this they’re going to *tell* you that they are finally taking *action* on *taxing* the bonuses of these rich elitist Wall Street types and they think that the *class* envy that they’ve created will have universal acceptance on the part of the American people, “Oh yeah, tax those AIG bonuses, tax everybody else’s bonuses,” that’s what they’ve gonna do. It going to be a *feint* and misleading thing, this is how Harry Reid is gonna drive the whole legislation *back* to the House, ah and and this is essentially what reconciliation is is all about, and in *one* move – and they’re targeting next *week* to get this done in *one* move, the U.S. Congress will take over *hospitals*, will take over *laboratories*, will take over the *medical profession*, will take over the insurance companies. The- what what they are planning – let me let me put it to you in a, in an even more *understandable* fashion: what they are *plotting*, and hope to pull off by next week, will make the takeovers of General Motors and Chrysler look like a joke. And *once* they’ve taken over, the *hospitals*, the labs, the *medical profession*, the insurance companies, guess who’s gonna get patronage jobs in all these industries? The union people, particularly the S-E-I-U union people. The Harry Reid-Pelosi-Obama plan comes down to this: the Democrats are *scheming* against the American people as they have been all along. The Obama Administration starting with the campaign – was a *scheme* against the
American people and against the traditions and institutions that have defined this country's greatness. I know I say that like a broken record, but it takes repetition. The Obama Administration is a scheme, the Obama campaign was a scheme (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/30/2009, 00:32:32 – 00:34:45).

Monica Crowley makes the case that Obama is an elitist who disdains the men and women who wear a uniform for a living:

Crowley: It does seem increasingly so that the Bama is dismissive and disregarding of the average American, the average Joe. Think about it this way: we have had three major experiences here ah watching the Bama interact with average Joes. Literally, and average Joe in Joe the Plumber during the campaign. Also Frank Ricci who was that ah New Haven fire fighter who led the group of fire fighters ah in going all the way to the US Supreme Court to have their rights restored when they were discriminated against by Sonia Sotomayor and the Second ah Court of Appeals when they were dissed for working hard because no African Americans had passed the promotion test, so they were held back as well. And you ask yourself, you say to yourself, self, what do all of these gentlemen have in common? They are all blue collar, hard-working guys, who are just looking to live their lives and have government leave them alone, they don't want any special breaks, Frank Ricci wasn't lookin' for a special break, Crowley wasn't lookin' for a special break, Joe the Plumber was not looking for a special break. They don't want handouts they don't want favors they don't want any kind of advantages. They just want a fair break and what we have seen each and every time, is that the Bama has repeatedly dissed them.

He has ah instead of being even-handed and fair, as the nations ah Chief Law Enforcement officer – the President of the United States should be – we have actually seen the opposite. We have seen this man actively move against them, weighing in on the other side, against them. And because now we have this pattern that we can ah really see quite clearly – what we have here is a President who is afflicted with elitism, classism and frankly just downright straight up snobbery. These examples of Joe the Plumber, Frank Ricci, James Crowley – they did not happen in a vacuum, OK. You can't say that any one of these guys and how the Bama has approached them or treated them and their cases is an aberration. You just you can't say that because none of them happened in a vacuum they're part of a pattern. And remember these guys weren't the only ones that Obama dismissed and disregarded out of elitism and classism and snobbery. Do you guys remember during the presidential campaign, last year Obama went to a San Francisco fundraiser and because he was surrounded by like-minded elite, liberal, Far Left nuts the Bama felt free to express his true feelings about guys like Joe the Plumber, Frank Ricci, James Crowley
and you and me because he referred to those working-class voters in states like Pennsylvania, and Ohio and Tennessee and Indiana and across the Midwest – he referred to them as “bitter” remember? Clinging to their guns and their religion (Monica Crowley Show, 8/01/2009, 00:05:57 – 00:09:34).

Ultimately, the greatest threat to capitalism and the Free Market system is not class warfare, it is socialism. In a Q&A at an outdoor rally, Herman Cain has the following interchange with a participant who asks him to identify the most pressing issue facing the nation under the Obama Administration:

Cain: What one thing could you say to someone to get their attention about what’s going on?

Patrick: That’s correct. I know it’s a big question.

Cain: I would say, if you have grandchildren or ever expect to have grandchildren they will live under communism if you don’t wake up [applause].

Patrick: Good.

Cain: That’s what I would say, that’s it. This country is on the road to socialism which is just a slow train to communism and if more people do not wake up that’s what their grandchildren is gonna have to live under. Now I know that the liberals are saying “Why is he trying to scare people?” I’m just trying to wake people up (Herman Cain Show, 05/25/10, 01:22:44 – 01:23:43).

CPTR narratives construct Obama as an Arch-Socialist, hell-bent on realizing utopian visions of a new, better America. Imaginatively, Monica Crowley portrays Obama as a revolutionary a la Fidel Castro. After playing an extended audio-clip from a documentary on the Cuban Revolution, Crowley makes the following extraordinarily, dubious historical comparison to Obama:

Crowley: What happened in 1959 {Cuban Revolution} is what ah is being replayed today, the destruction of symbols of capitalism, the wild rejoicing, the cult of personality, right? I mean Fidel Castro is considered by the Left, the Liberator of the Americanos, right? The Liberator of the Cuban people. Obama is now considered the Liberator of the Americanos.

Rush Limbaugh is especially brutal in his assessment of Obama and other progressives whose “presence is gonna magically result in all of these utopian, unrealistic dreams” of a new socialist America rising from the ashes of a capitalist nightmare:

Limbaugh: We have a sophomoric, naive, Leftist, radical little child who we have elected. President, who actually has such an ego, that he thinks this is all about him, that he’s president of the world, his presence is gonna magically result in all of these utopian, unrealistic dreams that these pantywaists on the Left have harbored their entire lives (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/28/2009, 00:40:00 – 00:40:26).

Limbaugh: And we have seen rise to prominence, the literal naïveté the dangerous naïveté of the utopian-inspired Left that basically has as it’s world perspective and experience academia and theory and philosophy coupled with an arrogance and a conceit that is personified by President Obama that says they are the really smart people in the world and only when they are leading the nation will the rest of the world, which is all smarter than we are too, only when the real true elites are leading this country will the rest of the world’s bad guys realize that the United States has turned a corner and is no longer a threat to them and they can stand down and join us in this weapon-free worldwide utopia – that is the summation of where we are in this country, of course aided and abetted by the same kind of academic, philosophical naïveté in the state-run media (Rush Limbaugh Show, 9/28/2009, 00:53:35 – 00:54:45).

Obama’s reforms are simply dismissed by Monica Crowley as too ambitious and ridiculous to even seriously consider:

Crowley: He really pressed this utopian vision that he has in mind that everybody should have access to healthcare, everybody would be able to pay their mortgage, everybody should be able to get a job and he – because he’s the government – is gonna be able to make that happen (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/2009, 00:28:26 – 00:28:42).

Crowley: Spoken like a true socialist, right? This is the utopian vision of socialism where everybody is surrounded by puppies and rainbows (Monica Crowley Show, 6/20/2009, 00:30:06 – 00:30:14).

Laura Ingraham portrays Obama “utopian promises” as a threat that will, if unstopped, destroy America and mark Obama’s presidency as a failure:
Ingraham: At some point we’ve got to look at the world as it is, not the as how he thinks it should be remade in some type of different image. And more Americans, I am heartened to see, find out that in the end all of these utopian promises of the Obama Administration and all of the things we’ve seen so far, add up to one big flop, a weakened America, a less influential America, and an America, yes, in decline. And for President Obama last night to say, “I’m sick of these people sitting on the sidelines rooting for failure,” no, no, no, no look in the mirror, President Obama. The only one looking for failure right now is you! You are bringing this country to her knees, with your out of control approach to spending, your lame, wimpy approach to foreign policy, and your inability to make a decision – that is what is luh luh- leading us toward the brink of failure – economic failure, military failure, foreign policy failure, and as failure of will! Look in the mirror (Laura Ingraham Show, 10/21/2009, 02:14:09 – 02:15:29).

CPTR hosts, guests, and callers sound the alarm. Obama’s plan is to destroy and remake America. While progressive may appear bumbling, just plain stupid, or naïve – they know what they are doing. To bring America to its knees, they first must enslave the American people to the government – this will be the source of their power.

American must be vigilant and watch for the signs of increasing socialist intrusions:

Limbaugh: You’re going to learn that all this is intentional. Because there is a track record of over seventy-five years of these failures, from even the stupidest people to learn from. It’s it’s not that they don’t want to learn the truth they want control they want power, they want as many people dependent on the government as possible. They just have a different belief system. Their intention may be good, but I don’t care about their intentions because their intentions have failed miserably this country and people like them all over the world – the people that run our country now have a much closer proximity ah and their much closer to the world’s tyrants and dictators than they are closer to the people who founded the country. This is not accidental they have chosen it. This is the ideology that they have chosen, this is what’s best for them and you’re gonna learn this if you stay focused and stay focused and eh eh stay interested and eh keep learning as you grow older you’re going to learn this, you’re going to learn that they’re not innocent idiots, they are dangerous, devious, central planners who have design on everybody’s liberty and freedom, that’s what matters to most of them because that’s where they derive their power (Rush Limbaugh Show, 10/06/2009, 02:11:43 – 02:13:02).

Michael Savage, typically hyperbolic, describes what is at stake for America under Obama’s scheme to nationalize the private sector:
Savage: But when you see a nation dying it’s hard to watch, it’s like watching an elephant go down and dying slowly on under Obama. Sometimes I feel like America’s been center shot with an elephant gun under Obama and the people behind him. He was the magic bullet to bring us down. And I hear the elephant roaring, it’s on his front legs, and it’s trying to hold on but it’s going down, I mean really I get heartbreaking images I don’t know how to control them sometimes. This guy is like a bullet that was shot into the heart of the country. The man is wrecking everything. He’s nationalized the banks, he’s nationalized the insurance industry, he’s tried to nationalize the auto industry, he’s trying to nationalize the healthcare industry, and when he gets through wrecking all of these free enterprise systems he wants to grant amnesty to 30 million illegal aliens and then he wants to impose an an universal tax on everyone under the scam called Cap and Trade, based on the fallacious theory of global warming. The man is the silver bullet of the enemies of America, in my opinion. Don’t call me about it because I’m not going to argue with you, I know I’m right (Michael Savage Show, 1/06/2010, 02:38:49 – 02:39:57).

Yet there is hope – here Michael Savage treats his audience to a spontaneous spoken-word commentary where he valorizing ordinary hardworking Americans:

Savage: But let’s hope that Obama being so radical and so immature and trying to push through so much so fast has awakened the sleeping giant of America: all the men who pack the silos with corn finally have awakened to what has happened to their country, all the men who raise pigs and cows and wheat and soy, all of the men and women who drive the tractors and drive the trucks, all the men who ride jackhammers and work on the high rise, the low rises, ride the low riders, high riders, in other words all of America finally waking up to the fact that we’re all about to descend into slavery in this country, all under the hands of this guy pretending to be Robin Hood when he is nothing but a ah shill for the New World Order Socialists who have virtually taken over all avenues of this government (Michael Savage Show, 2/24/2010, 02:31:03 – 02:31:46)

The American people – a Sleeping Giant – will awake in fairytale fashion, just in time to vanquish the socialist dragon and rescue the fair maiden, Capital.
Table 9-1. Hegemon Narratives

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<tr>
<th>QUANTITATIVE MEASURE</th>
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CHAPTER 10
CONCLUSIONS

Obama Narratives: Emergent Theory

Obama Narratives comprised the data that were used to address the first study question: What is Conservative Political Talk Radio saying to listeners? It was hypothesized that CPTR uses language and narrative to (re)construct the world as recognizable, manageable, and predictable along the lines of a hegemonic or “taken for granted” social order. Inductive analysis of the CPTR and PPTR data support this hypothesis, from which the following emergent theory was developed.

Firstly, CPTR creates social facts that support a populist (in that it champions ordinary, work-a-day folks under the banner of “We the People”) conservative social reality that restores listeners’ perception of a comprehensible world. I argue that CPTR Obama Narratives do their work through the following rhetorical moves.

- Obama Narratives build and enact social facts that become a part of the social reality of CPTR through repetition. Very often social facts manifest as talking points that are easy to master, set apart listeners as fans, and support political solidarity within this shared ideological community.

- Obama Narratives solicit listeners' involvement in their creation through a process of “leading gaps,” i.e., an invitation to listeners to co-author narratives by filling-in absent story details and conclusions with information supplied by a conservative knowledge system. Listeners are not told what to think, rather they are supplied with a discrete set of beliefs, values, assumptions, and vocabularies that lead to predictable conclusions. Hosts then compliment the amazing intellect and dedication to the truth that their listeners and supporters show.

- Obama Narratives encourage listeners to rely on anecdotal personal experiences and circumstances as a lens through which to understand the world that preserves a ‘folk authenticity’ that sets them apart from experts, academics, or intellectuals and the truths they produce. Too, loyal listeners take their place within narratives and become part of an unfolding story plot where they assume an intimate stake in outcomes where the political is personal (e.g., gay marriage) and evokes outrage.
Secondly, the election of the first African American President of the United States is a shock that requires a (re)articulation and assertion of a conservative social reality. Barack Obama’s presidency represented an ascendant, progressive social reality – a threat to White racial hegemony – that could not go unanswered. I argue that CPTR Obama Narratives supplied a degree of equilibrium to a community whose political identity and beliefs were being challenged. Obama Narratives fostered stability in three important ways:

- *Obama Narratives* are persuasive and rhetorically appealing; they are useful to the contemporary context – they fit the moment;
- *Obama Narratives* reflect and support long-held, culturally-embedded beliefs and therefore seem logical and based in common-sense; and,
- *Obama Narratives* make the unknown knowable, repairing a sense of normlessness, facilitating a sense of empowerment and mastery over an increasingly complex (read: diverse) social world.

Lastly, CPTR uses vocabularies and rhetoric that are in accord with the historical trajectory of conservatism in America (see Chapter 3). The political project of U.S. conservatism has been, and continues to be, White racial supremacy. While the manners and customs of contemporary conservatism are more refined – stressing populist over elite control, enlisting less strident race, gender, sexual, and class demagoguery, and appealing to diverse constituencies – it’s desire remain the same: White racial hegemony. I argue that CPTR Obama Narratives, both implicitly and explicitly, (re)construct and enact for hosts, guests, and listeners a preferred social order wherein African American race is portrayed as inferior to White American race. Obama Narratives socially reproduce white supremacy using racial caricatures that communicate Black inferiority, threat, and disorder.
The social reproduction and use of racial caricatures: CPTR *Obama Narratives* rely upon racial caricatures to convey to listeners that the first African American President of the United States is incompetent, an enemy-within, and psychologically impaired. CPTR *Obama Narratives* draw upon centuries-old racist tropes and stereotypes to support conservative assertions about Barack Obama. *Incompetence Narratives* that describe Obama as unpresidential, unfit, and unsuitable for the office of president – as a man too incompetent to perform the duties expected of the nation’s chief executive – draw from the Coon Caricature (Pilgrim, 2012b). CPTR *Enemy-Within Narratives* that portray Obama as disloyal and malevolent, as having secret intentions to destroy America through skillful manipulation and deception of gullible White Americans and disaffected African Americans, don’t stray far from the Brut or Nat Caricature (Pilgrim, 2012a). Finally, *Impairment Narratives* feature all the hallmarks of the Tragic Mulatto Caricature in their assertion that what underlies Barack Obama’s behaviors and motives – unbeknownst to him and many Americans – is an arrested development, narcissism, and a Messiah Complex (Pilgrim, 2012c).

**Obama as coon**

The word ‘coon’ is derived from raccoon and is meant to depict an African American (generally a male) who is, “lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate, [a] buffoon” (Pilgrim, 2012b, p. 1). The Coon is constitutionally unable to assume adult responsibilities. While the Coon has all his needs met in life, this is not something he achieved by dint of his own will and hard work. The Coon is often portrayed as falling into favorable circumstances that he exploits to his advantage. Despite his good fortune the Coon is perpetually dissatisfied with his lot in life, largely because he is unwilling or unable to master his life and do what it takes to change his circumstances.
The Coon Caricature emerged during slavery and was an expression of the slave master’s frustration with his ability to exploit the most labor possible from those he condemned to involuntary servitude. According to Pilgrim (2012b, p. 1):

The master and the slave operated with different motives: the master desired to obtain from the slave the greatest labor, by any means; the slave desired to do the least labor while avoiding punishment. The slave registered his protest against slavery by running away, and, when that was not possible, by slowing work, doing shoddy work, destroying work tools, and faking illness. Slave masters attributed the slaves’ poor work performance to shiftlessness, stupidity, desire for freedom, and genetic deficiencies.

White American ‘masters’ during the era of slavery viewed themselves as benevolent and as exercising a civilizing influence on enslaved African Americans (Pilgrim, 2012b, p. 2). Any hint of tension, rebuke, complaint, or condemnation – any refusal to give in to the demands of White masters was met with shock and the severest forms of discipline. White American slave owners had at their disposal an arsenal of weapons with which to rob African Americans of their labor. The Coon caricature supported notions of White superiority that justified the enslavement of Africans for their own interest. Pilgrim, 2012a, p. 1) concludes that Coon caricatures had a practical use within the context of the slave system.

Proponents of slavery created and promoted images of blacks that justified slavery and soothed white consciences. If slaves were childlike, for example, then a paternalistic institution where masters acted as quasi-parents to their slaves was humane, even morally right.

With the end of slavery, however, the Coon caricature morphed into something more debased and sinister.

After emancipation, the Coon caricature shifted and became identified with “young, urban blacks who disrespected whites” (Pilgrim 2012b, p. 1). These young black men could not be forced to labor; they wore loud, gaudy dress; demanded equal
standing with their former White masters; adopted, so-called, White values; and wanted to make decisions about their own lives. Referencing post-slavery minstrel depictions of the Coon, Pilgrim asserts (2012b, p. 3):

He thought he was as smart as white people; however, his frequent malapropisms and distorted logic suggested that his attempt to compete intellectually with whites was pathetic. His use of bastardized English delighted white audiences and reaffirmed the then commonly held beliefs that blacks were inherently less intelligent. The minstrel coon's goal was leisure, and his leisure was spent strutting, styling, fighting, avoiding real work, eating watermelons, and making a fool of himself. If he was married, his wife dominated him. If he was single, he sought to please the flesh without entanglements.

In sum: modern-day Coons are ‘uppity niggers’ who don't know their place (Pilgrim, 2012b, p. 3). From the perspective of the modern-day Coons stereotype, African American men are out of control (without the close supervision provided by slavery), childlike, and both unable and unwilling to manage their own affairs - let alone manage big, important things like a country. African Americans are, according to the caricature, “hedonistic children, irresponsible, and left to their own plans, destined for idleness -- or worse” (Pilgrim, 2012b, p. 2).

The Coon caricature may appear out of step with modern racial sensibilities; after all conservative critics of Obama and his Administration are just making the case for their candidate and policy preferences. Upon closer inspection, however, the Coon caricature manifests in Incompetence Narratives through the following narrative content and assertions:

- Obama is not presidential - he is too relaxed and casual and this diminishes the Office of the President of the United States;
- Obama is unpolished, an embarrassment to our country;
- Obama lacks substance;
- Obama is not really ‘into’ the job of President – he does not want to do the hard work of President – he finds the job too demanding;
• Obama just wants to cross things off his list and get on with smoking, partying, and playing basketball;
• Obama is frivolous, lazy, and narcissistic - he loves wealth and luxury;
• Obama seeks his own pleasure, ease, and personal satisfaction – and will betray America to get it;
• Obama just fell into the position of President – it even surprised him that he won the election;
• Obama lacks the intelligence to do the job of President of the United States;
• Obama is a coward, weak-kneed, and directionless.

Many of these assertions about Obama seem random, even bizarre considering his background and experience. However, when read through the framework of racial caricature from which these assertions draw their legitimacy, what CPTR is saying to its listeners is clear – there is a Coon in the White House.

**Obama as brut**

As Pilgrim (2012a, p. 1) explains:

The brute caricature portrays black men as innately savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal -- deserving punishment, maybe death. This brute is a fiend, a sociopath, an anti-social menace. Black brutes are depicted as hideous, terrifying predators who target helpless victims, especially white women.

The Brut caricature is an invention of the post-slavery, Reconstruction era. African Americans – freed from the plantation – were feared by White Americans. The racist assumption of the Brut caricature was that slavery calmed the beast that existed inside every enslaved African; once freed from the civilizing influence of slavery, African Americans would run wild and revert to baser instincts. Lamentably, gone were the faithful ‘Mammies’ and devoted ‘Toms’ loyal to their master unto death.

White women were especially vulnerable to the Black Brut who were said to desire White women, sexually, and would rape them given the slightest opportunity (Pilgrim, 2012a, p. 1). Lynching was White Americans’ response to the demons they
constructed out of free African American men. In fact, strangely enough, lynchings bolstered the Brut caricature – how else could one justify terrorism and torture (Pilgrim, 2012a). African American men were portrayed as animals, throwbacks who possessed a genetic predisposition to rape, kill, and destroy. The Brut caricature included perverse sexual impulses, the inability to experience normal love and affection for one’s fellow man, psychosis, and a bent toward evil. White Americans in the South objected to any attempts to protect Black lives from vigilante lynch mobs. Pilgrim (2012a) notes that the Dyer Bill (1921-1922) – a law designed to punish government entities that failed to protect African Americans from lynch mobs – died in the U.S. Senate when Southern politician posed a conservative states’ rights argument against its passage. White Americans during this period considered it their God-given, civic duty to protect their lives and property (which included property interest in White female chastity) from the danger of the Black Beast – thus was born the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The following quote by a Southern politician vividly links rape, white supremacy and the threat of a strong national government (Pilgrim, 2012a, p. 3):

Representative Benjamin Tillman from South Carolina claimed that the Dyer Bill would eliminate the states and "substitute for the starry banner of the Republic, a black flag of tyrannical centralized government...black as the face and heart of the rapist...who [recently] deflowered and killed Margaret Lear," a White girl in South Carolina.

Like the Coon caricature, the Brut caricature was linked to African American political access and empowerment. Pilgrim concludes (2012a, p. 4):

The brute caricature was a red herring, a myth used to justify lynching, which in turn was used as a social control mechanism to instill fear in black communities. Each lynching sent messages to blacks: Do not register to vote. Do not apply for a white man's job. Do not complain publicly. Do not organize. Do not talk to white women. The brute caricature gained in popularity whenever blacks pushed for social equality.
As lynchings received greater public condemnation, especially during the era of the Civil Rights Movement, they became less frequent, especially for alleged rape. Interestingly, when lynchings did occur during the Civil Rights era, they were most often for the offense of African American political and economic empowerment (e.g., exercising the vote or maintaining African American-owned businesses) (Pilgrim, 2012a).

During the Civil Rights Movement, the Brut caricature began to transform. The Brut was no longer associated with the rapist who savaged White women. Instead, the Brut was the proverbial ‘Bad Nigger’ featured in Blaxploitation movies of the 1960s and 1970s. Modern Brutes were portrayed as not only angry, aggressive, and remorseless, but decidedly anti-white. White men and White women were equally as likely to be victimized by the modern Brut whose goal was to demean innocent White people (Pilgrim, 2012a). The modern Black Brut seeks only payback – he is sadistic, manipulative, and fixed on revenge for wrongs real and imagined. According to Pilgrim (2012a), no cinematic character better typifies the modern Brut better than ‘Sweetback’ in *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (Gross, Van Peebles & Van Peebles, 1971).

Sweetback, the main character, is falsely accused of a crime. On the lam he assaults several men, rapes a black woman, and kills corrupt police officers. The movie ends with the message: A BAADASSSSS NIGGER IS COMING BACK TO COLLECT SOME DUES. That frightened whites (Pilgrim 2012a, p. 5).

Political campaigns and the news media are not strangers to Brut imagery. The Willie Horton narrative invented by the George H. W. Bush’s presidential campaign and the darken image of O. J. Simpson featured on the cover of *Time* magazine are but two of a long list of media portrayals of the Brut. The epidemic of police shootings of unarmed African American men and the birth of the Black Lives Matter Movement are the most
recent evidence of the enduring influence of the Brut caricature. A racist caricature related to the Brut caricature is the Nat caricature.

**Obama as Nat**

The Nat caricature gets its name from Nat Turner, an enslaved Virginian who led a slave rebellion. Known as “The Prophet,” Nat Turner viewed himself as a messianic leader who would deliver his people from slavery. Turner was a very religious man who experienced visions that supported his decision to incite rebellion. In 1831 Turner and his followers went on a killing spree; for forty hours, moving from plantation to plantation, Turner killed upwards of sixty members of White families and freed his enslaved brethren (Pilgrim, 2012c, p. 3). Turner was captured approximately six weeks after the initial attack and his fate in the hands of the White justice system matched the violence of his crimes. According to Pilgrim (2012c, p. 3):

> On November 11, 1831 he was hanged, skinned, decapitated -- and his body parts amputated for souvenirs. In the aftermath of the rebellion, a hysterical climate reigned in the South, leading to mob lynching of blacks amid false accusations of conspiracy: close to two hundred blacks, many of whom had nothing to do with the rebellion, were beaten, bludgeoned, tortured, disemboweled, burned, and shot by the angry white mobs. Turner is remembered today as a religious zealot; “a cowardly mass murderer with a messiah complex” (Pilgrim, 2012c, p. 3). Those who admire Nat Turner, however, view him as a revolutionary (Pilgrim, 2012c) and a man willing to kill and die for African American freedom.


Quoting Blassingame (1972) Pilgrim fleshes out the Nat caricature (2012c, p. 1):

> Revengeful, bloodthirsty, cunning, treacherous, and savage, Nat was the ravager of white women who defied all the rules of plantation society.
Subdued and punished only when overcome by superior numbers of firepower, Nat retaliated when attacked by whites, led guerrilla activities of maroons against isolated plantations, killed overseers and planters, or burned plantation buildings when he was abused.

The Nat caricature was most often applied to African American men who labored in plantation fields. The fear among White Americans was that African American men would foment dissension among docile negroes and organize rebellion. Slave rebellion meant two things to White slave owners – the deaths of White masters and their kin and an end to wealth-producing slave labor. Potential Nats were greatly feared; thus, laws were passed that not only exploited African labor, but assured that no enslaved man, woman, or child would obtain an ounce of advantage in this institutionalized system of oppression, degradation, and violence.

Whites, including non-enslavers, fearing rebellion among the slaves, used many strategies to ensure that angry slaves did not rebel: slaves were routinely searched for weapons; rebellious slaves were punished, publicly and harshly -- including cropping ears, castrating, hanging, burning, and mutilating; the all-white army and militias were constantly on guard; and, anyone, black or white advocating rebellion among the slaves could be lynched. Despite these measures and others, slavers lived with the constant fear that slaves would rise up and kill whites (Pilgrim, 2012c, p. 2).

Today, few White Americans lose sleep worrying about the possibility of marauding bands of African Americans intent on committing unspeakable acts of violence against White people. However, there are many White people who harbor concerns that African Americans simply hate all White people.

Nat's hatred of whites cannot be explained by saying he is angry or prejudiced or discriminates; no, Nat's hatred is the hatred of despair and he wants to act on it. A real-Nat, like his racist counterparts in white supremacy organizations, wants to annihilate the "racial other" (Pilgrim, 2012c, p. 4).
The circumstances that produced Nat Turner are not present today. Nat Turner was an exceptional individual – in his day and our own. Perhaps psychological projection explains the longevity of the Brut and Nat caricatures. Wouldn’t any people react violently under circumstances of multigenerational oppression and violence?

Obama *Enemy-Within Narratives* depend for their persuasive appeal on the Brut and Nat caricatures. The narrative content and assertions of *Enemy-within Narratives* invokes White fear of revenge – cold, calculated, and near apocalyptic in its destructiveness:

- Obama has barely hidden contempt for America and Americans;
- Obama’s presidency inspires fear, hopelessness, anxiety, and desperation;
- Obama’s presidency brings unwanted change – he wants to inflict a nightmare on us; he will force us (White people) into slavery;
- Obama is a fear monger; he wants us to feel fear and pessimism;
- Obama ultimately wants to destroy the United States; he wants to drag this nation into hell;
- Obama portrays himself as a divine, Messiah-like figure;
- Obama will abuse power and redistribute wealth, making us responsible for each other;
- Obama is unpatriotic;
- Obama wants to take away our individuality and muzzle dissent;
- Obama is tyrannical and wants to be a dictator;
- Obama is a thug, Stalin, Hitler, the Godfather;
- Obama needs chaos, contempt, unrest, anger, and bitterness to carry out his radical plan to divide America – he is out to “get whitey”;
- Obama is a radical community organizer; his ideas are utopian and out of step with reality.

**Obama as tragic mulatto**

The Tragic Mulatto caricature is a literary invention (Pilgrim, 2012d). The Tragic Mulatto was featured in novels and film as a mixed-raced individual who is deprived of ‘normal’ parental relationships. White Americans, during slavery and after emancipation, believed that interracial relationships (i.e., miscegenation) were “unnatural” (Pilgrim,
The progeny of an interracial relationship was believed to be fatally conflicted – both biologically and psychologically. According to Pilgrim (2012d, p. 4):

Many white Americans believed that mulattos were a degenerate race because they had "White blood" which made them ambitious and power hungry combined with "Black blood" which made them animalistic and savage . . . Mulatto women were depicted as emotionally troubled seducers and mulatto men as power hungry criminals.

Though mulattos may have the benefits and privileges that come with lighter skin and white phenotype – being able to pass as White or to successfully navigate the White world through speech, dress, manner, education and economic security – something is still not quite right; something essential is missing. Pilgrim (2012d, p. 7) argues:

The mulatto was made tragic in the minds of whites who reasoned that the greatest tragedy was to be near-white: so close, yet a racial gulf away. The near-white was to be pitied -- and shunned.

In classic literary depictions of the Tragic Mulatto, the character – usually a woman – dies in despair and indignity. When her African heritage is discovered, her world unravels, she is rejected by her unsuspecting White friends, spouse, and relations. Often in these literary portrayals the outing mulatto is violently assaulted and killed, or else she is relegated to a kind of social death, back where she belongs, in the Black community.

The moral of Tragic Mulatto stories, according to Pilgrim (2012d, p. 3), is that "mix blood [brings] sorrow." Pilgrim summarizes the construction of the Tragic Mulatto as seen in film (2012d, p. 1):

Cinematic portrayals of the tragic mulatto emphasized her personal pathologies: self-hatred, depression, alcoholism, sexual perversion, and suicide attempts being the most common. If light enough to "pass" as white, she did, but passing led to deeper self-loathing. She pitied or despised blacks and the "blackness" in herself; she hated or feared whites yet desperately sought their approval. In a race-based society, the tragic
mulatto found peace only in death. She evoked pity or scorn, not sympathy.

Quoting Sterling Brown (1969, p. 145), Pilgrim notes further:

White writers insist upon the mulatto's unhappiness for other reasons. To them he is the anguished victim of divided inheritance. Mathematically they work it out that his intellectual strivings and self-control come from his white blood, and his emotional urgings, indolence and potential savagery come from his Negro blood.

Importantly, the Tragic Mulatto is often outed as African American by a relative or close family member. The Tragic Mulatto has a strained, almost psychotic relationship to his or her blackness – at once driven by internal impulses associated with black race, yet repulsed by the corruption caused by a single drop of black blood. The Tragic Mulatto is not content with the benefits White blood has to offer in the Black world, she or he wants to live in the White world as or like a ‘real’ White person; this is the ultimate source of the Tragic Mulattos’ downfall.

Obama Impairment Narratives exploit his biraciality to interrogate his mental stability, loyalty, American pedigree, and intentions. CPTR narratives converge on the following questions and assertions:

- Obama’s White mother’s politics and choice of sexual partners are proof of a disgraced Whiteness – a pathology that she could not help but pass on to her son;
- Obama’s family relationships with his White mother and his African father raise questions of damaging absences and abandonment. ‘Unnatural parental relationships’ have created deep scars in Obama that have never healed – evidenced by his narcissist personality and an unexplained ability to convince others of his genuineness;
- Obama’s relationships with powerful White mentors (including his own maternal grandfather) groomed him so that he would be able to traverse Black and White racial worlds;
- Obama is not an American; he was not born in Hawaii as he insists;
Obama’s racial, ethnic, and religious allegiances are a mystery. Is Obama a Christian or a Muslim? Is Obama a friend to America or will he sell us out to our enemies (his friends)?

Will Obama’s biraciality help America solve its racial problems? Or will he align himself with the interests of the African American community?

Michelle Obama ultimately ‘outs’ Obama as African American; that Mrs. Obama is the daughter of African American parents, places Obama squarely in the Black community.

Barack Obama’s cultural, ethnic, geographic (i.e., Chicago and Hawaii), and racial liminality effectively blacken him on CPTR. For CPTR hosts, guests, and loyal listeners, this much diversity makes Obama unfathomable – a trickster figure who cannot be trusted.

**Crisis Narratives: Emergent Theory**

*Crisis Narratives* comprised the data that were used to address the second study questions: How does Conservative Political Talk Radio build and enact identity (e.g., subjectivity, selves), social groups (e.g., solidarity, otherness), cultures (e.g., values, beliefs), and social institutions (e.g., family, government)? It was hypothesized that CPTR uses narratives to build and enact identity and relationships through a set of oft repeated and reinforced binaries applied to individuals, groups, cultures, and social institutions. Inductive analysis of the CPTR and PPTR data supports this hypothesis.

The remainder of this section describes the emergent theory derived from an analysis of *Crisis Narrative* data.

CPTR *Crisis Narratives* build-up affective cognizance among listeners. Listeners are encouraged to frame the present reality as bordering on the edge of terrible, apocalyptic events that endanger the folk or “We the People.” Hosts, guests, and callers to CPTR portray the hegemonic social order – White, masculine/male, middle-class,
heterosexual, Christian subjectivity, selves, solidarity, values, beliefs, and the means to sustain, protect, and reproduce them – as in a state of existential crisis. By CPTR listeners’ choice to adopt aspects of a hegemonic identity and conservatism as their ideological stance vis-à-vis designated outsider identities, people, groups, cultures, and social institutions, CPTR Crisis Narratives can build, enact, and repair identity and relationships in crisis. Notably, while CPTR Crisis Narratives are doing identity-work, they are also spurring political activism that is affectively framed as accomplishing the crucial task of interceding in the historical trajectory of the United States of America – saving it from impending ruin.

What particular discursive processes build and enact identity and relationships through Crisis Narratives in this moment of existential crisis? Firstly, Crisis Narratives help to build and enact identity and relationship based on good versus evil binaries applicable to certain individuals (e.g., patriots versus traitors), groups (e.g., heterosexuals versus homosexuals), cultures (e.g., Western versus Eastern), and social institutions (e.g., family versus governments). These binaries are woven into CPTR narratives of all kinds and are the basis of conservative talking points for both sanctioned and contested issues.

Secondly, Crisis Narratives employ rhetorical strategies that build and enact identity through discursive processes that: 1) portray difference as an immutable reality and a core quality of being; 2) create a war or siege mentality where there is no room for compromise and zero tolerance for failure; 3) supply cognitive maps that set out diametrically opposed and crudely differentiated identities and relationships that either promote or proscribe association; 4) encourage facile, common-sense explanations of
issues, ideas, or experiences where complex, nuanced understandings are what is needed; 5) empty CPTR commentary of its ideological content and by doing so both privilege and obscure a conservative standpoint; and, 6) allow CPTR hosts to claim the less rigorous ethical standard of entertainer (as opposed to journalist) even while hosts present commentary on news and current events that actively blurs the line between fact and opinion.

Lastly, *Crisis Narratives* enlist discursive processes that build and enact identity by suppressing cognitive dissonance (e.g., when a host supports government regulation of marriage, but not government regulation of firearms) and thoughtful reflection, creating insider-only social worlds that are closed-off to the views of ideological outsiders. This is the ‘echo-chamber effect’ whereby the supposed irreconcilability of political standpoints discourages communication across difference and strengthens the legitimacy of a taken-for-granted worldview.

Towards a theory of existential crisis: Pulitzer Prize winning author Toni Morrison describes racial stereotypes (or Africanism) as a,

Disabling virus . . . a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and mediations on ethics and accountability. Through the simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of the color palette, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom (Morrison, 1992, p. 7).

In this excerpt, Morrison has succinctly identified the seductions and anxieties of race and racism for those who wield them as instruments of power. In his essay, “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” Ralph Ellison underscores how central words and stories are to the hegemonic social order:
Perhaps the most insidious and least understood form of segregation is that of the word. And by this I mean the word in all its complex formulations, from the proverb to the novel and stage play, the word with all its subtle power to suggest and foreshadow overt action while magically disguising the moral consequences of that action and providing it with symbolic and psychological justification. For if the word has the potency to revive and make free, it has also the power to blind, imprison and destroy (1964, p. 24).

In the balance of this essay, Ellison argues that anti-black stereotypes are part of a discursive process that resolves tensions fundamental to White American racial identity (Ellison, 1964; Lensmire, 2010). Summarizing Ellison’s perspective, Lensmire (2010) comments that, for Ellison, racial “stereotypes help white people take up the social role of being white in America” (p. 166) – no matter how dysfunctional. Ellison himself concludes (p. 28):

Hence whatever else the Negro stereotype might be as a social instrumentality, it is also a key figure in a magic rite by which the white American seeks to resolve the dilemma arising between his democratic beliefs and certain antidemocratic practices, between his acceptance of the sacred democratic belief that all men are created equal and his treatment of every tenth man as though he were not.

Findings from the analysis of CPTR data are consistent with both Morrison and Ellison assertions; together their reflections on the American literary tradition suggest that it would be worthwhile to explore what CPTR Crisis Narratives ‘say’ about ‘being’; in other words, examine what Crisis Narratives tell us about the identities and relationships of their authors. Concerning this method of understanding identity through narrative, Morrison write:

The subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work not to see this.
Morrison aptly concludes that stereotypes say more about the creator than the target of the creation (Morrison, 1992, p. 17).

CPTR narratives are ample evidence of a hegemonic existential crisis that moves from fear to fight in *Crisis Narratives*. Hegemonic identity (i.e., White race, masculine/male, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian identity in the U.S.) is the discursive bridge that connects fear to fight. White, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian, documented identity is American hegemonic identity. To borrow Lipsitz’s (1998) designation, hegemonic identity is a “possessive investment” that results in very real structural advantages that benefit White Americans, males, the middle-class, heterosexuals, documented citizens, and Christians, while it disadvantages racial minorities, women, the poor or working class, gays, lesbians, transgendered or queer people, undocumented citizens, and non-Christians.

In CPTR narrative challenges to the hegemonic order generate fear and anxiety – *Obama Narratives* are proof of this. Crisis is the consequence of anxiety and perceived threat. In *War and Innocence Narratives*, crisis becomes a frame CPTR hosts, guests, and callers erect around nearly all their commentary. In *Enduring Threat Narratives*, CPTR hosts, guests, callers, and loyal listeners construct shared opposition to the media and big government – two powerful institutions that are perceived as undermining American hegemonic identity. Lastly, in *Conservative Activism Narratives*, CPTR hosts encourage dedicated conservatives to “Take Back Their Country.”

**War and innocence narratives**

*War and Innocence Narratives* sound the alarm, creating a deep sense of dread among listeners who fear ‘life as we know it’ is at risk of extinction should Barack Obama go unopposed. CPTR hosts, guests, and callers incorporate martial language
and terminology into narratives about Barack Obama, his policies, and the need for concerted conservative opposition. Importantly, contemporary crises are set against the backdrop of an imagined, bygone era when the world was a simpler place and there were fewer challenges to conservative ideology. The narrative content and assertions of *War and Innocence Narratives* include the following crisis frames:

- Narratives that utilize a rhetoric of righteous anger on behalf of a just cause;
- Historical absences and revisions; erasure of difference, tension, and conflict that undergird narratives of American innocence and heroism;
- Crises juxtaposed to a longing for a past characterized by homogeneity, predictability, and consensus that is being threatened by difference, inconsistency, and dissent;
- The idea that there are potentially devastating conspiracies at work in an undeclared war on America and the American people; audiences are primed to see attacks forming on the horizon;
- Construction of a single-minded enemy – Obama, Democrats, liberals, the Left – that is out to destroy America and the America people; these enemies desire a weak America, a dependent America, an America that is no longer a super power, a less secure America that is vulnerable to its enemies;
- Crises are described as a battle or war for “truth, justice and the American way” – of good against evil; and,
- The stakes in the battle are life or death, a zero-sum fight – if they win, we lose our way of life - forever (crisis frames authorize extreme proposals, commentary, and arguments). Conservatives must be ever-vigilant.

Ellison (1964) would describe all such crises-framing as “group frenzy necessary for battle”; in a crisis, an individual “prepares emotionally to perform a social role” (p. 27) – white existential hegemony.

**Enduring threat narratives**

CPTR keeps the crisis frame going by constructing foes that are nearly impossible to conquer (i.e., not well-defined, but seemingly active on multiple fronts) but
whose actions are provocative enough to maintain listeners’ interest and enthusiasm in working to defeat them. The ‘mainstream’ media and government are the two most often mentioned foes on CPTR. Enduring Threat Narratives depict conservatives as the good guys in a battle of ultimate good against ultimate evil embodied in the media and government. Narrative content and assertions converge on the following social constructions about the ‘mainstream’ media and government. Notably, these social constructions reveal the aspects of identity CPTR hosts, guests, callers, and faithful listeners find most vital and problematic – what they are most seduced by and anxious for in regards to the human condition:

The mainstream media

- The mainstream media is biased in favor of Democrats, Obama, and the Obama Administration; conservatives must fight the influence of the mainstream media as they collude with the Left to push their agenda;

- The mainstream media is destructive to the American way of life: it appeals to baser instincts and tastes; is destructive to our culture, traditions, and founding ideals; and is a contaminating influence;

- The mainstream media cannot be trusted, it is: corrupt, predatory and desires to keep ordinary citizens stupid and uninformed. The mainstream media conspires to censor information and is intent on deceiving and misleading Americans;

- The mainstream media never presents solutions; its goal is to inflame audiences and cause dissension; its focus is on bad news and pessimism; and it is afraid to cover news stories it deems politically incorrect. All of this makes Americans less safe;

- Conservative media presents the truth; they are the underdogs of modern media;

- Conservative media appeals to common-sense and common-sense solutions that preserve liberty and the ideals that make America great; and,

- The mainstream media fears conservative media; it disrespects and maligns conservative media and portrays it as mean-spirited and intolerant because of its greater popularity with the American public.
• Big government is typified by bureaucracy, which is a threat to the enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Bureaucracies treat people like numbers, interfere in the lives of citizens, and hold the power of life and death;

• Bureaucracies are a form of soft tyranny: intrusive, unresponsive, and unrepresentative of ordinary people. Bureaucracies seek to keep people uninformed and consolidate power in the hands of a few;

• Bureaucracies cannot protect citizens: bureaucracies are rife with waste, corruption, and lack of accountability; bureaucracies lead to failure in whatever they set out to do;

• Bureaucracies are not what the Founding Fathers intended; the Constitution stands for limited government and maximum freedom; the proper role of government is to remove barriers to the American Dream;

• Big government encourages dependence and dependence is the first step to socialism; citizens will be forced to trade self-reliance for the Nanny State;

• Big government is a leveler that undermines productivity through public entitlement programs. The goal of big government is to have us all take care of each other. Big government seeks to redistribute wealth;

• Big government discourages competition; it cannot be trusted to maintain and protect free market and democratic principles; and,

• Big government is run by elites (insider politicians, celebrities, and university-based experts) who seek to undermine our culture and way of life: elites propagate radical ideas; foment hostility toward American traditions and history; and reject American cultural and founding ideals.

*Enduring Threat Narratives* are persuasive because they solidify allegiances and sharpen identity along a good versus evil binary. Through *Enduring Threat Narratives* CPTR hosts, guests, callers, and loyal listeners can take-up and virtually perform hegemonic identity.

**Conservative activism narratives**

Lastly, crises come to a head in *Conservative Activism Narratives* that stress the importance of fighting-back against perceived progressive tyranny. *Conservative Activism Narratives* promote a sense of camaraderie and commitment to conservative
causes, praise achievements, assign blame for failures, and manage supporters’
expectations for success in the long-term (which is virtually guaranteed). The narrative
content and assertions of Conservative Activism Narratives is focused on resistance –
at all cost.

Conservatives are depicted as:

- Citizen activists; “intelligent thinkers”; patriots; ordinary, independent folks;
tireless, trusty and faithful; happy warriors; the Defending Fathers and Mothers of
the Constitution and the American way of life; gladiators, superheroes and judges
who (sometimes prophetically) issue dire warnings that ought to be heeded;

- A threat to established power, which is why progressives depict them as enemies
of the state; and,

- Part of a rag tag Conservative Movement that is a leaderless, grassroots army of
underdogs battling progressive overlords. The Conservative Movement itself is
an organic and spontaneous outpouring of a spirit of resistance – a new counter
culture that represents the awakening of a sleeping giant.

Conservative solidarity and resistance are organized around:

- Conservative activism as an organic, inseparable part of everyday life;
- A desire to keep America the greatest country in the world and/or bring it back
from the breach of destruction; and,
- “Taking Back Our Government,” that is, realigning the relationship between
government and the people to better reflect the ideas of the Founding Fathers.
Conservatives are fighting to restore America and the American Dream through
less government, less taxes, and more individual responsibility;

Conservatism will win because:

- Conservatism is grounded in common-sense; conservatism is rational, logical,
and objectively true – a clear-eyed assessment of how the world works; while
progressivism panders to baser emotions and instincts (e.g., sexual desire, pride,
anger, dependence), conservatism possesses an unpopular truth – a revelatory
gospel; and,

- Most people are conservative and don’t even know it; people have been made to
be biased (by the mainstream media) against conservatism – they don’t
understand it. Upon unbiased reflection, most people discover that they agree
with the tenets of conservatism.
Conservative Activism Narratives are the anecdote to a hegemonic existential crisis. The enemy has been defined, the alarm has been raised, and faithful supporters answer the call. Conservatives, not surprisingly, are the heroes of their own stories.

**Hegemon Narratives: Emergent Theory**

Hegemon Narratives comprised the data that were used to address the third study question: What kind of social order is being (re)produced in Conservative Political Talk Radio? It was hypothesized that CPTR uses narratives that (re)inscribe the relational and structural logics and authority of white supremacy. Analysis of study data found that CPTR Hegemon Narratives operate as a performance of Whiteness. Additionally, Hegemon Narratives construct a moral justification for American economic dominance around the world and an unequal class structure at home. CPTR is “doing” (i.e., enacting and building) white supremacy. The following three points briefly outline an emergent theory of CPTR Hegemon Narratives; detailed discussion follows.

Recapturing white hegemony: First, Hegemon Narratives enact, project, and codify Whiteness – an unnamed marker of identity and status within a “racialized social system” (Doane, 2003, p. 9) – under the ostensibly neutral banner of American culture and nation. Hegemon Narratives operate as listener guideposts to an imagined social world where being an American – that is White, straight, middle class, documented ‘legal,’ and male – represents the status quo and is a kind of currency; the metric by which all things, ideas and experiences are measured.

Concerning the importance of whiteness in America, Toni Morrison (1992, p. 47) argues that:

Race, in fact, now functions as a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americaness that it rivals the old pseudo-scientific and
class-informed racisms whose dynamics we are more used to deciphering . . . American means white.

Whiteness is the politics of conservatism on CPTR. *Hegemon Narratives* inoculate CPTR supporters against counter-narratives, while they create and repel outsiders to whiteness. Perhaps most importantly though, *Hegemon Narratives* repair cognitive dissonance and disassociation caused by conflicting ideals (e.g., the American Creed versus deepening American inequality), and pull the many disparate strands of a complex social reality together into a neat, unified whole.

Second, in CPTR *Hegemon Narratives*, capitalism and the free market are the moral scaffolding upon which social goods are framed; that is, the vagaries of capital and the operation of the free market guide the entire social order – not just economics, finance, or politics. According to Gee (2011, p. 5), “Social goods are anything some people in a society want or value.” CPTR *Hegemon Narratives* identify social goods and how they should be distributed or withheld. In *Hegemon Narratives*, social goods are arrayed along a continuum, which reflects the binary narrative of good versus evil. Not coincidentally, social goods are articulated using language and stories that highlight productivity, individualism, and competition – the very preoccupations of capitalism and free market ideology. In CPTR *Hegemon Narratives* capitalism and the free market are conflated with (or misperceived as) democracy and freedom.

Last, CPTR *Hegemon Narratives* bolster and extend the authority, truths, values, logic, and ethics of white supremacy. White supremacy is the, “the domination of whites over nonwhites” (Mills, 2003, p. 36). *Hegemon Narratives*, and CPTR generally, naturalize white supremacy. CPTR is authoritative and persuasive not in the sense that it tells listeners what to say, be, or do – nor does its power lie in its claimed monopoly
on the truth. CPTR is compelling without ever having to prove its truths. CPTR works primarily by identifying and drawing listeners’ attention to things as facts and then distinguishing, typifying, and exemplifying those facts and inviting listeners to draw their own conclusion, using a restrictive, white supremacist-inflected narrative framework. This is the “doing” work of CPTR. White supremacy is credible, authoritative, and stealthy because, for loyal listeners to CPTR, it exemplifies a set of “doings” (i.e., practices and politics) that narratively link “saying” (i.e., supposed social facts) and “being” (i.e., identity and relationship) together to create a common sense, socially constructed reality.

**Whiteness and difference**

American culture and nation are exemplified by a set of idea(l)s, values, beliefs, traditions, and founding principles that are White-identified. According to Doane (2003):

> Because whites have historically controlled the major institutions of American society, they have been able to appropriate the social and cultural “mainstream” and make white understandings and practices normative (p. 7).

In CPTR *Hegemon Narratives*, White-identified culture and nation invisibly overlay hosts’, guests’, and callers’ understandings of historical and contemporary events and issues, facilitating a reliable, logical, and truth-based framework for meaning-making.

A case in point: from the hegemonic standpoint of White-identified American culture and nation presented on CPTR, Barack Obama is an interloper, opposed in every way to ‘Us,’ an outsider, foreigner, beyond fellow-feeling, a thing upon which to heap disapproval, disgust, and outrage; a bogey man and call to arms. In *Obama Narratives*, President Obama is beyond normal human consideration; an object – like the lynching victim – on which to heap sins, fantasies, and insecurities. Also, in
Hegemon Narratives, America is an exceptional nation, unique among all the nations of the world; an anomaly of history and divine gift to humanity. Patriots are willing to fight to the death to maintain American greatness. America’s enemies resent her greatness; Barack Obama does not believe in American greatness or American exceptionalism. Barack Obama is an enemy of America.

CPTR Hegemon Narratives do the work of (re)inscribing difference on bodies and ideas that fall outside of hegemonic, White-identified American culture and national identity. Andersen (2003, p. 26-27) astutely observes:

Whiteness is an unmarked category against which difference is constructed. Hence to be white is to be not black and blackness is created out of the vantage point of white identity . . . the construction of white identity develops through the creation of “otherness.”

Difference is a powerful rhetorical tool on CPTR. On the one hand, difference promotes compliance within the hegemon, marking-off boundaries and advancing the ideal of equality (e.g., the folklore of E Pluribus Unum). However, because difference also has the potential to disrupt supposed equality, it is used in Hegemon Narratives to ‘otherize’ people, bodies, actions, or ideas, marking them out as perverse or threatening. Difference also polices self- and other-perceptions of worth, object-subject position, relationship to the state/authority, and status within a cultural and national hierarchy that attaches value to categories of race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, nationality, and class. Notably, however, Hegemon Narratives incorporate more than any one status category alone; intersectional models that treat race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, nationality, and class as part and parcel of a “matrix of domination” (Collins, 1990) best describe how Hegemon Narratives work on CPTR.
How do Hegemon Narratives operate through Whiteness, White culture, and White nation? Gender and sexuality are made to support White-identified culture and nation through Hegemon Narratives that construct and enforce a heteronormative performance of masculinity and femininity. CPTR’s treatment of gender and sexuality are not simply sexist, oppressive, or homophobic. In Hegemon Narratives, there appears to be room for innovation and negotiation of gender and sexuality (e.g., hosts, guests, or callers are relatively free to transgress traditional gender roles if the speaker self-censors or silences; to titillate listeners; while disparaging the opposition), but only so long as the boundaries of the dominant heteronormative framework are not seriously or irrevocably breeched. For example, Tammy Bruce does not refer to her female partner as such on her program, only as “The Palin Democrat” – a political designation that disarms the disruption of sexual norms, making both Bruce and her lover ‘OK’ and “one of us,” avoiding the transgression of embracing homosexuality openly. In the same vein, Bruce can refer to “the gays,” but does not say “I am gay.” Bruce also sides with her conservative listeners who equate open homosexuality with mental illness and see it as a form of social bullying (so-called, “in your face” homosexuality).

Even Hegemon Narratives that appear to invoke liberal or progressive gender and sexual norms, serve the heteronormative status quo and hegemonic whiteness. On her Conservative Political Talk Radio program Monica Crowley makes frequent verbal and audio allusions to S & M and bondage (e.g., wearing stiletto heels that ‘discipline’ the opposition, sounds of whips snapping). However, all sexual insinuations are presented within a framework of aggressive female heterosexuality in service to heteronormative male sexual desire and fantasies. So, while Monica Crowley promotes
herself as a knowledgeable, capable, and strong political pundit, sexual innuendo undercuts this message by signaling to her listeners, female sexual hyper-receptivity and sexual availability.

Certainly, White-identified culture and nation privilege white skin; however, on CPTR it is not enough to be phenotypically White since White people can socially ‘blacken’ themselves in any number of ways (e.g., being identified as liberal, Left, gay, or Muslim). There is, though, a place (a prized place, even) for nonwhite, liberal, gay, or Muslim people who are narratively/biographically rehabilitated as White vis-a-vis their conservative political leanings. For example, conservatives of color, like Herman Cain, are whitened when they reject a hyphenated racial identity, opting instead to be “simply American.” Whitened conservatives – from all walks of life – are used as proof of conservative tolerance or neutrality.

The boundaries of whiteness on CPTR are also secured through the application of inclusionary and distancing language in Hegemon Narratives. Insiders know what kinds of “saying, being and doing” insure recognition of whiteness, and which risk misrecognition. This is done by making it very clear what kinds of people, groups, cultures, and institutions are considered right/white/different. On CPTR, outsider status is not portrayed as merely a choice among different ways of being. To be an outsider to whiteness on CPTR is to be erased from the human family; to be depicted and exposed as indecent, immoral, profane, contagious, an object of derision, outside of nature, evil.

Fundamentally, “racism and racial stratification [are] the foundation of white privilege” (Andersen, 2003, p. 26) and the performance of whiteness. It is critical to understand that whiteness on CPTR is not only an expression of racism – in the sense
of overtly rejecting nonwhite people as nonwhite people; that is the “old racism” and, yes, it is still very much alive and well in the language and narratives present in *Hegemon Narratives* on CPTR. However, to understand the subtleties of CPTR one must recognize how whiteness works itself out in *Hegemon Narratives*. What CPTR utterly rejects are nonwhite racial discourses – anything perceived as deviating from a norm of whiteness. Doane (2003, p. 11) argues that:

> “Whiteness” emerged in the late twentieth-century public discourse as an identity having some vague phenotypical basis (e.g., skin color) but whose social role was to serve as an oft-hidden claim to the social and cultural “center” . . . this aspect of whiteness has played a key role in maintaining white supremacy.

*Hegemon Narratives* demean people, groups, ideas, and values that do not conform to, perform, identify with, accept as superior, and worship at the feet of whiteness and White-identified culture and nation. This rejection is thoroughly racialized; it relies on racialized imagery, values, beliefs, customs, and erroneous conceptions that have over time in the U.S., and the world, marked-out whiteness as the superior and normative identity.

**Freedom and free markets**

In *Hegemon Narratives* capitalism and the free market are more than a way to regulate production and distribution of goods and services; they are a moral calculus. On CPTR, capitalism and the free market are respected knowledge systems that point to the ways in which the world should operate. Social goods (Gee, 2011) identified in *Hegemon Narratives* operate according to a zero-sum logic that favors competition over cooperation, the individual over the group, and revenue over benefit. The following frames are illustrative of the binaries present in *Hegemon Narratives*:
- **Worth vs. Worthless**: some people, groups, cultures, ideas, and institutions are worthy, while others are not. The worthless are a drain on resources and should be abandoned to the forces of the free market.

- **Subject vs. Object**: some people, groups, cultures, ideas, and institutions interface with society and the world as forces to be reckoned with, while others are ‘done to’ and exercise little or no control over themselves, society, or the world. ‘Objects’ are vulnerable to misuse and abuse – this is the human condition. No amount of utopian thinking or intervention will change the natural or universal laws reflected in capitalism and the free market – only the fittest survive.

- **Winners vs. Losers**: some people, groups, cultures, ideas, and institutions are a part of the broad sweep of history – these are “The Winners.” Others adopt a losing perspective that puts them on the wrong side of history – their impact is either negative or minimal and there is nothing that can or should be learned from these losers.

- **Free vs. Slave**: some people, groups, and cultures are independent because they work hard to make their way in the world, exercise restraint when need be, and are aggressive when the moment calls for it. They don’t need others to take care of them. Slaves are dependent on government support and are subject to the whims of others. Slaves ‘game’ the system and try to take what others have gained by hard work.

- **Decent vs. Immoral**: some people, groups, and cultures are law-abiding and play by the rules of the game; others take unfair advantage for selfish reasons, because they do not know better, or because they are simply not in control of their actions. What is decent builds society; immorality drains society and is an “enemy within,” bent on destroying America.

In *Hegemon Narratives*, Barack Obama is an anti-capitalist who wants to nationalize the private sector and shrink the wealth of the United States – transferring and redistributing valuable resources to non-productive segments of society. Obama wants to dismantle the free market system by substituting government dependence and a centralized economic system for market and individual control. The first African American president wants to take away Our individuality, enslave Us, and make America just like any other country - mediocre.
Of all the *Hegemon Narrative* themes, class is least likely to be spoken of directly on CPTR. When class is breached in CPTR commentary, it is most often depicted in *Hegemon Narratives* on the middle-class. The middle-class is a cultural designation built around particular values, beliefs, and experiences. The kind of “being” or living that counts as ‘real’ emerges from middle-class work that involves grappling with and solving real-life problems. The middle-class are truly operating in the real world; these are work-a-day folks. The middle-class is also associated with a particular kind of gender performance. The masculine middle-class archetype is a man who works with his body (e.g., plumber or electrician) including work done by members of heroic professions (e.g., police, firemen, and soldiers) or business leaders who work to create wealth and jobs. The elite class is most often associated with those who work behind a desk with their minds, particularly academics, (some) politicians, and government workers; their work is typically described on CPTR as feminine, soft, or effete.

The following memes summarize how class, capitalism, and the free market are connected in *Hegemon Narratives* and the moral rubrics that undergird this framework:

- The free market makes society possible; economic incentives encourage people to act in their own and society’s best interests. Free market principles increase a society’s health, wealth, and safety.

- Capitalism, through the operation of the free market, is the engine that makes the American Dream possible.

- Most people are middle-class and are pro-capitalist even when their interests collide with the free market.

- The American Dream is the birthright of (some) American children: (some) parents should expect their children to inherit better life chances than they themselves have had and to be able to exercise opportunity with little or no interference. Economic growth is near constant and unlimited in a capitalist economy like the U.S.’s, if government interference is limited.
Rich people deserve what they have, whether wealth is gained through work, luck, or inheritance. Class wars are instigated by politicians who want to garner power on behalf of those not willing to work hard to achieve wealth and the American Dream. There are enough material resources and opportunity in America for everyone to exploit.

Small government (especially in regards to individuals and individual needs) is necessary for the health of the free market; there should be little or no interference from the government in the economy. The government’s role in the economy is as referee – not an actor interested in a particular set of outcomes.

The free market is not exploitative or oppressive but rather an inviolable, disciplining force that operates invisibly and equitably. People get what they deserve from the Free Market. If people have little, it is because: 1) they did not work hard enough, or 2) the government disrupted the natural workings of the free market, producing bad outcomes.

America’s superpower status is built on hard work and individual determination; not imperialism, class, race, or gender exploitation. America is number one because it deserves to be; critics, inside or outside of the U.S., are jealous, guilt-ridden, or lazy. Everyone wants what we have in America – a high standard of living. There is no need to apologize for America’s well-deserved superpower status; it comes because of hard work, sacrifice, and ingenuity – a model for others to emulate, if they choose to.

Juxtapose President Obama to this moral system of social goods: Hegemon Narratives depict Barack Obama as an elitist, privileged and wealthy – not like Us. He is dismissive of American middle and working classes, anti-capitalist, someone who wants to undermine the free market by redistributing wealth – he wants Us to take care of people who are dependent on the government for support (like a mother). Obama is The Killer of the American Dream.

**White supremacy and white ignorance**

Charles W. Mills (2003), a philosopher, observes that white supremacy is a term that is largely out of fashion, both in the academy and in society generally. When “white supremacy” is used today, it is most often applied to extremist hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan or Neo-Nazis. Mills (2003) argues that this is a mistake; instead, white
supremacy should be used to describe the contemporary social order in America. In support of this proposition Mills (2003) writes:

Power relation can survive the formal dismantling of their more overt support . . . For the United States, where racialized and vastly disproportionate concentrations of wealth, cultural hegemony, and bureaucratic control are of course reinforced by white political majoritarianism, the case [for using white supremacy to describe the social order] should – were it not for ideological blinders – be much easier to make. So the argument would be that American white supremacy has not vanished but has changed from a de jure to de facto form. The merely formal rejection of white supremacist principles will not suffice to transform the United States into a genuinely racially egalitarian society, since the actual social values and enduring politico-economic structures will continue to reflect the history of white domination (pp. 36-37).

Very simply, White-identified culture and nation and white supremacy describe the same system of power: white social, cultural, political, and economic hegemony that extends beyond racist insult and diminished life chances and intersect with other practices of domination, including gender, sexual, and class oppression.

Viewed through a white supremacist lens, CPTR is engaged in the practices and politics (i.e., “doings” to use Gee’s (2011) term) of white supremacy. CPTR hosts’, guests’, and callers’ reactions to the first African American president are especially illustrative. In Obama, Crisis, and Hegemon Narratives, President Obama is depicted as:

- Unfit, perverse;
- An outsider, foreigner, “not like us”;
- Opposed to, challenging, or intent on subverting normative American beliefs, values, and ways of life;
- Insignificant – his background, experiences, professional achievements, and historic presidency are worthless;
- Aberrant, dangerous, self-interested, and destructive;
A “tragic mulatto” whose multiracial heritage and body are abnormal, the source of unmet emotional needs, indicative of psychopathology (e.g., egomania, his own misperception of his inherent abilities and intelligence), and degenerate.

These sentiments express the truths, values, logic, and ethics of white supremacy (see, Chapter 7 Obama Narratives for a detailed discussion of study findings).

As extreme as many CPTR narratives are, the views of CPTR hosts, guests, and callers are not completely at odds with broader public opinion. In fact, CPTR narratives mirror White American attitudes on many political and cultural issues. For example, the 2015 American Values Survey (Jones, et al., 2015) found that:

- 57% of White Americans believe that the American way of life has mostly changed for the worse since the 1950s; 60% of African Americans and 54% of Latinos say that American culture has changed for the better since the 1950s;
- 63% of White working class respondents indicated that they are bothered by immigrants who speak little or no English; 43% of White college-educated respondents agree;
- 65% of White Americans believe recent killings of African American men by the police are isolated instances; 41% of Latinos and 15% of African Americans believe the same.

Views diverge by political affiliation as well as race and class. Consider a 2016 Pew Research Center (Smith, 2016) poll that compared the views of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump supporters during the 2016 presidential campaign:

- 81% of Trump supporters stated that life for people like them is worse than it was 50 years ago; 19% of Clinton supporters agreed;
- 72% of Clinton supporters agreed that increasing numbers of different races and ethnicities makes the U.S. a better place to live; 40% of Trump supporters agreed;
- 78% of Clinton supporters stated that they believe White people benefit from advantages that Black people don’t share; 24% of Trump supporters agreed;
- 79% of Trump supporters favor building a wall on the Mexico-US border; 10% of Clinton supporters agreed;
• 57% of Trump supporters believe that the government should subject Muslims living in the U.S. to more scrutiny to prevent terrorism; 14% of Clinton supporters agree;

• 72% of Clinton supporters believe that the federal government should do more to help the needy, even if it means going into greater debt; 21% of Trump supporters agreed;

• 70% of Clinton supporters believe government regulation of business is necessary to protect public interests; 17% of Trump supporters agreed.

These poll findings point to vastly different constructions of reality. It appears that individual and group-based standpoints, vis-à-vis hegemonic structures of inequality, predictably produce different constructions of reality. Race, gender, and class differences in the opinions of poll respondents is evidence of differences in standpoint that reflect structures of inequality, like racism, classism, heterosexism, and patriarchy, at work in people’s lives.

Why would this be so? Are not political differences merely differences in opinion? Mills (2007) argues, no; white supremacy produces “epistemic asymmetry,” cognitive differences that exist between individuals who occupy different positions within and across structures of power. Concerning the differences of opinions found among Americans of different racial and ethnic groups, Mills (2007, p. 17) explains:

These are not cognizers linked by a reciprocal ignorance but rather groups whose respective privilege and subordination tend to produce self-deception, bad faith, evasion, and misrepresentation, on the one hand, and more veridical perceptions, on the other hand.

Perhaps nothing demonstrates epistemic asymmetry more than reaction to the comments and commentary of conservative Republican candidate Donald Trump in the months leading up to his presidential election victory in 2016. While Trump did not win the popular vote, and many of Republicans spoke out publicly against his candidacy, he did win the election. At points during the campaign, almost too numerous to count,
Trump voters and surrogates had to engage in cognitive somersaults to continue supporting their candidate (e.g., “self-deception, bad faith, evasion, and misrepresentation,” Mills, 2007, p. 17) in the face of comments like the following (Blacke, 2016):

- “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. ... They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (Campaign launch speech, New York City, June 16, 2015)

- “I think I’d get along very well with Vladimir Putin. I just think so. People say, ‘What do you mean?’ I think I would get along well with him.” (Donald Trump Interview on July 30, 2015, in Glasgow, Scotland)

- “You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever.” (Donald Trump in a CNN interview about Megyn Kelly, one of Fox News' moderators in the first Republican debate, on August 7, 2015.)

- “I watched when the World Trade Center came tumbling down. And I watched in Jersey City, N.J., where thousands and thousands of people were cheering as that building was coming down. Thousands of people were cheering.” (Referring to Muslims celebrating on 9/11 at a rally in Birmingham, Alabama, Nov. 21, 2015)

- “If you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato, knock the crap out of 'em, would you? Seriously. OK? Just knock the hell—I promise you, I will pay for the legal fees. I promise. I promise.” (Referring to protesters, rally in Iowa, February 1, 2016)

- “I’m speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very good brain and I’ve said a lot of things.” (Asked on Morning Joe who his foreign policy consultants are, March 16, 2016)

- “He is a member of a club or society, very strongly pro-Mexican, which is all fine. But I say he’s got bias. ... This judge has treated me very unfairly; he’s treated me in a hostile manner. And there’s something going on.” (Face the Nation on Judge Curiel, June 5, 2016)

- “He is the founder of ISIS. He’s the founder of ISIS, OK? He’s the founder. He founded ISIS and I would say the co-founder would be crooked Hillary Clinton.” (Speaking about Barack Obama at a rally in Sunrise, Florida, August 10, 2016)

- “You’re living in poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs. Fifty-eight percent of your youth is unemployed. What the hell do you have to lose? And at the end of four years, I guarantee you that I will get over 95 percent of the
African-American vote. I promise you. Because I will produce.” (Rally in Dimondale, Michigan, August 19, 2016)

- “I’ll answer that question [whether President Obama was born in the U.S.] at the right time. I just don’t want to answer it yet.” (Interview with the Washington Post in Canton, Ohio, September 15, 2016)

- “I will totally accept the results of this great and historic presidential election—if I win.” (Rally in Delaware, Ohio, October 20, 2016)

Donald Trump’s victory speaks profoundly to white, male, heterosexual, and class privilege: one can hardly imagine Barack Obama (or Hillary Clinton) winning election, or re-election, after making any one of these statements attributed to Trump. Incredibly, unsubstantiated claims of thuggish, perverse, unpatriotic, norm-thwarting, credential-challenging, aberrant, psychopathological behavior that disqualified Barack Obama in the view of many conservatives in 2008 and 2012, did nothing to subvert Donald Trump’s bid for the highest office in the land.

CPTR narratives, poll data, and the election of Donald Trump highlight race, gender, and class divisions that are woven deep into the social fabric of American society – differences that highlight structural inequality. However, questions remain. Why do CPTR host, guests, and callers embrace a standpoint that supports the truths, values, logic, and ethics of white supremacy – an oppressive social structure that is inimical to their own interests and well-being? Who benefits from epistemic asymmetry?

Here the discussion necessarily shifts from describing CPTR’s social reality construction, to an examination of those forces responsible for “both false beliefs and the absence of true beliefs” (Mills, 2007, p.16).

Likely, epistemic asymmetry is connected to the unconscious performance of whiteness – whiteness is a “hidden identity . . . that does not generally intrude upon the everyday experiences of most whites” (Doane, 2003, p. 7) and, I would argue, some
nonwhite people who put on the mantle of whiteness to share in its benefits – even if those benefits are only or largely psychic. Mills (2003, 2007) suggests another explanation for support of a white supremacist standpoint. Mills (2003, 2007) addresses the cognitive components of CPTR narrative constructions and proposes that “white epistemological ignorance” is the answer.

This study has been concerned, in the words of Mills (2003), with mapping the “distinctive epistemologies, factual claims, and normative outlooks” (p. 45) of CPTR; this is what Mills (2003) would call CPTR’s “claims of knowledge” (p.45). But there are also “claims of ignorance,” according to Mills, that offer another way to understand CPTR and the white supremacist standpoint. Mills (2003, p. 45-46) describes “claims of ignorance” as:

A nonknowing which is not the innocent unawareness of truths to which there is no access but a self- and social-shielding from racial realities that is underwritten by the official social epistemology. Being constructed as white means, *inter alia*, learning to see and understand the world in a certain way . . . a blindness arising not out of physiology but socialized cognitive psychology . . . Thus there will be characteristic and pervasive patterns of not-seeing and not-knowing – structured white ignorance, motivated inattention, self-deception, and moral rationalization – that people of color, for their own survival, have to learn to become familiar with.

CPTR supports and promotes “claims ignorance.” In a white supremacist society, epistemological ignorance is a functional imperative; systemic inequality requires the construction of both facts and the absence of truth to shape the reality constructions of both the oppressed and oppressors (and their agents). Within the hegemon, as Mills concludes, “The white delusion of racial superiority insulates itself against refutation” (2007, p. 19). White supremacy is both authoritative and insipid; a master narrative persuasive enough to explain almost every aspect of experience, but so mundane that it
is virtually invisible. Mills (2007) concludes that “white ignorance, linked to white supremacy,” is a “group-based cognitive handicap” (p. 15). White ignorance of the sort revealed in CPTR Hegemon (Obama and Crisis) Narratives is “structural group-based miscognition” (Mills, 2007, p. 13), a standpoint indicative of one’s position in a racialized, patriarchal, heteronormative, class order. Who benefits from epistemic asymmetry and white ignorance? Systems of power and oppression. CPTR is an instrumentality of white supremacy and a significant beneficiary as programs enjoy large market shares and hosts exercise considerable, if not overtly acknowledged, influence in electing candidates to high political office. For example, CPTR paved the way for a Donald Trump’s presidency. Without the narrative frameworks deployed on CPTR, Trump could not use conservative “dog-whistles” (e.g., birtherism, Islamic terror plots, undocumented immigration) to win support. Trump’s genius is that he positioned himself as the author of some of the most important CPTR narratives and thereby signaled to voters, who have been exposed to these story plots for years, that he was a certain kind of candidate. What is obvious from the 2016 presidential race is that carefully crafted fictions trump cold, hard facts.

Conclusions and Future Research

Obama Narratives

The social interactions that occur on CPTR between hosts, guests, callers, and listeners purport to communicate a common-sense understanding of the world; reality is socially constructed on CPTR. Recall Gee’s (1986, 1991, 1999, 2011) argument that reality is constructed and enacted through “language-in-use.” This study has demonstrated that CPTR Obama Narratives provide highly particular details about the President (e.g., characteristics, behaviors, imagined motives, ways of speaking and
things said) that are made significant or irrelevant, connected or disconnected within narrative story plots. Meanings are attached to everything that Barack Obama is, says, does, or is not, remains silent on, or does not do – all are fodder for the CPTR narrative mill. Places, events, aspects of embodiment, cultural artifacts, and relationships are scrutinized, constructed as significant, or not, and then drawn together into narratives that claim to tell the story of the first African American President of the United States.

Critically, the interpretive structures, knowledge, and sign system that inform CPTR Obama Narratives spring from centuries-old racial tropes and stereotypes. For conservative hosts, guests, callers, and listeners on CPTR, there is no winning for Obama – to know him is to disrespect, hate, or pity him. Future research on the first African American U.S. presidency, or racial reality construction more generally, would take racial caricatures seriously. Though we live in an age typified by colorblind or coded racism, the legacy of racist caricatures continues in our language and in the stories we construct about ourselves and others. It is far too early to abandon this vein of research. Racial social constructions are stealthy – they survive, breed, and transform when we drop our guard and flatter ourselves by thinking we are immune.

Crisis Narratives

CPTR Crisis Narratives use language and stories to build and enact a conservative social identity. The parameters for ‘authentic’ conservatism are laid out on CPTR in Crisis Narratives. Through CPTR Crisis Narratives, hosts, guests, callers, and listeners learn what language and narratives count as conservative and which identify enemies. In addition to creating opportunities for social relationship and solidarity, Crisis Narratives also terminate avenues for social relationship or interaction when they are
deemed unworthy of conservative consideration – either too progressive or simply not conservative enough.

*Crisis Narratives* say a great deal about the identity and relationships of their authors (Ellison, 1964; Morrison, 1992). CPTR *Crisis Narratives* disclose evidence of a hegemonic existential crisis that has sent conservatives in search of (new or old) identities and relationships to inhabit. Through discursive processes that construct good versus evil binaries, CPTR hosts, guests, callers, and loyal listeners are able to tap intense emotions to build a virtual community of like-minded ‘patriots’ who are ideologically committed to defeating an adversary that is as immense as it is nebulous. Nothing like CPTR *Crisis Narratives* exists in progressive media. In the future, researchers should explore hegemonic existential crisis in other forms of conservative media, including documentaries, books, and magazines.

**Hegemon Narratives**

CPTR *Hegemon Narratives* (re)inscribe the relational and structural logics and authority of white supremacy. White supremacy is an invisible presence in CPTR that works through narratives that promote hegemonic whiteness, class-inflected meaning-making, and white epistemological ignorance. This examination of CPTR *Hegemon Narratives* extends the scholarship on whiteness, class discourse, and white supremacy by addressing:

How the taken-for-granted and invisible character of whiteness reinforces systems of advantage and disadvantage and how the construction of whiteness supports the hegemony of white power and the class structure (Andersen, 2003, p. 22).

By taking CPTR seriously as a site of meaning and sense-making, greater insight has been gained into the cognitive, discursive, and interactional processes whereby white
supremacy is ‘done.’ In future research, it is critical that the mapping of the “distinctive epistemologies, factual claims, and normative outlooks” (Mills, 2003, p. 45) of hegemonic structures like white supremacy are undertaken in relation to the “material structures and the operation of power” (Andersen, 2003, p. 27) that make them possible.

Mills (2007) raises several caveats related to research on meaning-making and the social construction of white supremacy from which future research may benefit. Firstly, epistemic ignorance, like the performance of whiteness, is not the same for all, or even limited to, White people. Clearly, not all white people are alike because white people, like people of color, live everyday embedded in matrices of domination (Collins, 1990). White people stand in diverse relationships to systems of power and their choice of how or whether to reflect critically on their experiences comprises their individual standpoint. Not to be forgotten are people of color for whom there are powerful, unremitting cognitive seductions to adopt erroneous beliefs about themselves, white people, other people of color, and anyone less powerful than themselves. Resilience and coping, as well as resignation and capitulation, need to be studied from multiple perspectives.

Secondly, it should be remembered that all social reality constructions incorporate a moral framework. Future research should assess the moral assumptions that undergird social constructions of reality. For example, much could be learned from research that explicitly maps constructions of justice, equality, and fairness in a White-identified culture and nation like the United States. Exploration of the moral components
of white supremacy would shed light on the micro- and macro-level processes that prop up a racist, patriarchal, heterosexist, and class-based social order.

Lastly, the implicit goal in studying the social construction of reality, especially when meaning and sense-making enable oppressive social relations, is change. However, there is considerable disagreement on the role teachers/scientists should play in social change – or whether research motivated by an activist agenda is research at all. In *Science as Vocation* (1919), Max Weber, one of the most influential thinkers in sociology, expressed his concern for the comingling of science and politics:

> To take a practical political stand is one thing, and to analyze political structures and party positions is another. When speaking in a political meeting about democracy, one does not hide one’s personal standpoint; indeed, to come out clearly and take a stand is one’s damned duty. The words one uses in such a meeting are not means of scientific analysis but means of canvassing votes and winning over others. They are not plowshares to loosen the soil of contemplative thought; they are swords against the enemies: such words are weapons. It would be an outrage, however, to use words in this fashion in a lecture or in the lecture-room. … the true teacher will beware of imposing from the platform any political position upon the student, whether it is expressed or suggested (p. 10).

But is there room for hope? Has science an affirmative role to play in social change, and if so, what would that role be? Weber remarks that the weakness of science is that it does not address existential questions, it only diagnoses the problems that humans confront. Teachers and scientists must give people a reason to care about the questions they explore and the truths they discover – facts are simply not compelling enough. Scientists must disseminate their research in such a way that people immediately see the personal impact.

University of Florida professor and historian of Africana Studies Ibram X. Kendi (2016) outlines the problem with purely objective science. In the following quote from
Kendi’s 2016 University of Florida Commencement Address, he encourages freshly-minted Ph.Ds. to be “intellectuals”:

Throughout this nation’s history, Americans have dove into the false waters of racist ideas because we do not want to face the reality of racial discrimination. We have not bred intellectuals because only intellectuals are willing to always face reality. Only intellectuals pledge to look for and say the truth and nothing but the truth. … ignorance and hate did not lead to racist ideas as we have been commonly told, but the consumption of racist ideas led to ignorance and hate. We hate because we are ignorant about other groups. Our nation is racially divided because we attack groups of people instead of the policies that harms us all. Racist ideas have suspended reality, drenched us in lies, subjectified standards, misled millions by faulty statistics, and forcibly herded generations of unsuspecting Americans into legal ignorance and lethal hate. We now live in a society where comfort matters more than certainty, where tradition matters more than truth, where labels matter more than logic. The task of intellectuals is to transcend political labels. The task of intellectuals is to transcend political ideology and economic interests and cultural traditions. The task of intellectuals is to fashion a clear and unadulterated mirror of humanity, so we can see ourselves for what we really are. The task of intellectuals is to investigate the problems of our world. The task of intellectuals is to solve the problems of our world.

In my experience, there is nothing that attracts the ire of one’s fellows more than truth. Truth and its pursuit require nothing less than passion bordering on zealotry. There can be no purely “objective” science in pursuit of truth that is devoid of feelings – the stakes are too high. Science does no service to humanity when it stops at objective presentation of facts. Intellectuals/truth-seekers stand, resolutely, amid a war of ideas in the hope of demystifying age-old structures that promote false beliefs. Truth for truths sake? No. Truth to change the constructed reality. The enemies of truth understand this. Is it not time that those who say they stand against falsity do the same?
## APPENDIX A

### TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( ( ) )</td>
<td>Nonlexical sound (e.g., inhalation or exhalation of breathe, laughter, tssst, hmmm, um, ah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Rising inflection (i.e., indicates an appeal from the speaker)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Downward inflection (i.e., ending of speaker’s statement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>Pause in speech (i.e., continuing intonation, indicating items in a list)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>Animated or excited speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**</td>
<td>Stressed word, part of a word or segment of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAP LETTERS</strong></td>
<td>Shouted speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>Abrupt break in speech (three dash)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>Gap, pause, or silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; xxx &lt;</td>
<td>Slowed pace of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; xxx &gt;</td>
<td>Quickened pace of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ xxx ]</td>
<td>Speech of two or more speakers overlapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Direct quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ ’</td>
<td>Colloquial, ironic, parodied, mocking or imitative speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xxx)</td>
<td>Problem hearing and transcribing speech; possible speech; speech unclear</td>
</tr>
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### APPENDIX C
GEES (2011) BUILDING TOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Tool</th>
<th>Description &amp; Analytic Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Uses language to make things significant or lower their significance. For any communication explore how words are used to build-up or lessen significance for some things and not others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sign Systems and Knowledge</td>
<td>Uses language to create, sustain, revise, change, privilege or disprivilege language, sign systems, or characteristic ways of knowing the world or making knowledge claims. For any communication explore how words privilege or disprivilege sign systems, ways of knowing, or knowledge claims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Uses language to make things connected or relevant to each other or to make them disconnected or irrelevant. For any communication explore how words connect, disconnect or ignore connections. Also explore how words make things relevant, irrelevant, or ignore relevance.</td>
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<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Uses language to create or end and/or sustain or harm social relationships. For any communication explore how words are being used to build, sustain, or change relationships between the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures, and/or institutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identities</td>
<td>Uses language to enact specific socially situated identities, to project identities onto others, and/or to privilege or disprivilege particular identities. For any communication explore what socially recognizable identity or identities the speaker is trying to enact or get others to recognize.</td>
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<td>Practices</td>
<td>Uses language to enact specific practices or activities alone or with others. For any communication explore what practices or activities are being built or enacted.</td>
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<td>Politics</td>
<td>Uses language to give or take away social goods (“anything some people in a society want or value,” (Gee, 2011, p. 5) e.g., prestige, wealth) or to project how social goods are or ought to be distributed. For any communication explore how words are being used to construct or assume what counts as a social good and how those social goods should be distributed or withheld to or from whom.</td>
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LIST OF REFERENCES


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Dyer Anti-lynching Bill of 1918, H.R. 11279, (1918).


Eggerton, J. (2/13/09). Bill Clinton talks of re-imposing Fairness Doctrine or at least "more balance" in media. Downloaded http://www.broadcastingcable.com


Nicholas, P. (2008, January 22). Race enters the contest; Democratic rivals address a King Day rally, but discord seeps into even minor moments on the trail. Los Angeles Times, p. A15.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melissa Inez Bamba was born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Ms. Bamba holds a BA in criminology and criminal justice from Temple University, a MA in criminology from the University of Maryland, College Park and a MA in sociology from the University of Florida. Ms. Bamba’s scholarly interests include whiteness studies, masculinities, social constructionism, and qualitative research methods.